

## LEVITICUS

### Introduction:

The name Leviticus is taken from the Septuagint, identifying the section of the Pentateuch which we call Leviticus. The Hebrew word for the book is *wayiqraa*, which, according to Strong's a primitive root definition comes from *qara*, and which has the sense of calling a person by name. This name is based on the opening sentence of ch. 1:1 - "The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting."

We reject the idea that this book would have belonged to the Priests' Codex, which, supposedly, came into existence after the Babylonian captivity. Thirty-four times we read: "The Lord spoke to Moses" or similar expressions. It is only reasonable to suppose that we read the authentic account of words God spoke to Moses and of revelations that were given to him. Actually, the book should be divided into thirty-four chapters if we take *wayiqraa* as the heading of each chapter. God's communications were given on Mount Sinai, as well as in the Tent of Meeting. In ch. 7:37-38 we read: "These, then, are the regulations for the burnt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, the ordination offering and the fellowship offering, which the LORD gave Moses on Mount Sinai on the day he commanded the Israelites to bring their offerings to the LORD, in the Desert of Sinai." And ch. 27:34 says: "These are the commands the LORD gave Moses on Mount Sinai for the Israelites." And then again, the first verse of the book speaks of the Tent of Meeting.

If we read through Leviticus in a superficial way it makes for rather dull reading; a dry piece of literature. If we look at the book, however, as a handbook for sanctification in the light of the accomplished work of our Lord Jesus Christ, the book becomes a document of vital importance. The message of Leviticus is: "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy." (Ch. 11:44,45; 19:2; 20:7,26; 21:8). The subject of Leviticus is the sanctifying effect the sacrifice of Christ can have upon our daily lives. The book links our daily stumbling with *Life on the Highest Plane*, to which we are called by God.

The central role in the book is played by the Levitical priests. We may consider the chapters 8 and 9 as the chapters around which everything revolves: the consecration of Aaron and his sons. The role of the priest is the main topic in the first seventeen chapters and also in the chapters 21 - 25. So the name of the book, *LEVITICUS*, is very appropriate. According to the *Thompson Chain Reference Bible* the theme of the book is: "How can a sinful man approach a holy God?"

The *Nelson's Bible Dictionary* gives the following outline of the book:

#### **Part One: The Laws of Acceptable Approach to God: Sacrifice (1:1-17:16)**

- I. The Laws of Acceptable Approach to God 1:1-7:38
- II. The Laws of the Priests 8:1-10:20
- III. The Laws of Israel Regarding Purity 11:1-15:33
- IV. The Laws of National Atonement 16:1-17:16

#### **Part Two: The Laws of Acceptable Walk with God: Sanctification (18:1-27:34)**

- I. The Laws of Sanctification for the People 18:1-20:27
- II. The Laws of Sanctification for the Priesthood 21:1-22:33
- III. The Laws of Sanctification in Worship 23:1-24:23
- IV. The Laws of Sanctification in the Land of Canaan 25:1-26:46
- V. The Laws of Sanctification through Vows 27:1-34

We would like to modify this outline as follows:

#### **I. Access to God chapters 1-10**

- 1. By Means of Sacrifices. (The role of the bringer of the sacrifice.) 1:1 - 6:7
  - a. The Burnt Offering 1:1-17
  - b. The Food Offering 2:1-16
  - c. The Fellowship Offering 3:1-17
  - d. The Guilt Offering 4:1 - 5:13
  - e. The Sin Offering 5:14 - 6:7
- 2. The role of the priest in the bringing of these sacrifices.
  - a. The Burnt Offering 6:8-13
  - b. The Food Offering 6:14-23
  - c. The Guilt Offering 6:24-30
  - d. The Sin Offering 7:1-10

- e. The Fellowship Offering 7:11-21.
- f. The Blood and Fat of the Sacrifices 7:22-27
- g. The Share of the Fellowship Offering 7:27-38
- 3. The Priest as Mediator ch. 8 - 10.
  - a. The Consecration of the Priest. 8:1-36
  - b. The Taking up of Priestly Duties. 9:1-24
  - c. The Recklessness of the Priests. 10:1-20.

## **II. Sanctification of Daily Life 11 - 22.**

- 1. Expressed in clean and unclean food 11
- 2. Purification at birth 12
- 3. Diagnosis, treatment and purification of leprosy 13-14
- 4. Treatment of sexual impurity 15
- 5. Cleansing of spiritual impurity - The Day of Atonement 16
- 6. The place of sacrifice and of the blood 17
- 7. Purity in sexual relations 18
- 8. Sanctity in social relations 19
- 9. Purification of gross immorality 20
- 10. Sanctity in the life of the priest 21,22

## **III. The Feasts 23 - 24:1-9**

## **IV. Punishment for blasphemy (An object lesson) 24:10-23**

## **V. Ordinances regarding possessions 25**

## **VI. Blessing and curse 26**

## **VII. Vows 27**

The above is, of course, not the perfect outline. The main theme is access to God and how it is achieved and what the effect of it is upon daily life. We have to bear in mind that the whole book is a shadow of reality. It expresses in earthly images the spiritual truth that is in Jesus Christ. He is at the center of this book. He is the true access to the Father. The sanctification of our life is the holiness He acquired for us.

## **I. Access to God chapter 1-10.**

- 1. By Means of Sacrifices (The role of the bringer of the sacrifice.) 1:1 - 6:7.
  - a. The Burnt Offering 1:1-17 (The Holocaust)

A Scottish evangelist in Holland, Sydney Wilson, called the five sacrifices described in these chapters of Leviticus God's pictures of the cross of Christ. Four of the pictures are taken from the four directions the wind blows and one is taken from above. The first picture is the one taken from above. We could say that this is the one closest to God. The burnt offering brings out that aspect of the death of Christ which is closest to God, which is most precious to Him.

As we have already seen, the instructions regarding these sacrifices, as well as regarding other commandments given in this book, were issued at various times and places. Some of the laws were received when Moses was on the mountain and when he was given the two tables of stone with the Ten Commandments. (See 7:38; 27:34) Other chapters are accounts of conversations God had with Moses after the construction of the tabernacle. The first chapters of Leviticus fall mostly in this latter category. In ch. 1:1 we read: "The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting." It could also be, however, that some of these conversations took place in the tent Moses erected before the construction of the tabernacle. In Exodus we read: "Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the 'tent of meeting.' Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshipped, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ex. 33:7-11

God used these moments of intimate fellowship with Moses to reveal Himself to the whole nation. Moses does not enter the tent to listen to God's voice, just for his own enjoyment. God has the whole nation in mind. How intimate this fellowship was we find expressed in Exodus: "The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend."<sup>2</sup> That is the atmosphere in which these commandments were given.

The kind of sacrifice is not immediately identified in vs. 2, but the category is that of voluntary sacrifices, such as the burnt offering and the Fellowship Offering. We read: "When any of you brings an offering to the LORD, ..." The guilt offerings and sin offering were obligatory. A burnt offering was a free will offering, but it was a bloody sacrifice. This is a strange paradox. Killing and spilling of blood was not a part of God's original plan of creation. Death, also the death of animals, entered the world after sin had come in. And now, death become a bridge of fellowship with God. If a man seeks an intimate relationship with God, it has to be via the way of death. It is true that death did not exist before sin existed, but there was a principle of death, which we only know as dying. "The Lamb ... was slain from the creation of the world."<sup>3</sup> The principle, however, is that of the dying of one in the place of another. Jesus did not die for Himself, and the sacrificial animal did not die for itself but was killed in the place of man.

It is not so much the principle of dying, but the fact that it was substitutional which was eternal. Death comes from the power of the devil, but it is also God's weapon of victory over the enemy, as C. S. Lewis states in his book *Miracles*.

It sounds normal to us that the sacrifice should be an animal. But in a world where human sacrifice was the accepted norm, the demand for animal sacrifice draws a clear line between that which is acceptable to God and that which is not. An animal could be sacrificed, a human being could not.

The regulations in this chapter pertain to three different offerings of the same category: Verses 3 - 10 concern a head of cattle; vs. 11 - 13 concern a ram or a male goat and vs. 14- 17 concern a pair of doves or turtle doves.. Except for these three distinctions there is no real difference in the sacrifices.

The animal to be sacrificed had to be a male without defect, at least for the first two sacrifices. It was not stated what the sex of the birds had to be. The animals of the Old Testament were a representation of a healthy young man, and in the New Testament this young man is our Lord Jesus Christ.

The animal had to be brought to the entrance of the tent. The mention of the place was important, because it involved the person who brought the sacrifice and his acceptability to the Lord.

From vs. 5 we deduct that the entrance of the tent was the burnt offering altar. The entrance and the altar are identical, and access to God is via the altar. Evidently, the use of words is intentional. Man is only acceptable to God when he follows the right way and seeks fellowship with God via the sacrifice that was on the altar. The idea the good intention of man is what counts belongs to the realm of myths. But for the man who keeps the rules counts that he is pleasing to God. That is more than merely being acceptable. God rejoices actively and positively in the man who plays by the rules. It is good to let this truth work in upon us. The effect will be overwhelming.

In vs. 4 it is explained further that the being acceptable to God is dependent upon the identification of the one who brings the sacrifice with the animal to be sacrificed. We read: "He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him." *Strong's* gives the following definition of the word "accepted": *ratsah* as, "to be pleased with; specifically, to satisfy a debt." The word has the connotation of: "(be) accept (-able), accomplish, set affection, approve, consent with, delight (self), enjoy, (be, have a) favour (-able), like, observe, pardon, (be, have, take) please (-ure), reconcile self." The identification is brought about by the gesture of laying hands on the head of the animal, which symbolizes the unity between man and beast. The man who places his hand upon the head of the animal confesses that the animal has taken his place in what follows. What happens to the animal when it is slain, happens in principle with the man whose place it has taken. It is a substitution. The killing is substitutionary, but so is the acceptance. The whole scene is pregnant with meaning. It breathes the truth that Paul expounds: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."<sup>4</sup> There are three positive results of this identification which are mentioned in vs. 4: 1) it will be accepted, 2) it will be accepted on his behalf and 3) it will make atonement for him.

There is a fine difference between the "acceptable" in vs. 3 and the "it will be accepted" in vs. 4. In vs. 3 the man who brings the sacrifice is being accepted; in vs. 4 the animal is accepted as a sacrifice. The fact that it is "on his behalf" means that the acceptability is imputed to the man, as a payment on someone's account by a third person. "On his behalf" also stresses the positive blessing that comes to the man who does these things. And, finally, it states that it

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<sup>2</sup> Ex. 33:7-11

<sup>3</sup> Rev 13:8

<sup>4</sup> II Cor. 5:21

will make atonement for him. The Hebrew word is *kaphar*, which, according to *Strong's*, means, "to cover (specifically with bitumen); figuratively, to expiate or condone, to placate or cancel." In the KJV it is translated: "appease, make (an atonement, cleanse, disannul, forgive, be merciful, pacify, pardon, purge (away), put off, reconcile (make reconciliation)." So, literally it says that the burnt offering will cover the man who brings the sacrifice.

The man who brings the sacrifice has to kill the animal himself "before the LORD." This not only refers to the altar, but it is also a clear indication of the presence of the Lord. After this irrevocable act, the priest takes over. The work of the man who brings the sacrifice consists in bringing the sacrificial animal, in laying his hands on the head of the animal and in killing, skinning, and slaughtering it. If the animal is a head of cattle this is no mean job. If the priest had to do this for every sacrifice that was brought, he would be busy day and night. Later we shall see that the skin is given to the priest.

The first important thing the priest does is to sprinkle the blood around and upon the altar. The blood is not poured out at the foot of the altar but it is applied to it on all sides. Then the priest has to prepare the fire on the altar and arrange the pieces of meat upon the fire, with the head, the fat and the inner part, which had to be washed first. All this is burned to ashes. We shall see later, in ch. 6:8-13, that there are regulations which insure that this is done thoroughly. Three times in this chapter the rising of the smoke of the burning flesh is called "an aroma pleasing to the LORD" (Vs. 9, 13, 17). So, we read three different things about this sacrifice. Vs. 9 calls it "a burnt offering;" in vs. 13 we read that it is "an offering made by fire," and it is called: "an aroma pleasing to the LORD." These descriptions indicate what is being offered, how it is offered and what the result of it is.

Before we further pursue the actual burning, we have to see that the one who brings the sacrifice has the choice as to what animal he wants to bring. It may be a young bull; it may be a sheep or a goat, or a bird, such as a young pigeon or a dove. The ritual of the sacrifice is basically the same in every instance. We do not read that the man has to put his hand on the head of the sheep or the goat, but this may be understood.

In vs. 5 we read that the bull is to be slaughtered before the LORD, and vs. 11 states that the slaughtering is to be done at the North side of the altar before the LORD. We conclude from this that the ark of the covenant stood north of the burnt offering altar. This is confirmed in Exodus.<sup>5</sup> It seems that every reference to the residence of God is in the north. In Isaiah we read in the NIV, that the prince of Tyre, who is an image of Satan in that chapter, wants to set his throne "on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain" to supplant God.<sup>6</sup> The word for "sacred mountain" is *tsaphown* which *Strong* defines: "hidden, i.e. dark; used only of the north as a quarter." The KJV renders this verse as: "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north." And Ezekiel saw a windstorm coming from the north in his first vision in which the glory of God appeared to him.<sup>7</sup> Astronomers confirm that there is a large black hole north of our North Pole.

The killing of the pigeons is done differently from the killing of the other animals. Now it is the priest who kills the bird by wringing off its head. If the man who brings the sacrifice would kill the birds, the problem would be to catch the blood and sprinkle it on the altar. The blood of the bird would spout all over and could not be caught in a bowl. The tearing open of the wings seems a senseless act. If the bird were still alive, this would be an inhuman cruelty. There the priest does it after the animal is dead. The severing of the wings symbolizes the act of complete surrender. The bird gives up its right to open its wings and fly, so to speak. In the same way, the man who sacrifices the bird gives up his soul so it will no longer be able to soar. It means death in its most complete form. The tearing of the wings is a symbolic substitution of the surrender to God of that which is of the most vital value to man.

Now, what does all this mean? We said already that the burnt offering was God's first picture of the cross of Christ. It represents that aspect of the sacrifice of our Lord which is closest to the heart of the Father. It is the image of "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."<sup>8</sup> The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks about "the blood of the eternal covenant."<sup>9</sup> Evidently, before the creation of the world, there was an agreement between the Father and the Son; the Son promised complete surrender to the Father, even before anything was created. The Father promised complete renewal following this act of surrender. That is why the verse reads: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,

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<sup>5</sup> Ex.40:22

<sup>6</sup> Isa. 14:13

<sup>7</sup> Ezek. 1:4

<sup>8</sup> Rev. 13:8

<sup>9</sup> Heb. 13:20

equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”<sup>10</sup> We know how this was acted out on our planet. The death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the outcome of this covenant. His act of complete surrender to the Father was the ultimate expression of love. The essence of the covenant, as it was made in Heaven, was spiritual. The death at Golgotha was the physical expression.

Jesus’ death on the cross was, first of all, a surrender in love of the Son to the Father: of God to God. This level of surrender to God is inaccessible to us. Yet, the burnt offering involves us in this aspect of Jesus’ death. The apostle Paul makes this point in his exhortation in Eph. 5:1-2, where he says: “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” The burnt offering expresses a divine principle of the giving of one’s life for someone else in the Name of Christ. It is a statement of God’s eternal love which can only become our part by the filling of the Holy Spirit.

It is obvious that this burnt offering has nothing to do with sin, or even with our human nature. It is a purely divine affair. The human element in it is that Jesus Christ fulfilled the divine terms of the covenant in His human body in His death on the cross, and He saw the divine promise fulfilled in His own resurrection. As far as the Father is concerned, the cross, in the first place, is a symbol of the love of His Son. The only way we can partake in the burnt offering is if we partake in the divine nature. The burnt offering is the greatest gift we can ever present to God; it is the only sacrifice of which no man can eat. It is exclusively for the Lord. David says: “May he remember all your sacrifices and accept your burnt offerings.”<sup>11</sup>

The law of the burnt offering was not new. Even before it became part of the Israelite worship service in Sinai and the desert-journey, it had been an existing sacrifice. Noah is the first person mentioned to bring a burnt Offering.<sup>12</sup> Later Abraham was going to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt Offering.<sup>13</sup> And the Israelites asked Pharaoh’s permission to go into the desert to bring burnt offerings. It is possible that the term “burnt offering” is sometimes used as a general word and that it stands for everything that is sacrificed to God.

The Hebrew word is *’olah*, which, according to *Strong’s Definitions* means: “a step or (collectively, stairs, as ascending); usually a holocaust (as going up in smoke): “The KJV translates it with “ascent, burnt offering (sacrifice), go up to.”

## CHAPTER TWO

### b. The Grain Offering 2:1-16.

In this chapter, five different kinds of grain offerings which the Israelites were allowed to bring are mentioned. In vs. 1 fine flour is mixed with oil; in vs. 4 it is cakes or wafers without yeast, baked in an oven. In vs. 5 baked grain from the griddle is brought, and in vs. 7 the grain offering is cooked in a pan. The offering mentioned in vs. 14 is not part of these regular offerings. First fruits were harvested only once a year.

All these offerings consisted of the same basic elements: flour and oil with salt. Added to this was incense. Yeast and honey were forbidden articles. In the case of the first fruits, the grain did not have to be ground finely. All these offerings were bloodless; they were the fruits of the earth: wheat or corn and olives, in either crushed or ground form. It is not too clear at this point whether these offerings could be brought separately, as sacrifices in their own right. They were, probably, always connected to a bloody sacrifice that was brought at the same time. In Numbers the law links the grain offering to bloody sacrifice.<sup>14</sup>

The grain offering does not refer to the sinful condition of man. They were “a pleasing aroma” to the Lord. The grain, which is the main element in this offering, is a produce of nature. Jesus uses the image of the grain for His own life. He says: “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single

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<sup>10</sup> Heb. 13:20,21

<sup>11</sup> Ps. 20:3

<sup>12</sup> See Gen. 8:20

<sup>13</sup> See Gen. 22

<sup>14</sup> Num.15:1-16

seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”<sup>15</sup> This reference, as well as the parables of the sower and of the weeds in the field, give a deeper meaning to this sacrifice.

The grain is uniquely a symbol of the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as of our own humanity. The purpose of grain is to be eaten. It is also our “reason d’être” to present ourselves as a sacrifice to God. The reason for our being created is that we give our body and our human nature over to God. That was God’s expectation when He breathed the breath of life into Adam and made Adam and Eve into living beings. God waited in vain for this surrender. He is still waiting in vain for most people’s surrender. Even if sin had not entered the world, God would have expected us to give our body to Him as a sacrifice. Paul expresses this in Romans, where he says: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship.”<sup>16</sup> Now, since sin has become a major issue in our lives, this sacrifice is the even more urgent.

We could say that there is a three-fold death in the grain offering: In John’s Gospel Jesus speaks about the need for the kernel of corn to fall into the ground and die in order to produce fruit.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, the grain was ground into flour, and the olives were crushed in order to make oil, and, finally, the sacrifice was put on the fire and burned. It is this last act which symbolizes complete surrender which makes this sacrifice “a pleasing aroma to the Lord.” It is clear that Jesus fulfilled these three facets of the sacrifice. His humbling Himself in His baptism, His suffering of hardship, His self-denial and, ultimately, His death on the cross give the complete picture of what is expressed in this grain offering. Psalm Forty must have played a decisive role in Jesus’ decision to be baptized in the river Jordan. We read: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, ‘Here I am, I have come-- it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.’ I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O LORD.”<sup>18</sup> It was His insight in God’s intention with His incarnation that brought Him to this fundamental surrender of Himself, of which, ultimately, the result was His death on the cross.

The principle is the same for us. Our understanding of God’s plan for our life as a human being is the basis for the surrender of ourselves. It would be impossible that, when we, consciously and systematically, put on the altar all the members of our body with the functions they perform, that our ambitions, our complexes, both good and bad, would not be involved in this.

If the fine flour represents the broken body, Jesus’ body and ours, then the oil stands for the surrender of the human spirit. The crushing of the olives, which is necessary to produce the oil, indicates the price that has to be paid. Here also, our sinful condition adds urgency to this surrender. When David says in the Psalms, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise,”<sup>19</sup> this has to be seen against the background of his sin with Bathsheba. Yet, sin is a foreign element in this sacrifice. Apart from sin also, our spirit becomes free only in surrender to God.

The brokenness of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross is the key that opened the gate for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. In our identification with the grain offering, we find that “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”<sup>20</sup>

The incense that had to be added to the grain offering represents the divine element in this sacrifice. Just as the Holy Spirit complements the surrender of our human spirit to the Father, so is the incense God’s finishing touch to this sacrifice. This is the element that transforms food into an offering. We read in Revelations the following: “Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel’s hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.”<sup>21</sup> It is the mixing of the prayers of the saints with the incense that has such a tremendous effect upon the earth. Without the

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<sup>15</sup> John 12:24

<sup>16</sup> Rom. 12:1

<sup>17</sup> John 12:24

<sup>18</sup> Ps. 40:6-9

<sup>19</sup> Ps. 51:17

<sup>20</sup> Rom. 8:16

<sup>21</sup> Rev. 8:3-5

incense the grain offering would be a senseless burning of food. It is the incense that makes the burning of the flour and the oil into a “most holy part of the offerings made to the LORD by fire.”

We see this principle of God adding His sanction in events such as the new birth of a man who turns to Him in conversion. The golden lampstand in Revelations expresses this same principle.<sup>22</sup> If we give our body and soul and spirit, that is our whole human nature, to God He answers with the testimony of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. We see this illustrated in the baptism of the Lord Jesus. In the Gospel of Matthew we read: “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”<sup>23</sup>

In vs. 11-13 we find two ingredients that were forbidden in the sacrifice, yeast and honey, and another one that was required: salt. Yeast is a symbol of sin in the Bible. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, we read about in Exodus, was directly connected with the Exodus from Egypt. Yeast was not even allowed to be in the house during this feast.<sup>24</sup> Paul’s interpretation of this feast is that people who have been delivered from the slavery of sin should remove malice and wickedness out of their lives and lead a life of sincerity and truth. In I Corinthians we read: “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast-- as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.”<sup>25</sup> The grain offering has nothing to do with man’s sinful nature. It could not even contain any reference to it. The sacrifice points to the human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, the man after God’s heart, in whom no malice or wickedness was found. In the bringing of this sacrifice to God we identify ourselves with Him. He and we give ourselves to the Father, not because we are sinful, but because we are human. The reference in vs. 12 is to the Feast of Pentecost which is described in ch. 23:15-22.

Honey was also a forbidden item. It seems harder to determine why this was so. Nowhere in the Bible is honey used as a symbol of something bad. In the Psalms a parallel is drawn between honey and the Word of God. “The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.”<sup>26</sup> The comparison is favorable. Maybe honey stands for the perfection of God’s character. To use it as a sacrifice would be forbidden because it is incongruent with our present condition. Or, we could say that we are not advanced enough yet to do such a thing.

Vs. 13 speaks about salt as an ingredient that should never be lacking in any sacrifice. It symbolizes the covenant God made with man. The terms of this covenant are not referred to here. This is not the point where we should dig into the different theological nuances of the various covenants in the Old Testament. The main common factor in all of them is the fact that God revealed Himself to man and that the man to whom this revelation is given becomes himself part of the revelation. God reveals Himself to man in order that He may reveal Himself to others through that man. God called Abraham blessed because he would become a blessing to others. God says to Abraham: “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”<sup>27</sup>

In as much as all sacrifices are an image of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the salt is, no doubt, a reference to the “Eternal Covenant”<sup>28</sup> mentioned in Hebrews, of which all covenant made between Heaven and earth are derived. The grain offering is the sacrifice of our human nature, the sacrifice of the creature to the Creator. It reminds man of the fact that God bound Himself in love to man whom He created. The salt speaks of God’s intention for man: to redeem, rehabilitate, and glorify him.

Finally, the term “memorial portion” is used three times in this chapter. (Vs. 2,9,16). The “memorial portion” is the part of the sacrifice that is burnt on the altar. It is to be a reminder, in the first place, for man. The omniscient God does not need to be reminded of anything; but forgetful men need to have their memory refreshed from time to time. The grain offering reminds us of the fact that He is God and we are men. We owe our existence to Him. “In Him

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<sup>22</sup> Rev. 2:5

<sup>23</sup> Matt. 3:16-17

<sup>24</sup> See Ex. 12:15-20

<sup>25</sup> I Cor. 5:7,8

<sup>26</sup> Ps.19:9,10

<sup>27</sup> Gen. 12:2,3

<sup>28</sup> Heb. 12:2,3

we live and move and have our being,”<sup>29</sup> as the apostle Paul says in Acts. We come from Him, and we shall return to Him. It is for this reason that we are to present our bodies to Him as a sacrifice. That is our spiritual or reasonable sacrifice. The Greek word that in Rom. 12:1 is translated as spiritual is *logikos* which means “rational” or “logical.” The grain offering is the most logical of all the sacrifices.

The last three verses deal with the first fruits of the harvest. Thus God opens a window to eternity. The sacrifice refers to the Feast of the First Fruits, which we read about in ch. 23:9-14. It is a symbol of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Who is called “the first born from the dead.”<sup>30</sup> He was the first one to conquer death. Since, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we are partakers of His resurrection life, the Feast of the First Fruits is very relevant to us. It speaks of our own resurrection. That is why James calls us “first fruits of all he created.”<sup>31</sup>

The offering of the grain of first fruits is also a reference to our status in life on earth. Fire is involved. The grain was, first, roasted and then crushed. This speaks of testing and hardship. It is not easy to be a first fruit. In this instance, however, the crushing is not the result of our own choice as with the fine flour in vs. 1. The roasting and crushing is not something we do to ourselves. The pressure comes from the outside. This sacrifice is an acknowledgment of the fact that the hardship and persecution to which we are exposed are not there as a freak fate, as Shakespeare describes: “The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.” Our hardships and persecutions represent the hand of the divine Potter who is preparing us for the glory of our resurrection. We ought to understand that difficulties and hardships are ours for Christ’s sake, as Paul elaborates in his epistles. This is what is expressed in this offering of the first fruits. Our hardships and trials should strengthen our hope of the resurrection of the dead, in which Jesus went ahead of us. In this sacrifice too, salt and incense are present.

We will see later, in ch. 6, what the share of the priest was in this sacrifice.

## CHAPTER THREE

### c. The Fellowship Offering.

We shall see later, in ch. 7:11-21 that there are at least two categories in this fellowship offering: the Thank Offering and the offering for a vow, which is called the “Votive Offering” by the NAS.

The Hebrew word is *shelem*, which means “a peace-offering, a requital, a sacrifice for alliance or friendship; voluntary sacrifice of thanks” (*Brown-Driver-Briggs*). The ASV, KJV and NAS translate the word with “Peace Offering.” The word may also have the meaning of “being safe,” both in the spiritual as well as in the physical sense of the word. There is a sense of reciprocity in the various shades of meaning of the word. Peace and thanks are fitting names for this sacrifice.

This sacrifice speaks of the condition of the man who has come through the question of sin and guilt, which are the issues in the last two sacrifices in this book. It also acknowledges the fact that the new condition of peace and safety are the results of God’s dealing with man. So, we cannot say that the Fellowship Offering has no connection with sin at all, like the two preceding sacrifices. There is, at least, an indirect link.

In the description of this sacrifice a distinction is made between the offering of an animal of the herd (vs. 1-5) and an animal of the flock (vs. 6-16). In the latter section the sacrifice of a lamb is treated separately in vs. 7-11 and that of a goat separately in vs. 12-16. In all categories both a male or a female animal could be brought as a sacrifice. No distinction is made between redeemed men and women in their relationship to God. Paul says: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>32</sup>

At the bringing of the sacrifice there is the same kind of identification of the person who brings it with the animal as when the burnt offering is brought. The man who brings the sacrifice has to lay his hand on the head of the animal. In doing so he sacrifices himself in a sense. The paradox of salvation is that man who has been saved from death is ready to die in gratitude for his salvation.

In the description of this sacrifice, the Lord gives detailed instructions to the Israelites that they were not to eat any fat. The fellowship offering consists mainly in the burning of the fat: “all the fat that covers the inner parts or is

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<sup>29</sup> Acts 17:28

<sup>30</sup> Rev. 1:5

<sup>31</sup> James 1:18

<sup>32</sup> Gal. 3:26-28

connected to them, both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys.” What is meant with “the covering of the liver” is not very clear. This could be the gallbladder. Fat, kidneys, and maybe the gallbladder had to be burnt on the altar. This instruction is repeated three times. The last verse summarizes it by saying that fat and blood are never meant for consumption. “You must not eat any fat or any blood” (vs. 17).

The prohibition to eat blood dates from the days of Noah. In the Genesis account we read: “But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.”<sup>33</sup> The same prohibition to eat blood and fat is found in ch. 7:23-27 where God says: “Do not eat any of the fat of cattle, sheep or goats. The fat of an animal found dead or torn by wild animals may be used for any other purpose, but you must not eat it. Anyone who eats the fat of an animal from which an offering by fire may be made to the LORD must be cut off from his people. And wherever you live, you must not eat the blood of any bird or animal. If anyone eats blood, that person must be cut off from his people.” Again, in ch. 17:10-15 we read: “Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood-- I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life. Therefore I say to the Israelites, ‘None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood.’ Any Israelite or any alien living among you who hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth, because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, ‘You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off.’ “ Vs. 11 gives a clear explanation for the commandment: “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.” But there is no direct reason given for the prohibition to eat fat. In the Old Testament fat was usually a symbol of blessing. Sometimes it stands for godless self-complacency, but, usually, it has a favorable connotation. The book of Proverbs tells us: “The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.” “The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.” “He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the LORD shall be made fat.” All these quotations are from the KJV. The NIV renders the word *dashen* with “prosper.”<sup>34</sup> But, according to Strong’s definition it means “to be fat; transitively, to fatten (or regard as fat); specifically to anoint; figuratively, to satisfy.” Probably the command not to eat fat refers to our attitude towards God’s blessings, in the same way as the prohibition to eat blood is connected with our attitude towards atonement. We are not allowed to use the implements of grace for our own egoistic satisfaction; they are to be considered as elements that have to be given back to God. Blessings are meant to be put on the altar.

We will see at a later point, in ch. 7:11-21 what the difference is between a Thank Offering and an offering brought to make a vow, what was called a “Votive Offering” in the NAS.

As with all sacrifices, the Fellowship Offering is an image of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our position as human beings who have been reconciled with God, who want to thank Him for it and make vows before Him, cannot be separated from the person of Christ. We do not depend upon ourselves in our relationship with the Father. There is no fellowship, or peace, or gratitude or service to Him, apart from Christ. We cannot bring up any of the above by our own efforts. Our peace, gratitude, and service will grow according to the measure of fellowship we have with Him. Paul says: “For he himself is our peace.”<sup>35</sup> And the pleasing aroma for God of this fellowship offering is the aroma of Christ. Paul says elsewhere: “For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Gen. 9:4

<sup>34</sup> Prov. 11:25; 13:4; 28:25

<sup>35</sup> Eph. 2:14

<sup>36</sup> II Cor. 2:15

## CHAPTER FOUR

## d. The Sin Offering 4:1 - 5:13.

This section can be divided in two at the beginning of chapter 5. The following part would seem to belong to the “Guilt Offering,” if it weren’t for the fact that the name “Sin Offering” is used for this section also in vs. 6.

The Hebrew word is *chatta’ah*. *Strong* defines this: “an offense (sometimes habitual sinfulness), and its penalty, occasion, sacrifice, or expiation; also (concretely) an offender.” The root word has the meaning of “to miss” as in missing the mark. From this the word for sinning is derived. According to the above definition, this can refer to a habit of sinning, or sinfulness. The emphasis, therefore, in this sacrifice is not, primarily, upon the sinful act, as upon the person who sin, upon his sinful nature. In the Guilt Offering the stress is upon **what man has done**; in the Sin Offering it is upon **who he is**.

This becomes particularly clear in chapter four. A distinction is made between a priest who sins, (vs. 3 - 12), the whole Israel community who sins, (vs. 13 - 21), a leader of the people who sins, (vs. 22 - 26), and a member of the community who sins, (vs. 27 - 35). The sacrifice varies according to the position of the person and also the way in which it was brought.

There is a sense in which all people are equal. The American Constitution says: “All men are created equal.” We are all equal before God because we are descendants of Adam and we all bear the consequences of his fall. We are all sinners. We all have the same rights because we all bear the image of our Creator. On the other hand, no two people are equal. It is not true that God created two people who are the same in every respect. In his book *That Hideous Strength*, C. S. Lewis lets the main character say: “Yes, we must all be guarded by equal rights from one another’s greed, because we are fallen. Just as we must all wear clothes for the same reason. But the naked body should be there underneath the clothes, ripening for the day when we shall need them no longer. Equality is not the deepest thing, you know.” The lady to whom he says these things answers: “I always thought that was just what it was. I thought it was in their souls that people were equal.” “You were mistaken,” said he gravely. “That is the last place where they are equal. Equality before the law, equality of incomes - that is very well. Equality guards life; it does not make it. It is medicine, not food.”

This, however, is not too important in the study of the sin offering. The distinction made in this chapter is in the relationship of a person to God and to one another; it is the spiritual and social aspect. The priest is the mediator between God and the people. The leader represents the authority of God over the individual. The priest, the whole community of Israel, the leader of the people, and the “man in the street” have all been affected by sin; they all fall short of the glory of God. Man, whoever he is and in whatever position God has placed him, is a sinner.

All the sacrifices in this chapter pertain to sins committed unintentionally: things we didn’t mean to do, but we did them. This chapter underlines our terrible human failing as well as the fact that Jesus died in our stead. He died, not only for our sins, but for ourselves.

The first person who fails is the priest, the mediator between God and man. The horrible consequences of this fact are not detailed in this chapter. The man who had been anointed to be a priest, who had been prepared by the Holy Spirit to stand between God and the people is, himself, a sinner like everybody else. And he does not sin alone. Being a priest, he represents all the people and brings, therefore, guilt upon the whole of the nation. This sacrifice has a collective character, which reminds us of what happened to the whole of mankind when the first man sinned.

For this kind of sacrifice the best of animals is used: a young bull without defect. This is the most precious of all cattle. We shall see that this sacrifice differs from all the following ones. First of all, there was the identification with the sacrificial animal by laying his hands on the head of the bull. In doing so, the priest confessed his sin and acknowledged that what happened to the animal should have happened to him. The bull is presented before the Lord and killed before the Lord.

Sometimes we feel pity for animals that are slaughtered. People react differently. Their reactions can range from pity to sadism. How does God react to the death of one of his creatures? Jesus says that God is moved with the fate of a little sparrow. “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.”<sup>37</sup> The sight of the blood of an animal touches the heart of God. The death of animals was not included in God’s original plan of creation either.

This is the only sacrifice in this series of which some of the blood was brought into the Tent of Meeting, where it was sprinkled in front of the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. This ritual was different from the one that was performed at the Day of Atonement when the blood was sprinkled on top of the

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<sup>37</sup> Matt 10:29

atonement cover, which the KJV calls “the Mercy Seat.”<sup>38</sup> This sacrifice comes closest to expressing a complete atonement. As far as I can see, this is the only instance where blood is applied to the horns of the altar of fragrant incense. This is probably due to the fact that the stress in this sacrifice is upon the ministry of the priest. The altar of fragrant incense was the place to which he brought worship and praise to God. Now this worship is covered by blood which cleanses it from impurity. The remainder of the blood is poured out at the foot of the burnt offering altar which symbolizes the cross of Golgotha.

Seen from a chronological viewpoint, this sacrifice goes opposite to the reality it represents. The blood is, first of all, applied to the altar of fragrant incense then to the burnt offering altar. Maybe we should say that it emphasizes the order of importance instead of chronology: first to the Lord, then to the priest and his ministry and finally to the people who had become guilty.

The blood is sprinkled seven times before the curtain. We can hardly doubt the symbolical significance of this number. The fat and kidneys of the bull were the only parts that were burned upon the altar. This is the same process as in the bringing of the Fellowship Offering. But here ends the similarity. The Sin Offering was not to be eaten. Vs. 11, 12 tell us: “But the hide of the bull and all its flesh, as well as the head and legs, the inner parts and offal -- that is, all the rest of the bull-- he must take outside the camp to a place ceremonially clean, where the ashes are thrown, and burn it in a wood fire on the ash heap.” It was to be treated as garbage. There is another similarity here with the sacrifice brought on the Day of Atonement. We read in ch. 16:27, “The bull and the goat for the sin offerings, whose blood was brought into the Most Holy Place to make atonement, must be taken outside the camp; their hides, flesh and offal are to be burned up.” The author of the Hebrew epistle sees a parallel between this burning and the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ. “The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.”<sup>39</sup> This burning accentuates the disgrace of our sin. Our sinful nature has no place in our fellowship with God. God throws it away, outside the camp, outside the city gate.

The second sacrifice is described in vs. 13 - 21. The whole Israelite community is considered as one person. Evidently, collective guilt is the same for God as personal guilt. This is the principle that governs God’s acting with men. Adam’s guilt is imputed to all of mankind. This means that every man stands before God as a sinner. It also means that the righteousness of Jesus can be imputed to everyone who accepts Him as his head and representative.

There is, therefore, no difference between the sacrifice for the priest and the sacrifice for the whole community. The animal is the same, and the way in which it is sacrificed is the same. In both cases the blood is sprinkled in front of the curtain of the Holy of Holies and it is applied to the horns of the altar of fragrant incense, and the rest is poured out at the foot of the burnt offering altar. The kidneys and the fat are burned on the altar, and the rest of the animal goes to the ash heap.

The stress in this sacrifice is upon the unintentional aspect of the sin. The fact that people sin without being conscious of it does not exempt them from guilt. Not many people will intentionally put their hands on a live wire. Whether they intend to do so or not does not make any difference to the electricity. Guilt consists in our wrong relationship with God, not in how we feel about it. So called “psychological guilt” doesn’t, necessarily make us guilty, and the absence of guilt feelings does not prove absence of guilt. If we lean against a gate post that has been freshly painted, we will get paint on us whether we want to or not. It was possible for the whole community of Israel to become guilty before God without knowing it, as in the case of Achan. Also, as we have seen, the sin of a priest could bring guilt upon the whole community.

In this sacrifice we find the first mention of forgiveness. Vs. 20 reads: “In this way the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven.”

The third sacrifice is prescribed in case the sinner is one of the leaders or rulers of the people. The Hebrew word for “leader” is *nasiy* which *Strong* defines as “an exalted one, i.e. a king or sheik; also a rising mist.” In the KJV it is translated as “captain, chief, cloud, governor, prince, ruler, vapor.” *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* cites the following about this term: “prince; chief; leader.” “This noun appears 129 times in biblical Hebrew. An early occurrence of *nashi* is in <Gen. 23:6>: ‘Hear us, my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us....’ The books of Numbers and Ezekiel use the word most frequently. Elsewhere it rarely occurs.” So, the person mentioned is someone who has authority over others. As we have seen elsewhere, the ruling of one man over other men is the result of Adam’s fall into sin. Only after sin had entered the world, did God say to Eve: “Your desire will be for your

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<sup>38</sup> See: Lev. 16:14,15

<sup>39</sup> Hebr. 13:11-13

husband, and he will rule over you.”<sup>40</sup> Nowhere else in the Bible do we read that God gave a mandate to man to rule over others. Israel was a theocracy. God only ceded reluctantly to Israel’s request for a king. We read: “But when they said, ‘Give us a king to lead us,’ this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. And the LORD told him: ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.’”<sup>41</sup> It is because man has gone astray that God permits the rule of one man over another, especially in the case in which people are threatened by an enemy. Now it turns out that the ruler has failed also and has become guilty before the Lord. But he does not bring the same sacrifice as the priest, or as the whole community. His guilt is not imputed to others: he stands alone before God.

His sacrifice consists of a male goat without defect. He identifies himself with the animal by laying his hands on its head. There seems to be a deeper meaning in this ritual in view of the choice of the animal. Not only does the leader confess that he deserves punishment which is executed upon the animal instead of on him, but he also admits to the similarity between himself and the animal. A male goat is the incarnation of stupid arrogance. The male prowess of a male goat is expressed in tyranny. A male goat is not the image of meekness, humility, and self-control. He is a caricature of leadership. It is quite a discovery for a leader to see what he did with the task God had entrusted to him. When the leader lays his hands on the male goat he makes a profound confession. For him it means dying and being dumped on the ash-heap.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Sin Offering (Continued) 5:1-13.

As was mentioned before, the fifth chapter deals with another kind of sacrifice. The theme is still the offering brought by a common member of the community. For the first time an act of sin is mentioned. It would, of course, have been impossible to give the preceding commandments without any indication as to when they had to be brought. We may, therefore, presume that, even if the acts of sin are only mentioned in relationship with “the man in the street,” they are also the basis for the sacrifice of the priest, the whole community and the leader. They are not free-will offerings. Giving the reasons at the end strengthens the impression that man’s sinful nature is the issue in this sacrifice and not his act of sin.

The sinful acts mentioned are more of a passive nature than intentional sins. Even in the mentioning of the third sin, the careless swearing of an oath, we are given the impression that it is not an act of the will in the existential sense of the word. The sins mentioned are more sins that are the result of contamination than of the will of man. The lack of immunity against being polluted by sin, the lack of inner resistance, show the sinful nature of man.

When Jesus walked on earth, He rubbed shoulders with all kinds of people who could have made Him ritually and morally unclean. But even on the cross, when He carried the sins of the world, He was never polluted inwardly. The fire of *Gehenna* did not touch Him because there was no worm inside Him.<sup>42</sup> But man, who is a descendant of Adam, becomes guilty when he hears someone utter an oath, or even when he hears that a curse was pronounced in his absence. We read in vs. 1, “If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible” (NIV). The KJV puts this quite differently: “And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity.” But Jesus could be touched by a person who was ritually impure, as by the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years, and not only did He not become impure Himself, but He made the woman pure. Evidently, it all depends on the sinful nature as to whether a person is susceptible to pollution or not.

The nature of the beast shows itself most clearly in the thoughtless taking of an oath. The heart of man is like a cesspool. If he is not careful when he opens his mouth, all kinds of things come out for which he cannot account. It is obvious from the examples given that man commits wrong acts because he is wrong inside. The fruits are bad because the tree is no good.

Interestingly enough, there is a way out for the man who takes a thoughtless oath. We do not get the impression that there was a way out when we study the lives of Jephthah and Saul. The slogan, “A man is as good as his word,” seems to have been regarded as the highest virtue in the Old Testament. Men would rather commit a murder

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<sup>40</sup> Gen. 3:16

<sup>41</sup> I Sam. 8:6,7

<sup>42</sup> See Mark 9:48

than break their oath. If Jephthah had known the law of the sin offering, he could have saved the life of his daughter.<sup>43</sup> It is harder for a man to confess that he is unreliable in his words than to sacrifice the life of someone else to his own honesty. Even the conscience of godless Herod would not permit him to break his oath. We read in Matthew: “The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison.”<sup>44</sup>

The declaration or pronouncing of an oath thoughtlessly demonstrates the hopelessness of our sinful nature. “Thoughtlessly” or flippantly means not to be aware of the seriousness of his oath. In the use of this term, God demonstrates that He pities the person who does this. That is why, when He was being crucified, Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”<sup>45</sup> Then follows: “when he learns of it,” meaning when he becomes aware of the sinful aspect of his deed. Man recognizes his sins as they are only when he finds himself in the presence of God. It was when Isaiah had a vision of God that he cried out: “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”<sup>46</sup> This does not mean that guilt only starts when we become aware of it. Guilt is as old as the act; awareness of guilt only confirms the fact.

Vs. 5 makes clear what steps a man must take when he has come under conviction of his sin. He has to confess his sin clearly. Confession in general and vague terms is useless. “He must confess in what way he has sinned.” After that he has to bring the sacrifice prescribed in the preceding verses. Twice we read: “And he will be forgiven” (vs. 5, 16).

A wonderful thing in this section is that, the poorer the sinner, the more meaningful the sacrifice he has to bring. In case he offers two pigeons, one of the birds becomes a burnt offering with all the deep meaning the sacrifice encompasses. In case he is so poor that he “cannot afford two doves or two young pigeons, he is to bring as an offering for his sin a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering,” and, “the rest of the offering will belong to the priest, as in the case of the grain offering.” So he learns to share his poverty with the priest, who is his fellowman.

The Good News Bible translates “a tenth of an ephah” with “one kilogram,” which is enough bread for a few days. In the share the priest receives of this sin offering, we find the suggestion that God is able to bring about a blessing, even in the most miserable of circumstances.

#### e. The Guilt Offering 5:14 - 6:7.

In the law concerning the guilt offering, the stress is on the act. No distinction is made between one man and another, nor is position in life an issue. The sacrifice declares that Jesus Christ died for our sins.

Twice in this section we read: “If anyone commits a violation” (5:15; 6:2). The idea seems to be an unintentional act. Before the sin is committed there has been a deterioration of the fellowship between God and man. Every trespass concerns a sin against objects which had been dedicated to the Lord, “The Lord’s holy things.” The point is not further elaborated. The intent is, probably, regarding matters that had been promised to the Lord and had been forgotten, or had never been given, or never reached their destination. Man has come to the point where he no longer recognizes what belongs to the Lord. He acts as if the Lord’s possessions belong to himself. This kind of “confusion” is widespread. Most people consider their lives and bodies as personal possessions. And where this misunderstanding reigns regarding vital matters like life and body, the lesser ones are more easily considered to be part of man’s jurisdiction. The law, very graciously, gives us a lot of leeway in supposing that we do this unintentionally.

But this does not diminish guilt. A double fine is imposed. We could say that a triple punishment is needed to straighten things out. A ram has to be sacrificed, which has to be the equivalent in money of the object of the sinful neglect. The object has to be paid for, and twenty percent is levied on top of this.

In the second part, vs. 17 - 19, the subject is trespasses against the will of God. This means doing things God has forbidden. Here too, the person who sins is given a certain leeway because it is supposed that he sinned out of ignorance. The person who sinned didn’t know the will of God. Only a man who loves God and lives in fellowship with Him will endeavor to know the will of God. Both knowledge and love are needed to keep one from sin and to help him to be obedient.

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<sup>43</sup> Judges 11:20-40

<sup>44</sup> Matt. 14:9,10,

<sup>45</sup> Luke 23:34

<sup>46</sup> Isa. 6:5

The sacrifice for this kind of sin is the same as in the first instance, with the exception of the fine. Whether we sin by trespassing a commandment we did not know or by sinning against an object that belongs to God, we sin against the person of God. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross constitutes atonement for both kinds of sin; this is confirmed in vs. 18: “he will be forgiven.”

## CHAPTER SIX

### **The Guilt Offering** (continued) 6:1-7.

The sins mentioned in these seven verses deal with human relations. The first cause of this kind of sin, however, is the same as in the preceding category. Sin against a neighbor begins with a decline in our relationship with God; therefore, when we are unfaithful to God, we become unfaithful to men. Our relationship with God determines our relationship with men.

The sins in this section are not committed in ignorance or in good faith. They are deliberate sins, such as lying, stealing, extortion, and taking a false oath. There is no excuse for these acts. The person who commits these sins knows what he does and he knows he is guilty. That is why we do not read, as in previous cases, what he should do when he discovers his sin. There is nothing to discover; he knew all the time what he did. There should, however, be a moment of awakening, of realization of the seriousness of the act; otherwise, the sinner would not make restitution or bring a sacrifice to the Lord. This moment of repentance and brokenness is not specifically mentioned here; yet, it is an important factor in the process. Without the presence and conviction of the Holy Spirit, man’s eyes will never be opened to the reality of what he is. It is only in the presence of the Lord, as when Zacchaeus, who “stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount,’ ”<sup>47</sup> that the desire to set things straight will become a natural response.

Reconciliation consists of two parts: Restitution to the person who has been wronged by the sin committed is mentioned first. This, probably, means that there should be reconciliation with men before reconciliation with God. At least, Jesus favors this interpretation when He says: “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”<sup>48</sup> After reconciliation with man, reconciliation with God takes place. The Bible considers both acts to be part of the same matter so that both have to be carried out on the same day. The guilt offering is the same for all cases: a lamb without blemish, foreshadowing the Lamb of God who carries away the sin of the world. Jesus died for our sins; sins committed in ignorance, sins committed unintentionally as well as deliberate sins. By means of this sacrifice we are forgiven. “He will be forgiven for any of these things he did that made him guilty” (vs. 7).

### **2. The Role of the Priests in All the Sacrifices** 6:8-7:38

#### **a. The Role of the Priest in the Burnt Sacrifice** 6:8-13.

These verses belong to the sacrifice of ch. 1:1-17. They deal specifically with the fire and the ashes of the altar. The sacrifice has to be completely consumed by fire. In order to guarantee this, the ashes of the burnt sacrifice could only be removed the next morning. For a sacrifice that had been brought in the morning of the previous day, this meant a period of twenty-four hours. The minimum would be twelve hours if it had been killed the night before.

Man was not allowed to eat any part of this sacrifice; there was nothing that remained of it. The sacrifice belonged to God exclusively. It was irrevocable; it meant death twice over: first, the death of the sacrificial animal and then this complete decomposition. Three times the commandment is given that “the fire must be kept burning on the altar.” In practice, this must have meant that the priest who served at night could not sleep. He had to keep watch over the sacrifice.

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<sup>47</sup> Luke 19:8

<sup>48</sup> Matt. 5:23, 24

Obviously, this has a deep spiritual meaning. It is man's responsibility to keep the fire burning in providing the fuel. Most of the work of the Holy Spirit in this world depends upon our watchfulness and zeal. Isn't that the point in the parable of the five virgins?<sup>49</sup>

The removal of the ashes was a sacred matter, for which the priest had to wear special garments. The burnt offering expresses God's *agape* love. It constitutes the highest form of sacrifice, and it lays the basis for all the other sacrifices. We read that the sin offering and the guilt offering had to be killed at the same place as the burnt offering (6:25; 7:2). All sacrifices are aspects of the cross of Christ Jesus.

#### **b. The Grain Offering 6:14-23**

This section consists of two parts: vs. 14-18 detail what the priest has to do with the grain offering brought by the Israelites, and vs. 19-23 give instructions for the grain offering the priest brings on the day of his consecration.

For the ordinary grain offering a handful of flour and part of the oil with all the incense had to be burned on the altar. The rest of the flour and oil was to be made into unleavened cake; for the priests who had to eat it in the courtyard of the tabernacle.

This sacrifice, in which man gives himself as a creature, made of the dust of the earth, to his Creator, serves mainly as food for the priest. The person who surrenders his life to the Lord supports the work of the Lord in supporting those who serve the Lord.

God considers this grain offering as sinless. The cakes that are baked are without yeast, symbolizing a life that is pure and not influenced by sin. It is called "most holy." Because it is dedicated to the most holy God, it exhibits God's characteristics. That is why it is also contagious, in the good sense of the word, and influences all that it touches. As such, it is an image of the human nature of Jesus. "All who touched him were healed."<sup>50</sup>

The verses 19 - 23 mention a particular grain offering which is only used at the anointing ceremony of a priest. It seems that it would have been more logical if this section had been inserted in ch. 8 or 9, but, as it appears here, it emphasizes more directly the anointing of Jesus Christ to the priesthood. The dedication of a man to God was academic in as far as there was no one who was far enough from the pollution of sin to be able to be represented by this sacrifice. Only Jesus could say: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come-- it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.'"<sup>51</sup> Or, as the author of Hebrews puts it: "Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am-- it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.' First he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them' (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will.' He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."<sup>52</sup>

There is also a reference to the resurrection in the acceptance of the priesthood. If I understand Heb. 5:5-10 and other parts correctly, Jesus' priesthood is connected to his resurrection from the dead. He became priest at the day of His resurrection. In that sense ch. 6:19-23 deals with a sacrifice that lies beyond our horizon.

#### **c. The Sin Offering 6:24-30.**

The fact that both the sin offering and the burnt offering foreshadows of the cross of our Lord Jesus is confirmed by vs. 25, which says: "The sin offering is to be slaughtered before the LORD in the place the burnt offering is slaughtered; it is most holy." Both are brought before the Lord, both are most holy. With the exception of the bull that was sacrificed for the sin of the priest or for the sin of the whole community, the part of the sacrifice that was not burned on the altar was for the priest. This meat was not to be considered as ordinary meat. We read in vs. 28, "The clay pot the meat is cooked in must be broken; but if it is cooked in a bronze pot, the pot is to be scoured and rinsed with water." The priest ate holy food in a world that is polluted by sin. And he had to see to it that what was polluted would not be sanctified by that which was holy!

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<sup>49</sup> Matt. 25:1-13

<sup>50</sup> Mark 6:56

<sup>51</sup> Ps 40:6-8

<sup>52</sup> Heb. 10:5-10

We get the impression from what the prophet Haggai says that the opposite was true. We read: “‘If a person carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, oil or other food, does it become consecrated?’ The priests answered, ‘No.’ Then Haggai said, ‘If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?’ ‘Yes,’ the priests replied, ‘it becomes defiled.’ Then Haggai said, ‘So it is with this people and this nation in my sight,’ declares the LORD. ‘Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled.’”<sup>53</sup> In the case which Haggai mentions, the contact is indirect. It was not the meat that touched other food, but the garment in which the meat was wrapped. The fact remains that we live in a world in which unholiness is contagious and holiness is not. This is due to the fact that we, as men, are fallen and that the world in which we live is corrupt. The declaration of ch. 6:27, therefore, is just as much a declaration of the resurrection as the vs. 19-23 are. In the midst of the corruption to which creation is subjected, God announces a reversal of the process.

We saw already that Jesus was not susceptible to pollution, but that everything He touched became pure and whole. We should never underestimate the sanctifying influence of the Word of God.

There is a paradox in that this principle did not apply to the first two sacrifices, of which the blood was brought into the sanctuary. In the Old Testament two sacrifices were necessary to portray all the aspects of the sacrifice of Christ.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### d. The Guilt Offering 7:1-10.

The sacrifices are given here in the order of importance accorded them by the priest; for example, the sacrifice of which the largest portion was given to the priest is mentioned last. That is why the order is not the same as in the first six chapters. This treatment is at the same time beautiful and ironic, since the more the sacrifice has to do with sin, the more the priest profits from it. However on exception is that the last sacrifice mentioned in this series is the fellowship offering which is a sacrifice that is brought voluntarily as man’s answer to reconciliation with God. But we could say that the priest’s salary is largest where atonement is most clearly expressed. Both the sinner and the mediator live by grace! This is a defeat for the devil.

The unity among the various sacrifices is emphasized again in the fact that all are brought to the same place as the burnt offering. The place of the altar of the world is the place where the Lamb of God was slain, on the hill of Golgotha. The burnt offering shows us the deepest meaning of the cross. Everything else is included in this.

The procedure of the sacrifice of the sin offering is the same procedure as the fellowship offering and as the guilt offering. Only in the fellowship offering is the largest portion of the meat left to the person who brings the sacrifice.

The instructions here given to the priest are that the blood had to be sprinkled around the altar and all the fat, kidneys, and the covering of the liver had to be burned on the altar. Here too, the emphasis is on the unity of the sacrifices. They all portray the sacrifice of the body of Christ. The five sacrifices in these seven chapters are five facets of the same sacrifice.

I wonder why only the male members of the priest’s family were allowed to eat these offerings. We do read in ch. 10:14 that the daughters, too, could eat of the meat of the fellowship offering. The verse reads: “But you and your sons and your daughters may eat the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented. Eat them in a ceremonially clean place; they have been given to you and your children as your share of the Israelites’ fellowship offerings.” Atonement for sin, however, was the affair of men, because the man bears the greater responsibility for sin in the world. The share of guilt for Adam was greater than that of Eve. It was through his disobedience that death came into the world. That is why it is reasonable that the man eats part of the sacrifice that atones for sin.

Vs. 7 links the sin offering and the guilt offering directly. They both form the corner stones of reconciliation. Vs. 8 refers back to the burnt offering and, as such, it could just as well fit in ch. 6. It fits here too because it is part of the bonuses the priests receives from the sacrifices. The skin of the burnt offering is the only part that is given to the priest. Evidently, the first sacrifice that was brought in Paradise when man had fallen into sin must have been the burnt offering, because by it Adam and Eve were saved from their feeling of shame and nakedness. The prophetic meaning of this sacrifice was also fulfilled literally when the Roman soldiers divided the clothing of Jesus Christ among themselves. They were the priests who sacrificed the Lamb of God as a burnt sacrifice.

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<sup>53</sup> Hag. 2:12-14

The art of leather preparation must have been widely practiced among the priests. After a handful of the grain offering had been put on the altar, the priest also received the larger portion of the grain offering, both in baked and dry form. So, in a community where people took the atonement of their sins seriously, the priest never lacked meat and bread.

#### e. The Fellowship Offering 7:11-38.

An interesting distinction is made between fellowship offerings that serve as a thank offering (vs. 11 - 15) and those that represent a vow or a freewill offering (vs. 16 - 21).

The thank offering becomes an act of praise by the symbolic giving of oneself to the Lord in death and, secondly, the sacrifice serves as a symbol of surrender in the making of a vow. The contents of the vow is not specified. It implies that the person who brings the sacrifice promises to do something for the Lord, some kind of service, either for a life-time, or for a limited period of time.

The fellowship offering is the logical result of the atonement and of the forgiveness of sin which was received in the sin offering and the guilt offering. For us, it means that we give ourselves to God because He has saved us.

All three forms of the grain offering which were specified in chapter two had to accompany the fellowship offering. This means that the fellowship offering was actually a combination of two kinds of sacrifices. Our praise and gratitude demonstrates the joy of our forgiveness and of the fact that God, as our Creator, has a right to the body, soul, and spirit of the man He created.

We fall easily into the fault of thinking that, if we praise God out of gratitude, we just pronounce certain words. Here it becomes clear that the essence of praise is insight in the meaning of atonement and of our *raison d'être* as humans who have been created by God: an insight which translates itself in a complete surrender of ourselves in all the aspects of our life. The three kinds of the grain offering (the fine flour the cakes made without yeast and mixed with oil, the wafers made without yeast and spread with oil) all symbolize the various aspects of our life. The cakes without yeast stand for the purity of our human nature, the oil for the influence and fullness of the Holy Spirit, and the fine flour for the broken spirit before God. This kind of perfect purity of a spirit that is broken and filled before the Lord is an ideal that is not found in men, except in our Lord Jesus Christ. It should also be clear that, without the presence of the Holy Spirit there can be no real fellowship offering.

It is surprising that the man who brings a thank offering should, at the same time, bring an offering of cakes made with yeast as an offering that had to be lifted up before the Lord. The Hebrew word used here is *teruwmah* or *terumah*, which is defined by *Strong's Dictionary* as "a present (as offered up), especially in sacrifice or as tribute." The KJV translates it with "gift, heave offering." There are, to my knowledge, only two instances in which bread with yeast was allowed to be brought before the Lord: the one here and the other at Pentecost, in ch. 23:17. At the occasion of Pentecost the bread with yeast is a symbol of the church in which sin has done its work and has been conquered by the fire of the Holy Spirit. Or, if you want, it is a reminder of the imperfect condition of the church on earth. The same principle is present here but on an individual level. Yeast symbolizes sin but bread baked with yeast is tastier than unleavened bread. In the process of baking all the germs have been destroyed; therefore, bread with yeast is a fitting image of man in whom sin has been conquered by the power of God.

The meat of the sacrifice had to be eaten on the day on which the animal was killed, and none was to be kept till the next day. Praise has to be fresh. Yesterday's praise is not enough for today.

Of the votive or free will offering we do not read that it has to be accompanied by a grain offering. We suppose that the votive offering and free will offering are identical. The occasion for the sacrifice is a vow to do something specific for the Lord or to give something to Him. The principle is that of surrender of a person or something belonging to that person to serve the Lord. The fact that this act takes the form of a fellowship offering indicates that it costs us everything we have. After all, the sacrificial animal was killed and the one who brought the sacrifice identified himself with the animal through the imposition of his hands. There is no such thing as "part time" service. Even if we give part of what is ours to the Lord we imply that He has the right to all and that we borrow from Him what we use for ourselves.

Contrary to the law concerning the thank offering, the meat of the votive offering could be eaten on the second day, but not on the third because by that time the meat would have started to spoil. A vow does not have to be renewed daily, but we have to watch for corruption. Our vows and resolutions are subject to corruption also. We must examine our motives from time to time and ask ourselves if what we do is born of the Holy Spirit or of ourselves. If a man ate the meat of the sacrifice on the third day, he forfeited the grace God had given him. We do not read that he must be cut off from his people, as vs. 21 says, but that "the person who eats any of it will be held responsible" (vs. 18). The first punishment for eating spoiled meat was, of course, indigestion or sickness; but, added to this, the person

in question lost his pardon that was his as a result of the sin offering and guilt offering which he had previously brought. He had to start over again.

We should remember that in the Jewish way of reckoning time “the third day” could start as shortly as twenty-four hours after day one. Jesus’ resurrection took place on the third day before decomposition had set in.

Contrary to the effect the meat of the sin offering had upon objects it touched and made holy, (6:27) the meat of the votive offering became desecrated by contact with impure objects. This sacrifice did not emphasize symbolically the resurrection power of Jesus Christ as the sin offering did, but it laid the stress on the nature of the man who served God and who could be polluted by outside influences. The prohibition to eat meat on the third day and the warning against pollution by impure objects spoke of two kinds of sources of pollution: one from the outside and one from inside. This gives us a complete picture of the danger that threatens our service for God.

On the other hand, it was impossible for unauthorized people to serve the Lord. If a man was impure, he forfeited his life when he ate the meat of a votive offering. In that case too, a distinction was made concerning the source of his impurity. The cause of a person’s impurity could be something within himself, such as a bodily discharge (ch. 15:2 and following verses), or normal sexual intercourse (ch. 15:18) or leprosy. Or the contamination could be caused by touching unclean objects or persons. We cannot serve the Lord if we do not take our sanctification seriously.

We have already seen that there is a series of three prohibitions to eating fat and blood. The verses 22 - 27 are the second in this series, and the others are found in 3:17; 17:10 - 16. The prohibition here is the first instance in which we are told that the person who does not obey this commandment shall be cut off. Later, in ch. 17:10 we read: “Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood-- I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people.” The Lord says: “I will set my face against that person who eats blood.” So, evidently, it was not a matter of a public execution.

There is probably a hidden reference to a healthy diet in these commandments. Although eating fat and drinking blood are not good for a person’s health, the main issue in the prohibition of drinking blood is that the person who trespassed this commandment demonstrated a lack of spiritual understanding regarding the pardon of his sins. A man who drank blood despised the altar and committed a sin against the Holy Spirit. The shedding of Jesus’ blood should, obviously, bring a drastic change in our attitude toward animal blood. From a spiritual viewpoint animal blood has no longer any value and whether we drink or eat it is of no spiritual importance. It may be, though, that from a medical viewpoint consumption of blood is not advisable.

Verses 28-38 form the conclusion of this section and deal with the share the priest received from the fellowship offering. The person who brought the sacrifice had to lift up and wave the breast and the right thigh of the animal before the altar and give it to the Lord, after which he would hand it over to the priest who burned the sacrifice. The meaning of the waving consisted in the acknowledgment of God’s right to all of the sacrifices. It illustrates what David says: “Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”<sup>54</sup>

The reality of the atonement of our sins is brought home to us in the understanding that God has a right to our very being and to everything we possess. This is expressed in the bringing of the fellowship offering which symbolizes our praise and service to God.

God Himself acts in accepting the breast and the thigh of the fellowship offering and He gives it to the priest. He takes and He gives. What we do is nothing more than carrying out God’s act. This double emphasis on what we do and what God does teaches us a deep lesson. Vs. 30 tells us that the person who sacrifices has to bring the offering with his own hands, and, at the same time, it is God Who takes and gives. This unity of action is characteristic of the fellowship offering.

Vs. 36 says that “the LORD commanded that the Israelites give this to them as their regular share for the generations to come.” The KJV states this more emphatically by making it a perpetual institution. We read: “Which the LORD commanded to be given them of the children of Israel, in the day that he anointed them, by a statute for ever throughout their generations.” Yet, the practice has long been abolished. Not only have the Israelites ceased to bring bloody sacrifices in our modern days, but the Bible states clearly that God was never interested in animal sacrifices other than as a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of the body of Christ. Quoting from Psalm 40, the author of the Hebrew writes: “Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am-- it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.’ ”<sup>55</sup> There is, however, an eternal principle expressed in the wave offering which is valid for today. The first lesson is that when we realize what our salvation

<sup>54</sup> I Chron. 29:14

<sup>55</sup> Heb 10:5-7; see Ps. 40:6-8

means we also understand that God has a right to our lives. The sacrifice was, actually, a triple surrender: in the imposition of hands upon the head of the sacrificial animal and the subsequent killing, the redeemed man gave himself to God. The waving of the thigh and breast expressed anew the right God has upon the whole of our lives and, finally, this portion of the sacrifice is handed over to the priest. Man gives himself to God, and God gives him to his fellowmen. The marvelous side-benefit is that in the process the priest's needs were provided for. The "Mission Dollar" is the by-product of our surrender, based on the reality of our redemption.

Vs. 35 and 36, where the right of the priest is repeated, make clear that this right is included in his unction. The unction is the guarantee that God will provide for his material needs. This guarantee not only counts for the fellowship offering but also for all sacrifices consumed by fire described in the preceding verses. The support comes in daily life from the person who brings the sacrifice, but the fact that God Himself takes responsibility for the support means that the priest is, in principle, not dependent upon human benevolence. He is not obliged to go around begging. Even if his fellowmen forget him, the divine "I have taken ... and have given," remains. (vs. 34). It is probable that this portion of the law was given to Moses on the top of Mount Sinai, although the book of Leviticus opens with the statement "The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### 3. **The Priests as Mediators.** Chapter 8 - 10.

#### a. **The Consecration of the Priests** 8:1-36.

We are greatly impressed by the solemnity of the consecration and installation of the priest which is described in this chapter. The Lord gives the command to Moses to preside over the ceremony in the presence of the whole Israelite community. This is not stated specifically, but it is probable that women and children were excluded. Probably, only adult men attended.

The unity of Aaron and his sons and the people, as is demonstrated in this chapter, is important. After all, the priesthood consists of a two-sided relationship: to God and to the people.

The first and second verses give us an inventory of what was needed for the installation of the priesthood. The first is the Word of God: "The LORD said to Moses." Second is man: "Bring Aaron and his sons" and then the garments which were both a covering for man and an indication of the ministry. The oil was a symbol of the working of the Holy Spirit. Finally, there were the sacrifices by which the people were to be brought into fellowship with God. The place, too, is important: "the entrance of the Tent of Meeting." The consecration was done at the place of God's choosing, not men's.

When all were gathered at the entrance of the Tent, Aaron and his sons were washed and clothed. This meant that those men must first have stood naked before God. That nakedness before the Lord became an experience of shame as Adam and Eve had felt ashamed before God because they were naked. In contrast, nakedness can be an expression of an intimate and loving relationship. Love is naked, not only sexually, but also in the spiritual and emotional sense. The ritual washing symbolized, of course, the cleansing of the life of man who enters into fellowship with God. We should never forget that God, not man, takes the initiative for the installation of the priesthood.

The metamorphosis from naked man to priest in full pontifical is described in detail. It is as if we see it happening before our eyes. We can see a reference to the resurrection in this ritual. Jesus became High Priest on the day of his resurrection. From the nakedness of the cross, He was clothed with glory and honor.

We could also see in the washing a symbol of regeneration. Paul uses this symbol: "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."<sup>56</sup> In the present dispensation baptism is a symbol of identification with the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Aaron's consecration pointed, in the first place, to the real High Priesthood and to an identification with the real sacrifice.

. There is no better symbol for purification and sanctification than the washing which is a reminder of the impurity that clings to man. God chose Aaron and his sons to become His priests.<sup>57</sup> They became God's property and, as such, they were purified; this is reminder that God does not use polluted instruments.

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<sup>56</sup> Titus 3:5

<sup>57</sup> See Ex. 28:1

We must see the garments Aaron and his sons were to wear according to Exodus.<sup>58</sup> All the garments, from the underwear to the turban, were masterpieces of weaving and braiding. The tunic worn on top of the linen undergarments, had a pattern woven into it. The waistband and the robe were colorful pieces of woven cloth embroidered with gold. The breastpiece and head plate were made of gold embellished with precious stones. Aaron, the best dressed man of his time, enjoyed all the honor and glory that came with his office. The priesthood unto the Lord was honorable and glorious. “The fine coat makes the fine gentleman,” this in anticipation of the day that “the fine gentleman makes the fine coat,” when our inward glory makes our clothing glow and glitter. This happened at Jesus’ transfiguration when: “His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.”<sup>59</sup> At this time Aaron is, symbolically, clothed with the glory of God.

We hardly know anything about the ephod and the Urim and Thummim. *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* defines the ephod: “a vest worn by the HIGH PRIEST when he presided at the altar <Ex. 28:4-14; 39:2-7>. Worn over a blue robe <Ex. 28:31-35>, the ephod was made of fine linen interwoven with some threads of pure gold and other threads that were blue, purple, and scarlet in color. The ephod consisted of two pieces joined at the shoulders and bound together at the bottom by a woven band of the same material as the ephod. This band perhaps served as a girdle. Upon the shoulders of the ephod, in settings of gold, were two onyx stones. Upon these stones were engraved the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The front of the vest, or the breastplate, was fastened to the shoulder straps by two golden chains <Ex. 28:14> and by a blue cord <Ex. 28:28>. In later years, ephods were worn by associate priests as well as the high priest <1 Sam. 22:18>. Even the boy Samuel, dedicated to serve in the Shiloh temple, wore an ephod <1 Sam. 2:18>. David, although not a priest, wore an ephod when he brought the ark to Jerusalem <2 Sam. 6:14; 1 Chr. 15:27>.

Since Christ is our great High Priest <Heb. 8:1-6>, the symbols in the ephod may be applied to Him. White linen speaks of His absolute righteousness. Scarlet (the color of blood) symbolizes His atoning work on the cross; purple, His royalty; gold, His divinity. Blue, the color of the sky, signifies Christ’s origin with God the Father in heaven.”

Regarding the Urim and Thummim *Nelson’s Dictionary* records the following: “(lights and perfections)--gems or stones carried by the high priest and used by him to determine God’s will in certain matters. Many scholars believe these gems were cast, much as dice are thrown, to aid the high priest in making important decisions. The Urim and Thummim were either on, by, or in the high priest’s breastplate. For this reason the breastplate is often called the breastplate of judgment, or decision. In the instructions for making the breastplate, the linen was to be doubled to form a square <Ex. 28:16>. If the top edge was not stitched together, the breastplate would be an envelope or pouch. Many scholars believe the Urim and Thummim were kept in this pouch and were stones or gems with engraved symbols that signified yes no or true-false. By these the high priest reached a decision, according to this theory. The Jewish historian Josephus (A. D. 37-100?), a contemporary of the apostle John, believed that the Urim and Thummim had to do with the flashing of the precious stones in the breastplate. Later Jewish writers believed that the letters in the names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on the stones stood out or flashed in succession to spell out God’s answer. This theory does imply that the Urim and Thummim could produce answers to questions which called for more than a mere yes or no reply. Another theory is that by staring at the glow of the Urim and Thummim, the high priest went into a state of ecstasy or trance during which God spoke to him. The student or Bible teacher should bear in mind that all of these theories are pure guesswork. No one knows the exact nature of the Urim and Thummim or precisely how they were used. There are few allusions to the Urim and Thummim in the Bible. They are first mentioned in the description of the breastplate of judgment <Ex. 28:30; Lev. 8:8>. When Joshua succeeded Moses, he was to have answers from the Urim through Eleazar the priest <Num. 27:21>. They are next mentioned in Moses’ dying blessing upon Levi <Deut. 33:8>. There are places in the Bible where Urim and Thummim may be implied but are not named <Josh. 7:14-18; 1 Sam. 14:37-45; 2 Sam. 21:1>. Saul sought direction from the witch of En-dor when he could receive no answer from the Lord, ‘either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets’ <1 Sam. 28:6>. Another interesting reference to the Urim and Thummim occurred during the period after the return of the Jewish people from their years in captivity by the Babylonians. The Persian governor of Jerusalem denied the people permission to observe some of their ancient Jewish food laws until ‘a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim’ <Ezra 2:63>.”

The ephod, on which also the stones with the names of the tribes of Israel were connected, symbolized both intercession and searching for the will of God. The turban was adorned with the golden diadem with the inscription “Holy to the LORD.” So Aaron stands in full pontifical before the Lord.

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<sup>58</sup> See Ex. 28

<sup>59</sup> Mark 9:3

I have to think of Zechariah's vision, where Joshua, the High Priest, stands before the Lord in filthy clothes and Satan stands on the side accusing him.<sup>60</sup> Seen in the light of ch. 8, Zechariah's vision gains in depth. Zechariah puts special emphasis on the turban, on which, as we know, the diadem with the inscription "Holy to the LORD" would have been tied. The angel of the Lord called Joshua's new garments "festal robes."<sup>61</sup> Being priest before the Lord was an honor and required a feast. The glory and the joy of God emanated from the one who occupied the office of the High Priest.

After the priests were dressed, the anointing took place. First the tabernacle was anointed. The heaviest stress in this ritual is on the burnt offering altar. The same oil that is used for this ceremony is poured out upon the head of Aaron. In this anointing ceremony God, the Holy Spirit, places His hand upon the house and the priest. This means that the Spirit of God fills this house and the priest, which accentuates the unity between the two. It is this anointing that sanctifies; that is the Holy Spirit sets people aside for God. This sanctification or setting apart is at the same time a cleansing.

In this context we should read the psalm that says: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes."<sup>62</sup> Aaron's anointing is an image of the love and unity of the body of Christ. In this way is Aaron's anointing not only a foreshadowing of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, but also of Pentecost.

Aaron and his sons, however, were descendants of Adam; that is, they were sinful human beings. Without the sacrifice of Jesus their ministry would have no significance whatsoever. The presentation of the bull for the sin offering in vs. 14 is a reminder of their sinful nature. In their laying on of their hands on the bull's head, they confessed this fact. This sin offering differed from all the other sin offerings that have to be made in behalf of the priest in that the blood was not taken into the tabernacle to be sprinkled in front of the curtain. After the altar has been sanctified this blood is poured out at the foot of it. Since, up to this time, there had not been an official priesthood, it would have been impossible to sprinkle the blood in front of the curtain.

After the burning of the fat, all that remained of the bull was brought outside the camp in the same way that the animals, whose blood had been brought into the sanctuary, were disposed off.

After the problem of the priest's sinful nature had been dealt with, the emphasis of the action was put upon the purpose of all sacrifices, that is, surrender to God and love for Him, as this was expressed in the burnt offering or holocaust. As we have already seen, the burnt offering exemplified the love of the Son for the Father. This sacrifice emphasized the heavenly aspect, from which all other sacrifices derive their meaning. Without this sacrifice the altar would be nothing but an abattoir for animals. God must have had this burnt offering in mind with every other sacrifice that was brought to Him. This sacrifice and what it expressed was the central meaning of the priesthood. Everything else was either preparation or after-meditation. The bringing of this sacrifice is described in vs. 18-21. There is no difference from what we read about this sacrifice in ch. 1. It was the first burnt sacrifice brought in that dispensation, and it was offered up by Moses in behalf of his brother and nephews.

The next sacrifice was the ram for the ordination. The extraordinary feature of this sacrifice was in what happened to the blood of the animal. Some of its blood was put on the right earlobe of Aaron and his sons, on the thumb of their right hand and on the big toe of their right foot. The symbolism is clear. The earlobe stands for hearing and obeying the voice of God. All misery in this world began when man paid attention to the devil's insinuation: "Did God really say ...?" This fundamental act of disobedience had to be atoned for before fellowship with God could be renewed. Priesthood would have been impossible without obedience.

The thumb symbolized man's acting, and it played an important part in the process that led from the attitude of disobedience to the sinful act. It would have been difficult for Eve to pick the fruit without using her thumb. It was the act of picking the fruit that made sin irrevocable. This act was atoned for in the application of the blood to the thumb. The thumb with the hand to which it is attached was given back to God who created both and who, consequently, had a right to both.

The big toe governs man's walk, and man must walk in God's way. If the thumb stands for man's acts, the big toe stands for his habits. Man does not commit sin as a series of unrelated acts; he walks in the path of iniquity, and that makes him act sinfully.

We now can see a parallel between the hand and the foot as just discussed here, and the sin offering and the guilt offering, as also described. Both are related to our walk in life, to the acts of sin we commit, and to our sinful

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<sup>60</sup> Zech. 3:3-5

<sup>61</sup> Zech 3:4 (NAS)

<sup>62</sup> Ps. 133:1,2

nature. Later, in ch. 14:14, we shall see that the same ceremony was performed at the cleansing of a leper who was healed from his sickness.

The same blood that was applied to the vital parts of the priest's body was also sprinkled around the altar. Under the new covenant, no renewal of our obedience and of our walk in life is possible without the cross of Christ. We observe that the renewal took place after the oil had been poured out over Aaron's head. Renewal of life is, also, not possible without the presence of the Holy Spirit, who woos us and nudges us to surrender our body to God.

The fat of this ordination sacrifice was burned upon the altar together with the grain offering. Moses was the first one to receive the breast of the sacrifice. This institution elevated Moses to the position of the priest who received the portion, but this was only applicable the first time.

After this, Aaron and his sons were sanctified by the sprinkling on their clothing of a mixture of blood and oil. It seems a pity to us that those precious garments were "spoiled" in this way with drops of blood and oil, but without the blood of atonement and the oil of the Holy Spirit the most expensive clothing would be nothing but a heap of rags. As Isaiah says: "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."<sup>63</sup>

This sacrifice provides for the physical needs of Aaron and his sons. The meat has to be cooked and eaten together with the bread of the grain offering. In this way their sanctification becomes their satisfaction. The fact that nothing of this sacrifice is to be kept till the next day makes this a "Thank Offering," according to ch. 7:12-15. This dedication ceremony lasts for seven days. Every day the ritual is repeated in the same way.

In conclusion, we can say that this dedication involved many areas and duties: his approaching God, his wearing the priestly garments, the anointing of that which was holy, the preparing of the three kinds of sacrifices, the applying of the oil and the blood to the organs that were of vital importance for this ministry, the sprinkling of the mixture of blood and oil on the garments, and the eating of the meal. All this happened in public. The priests-to-be had to remain at the entrance of the tent, in the presence of the Lord. "You must stay at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting day and night for seven days and do what the LORD requires, so you will not die; for that is what I have been commanded" (vs. 35). This "so you will not die" was not an empty threat. In fact the priest performed duties that endangered his life as a man who works with live wires. Chapter 10 confirms that the smallest mistake could cost him his life.

## CHAPTER NINE

9:1-24.

After the detailed description of the sacrifices in ch. 8 it almost seems redundant that the offering of the animals for the dedication of the priests is given in such detail. This shows us that God is a God of detail. For Him there exists no routine. It is also characteristic for the sense of God's presence that Moses and Aaron must have had, that everything is remembered so precisely. Our brain always registers all details whether we are conscious of this or not. God's presence makes our brain and our awareness function as they should.

The day on which the priests enter into their duties is the eighth. This suggests resurrection. We are not told whether the first day of dedication coincided with the first day of the week, but the phrase "eighth day" suggests the day after the Sabbath, which is the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. The suggestion is important in as much as this priesthood is a shadow of the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. According to the writer of the Hebrew epistle Jesus' priesthood started with His resurrection.<sup>64</sup>

With this reference to the resurrection there is, at the same time, a reminder of death. Aaron and his sons have to bring first a sacrifice for their own sin. The bull that was sacrificed was a sin offering and the ram a burnt offering. The fact that a male goat had to be sacrificed for the Israelites as a sin offering suggests that the leaders of the people represent the people as a whole in this ritual. Yet, all the people are present at this inauguration ceremony.

There is a specific promise given, at this occasion, that the Lord would appear to the priests and to the whole community. Vs. 6 tells us: "Then Moses said, 'This is what the LORD has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the LORD may appear to you.' " In connection with this promise Moses gives the last instructions regarding the sacrifices Aaron and his sons have to bring, first for themselves and then for the people: first the sin offering for the priests themselves followed by the burnt offering. After this the sin offering for the leaders of the people then burnt offering, the grain offering and the fellowship offering. The sin offering for the priests here is not brought completely

<sup>63</sup> Isa. 64:6

<sup>64</sup>See: Hebr. 4:14,15; 5:5,6,9,10; 6:19,20; 7:15-17, 23-25; 8:1,2.

in accordance with the regulations in ch. 4. The blood is not yet sprinkled before the curtain in the Holy Place. The reason for this is, probably, that the glory of God had not yet descended upon the ark and, consequently, it would have made little sense to sprinkle the blood at that place. Apart from this difference all the other sacrifices are brought according to the prescribed rules.

Vs. 17 also mentions a morning's burnt offering. The regulations for this sacrifice are found in Ex. 29:38-46. There we also find the remarkable verse: "There also I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated by my glory." (Vs. 43). Evidently, in Hebrew, the word that is translated here with "the place" can apply to people also. Some translations have "they will be consecrated by my glory."<sup>65</sup>

After all the sacrifices have been brought for the priests and for the people, Aaron lifts up his hands and pronounces the benediction. The text of this benediction is given in Num 6:24-26, "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." This triple blessing corresponds with the apostolic one in II Cor. 13:14, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." In the blessing and keeping we recognize the love of God the Father, making His face shine upon us corresponds with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the turning of God face toward us and giving peace are brought about by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

After this Moses and Aaron both enter the tent. This is now made possible because of the blood that had been poured out. The way into the sanctuary is now open, if not for all then, at least for the representatives of the people. After this they both come out and repeat the blessing for the people. Up till that moment everything was done in faith because there had been no visible manifestation of God's presence. The blood that was poured out and the pronouncing of the blessing make the revelation of God's glory a visible reality. We are not told what exactly happened. Fire falls upon the altar, probably in the form of lightening that struck. But this was not the only proof of the undeniable presence of the "Shekinah." At the dedication of the temple we read how the glory of the Lord filled the newly constructed temple of Solomon. "When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple."<sup>66</sup> Whether the manifestation was the same here, in the form of a cloud, we are not told. The cloud and the pillar of fire which accompanied the people out of Egypt must have been present. We do not know when they disappeared. Possibly at the beginning of the forty years of punishment. But this is stated nowhere. It is possible that it was the cloud that appeared here.

I have often tried to imagine what it would have meant to have a physical experience of the presence of the Lord, like the Israelites had. Their five senses were involved in their worship. Yet, as New Testament Christians, we lack nothing. The presence of Christ within us, the hope of glory, may not be perceived by our five senses, yet, it is a greater reality than the Old Testament one. The biggest difference is in the condition of man. For Israel the Lord's presence was always a kind of condemnation. The blood of animals could never completely quiet the accusing voice of their conscience. We have the spiritual and emotional experience of inner cleansing.

In Tolkien's book *Lord of the Rings*, Frodo and his friend and Gullum stand before "the crack of doom" to throw the ring in it. One brief moment they see the eye of Sauron and they are hypnotized by the presence of evil. If Satan can cause such a physical experience of the senses in the negative, how much more would seeing the glory of the Lord have been an experience that was overwhelming, healing and uplifting.

The glory of the Lord consumes the burnt offering, which was the expression of divine surrender in love. From now on the fire that burns on the altar is the fire of the Lord.

The reaction of the people is interesting. We read in vs. 24, "when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell face down." It was a spontaneous reaction of real worship. It resembled the worship we read about in heaven, where the twenty-four elders fall down before the throne and cast down their crowns. The worship of the people of Israel at this moment was much more real than the formality that passes for worship which we can see in churches in our day. In one African country people who watched the *Jesus Film* burst out in spontaneous applause when they saw Jesus come out of the grave. Ethan the Ezrahite says: "Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD. They rejoice in your name all day long; they exult in your righteousness."<sup>67</sup> If Israel would have kept this vision we would have a different world today.

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<sup>65</sup>NBG in Dutch, for instance.

<sup>66</sup> I Kings 8:10,11

<sup>67</sup> Ps. 89:15,16

## CHAPTER TEN

**The Daring Negligence of the Priests 10:1-20**

We are not told specifically when the incident described in these verses took place, but we get the impression that it happened during the consecration and entrance into the service of priesthood of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu who brought "unauthorized fire" before the Lord. This, probably, meant that, instead of using the fire that was on the altar which had been kindled by the Lord Himself, they made their own fire. According to ch. 6:12,13, that fire was never allowed to go out; it had to be kept burning.

The incident is not described in detail. We read in vs. 8 and 9 a prohibition against the use of alcohol by priests. "Then the LORD said to Aaron, 'You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the Tent of Meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come.'" We deduct from this that the two priests had probably drunk too much. Vs. 6 mentions that the Lord destroyed them with fire which must have broken out and killed them. It could be that they could have saved their lives if they had not been too drunk to realize what was happening.

What, actually, was their sin? It was not only the fire; the cause was something much deeper. Nadab and Abihu ignored had God's revelation of Himself, and believed that the fire they made was just as good as the fire that had come from the Lord. They did not distinguish between what was the Lord's and what was man's effort. They did not distinguish between what was holy and what was not.

In ch. 16:1,2 we read: "The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the LORD. The LORD said to Moses: 'Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement.'" We may conclude from this warning that, not only had the two men used unauthorized fire, but that they had also entered the Holy of Holies on their own initiative. At this point there had not been any regulation regarding the Day of Atonement, but the fact that God had not commanded this, according to vs. 1, should have been indication enough for them.

So, their sin consisted of three fatal offences: they had used alcohol, they had made their own fire, and they had entered the Most Holy Place. Each of these actions alone could have cost them their lives. We can understand the gravity of their sin when we read in Revelation: "Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand."<sup>68</sup> The bringing of incense before the Lord was a representation of the heavenly reality of intercession. The brothers could, of course, not have understood in detail the meaning of their ministry, but they experienced the presence of the Lord in a way their senses could understand. They could have known with Whom they were dealing. Their actions prove that they had no notion who God was. Their use of wine surely gave evidence of this lack of understanding.

The incident should teach us, in the first place, how great and wonderful true adoration and worship is. Just as a miscarriage accentuates the miracle of the birth of a healthy baby, so does this tragedy emphasize the glory of genuine fellowship with God. Revelations gives us a description of the heavenly reality, of which the bringing of the incense offering by the priests was a representation. Aaron's sons had not entered the Most Holy Place on the basis of the blood of the sacrificial animal that had been shed. Their standing before the altar had not been preceded by a recognition of sin and confession. They had bypassed the necessity of atonement. In their act they demonstrated trust in their own righteousness and that they despised the blood of atonement.

Unless we stand before God in the power of the Spirit, we are under the influence of evil spirits. No one stands alone before God. If we are not part of God's reconciliation that encompasses the whole world, we are part of the universal rebellion. The entering into the Most Holy Place by Nabad and Abihu was like a revolt in the palace of a king. They were like the man in Jesus' parable who had infiltrated the wedding feast without wearing wedding clothes.<sup>69</sup>

The incident gives us also an example of human grief and shame. "Aaron remained silent" (vs. 3) is just as heart rending as "Jesus wept"<sup>70</sup> in John's Gospel. In a sense, Aaron was responsible for the death of his sons; their

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<sup>68</sup> Rev. 8:3,4

<sup>69</sup> See Matt. 22:11,12

<sup>70</sup> John 11:35

failure was his failure. The testimony he had given regarding the “fear of the Lord” and an intimate walk with God had not been clear enough to make a lasting impression upon his sons. It was the Word of God that made Aaron remain silent at his recognition of the high and privileged position in which he and his sons were placed. God had said: “Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored.” God made clear to those who thought that the punishment of Aaron’s sons was too severe that the closer we come to God the finer the lines are drawn between good and bad. God cannot let sin slip by. “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”<sup>71</sup> The KJV translates vs. 3 with “I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified.” The word “glorified” seems out of place here. How can capital punishment be an expression of glory? Yet, it is true that Nadab and Abihu were killed by the glory of the Lord. Their sin had taken away their protection against this glory, but that was not God’s fault. “For the LORD God is a sun and shield.”<sup>72</sup> We cannot throw away the shield without being burned. Aaron’s silence was, no doubt, a sign of deep grief, but also of surrender. He did not object. He who keeps his peace agrees. Approaching God or coming nigh to God, as the KJV says, is an act of intimacy. Our walk with God should involve two things which are, in our thinking, irreconcilable: fear and love; deep respect and deep intimacy.

Aaron and his sons were not allowed to take part in the burial ceremony. The cousins of the deceased carried the bodies out of the sanctuary. We do not read about any problem of their entering the Holy Place. The dead priests are carried out in their underwear. Evidently, the uniforms which were part of their glory were removed from their bodies.

Three reasons are given as to why Aaron and his sons were not allowed to attend the funeral: First of all, they were not allowed to leave the sanctuary. Secondly, a priest was not allowed to mourn, and, finally, the touching of a dead body would have made them ritually impure. These stipulations are recorded in ch. 21. Death is an insult to God. A priest was not allowed to have a part in it. Of course, the position of a priest who stands before the Lord and his relationship with death should not be seen as a denial of the reality of death. It is not a question of, “if you do not look at it, it will go away.” It should rather be seen as a reaching forward to the resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is an expression of the fact that God is the God of the living and not of the dead,<sup>73</sup> as Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew.

As far as we know, the concept of resurrection was a rather vague idea in the mind of the Old Testament Jew. The revelation of an eternal life after death and a resurrection of the body from the dead was a progressive one that became clearer as the history of salvation came into focus. The death of Aaron’s sons must have been seen by their contemporaries as the end of their existence. Seen in that light, it is the more striking that Aaron and his sons were not allowed to mourn nor to leave the entrance of the tent. Their consolation was to be found in an uninterrupted fellowship with God. At that time God did not show them the “why” of it all. It was only made clear to them that they were not allowed to give in to the humiliation and shame that death is to man, because they had been anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit. They had to remain close to God, Whose glory was physically present. So they learned the truth that is expressed in the psalm that says: “Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign LORD comes escape from death.”<sup>74</sup>

Yet, it is no sin to mourn and weep. Aaron’s silence and later the erroneous burning up of the sin offering for the people of Israel testify to the fact that the events did not leave the priests untouched. They only expressed outwardly that they were not mourning, not that they inwardly conquered death.

As we said above, the prohibition against the drinking of wine or intoxicating beverages suggests a connection with the preceding verses. We get the impression that Nadab and Abihu were under the influence of alcohol when they entered the sanctuary and lost their lives. There was no general prohibition for Israel. But for a priest, a man who stands between God and his fellowmen, all forms of intoxication were forbidden. I take this to be a good reason for a Christian to be a teetotaler. God expects us to be filled with the Spirit instead of being drunk with wine.<sup>75</sup> The joy and exuberance which are the result of drinking too much alcohol present only a vague image of the real joy and relaxation that come from the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We are part of the real vine, not of the image of a vine.

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<sup>71</sup> Heb 9:22

<sup>72</sup> Ps. 84:11

<sup>73</sup> Matt. 22:32

<sup>74</sup> Ps. 68:20

<sup>75</sup> Eph. 5:18

There are two reasons given for this prohibition to the priests: [They] “must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, and [they] must teach the Israelites all the decrees the LORD has given them through Moses” (vs. 10,11). Spiritual discernment and the giving of instruction are essential parts of the priesthood, and they are elementary gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Ch. 10:12-14 tell us: “Moses said to Aaron and his remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, ‘Take the grain offering left over from the offerings made to the LORD by fire and eat it prepared without yeast beside the altar, for it is most holy. Eat it in a holy place, because it is your share and your sons’ share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire; for so I have been commanded. But you and your sons and your daughters may eat the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented. Eat them in a ceremonially clean place; they have been given to you and your children as your share of the Israelites’ fellowship offerings.’”

After the incident, life had to go on normally. Aaron and Eleazar received the command to eat the grain offering and also “the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented.” This was part of the fellowship offering described in 7:30 - 34. It was the sacrifice of which the whole family was allowed to partake. Of the sin offering brought by a leader of the nation or a common citizen, only the priest who had brought the sacrifice was allowed to eat. That was the sacrifice Moses was looking for. But in the excitement of the moment when the incident took place, it had been burned, probably outside the camp. Some sacrifices were burned up and some were not. This depended on whether the blood had been taken into the sanctuary or not. Although, with the particular sacrifice the blood had not been taken into the sanctuary, the carcass had been dealt with as if it this had been done. So Moses became angry with Eleazar and Ithamar because of the mistake they had made. Obviously, this was not an intentional sin, such as the act of Nadab and Abihu; it had simply been a mistake. The excuse Aaron presented did not really sound logical. We read in vs. 19, “Aaron replied to Moses, ‘Today they sacrificed their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD, but such things as this have happened to me. Would the LORD have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?’” The “they” designated, of course, Aaron’s sons who died. We do not read, however, that they brought these sacrifices: a sin offering and a burnt offering. The information given is rather sketchy. Aaron presented the death of his sons as his personal experience. He says: “such things as this have happened to me.” The incident is indeed worse for those who remain behind than for the victims themselves. Aaron was not allowed to mourn openly, but he could not bring himself to carry on as if nothing at all had happened. In cases of death we have to stand on the victory over death by Jesus. But this does not mean that death does not affect us. Jesus wept at Lazarus’ grave, although He knew that Lazarus would rise. Victory over death and grief are not incongruent.

This brings us to the end of the first part of this book: “Access to God,” in which the problem of sin is considered from God’s viewpoint. A sacrifice and a mediator are needed.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### II. Sanctification of Life ch. 11 - 22

#### 1. Expressed in Pure and Impure Food ch. 11

The message of this chapter can only be understood if we take it in the larger context of the whole Bible. The most important commentary on the subject is found in Peter’s vision described in Acts: “About noon the following day ... Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ ‘Surely not, Lord!’ Peter replied. ‘I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.’ The voice spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.”<sup>76</sup>

The point of this chapter is not a series of dietary prescriptions but an object lesson of sanctification of daily life. This is clear from ch. 11:44,45 where we read: “I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground. I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.” The basis for these ordinances is the fact that Israel was a people which God had redeemed from slavery and humiliation. That is why

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<sup>76</sup> Acts 10:9-16

every Israelite had to live the life of a redeemed person. The role model is God Himself, His Person and character. Man should be holy because God, who redeemed him, is holy.

The animals the Israelites were prohibited from eating were, somehow, connected with the fall for which the whole of creation suffered the consequences. Why some animals fall into one category and others in another is not explained. Interestingly, if we place this chapter next to the mythology of the Me tribe in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, we find that they have traditional prohibitions for not eating certain animals. It could be that Israel had a certain mythology and that these commandments regarding kosher and non-kosher food are connected with this.

In a sense, this chapter could be taken as an example of divine predestination. God chooses some animals above others. There is a similarity between this predestination and the Calvinistic doctrine in that it is “unconditional.” The problem for us is that we do not know what changes in God’s creation were brought about first of all by the fall, of Lucifer and then by the fall of man. There is no doubt that some drastic changes took place. Some animals surely did not have the kind of teeth they have now before death entered the world and one animal started preying on another. We are given no explanation as to why there is such a gap between God’s goodness and the present condition of creation. It could be that, as a result of the entrance of sin, some kind of evolution has taken place in the animal world. I have always had the impression that there existed a link between evolution and the devil. We also do not know whether the animals should be held responsible for their own deterioration; the fact that the serpent was punished in Paradise seems to indicate that he had willingly surrendered himself to the devil’s use of his body. It could hardly be that this predestination was one hundred percent unconditional.

Another difference between this predestination and Calvin’s theology is that it was not an election for salvation. In a sense we wonder if the animals that were not chosen did not get a better deal. It was the clean animals that were destined to be slaughtered. This fact also is an accommodation to the sinful condition of creation. No animal would ever have died, had sin not entered the world. The only positive side for the kosher animals is that they represented, in their being sacrificed, the death of the Savior of the world.

Another strange phenomenon is that the distinction between pure and impure existed long before the nation of Israel came into being. When God brought the flood upon the earth, He said to Noah: “Take with you seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and two of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, and also seven of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth.”<sup>77</sup> This reinforces the impression that the distinction was made immediately after the fall.

There is no doubt that the law regarding clean and unclean animals also takes hygiene and health into consideration. Some of the impure animals were carriers of sicknesses which could be transmitted to man. The stress in this chapter is on human consumption, not on sacrifices. Which animals could be sacrificed was already determined in the laws concerning the various kinds of offerings. The condition of our bodies is determined by what we eat. The little rhyme that C. S. Lewis uses in his book *Miracles* is applicable here: “It is a funny thing, as funny as can be, what Miss B eats, turns into Miss B.” We become what we eat.

Jesus’ quotation of Moses is also fitting here: “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ” Moses had said: “He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”<sup>78</sup> Eating is an image of our hearing, understanding and obeying God’s Word, because the whole of our physical activities is an expression of spiritual life. Our eating and drinking are, after all, transitory occupations. Especially our eating of meat is a temporal accommodation to the condition of sin in the world. The killing and eating of animals could not be done if sin had not entered creation. One of the results of redemption will be that we become vegetarians. I repeatedly told my daughter, Viviane, that there will be no Arby’s<sup>79</sup> in Heaven.

The key-word in the verses 1-22 is “eat.” In vs. 23-40 it is “touch” and the end of the chapter, vs. 41-47 give the reason for it all.

The objects in vs. 2-8 is domestic and wild animals. In vs. 9-12 it is fish; in vs. 13-19 birds, and in vs. 20-22 insects.

The criteria for clean animals include that they have split hoofs, such as cattle, goats, and sheep and that they chew their cud. When this combination of both factors is not present, the animal is considered unclean. It seems to me to be pure speculation to draw spiritual lessons from these characteristics

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<sup>77</sup> Gen 7:2-3

<sup>78</sup> Matt. 4:4; Deut 8:3

<sup>79</sup> A roast beef sandwich

The animals that live in the water are divided into those that have scales and fins and those that do not. In this case, it is not necessarily a combination of two features. One or the other would make the creature pure. Most fish would, consequently, be considered clean, however, most sharks and whales have no scales. Whether this means that Jonah was swallowed by an unclean animal, I do not know.

In the bird-category all birds of prey are considered unclean, that is all that eat fish or meat. Of the insects only those belonging to the locust family could be eaten. The description of insects walking on four legs is incorrect if taken literally. Most insects have six legs and some eight, such as spiders. The two front legs could be considered to be the equivalent of hands. That is probably what is intended here.

Besides the prohibition of eating, there is a warning against touching certain dead animals because the carcass of the animal had started to decompose. Vs. 26 seems to say that one would become unclean by touching of live animals that were unclean, and vs. 27 speaks about the touching of carcasses. The intent of both verses is probably the same.

Every food item touched by a carcass had to be destroyed or, whenever possible, disinfected. Wells, water reservoirs and seed were exempt.

It is remarkable that the Israelites were not forbidden to eat a clean animal that had died. If they did so, they became temporarily unclean, but there was no prohibition as in the case of unclean animals.

The question, of course, is what does this all mean? One of the points made was, undoubtedly, the effect the fall of man had upon the fauna in creation. How this came about is nowhere stated in the Bible. But soon after the fall, we read that a distinction is made between clean animals and unclean ones, and between people who called upon the Name of the Lord and those who did not.<sup>80</sup>

For Israel the distinction between clean and unclean was made, primarily, as an object lesson in order to make them understand the difference between peoples and their life styles. That is the point made in Peter's vision in Acts.<sup>81</sup> Peter, correctly, draws the conclusion from the fact that God declared the unclean animals clean that its application is to men. In the house of Cornelius he says: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean."<sup>82</sup> Here we may quote Paul's rhetorical question: "Is it about oxen that God is concerned?"<sup>83</sup> He is, of course, but not primarily. For the Israelites who were about to enter Canaan, the commandments were particularly a warning against fraternization with the Canaanites. God had spoken to Abraham about the full measure of the sins of the Amorites.<sup>84</sup> Abraham had seen a sample of their sins in the condition of Sodom and Gomorrah. Homosexuality and rape were the order of the day. The incest of Lot's daughters was the fruit of their life in Sodom.<sup>85</sup> The book Deuteronomy shows us that the people of Canaan were wrapped up in spiritism and forms of idolatry that demanded human sacrifices.<sup>86</sup> The word "detestable" which is used for animals in this chapter is also applied to people there.

So, the point of the chapter is sanctification, as demonstrated in what man eats and produces. God wanted to teach His people that there is a connection between what goes in to man and what comes out of him. In this connection Jesus' words in Mark are interesting. In His argument with the Pharisees He says: "Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.' After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. 'Are you so dull?' he asked. 'Do not you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? For it does not go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.' (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods 'clean.')" Especially the last sentence: "In saying this, Jesus declared all foods 'clean' "<sup>87</sup> is very striking. There cannot be any contradiction between Jesus' words and the concept of clean and unclean in this chapter.

The commandment regarding clean and unclean does not pertain to making a man clean. Cleanness and sanctification are presupposed. In a sense this is unrealistic. Jesus takes the impurity of man's heart as His starting

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<sup>80</sup> Gen. 4:26

<sup>81</sup> See Acts 10:9-16, 28

<sup>82</sup> Acts 10:28

<sup>83</sup> I Cor. 9:9

<sup>84</sup> Gen. 15:16

<sup>85</sup> Gen. 19:30-38

<sup>86</sup> See Deut. 18:9-14

<sup>87</sup> Mark 7:15-19

point. We understand also from the larger context of the Bible that the intent of the commandments of the Old Testament is to make us conscious of our sin. "By the law is the knowledge of sin."<sup>88</sup> Inasmuch as the law sets forth the standard of God's holiness, it is not unrealistic. The Israelites were unrealistic in presuming that they would become clean by eating clean animals. Therefore, we should not fall into the same mistake by separating this chapter from the preceding one. Man becomes clean by the blood of the sacrifice. Eating the right kind of food preserves this holiness, it does not cause it.

Finally, we have to observe that most of the animals that are listed as unclean are predators or eaters of garbage. The basis of all these commandments is the holiness of God. God is the reason and the standard for what we eat or do not eat. The essence of it all is given in vs. 44,45 where God says: "I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground. I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy." The fact that we acknowledge and worship Him results in changes in our lifestyle. "Be holy" is in the imperative mode. It pertains to our acting and our initiative. "Be holy" expresses the maintaining of an acquired position. Vs. 25 goes deeper into the background of it all in that God mentions the deliverance from slavery in Egypt. It also gives the reason why God brought about this redemption. There are, therefore, in the whole complex of our redemption and regeneration certain tasks that are our responsibility. But the great work of redemption was brought about by God, and His holiness is the measure and standard of it all.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### 2. Purification at Birth

According to the law of Moses, a woman who gives birth to a baby is ceremonially unclean. Her impurity lasts thirty-three days if the baby is a boy and sixty-six days when it is a girl. Even as in the preceding chapters, no explanation is given as to why this is so.

The birth of a human being in this world is a holy and glorious event. This chapter shows, more than anything else, how serious the damage sin has caused in life is. Sin has affected the source of life itself. A woman who brings a child into the world makes herself impure, because the human being she brings forth is impure. That must be the point of this chapter. Man has a sinful nature. He enters the world unclean and he pollutes the person who brings him into the world.

The actual period of impurity for the mother is not thirty-three and sixty-six days, but respectively one or two weeks. The following period of thirty-three or sixty-six days is the time of purification. Vs. 4 says: "Then the woman must wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding." The RSV renders it: "Then she shall continue for thirty-three days in the blood of her purifying." The latter reading is, undoubtedly, literally more correct. What this involves, we do not know. It does not mean that she goes to the tabernacle or into the temple because that was forbidden for her during this time.

The question remains why a difference is made between the birth of a boy and a girl. The circumcision of the baby boy has, no doubt, something to do with the shortening of the period of purification. It is also possible that the longer period of purification at the birth of a girl has to do with the fact that the girl will become a mother herself and will become unclean when she gives birth. Also, sin first came into the world through the woman.

The sacrifice to be brought at the end of the period of purification consists of two parts: a burnt offering and a sin offering. The sin offering refers to the corrupted nature of man. The burnt offering points to the divine love that gives itself and that is the "raison d'être" for man. This burnt offering could be a sheep or, for poor people, a young pigeon or a turtle dove. The sin offering was always one of those two birds.

The only known example of the poor man's sacrifice recorded in the Bible was at the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. We read in Luke: "When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord'), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: 'a pair of doves or two young pigeons.'"<sup>89</sup> That passage speaks about a combination of the purification rite and

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<sup>88</sup> Rom 3:20 (KJV)

<sup>89</sup> Luke 2:22-24

the consecration of the first born son. This latter rite was prescribed in connection with the Exodus from Egypt.<sup>90</sup> The fact that Joseph and Mary brought a pair of doves puts them in the class of the poor.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### 3. Diagnosis, Treatment and Purification of Leprosy Chapters 13 and 14

These chapters can easily be divided in four parts:

- a. Leprosy in people 13:1-44
- b. Leprosy in objects 13:45-59
- c. Purification after healing of leprosy 14:1-32 and
- d. Leprosy in houses 14:33-57

#### a. Leprosy in people 13:1-44

Vs. 1-8 deal with the diagnosis of possible leprosy, vs. 9-17 with leprosy that has run its course, vs. 18-25 with the diagnosis of possible leprosy in a healed boil, vs. 24-28 in a healed burn, vs. 29-44 with the diagnosis of the sickness on the head, under the hair on the head, or in the beard.

The NIV does not use the word leprosy, but “infectious skin disease.” The RSV says “leprous disease,” but the KJV and even TLB use the word leprosy. The Hebrew word is *tsara'ath*.

The diagnosis of leprosy was carried out with great caution. In most cases the person suspected of having the disease was quarantined for one or two weeks. The presence of the sickness was determined by the fact that the rash was deeper than the skin, that it discolored the hair, and that it had a tendency to spread.

There are some important lessons to be learned from these chapters. In the first place, there was the role the priest played in connection with this sickness. The man who stood between God and man had to diagnose the sickness.

God had revealed himself to Israel as *Jehovah Raffa*, “I am the LORD, who heals you.”<sup>91</sup> This revelation placed this section in a different light. The priest made no effort to bring about healing. As far as I know, the sickness was considered incurable. From a medical viewpoint the sickness may have been incurable, yet, in these chapters it was not treated as such. Although the emphasis in these chapters was on the diagnosis, the whole atmosphere is one of hope of healing. The point was, obviously, that man would become conscious of his condition. Undoubtedly, leprosy was used as a symbol of sin in this context.

The discoloration of the hair and the growth of “proud flesh” were important. The chapter opens with a man who asked himself the question, “Am I a leper or not?” The way to receive an answer to this question was to be taken to the priest. This presupposed help from others. The man asked himself what was wrong with his body, and the community asked in what respect he was a danger to his fellowmen. The place to receive an answer was at the priest’s in the presence of the Lord. It was not important what other people in general thought about him, but what God thinks about him.

When it appeared that the problem was not a superficial irritation of the skin, but something that went deeper than the skin, the sickness was diagnosed as leprosy.

All this made leprosy the symbol “par excellence” of sin in man. Sin is not a deviation from the general behavioral pattern of the society in which we live, but a deviation from God’s holiness. It is the presence of the Lord that reveals sin. Sin is not a superficial deviation that is only skin deep; it is a corruption of the inside of our being. Ch. 12 shows us how we inherit sin from our parents, and chapters 13 and 14 show us how deep sin goes.

Some commentators doubt that the sickness described here is the same as what we know as leprosy,<sup>92</sup> but the question here is not sick or healthy but clean or unclean. Most likely, what is called leprosy here is a name for a group of sicknesses that have certain symptoms in common. The symptoms described in 13:9-11 probably point to a form of skin cancer.

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<sup>90</sup> Ex. 13:1-16

<sup>91</sup> Exod 15:26

<sup>92</sup> A Dutch Biblical Encyclopedia (De Bijbelse Encyclopedie - Bosch en Keuning)

Vs. 12,13 come as a surprise to us: "If the disease breaks out all over his skin and, so far as the priest can see, it covers all the skin of the infected person from head to foot, the priest is to examine him, and if the disease has covered his whole body, he shall pronounce that person clean. Since it has all turned white, he is clean." Leprosy that had run its course and had made the whole body white made the patient ritually clean. A man who confesses before the Lord that sin has done a complete work in him, that he is sinful through and through, is saved. It is, of course, not the confession that makes him clean, but the confession creates the condition in which God's salvation of man can become effective. Sins that are confessed are no longer contagious. They lose their power.

Leprosy could erupt at a place where previous injuries had healed. In vs. 18 we read about a boil and in vs. 24 about a burn. Certain conditions that had weakened the skin could form a fertile soil for leprosy. Sin will reveal itself where the defenses of our soul are undermined. Boils are infections caused by an inward source, but in some cases the infection may have outside causes. Burns are damages of the skin that have an outward cause. Scars are places where the victory over the infection was won, but former victories do not make us immune to later attacks.

A special section is devoted to the human head. The head is examined to see if a rash develops into leprosy. This is the subject of the verses 29-37. Vs. 38 and 39 deal with light spots on the body. Being baldheaded myself, vs. 40 is one of my favorite verses in the Bible. "When a man has lost his hair and is bald, he is clean!" This testimony is given about no other heads.

Vs. 45 and 46 tell briefly how a leper should live. He has to rend his clothes, as a sign of mourning, and he must let his hair hang down. The covering of the upper lip is probably an effort to prevent infection of other people. Medical science confirms that the breath of a leper can be contagious. He has to make known his presence and the danger of contamination by calling out: "Unclean, Unclean!" And he has to live isolated from his fellowmen. The rent clothes, the demonstration of mourning, the danger of contamination, and the isolation are clear pictures of the damage sin does in human life.

#### **b. Leprosy in objects 13:45-59**

At first sight, it seems as if this sections deals with some kind of primitive superstition in that it links a fungus on garments and leather object to be related to the sickness we call leprosy. First of all, it is not certain that the leprosy in chapter 13 is the same sickness that we know today. Also, medical science has come to the conclusion that there are certain fungi that can vegetate on objects as well as on human skin.

The way affected objects are dealt with shows a great respect for the ownership of the people. Garments and leather objects are not just confiscated and burned.

It also becomes clear that both, man and the objects he uses, have to be clean before the Lord. It may be difficult to ascribe a moral value to leather and textile, but there is a connection between the moral behavior of man and the objects he uses. For instance, the writer to the Hebrews says: "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure."<sup>93</sup>

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

#### **c. Purification after healing of leprosy 14:1-32**

The sacrifice that has to be brought for the purification of a leper is one of the most beautiful and meaningful rituals in the book Leviticus.

In vs. 1-20 we read about the sacrifices which the common man and the affluent citizen had to bring. Vs. 21-32 deal with the sacrifice of the man who is too poor to be able to afford the first kind of sacrifice.

The ritual had to be performed when the patient was actually healed of his sickness or when the sickness had run its full course and the patient was declared clean because he was no longer contagious. The latter case is described in ch. 13:12,13. There is only the one case in the Old Testament of a person who was spontaneously healed of leprosy. It was Naaman, the Syrian general, who was not in a position to bring this kind of sacrifice since he was not a Jew.<sup>94</sup> When Jesus healed the leper in Mark's Gospel and told him: "See that you do not tell this to anyone. But go, show

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<sup>93</sup> Heb. 13:4

<sup>94</sup> II Kings 5:1-19

yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them,"<sup>95</sup> may have been the first time that this law was applied. According to what we read in the following verse in Mark's record, the man did not obey the command.

The first thing that strikes us is that the priest had to go outside the camp to visit the man who was there in isolation. The priest's place was before the Lord and outside the camp. The purpose of going outside the camp was to bring the man who was there before the Lord.

The first sacrifice that was brought for the purification was brought outside the camp. This sacrifice consisted of two birds, that had to belong to the category of clean animals. One of the two birds was killed above a clay pot containing fresh water so that the blood was caught in the pot. A piece of cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop were added to this. The term "fresh water" is used in the NIV. Most other translations use "running water." So it could be that the pot was to be held over a stream. The literal meaning is "living water." This expression gains depth by Jesus' use of it. Speaking to the Samaritan woman Jesus said: "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."<sup>96</sup> But, in spite of the spiritual implications, the text is clearer if we read "fresh" or "running" water.

As far as I know, this sacrifice of the bird is the only one that is ever brought outside the camp. In the light of this sacrifice, what the author of Hebrews says acquires a deeper meaning. We read: "And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore."<sup>97</sup> The sacrifice of this bird expresses, more clearly than anything else, the reality of Jesus' death on the cross. The cedar wood, the color of the scarlet yarn and the hyssop that were used in Egypt to apply the blood of the lamb to the door posts all point in the direction of the cross of Calvary.

The clay pot stands for the temporary character and the fragility of our human life on earth. This is the sense in which Paul uses the object in his second epistle to the Corinthians. He says: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."<sup>98</sup>

The streaming water, or running water, which forms the basis of the action is an image of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit of God this sacrifice would have no meaning at all since it was by the Holy Spirit that Jesus gave Himself, as we read in Hebrews: "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"<sup>99</sup>

Nothing more is said about the bird that was killed. The stress was on the blood of the bird. The meat was not offered as a sacrifice, nor burnt, nor eaten as far as we know. It was, most likely, thrown away. But the blood was caught in the clay pot. The hyssop suggested that the blood had to be applied somewhere, as was the case in Egypt. The scarlet yarn refers to the disgrace Christ bore. Scarlet is the color of royalty. When the soldiers mocked, Jesus we read: "They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him."<sup>100</sup> The cedar wood speaks of the cross where Christ shed His blood.

Then the living bird was dipped in the blood, together with the above mentioned objects. The leper himself was sprinkled seven times with this blood. Then came the surprise: the living bird, carrying the blood of the dead one on his wings, was given his liberty and flew away. This is the most beautiful and meaningful symbol of resurrection from the dead in the Old Testament. In the symbolic enactment two birds were needed to what, in reality, happened to one man in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The purification of the leper was nothing less than an identification with death and resurrection. The seven drops of blood that were sprinkled on this man connected him irrevocably with the greatest event in the history of Heaven and earth.

There is similarity between this sacrifice and the two male goats of the Day of Atonement.<sup>101</sup> There, also, two animals were used to express what happened, in reality, to one man. But in that enactment the carrying away of the sin of the world was stressed, not the resurrection from the dead. The goat that was sent away was cursed. The bird that

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<sup>95</sup> Mark 1:44

<sup>96</sup> John 4:10

<sup>97</sup> Heb. 13:12,13

<sup>98</sup> II Cor. 4:7

<sup>99</sup> Heb. 9:14

<sup>100</sup> Matt. 27:28

<sup>101</sup> Lev. 16:17-22

flew away was blessed. In every bird that flies there is a hint of resurrection. Every flight is a victory over the law of gravity, just as the resurrection is a victory over death.

Through the sprinkling of the blood of the dead bird, the leper had been identified with death and at the same time he was linked with the resurrection through the living bird that flew away. Only if we have identified ourselves with the death of Jesus Christ will we be partakers of His resurrection.

It is interesting to see how this principle of death and resurrection is also found among the Me tribe of Irian Jaya, Indonesia. They have a ritual which is called “no-mune,” in which, at the death of a female member of the tribe, two pigs are taken. One is killed and the other is given to a relative to be raised. Probably, this ritual or similar ones are found among other tribes of the Mountain Papuans.

This symbolic representation of the resurrection is followed by an enactment of the new birth in the washing of the clothes of the healed leper and the shaving of all the hair on his body. The washing of the clothes is a picture of the righteousness with which God clothes us when we put our trust in Jesus Christ. There is a clear connection between this ritual and Revelation: “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”<sup>102</sup> The shaving of the hair gives the impression of a new-born baby. This expresses the spiritual renewal, which is called *the new birth* in John chapter 3.

Obviously, there are stages of purification. The healing in itself means purification. We read in the story of Jesus’ healing of a leper: “A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, ‘If you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.”<sup>103</sup> Or, as the RSV puts it: “And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.”

After the bathing and the shaving vs. 9 states again that the leper is clean, but he cannot sleep in his tent yet. After eight days, he is finally pronounced clean. This process points rather to a growing awareness of cleansing than to a process of progressive cleansing. Since the basis of the purification is outside the man, his cleansing becomes a fact the moment the blood is sprinkled on him. It is as if God wants the man to become slowly accustomed to his new condition of being clean. In the same way, a man with frozen limbs cannot immediately be put into warm water and a starved person cannot be given a full meal. So a cleansed leper has to slowly get used to his new status. This does not mean, however, that positional cleanness takes that long before God.

On the eighth day, which is the day on which the resurrection is commemorated and celebrated, the man himself brings his sacrifice. On the first day it was the priest who took charge and ordered things to be done, but now it is the man himself who takes the authority and the initiative, the same way as any other clean person would do.

It is interesting to see that the first animal to be brought is sacrificed as a sin offering, as if the sickness were a sin committed before God. Evidently, leprosy falls into the category of unintentional sins.

On the eighth day the man appeared with his sacrifices before the Lord: the man himself with the sin offering and the burnt offering. Isn’t this typical of our appearance before God? Our sins have been atoned for, but we have to come before the Lord as a constant reminder that our sins have been forgiven. We have to keep on reminding ourselves how our redemption came about.

The sin offering and the oil had to be lifted up and waved before the Lord and then the meat of the sacrifice was given to the priest who had brought the sacrifice. Again, the place where the animal was to be killed was mentioned, as it accentuates the unity of all sacrifices; it was not only the place where the burnt offering was brought, as in 6:25 and 7:2, but also the place of the sin offering. This tied all the sacrifices together into one event.

Then came the most interesting part of this ritual: part of the blood of this sin offering was applied to the right earlobe, the thumb, and the big toe of the leper and, on top of this, the oil is applied. We see the same actions at the dedication of the priests in ch. 8:23,24. But there, it is not said that the oil was put on top of the blood. Aaron and his sons were only anointed with oil and, afterwards, sprinkled.

The implication is clear: the cleansing of the leper consisted of atonement for his sins and regeneration and also a restoration of his hearing and obedience, of his walk and actions. Hearing the Word of God means doing the work of the Lord and going in obedience where He sends. The key to all obedience is the ear.

God reproached Israel by means of Isaiah’s prophecy that they had an ear but they did not use it to hear. “Be ever hearing, but never understanding.”<sup>104</sup> Jesus repeats this exhortation in Matthew and Revelations. “He who has ears, let him hear.”<sup>105</sup> “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Rev. 7:14

<sup>103</sup> Mark 1:40-42

<sup>104</sup> Isa. 6:9

The atoning and the sanctification of these three vital members of the body were reserved only for the lepers who were cured. No other curse produced this kind of blessing. In the Kingdom of Heaven a sinner who is born again is made equal to a priest. This priesthood consists in the hearing of God's Word, the doing of God's work, and the going of God's ways.

The rest of the oil that was used in this ritual was placed, with the person and his sacrifice, before the Lord. It was as if the Scriptures said here that the oil came from God, which is a symbolic way of saying that God pours out His Spirit upon man. The accent is upon the practical aspect. The coming of God's Spirit into our lives is not only an experience that sets our hearts on fire, but it fills those parts of our lives to which the blood of Christ has been applied. Atonement and regeneration are not just generalities.

The oil was first sprinkled seven times before the Lord and after that applied to man. It was God who took possession of the ear, the thumb and the big toe. After this the man was anointed as the oil was poured over his head. Leprosy became a symbol of everything that is the undoing of man. God uses this one symptom of a disease to show how man is rehabilitated by the death and resurrection of His Son.

The crowning part of the ritual of purification was the killing of the burnt offering and the simultaneous burning on the altar of the burnt offering and the grain offering. This symbolized that the man who was redeemed and purified gave himself to his God because he loved Him and to his Creator because he was made by Him. With this, the last trace of the devastating work of the Evil One was eradicated from his life. The healed leper had overcome the enemy "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of [his] testimony; [he] did not love [his] life so much as to shrink from death."<sup>107</sup>

In the verses 21-32 we find regulations for a man who could not afford to kill two sheep. The second sheep was replaced by two turtle doves or two young doves. In so doing, the sacrifices were enriched in that another sin offering was added. It also, at the same time, gives us an interesting insight into the economic aspect of the Israelite community. An Israelite was conscious of his own financial responsibilities. The economic life of these people did not consist of a web of loans and debts, as we see among some primitive tribes.<sup>108</sup> They live with a system that is more or less capitalistic. The society took no responsibility for the welfare of the individual. No doubt, every leper would have had family members who could have loaned him a sheep but, evidently, this was not the custom. Everyone was responsible for his own sacrifices.

One of the doves had to be brought as a sin offering to indicate that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ provides for the condition that is brought about by our sinful nature. For the rest, the sacrifice of the poor man was the same as that of the rich. Probably, most lepers would have fallen into the category of the poor. The isolation and expulsion to which they were subjected were not conducive to economical advance. This fact emphasizes anew that man is not able to pay the debt he has before God.

#### **d. Leprosy in Houses 14:33-57.**

The commandments regarding leprosy in houses were given while Israel was still in the desert and lived in tents. So these commandments foreshadowed the victory which was yet to be won. The "land of milk and honey" was not pictured as a utopia where there would be no trace of corruption, nor was the land on the other side of the Jordan River perfect. The fact that the people would move from their tents into houses of stone would not protect them from the plague of sin.

In vs. 34 God said clearly that He gave the land as their possession. But in the same verse He took responsibility for the plague. We see in this verse the same mystery as in Exodus where God says to Moses: "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"<sup>109</sup> And at the same time the Bible says: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."<sup>110</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Matt 13:9; Rev. ch. 2 and 3

<sup>106</sup> Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22.

<sup>107</sup> Rev 12:11

<sup>108</sup> Such as the Me in Irian Jaya, Indonesia.

<sup>109</sup> Ex. 4:11

<sup>110</sup> James 1:17

With this law God wanted to teach His people a lesson concerning that land and the houses therein, so that they would not establish themselves there to the point that they never wanted to leave anymore but wanted to remain there throughout eternity.

Man has come where God wants him to be, and he lives the life that God wants him to live with his wife and children. Then enters the enemy to destroy what God intended. And God Himself allowed the enemy to enter, and we find that our only security is in Him, not in our houses or in our families.

The implication in this chapter is that the same sickness that enters the house can infect man also. It does not seem that the sickness of the house is the same as the leprosy that affects man as we know it now. The NIV calls it "spreading mildew." It is more likely that there were forms of mildew which could thrive in objects, as well as in the human skin. We have already seen that there was a "leprosy" that affected textile and leather (13:47-59).

The owner of the house was held responsible to warn the priest. After the first inspection, the priest would order the house to be emptied and shut for seven days. If, after that, it became apparent that the plague had spread, the stones that were affected would be removed and the house plastered anew. If the plague returned after that, the house had to be torn down.

The same sacrifice as for a healed leper was brought for the cleansing of the house. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the principle upon which our houses and families are to be built.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### 4. Sexual Impurity 15:1-33.

In this chapter we find the fourth of the series of commandments regarding sanctification of life. The others were in connection with food, birth and leprosy. This portion deals with conditions that are brought about by man's sin and other that are not his fault.

Vs. 1-15 refer to a man with gonorrhea, or some venereal disease. This condition would have been the result of an illicit sexual relationship.

Vs. 16-18 speak about an ejaculation of semen that is either spontaneous or purposely brought about.

Vs. 19-24 deal with the normal menstrual period of a woman and vs. 25-31 are about an abnormal flow of blood caused by a sickness.

We have to realize that the point of these commandments is not the moral issue, but the ceremonial cleanness. The protective measures prescribed are a mixture of hygienic and ritual nature. When a man has gonorrhea it is logical that the objects he has touched be cleaned in order to prevent spreading of the sickness, but this would not make sense in the case of a woman who has her monthly period. We conclude, therefore, that hygiene is, probably, of little or no importance in the context of this chapter.

As in chapter 12, in connection with the birth of a baby, the impurity in this chapter emphasizes the fact that the origin of human life has been polluted by sin. A child that is born makes the mother unclean. Also the man who begets and the woman who are impregnated is impure.

This does not imply that sexuality or sexual intercourse are unholy in themselves; they are some of the most holy facets of human life. But the fall affected, first of all, the sexuality of man. The feeling of shame Adam and Eve demonstrated were symbolic of the totality of a broken relationship. In the same way the covering God provided for them was an image of total healing and reconciliation in Jesus Christ.<sup>111</sup>

The first example of impurity given is the result of an illicit sexual behavior. Nothing seems to be more typical of the fallen condition of man than the wrong use he makes of his sexuality. The sickness described is a result of this behavior. In the case in which a man has gonorrhea, we can say that he is responsible for his condition. Also, a woman was held responsible for an abnormal flow of blood. This is not so with the other cases mentioned.

In the case of personal guilt, a sacrifice had to be brought, as is described in vs. 14,15, and vs. 29,30. Before this sacrifice could be brought, the man or woman had to be clean for seven days. Then he had to wash his clothes in a stream. The NIV says "in fresh water," other translations say: "in running water." Undoubtedly, we may see in this an image of regeneration. Both the body and the body covering have to be washed.

The sacrifices to be brought are the sin offering and the burnt offering. The sin offering accentuates the sinful nature, not the guilt of sin, which is expressed in the guilt offering. The burnt offering is an expression of our love for the Lord.

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<sup>111</sup> See Gen.2:24; 3:7-11,21.

Vs. 16 and 17 deal with a condition which comes from the normal functioning of the male human body. I am convinced that this condition is good and holy in itself. The devil tries to tell us that the functioning of a gland that God has created, makes us impure. Sin makes a man impure, not the ejaculation of his semen. The ejaculation only symbolizes a sinful condition. In the same way, normal sexual intercourse between husband and wife, as mentioned in vs. 18, is not impure. Obviously, the regulations do not deal with an extra-marital affair or fornication. It would be hard to imagine that God would wash away this kind of immorality with some water and declare the delinquents pure after twenty-four hours. It was, after all, God who created man and woman so that they could have a love relationship and He commanded them to procreate children. In these verses, however, the Holy Spirit makes clear to us how deeply the corruption has penetrated, to the point where a female egg cell and male sperm have become unclean. Sin has affected the normal functions of the human body, both for the man and the woman.

Since we have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, this pollution caused by the fall no longer hinders our fellowship with God. This chapter issues a warning, however, that we should not put any trust in that what comes out of us. Outside the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we would be as impure as anybody else.

Vs. 25-31 deal with abnormalities by women, just as vs. 1-15 did in regard to men. These abnormalities are treated as sinful and contagious. The discharge by the woman could be the result of illicit sexual activity, just as the discharge by the man, but this is not always the case. A double sacrifice had to be brought.

The Bible indicates that the sexual aspect of our lives has become representative of the sin into which man has fallen. As we mentioned above, Adam's and Eve's awareness of sin was demonstrated in this feeling of shame; the first effort man made was to cover his sexual organs. Some primitive people, such as the Mountain Papuas in Irian Jaya, consider sexual sins to be more sinful than any other. We, too, have a tendency to use the word "immoral" exclusively for sexual sin. When we ask question why this is so, we understand that our sexual relations, more than anything else, are an expression of our spiritual relationship with God. Speaking about marriage relationships, the apostle Paul says: "This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church."<sup>112</sup> Adam and Eve felt shame before God because their spirit, the organ that enabled them to have fellowship with God, had died when they sinned. Their sexual life no longer had a spiritual counterpart, and, consequently, it had become polluted and meaningless. The balance is restored through the bringing of the sin offering and burnt offering, the latter being the image of supreme surrender in love.

When we read the story of the woman who suffered from bleeding for twelve years in the Gospel of Mark against the background of this chapter in Leviticus, it comes very much alive. There healing takes place when the woman touches Jesus. We read: "She thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.' Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?' "<sup>113</sup> There is nothing vulgar in this touch. It had nothing to do with a desire for physical intimacy, but what the woman did becomes symbolic of the spiritual reality of fellowship between man and God of which sexual contact is an image. In our touching Jesus, our intimacy with God is restored in the deepest sense of the word. Jesus did not become impure when the woman touched Him, although this is what the law said would happen. Another person would have become impure, but in this case the unholy becomes holy through this touch. The woman actually broke the law when she touched the man Jesus. "Anyone the man with a discharge touches without rinsing his hands with water must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening."<sup>114</sup> The implication is that the same would happen when a clean person was touched by an unclean woman. The faith of this woman bridges the gap. For us it is Jesus Who bridges the gap. The fellowship of our spirit with the Spirit of God is restored in Him. By His death and resurrection, our impurity has been cleansed. We no longer have to feel ashamed before God.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### 5. The Day of Atonement - Purification of Spiritual Impurity 16:1-34

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<sup>112</sup> Eph. 5:32

<sup>113</sup> Mark 5:28-30

<sup>114</sup> Vs.11

Chapter sixteen is the pivot of the book of Leviticus. It is one of the great chapters in the Bible, and it gives us one of the clearest pictures of the day Jesus died at Golgotha. The events in this chapter form the basis for John the Baptist's words, announcing the arrival of Jesus: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"<sup>115</sup>

It comes as a surprise that the cause for this glorious revelation is a great tragedy, that is, the death of Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu. We read about the event in ch. 10. From vs. 1 we conclude that those two brand new priests, not only brought their own fire and incense, but also that they penetrated the veil and went into the Most Holy Place. We remarked before in connection with ch. 10 that the two men had, probably, been under the influence of alcohol when they committed this sin. The whole fatal tragedy is here put into a few simple words: "The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the LORD." God does not recapitulate about what happened; it is only mentioned because it was the reason for what follows.

The Day of Atonement is not only a picture of the way in which man is cleansed from his sin, but also of the purification of Heaven and of the throne of God which had been polluted by the sin of man. The first lesson we draw from this chapter is that the sin of man has cosmic consequences and that something must be done to undo this cosmic pollution. The fact that sin not only affects the person who sins, but also we dishonor God when we sin; and God cannot become impure without losing His eternal character. This is the tension that lies behind this chapter.

In vs. 2 Moses is given a prophecy which he has to pass on to Aaron. "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover." Aaron is the only person in the world who is allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, but God addresses Moses. He is the prophet who hears the Word of God and passes it on. God gives to each person his particular gift. The contents of the prophecy is that the way to the Sanctuary, that is to intimate relationship with God, was not yet open. Entrance into God's presence was the exception, not the rule. God, not Aaron, determined when man would enter His presence.

It is logical that we go here to the Hebrew epistle, where we read: "But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing."<sup>116</sup> But in Hebrews we read that now we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place.<sup>117</sup> So the Day of Atonement speaks to us of the limitations God imposes upon man as well as of the promise of unlimited fellowship with God.

The place of God's presence is defined by the words "in front of the atonement cover on the ark." The eternal God uses as limited space of not much more than three cubit feet to reveal Himself in time and space. This is the principle of the Incarnation. At the construction of the tabernacle and the making of the ark God had said: "There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites."<sup>118</sup> This was the essence of the Shekina glory that filled the whole tabernacle, as we read in Exodus: "Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."<sup>119</sup> So, the presence of the Lord must have been obvious. It could be verified by human senses, because the cloud and the column of fire were visible.

The verses 3-5 give a brief overview of the sacrifices that were necessary for Aaron to open the way to the Sanctuary. For himself, a sin offering and a burnt offering were needed; for the people a double sin offering, consisting of two male goats and a burnt offering. The sin offerings correspond with the ones described for the leaders in chapter 4 in that no bull was to be sacrificed, but a male goat.

The sin offering Aaron had to bring emphasized his own sin and weakness. The epistle to the Hebrews expresses this beautifully, where the contrast between Aaron and Jesus is made clear. We read: "Unlike the other high priests, he [Jesus] does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever."<sup>120</sup> Ch. 16 brings out the failure of man: the failure of the priest as well as of the people. Aaron was, at the same time, the most

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<sup>115</sup> John 1:29

<sup>116</sup> Heb. 9:7,8

<sup>117</sup> Heb. 10:19

<sup>118</sup> Exod 25:22

<sup>119</sup> Ex. 40:34

<sup>120</sup> Heb. 7:27,28

privileged and the most pitiful of all among the human race. This realization should have created a deep desire in the heart of every thinking Israelite for a Messiah who would not be subject to this kind of sinful nature.

In order to enter into the Sanctuary, Aaron first had to take a complete bath and then clothe himself with the undergarments of the high priest. He was not allowed to wear his official pontifical clothes. He had to appear before the presence of the Lord in the most elementary covering. This brings to mind Zechariah's vision of Joshua, the high priest, who stood before the Angel of the Lord in filthy clothing, while Satan accused him.<sup>121</sup> Joshua received a change of clothes, from filthy rags to rich garments. The intent of the vision was to point to the coming of Jesus Christ, Who is called "the Branch" in that chapter.

The use of Aaron's undergarments is in itself an image of the coming of Christ. Aaron's partial clothing indicates that he was not the real person to enter the Sanctuary. The Israelites were to expect a High Priest who could enter the Sanctuary in full pontifical garment: One who did not first have to bring a sacrifice for his own sin.

Aaron had to set apart the two animals for his own sacrifice and after that he had to bathe and clothe himself. Following his cleansing he had to prepare the two male goats and the ram for the people. These were brought before him, but apart from that, nothing happened to them at this moment, until after the bringing of the first sin offering for the priests was completed. Vs. 6 states in one sentence what is worked out in detail in vs. 11-14.

Then Aaron entered the Sanctuary with a censer with burning coal on which incense was placed and with the blood of the bull. It is not clear whether he did this in one trip or in two. If he entered with both the censer and the bowl of blood, he would have to put the censer on the floor before the ark in order to be able to sprinkle the blood in front and on top of the lid of the ark. This was, of course, quite possible. It is also possible that he had to make two trips. So, we cannot know for sure whether the high priest entered the Sanctuary twice or three times on the Day of Atonement. The essential part of the rite was that the blood of the bull, which was killed for his own sin, and of the male goat, which died for the sin of the people, was sprinkled seven times up and around the cover of the ark, which is called "the mercy seat."

We will never be able to analyze this ceremony in a complete and exhaustive way. Partly, this is due to our limited understanding of the Person and character of God, and, consequently, our understanding of what our sin actually did to God. The eternal, almighty, good and loving Creator is not a blood-thirsty Person. The blood of animals which He created is precious to Him. In a sense the sacrifice of an animal is as much a dilemma for God as the death of man. We have very little idea how much God was put in jeopardy, so to speak, by the sin of man and of Satan. The fall polluted heaven. The blood of Christ did not only cleanse our consciences but also "the heavenly things." As the writer to the Hebrews puts it: "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence."<sup>122</sup>

This cleansing of the sanctuary by the blood of the goat demonstrates what atonement meant for God and for our relationship with Him. Everything that represented our fellowship with God had to be sprinkled with blood. It started with the throne, that is the ark, and went back to the altar for the burning of incense, that is the place of prayer and worship. From our point of view the cleansing should have started at the altar, because that is where we find ourselves. The core of the problem, however, is before the throne of God. God always penetrates to the core. He sees reality as it is objectively. We always approach problems subjectively. Our sins are atoned for at the throne of God, and that is what matters.

The scapegoat that carried away the sins to the desert represents our human experience of atonement. As far as God is concerned, it was not necessary for sins to be carried away, but, in order for us to understand what happened in the throne room, we see our sins being carried away. Now, we should be able to draw the right conclusions for our lives from this ritual. In our experience this is a growing process. The first goat died a violent death; the second goat died slowly through deprivation and starvation. We do not die to our sins once and for all; it is a daily process. On the basis of Jesus' death on the cross we die a little bit every day. We are separated from our sins by the death of Jesus, but the scapegoat is a tough creature. He dies slowly!

As it stands in vs. 12 and 13 it is as if the incense saves Aaron's life. We read in Revelation about the role of incense: "And when he had taken it, [that is when the Lamb had taken the scroll from the hands of the Father] the four

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<sup>121</sup> Zech. 3:1-5

<sup>122</sup> Heb 9:13,14,23,24.

living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”<sup>123</sup> The censer full of incense symbolizes the prayers of the saints on earth. It seems like an anachronism that God would want to wrap Himself in the prayers of His saints, whilst there are only people on earth who have been soiled by sin and who have to be purified.

The Day of Atonement was, specifically, the day when the people were to do soul searching. Vs. 29 says: “This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work-- whether native-born or an alien living among you--” (NIV). The RSV says: “And it shall be a statute to you for ever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves, and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you.” And TLB reads: “This is a permanent law: You must do no work on the twenty-fifth day of September, but must spend the day in self-examination and humility. This applies whether you are born in the land or are a foreigner living among the people of Israel; for this is the day commemorating the atonement, cleansing you in the Lord’s eyes from all of your sins.” Yet, God wanted to draw the attention of man away from himself to a later time when the church would stand before Him “as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”<sup>124</sup>

No specific system is indicated that has to be followed to sprinkle the blood on top of the cover of the ark and in front of it. But the fact that blood had to be sprinkled on the ground in front of the ark would suggest that Aaron’s feet would have to stand upon the blood. This standing on the blood of the sacrifice symbolizes the basis for his priesthood.

The cover of the ark is the most important part of the tabernacle. The Hebrew name for it is *kapporatte* which is derived from the word *kafar* meaning “to cover.” Paul uses the Greek equivalent in Romans, which is the word *hilasterion*. The verse reads: “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement.”<sup>125</sup> The phrase “a sacrifice of atonement” is the Greek word *hilasterion*, that is “the cover of the ark” or, as the KJV calls it, “the mercy seat.” As we saw already, the book of Exodus describes the cover of the ark as the unique place where God would reveal His presence.<sup>126</sup> The Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, uses the word *hilasterion* for the Hebrew *kafar* which means “to cover.” The cover of the ark was, at the same time, God’s way of putting a cover over the law which was inside the ark in the form of the two stone tablets, as well as the place where God covered the sins of man with the blood of the sacrificed animal. This is the essence of grace. The concept that is used here is also expressed in the Greek in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, where the tax collector cried out: “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”<sup>127</sup>

The cover of the ark was, foremost, an image of the throne of grace. It is fitting that the word that is used here for “cover” is also applied to our Lord Jesus Christ in whom the presence of God is personified and in whom atonement was brought about.

So, Aaron enacted Jesus’ ascension when he entered the curtain with the blood. In this way the resurrected Lord presented Himself before the Father as a living guarantee for our pardon and atonement. Some of the glory of the Day of Atonement is expressed in the 24<sup>th</sup> psalm, where we read: “Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty-- he is the King of glory.”<sup>128</sup> At the same time this Day of Atonement is a picture of Golgotha where the shame of the world was rolled away by Him who knew no sin.

Aaron had to perform some consecutive acts which expressed different facets of one and the same matter. What he enacted in different actions is an analysis of the one act of obedience of Jesus when He died on the cross. The blood of the lamb was shed for the sin of the people. One died for all. With this blood everything that related to our fellowship with God was cleansed. This was done in a unique and lonely act.

Vs. 17 stresses the fact that Aaron had to be absolutely alone in the tabernacle as the blood was taken behind the curtain. It was a heroic deed which foreshadowed the heroism of Christ’s act. It took the courage and strength of a lion. Nobody could stand next to Christ to assist Him, even the burnt offering altar where the blood was poured out

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<sup>123</sup> Rev. 5:8

<sup>124</sup> Eph. 5:27

<sup>125</sup> Rom. 3:25

<sup>126</sup> Ex. 25:22

<sup>127</sup> Luke 18:13

<sup>128</sup> Ps. 24:7-10

and where the animals were burned was cleansed by the blood that was taken into the sanctuary. The cross is the symbol of human deprivation and shame. But ever since Jesus died on a cross, it has become the emblem of love, grace and faith. Everything Jesus touched turned into gold!

After all the sacrifices were brought, the ritual of the scapegoat follows. This goat was to be sent away into the desert “for Azazel” as the RSV puts it. This does not happen in secret, as the ritual inside the sanctuary, but in public. It was not for God’s eyes alone but for public view. The male goat was set apart “for Azazel” by the casting of lots. The meaning of the word “Azazel” is unclear. To leave the word untranslated, as the RSV does, gives no indication of a possible meaning. The Amplified Bible gives the alternatives “removal” and “for dismissal.” TLB says that the male goat is “to be sent away.” The KJV and NIV call it “scapegoat.” The Good News Bible leaves the word untranslated and gives a footnote saying that the meaning of the word is unknown. There is no basis for the supposition that Azazel would have been a desert demon. This suggestion is the result of form-historical and archaeological prejudice. We will leave that alone. The Bible gives us no reason to believe that God would order Israel to give a male goat to a desert deity. Even if there were a demon called Azazel, he would probably have received his name from the ritual with the scapegoat. The goat was there before the demon. Jesus did not carry away the sins of the world to give them to the devil.

It is true, of course, that there would have been no deserts where man and beast could die if Satan had not introduced sin into the world. As a body decomposes when the soul leaves, so sin will disintegrate if it is no longer fed by human disobedience. It is enough for sin to be carried away.

The important point of the ritual was that the male goat of which the blood was taken into the sanctuary and the scapegoat that was sent into the desert loaded with the sins of the people, presented one and the same image. Jesus was both “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”<sup>129</sup> and the Lamb whose blood was brought into the sanctuary. Actually, He is also the High Priest who performed the act as well as the cover of the ark upon which the blood was sprinkled! All the details of the ceremony speak of only one name: Jesus.

In the reality of time and space, the order was the opposite of that followed in the image. Aaron first brought the blood into the sanctuary, and after that the scapegoat was led away. In the image the thing that is most important to God is mentioned first. In reality the killing of the Lamb and the carrying away of the sin of the world happened simultaneously, and after that the blood was presented before God, probably after the resurrection of Christ.

We read in vs. 21, “He [Aaron] is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites-- all their sins-- and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task.” This confession in detail was not necessary for the omniscient God but it was needed for the awareness of man. It is very important for us to become aware of our sins and to look at them in detail. Two words are used to distinguish the sins of the people: wickedness and rebellion. The KJV uses the words “iniquity and transgressions.” Iniquity refers to the nature of man and transgression stands for the act of breaking the law.

As representative of the people, Aaron had to identify himself completely with this goat, just as he had done with the bull and the other goat. He had to lay both hands on the animal’s head. The identification is even more complete because of the use of both hands. The confession implies that what happens to the scapegoat should happen to all men. We deserve to be chased away, banned, and rejected in complete separation by death. The experience of the scapegoat was like a death sentence, just as much as it was for the goat that was killed. Actually, the goat that was killed by one stroke of the knife came to an end that was more merciful. The scapegoat was condemned to a slow death by wasting away and starvation. Jesus experienced both facets of this condemnation in our behalf. “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> John 1:29

<sup>130</sup> Isa. 53:2-7

Without doubt John the Baptist referred to the ritual of the Day of Atonement when he said: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"<sup>131</sup> This puts in perspective John's baptism of repentance. We read in Mark: "And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River."<sup>132</sup> The sins of the people that were baptized by John were not washed away in the water of the Jordan River, they were laid upon Jesus. This gives a new meaning to Jesus' baptism. The ritual of the Day of Atonement shows how the door was opened for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

After the two sin offerings have been brought in their double aspect, one goat that was killed and one that was led away, Aaron had to change his clothes. He had to take off the simple dress of the undergarments, and he had to bathe anew and dress himself with the beautiful pontifical garment, described in Exodus.<sup>133</sup> There was no demonstration of beauty and glory during the bringing of the sin offerings. This was a time of self examination and humility. The prescribed dress code for this ritual was, in itself symbolic of the nakedness of our Lord Jesus Christ when He died on the cross. He died naked. As the Flemish poet Guido Gezelle wrote: "All rights denied, naked Christ died."<sup>134</sup>

Then the burnt offering was brought. A sin offering without a burnt offering would have been a senseless martyrdom. The burnt offering is the expression of love which Paul expresses this so beautifully in I Corinthians: "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."<sup>135</sup>

There is a relationship between humility and love. We can only humble ourselves if we love God with all our heart, our mind, and our will. We should remember, however, that Jesus is, at the same time, the burnt offering and the sin offering. Just as we cannot take away our own sins, and die at the same time, so we cannot give ourselves as a burnt offering to God without help from the outside. If Christ were not our burnt offering, we could never surrender to God in love.

The man who led the scapegoat away was unclean. He could not enter the camp without washing himself and bathing. Jesus became unclean when He took upon Himself our sins. While Jesus was in the process of carrying away the sins of the world nobody touched Him. The murderer who was crucified next to Jesus touched Him in a spiritual sense and he became pure. What a marvelous paradox!

The carcasses of the bull and the male goat of the sin offering had to be burned outside the camp. This sets these sacrifices apart from all other sin offerings; because those could be eaten by the priests who brought them. We read in ch. 6:30, "But any sin offering whose blood is brought into the Tent of Meeting to make atonement in the Holy Place must not be eaten; it must be burned." The Hebrew epistle gives an interesting comment on this point: "The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come."<sup>136</sup> The burning of the carcasses points to the disgrace of Jesus' crucifixion in which we share as Christians. There is something in our communion with God that makes us unfit for fellowship with other human beings. It sets us apart. We have to be very careful, of course, where we draw the line. We should not become exclusive and hypocritical. The cross of Christ is a disgrace because of our sins that were nailed it. That is why the person who touches the scapegoat or the ashes of the carcasses becomes unclean. This uncleanness originates from within our beings. If we realize this, we have ample reason to feel ashamed and to humble ourselves. Self-denial and introspection are the keywords for the attitude of man on the Day of Atonement. This is the day on which someone else dies in our place and the blood is sprinkled before the throne of God.

In the verses 29-34 we read three times that the Day of Atonement is "a lasting ordinance." Up to this day Orthodox Jews still celebrate "Yom Kippur," but the ritual, as it is described in ch. 16 is no longer observed. A fundamental change had to take place after the destruction of the temple and the disappearance of the ark. But the "lasting ordinance" is preserved in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

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<sup>131</sup> John 1:29

<sup>132</sup> Mark 1:4,5

<sup>133</sup> See Ex. 28

<sup>134</sup> "Schamel en bloot, stierf Hij den dood!"

<sup>135</sup> I Cor. 13:3

<sup>136</sup> Heb. 13:11-14

In these last verses of the chapter three things are emphasized: First, the self-denial of man; then the objective cleansing, not only of man's conscience, but of the holy objects in the tabernacle; and, finally, the importance of the priesthood, the consecration and even the clothes.

TLB translates "the tenth day of the seventh month," that is, the month "Nissan" as "the twenty-fifth day of September." The self-examination that man had to carry out was not a self-analysis in the larger sense of the term, but an realization of what went wrong in the relationship with God. It is a hard look at the reality of our fellowship with God. It would have been impossible for any Israelites, at this point, to discover the great surprise that was hidden in the sacrifices of that day. The only thing the Israelite could know was that he should have died for his own sin, but that God accepted the blood of an animal in the place of his own blood. David made the discovery that God was not interested in animal blood, but the Holy Spirit did not reveal the mystery to him either. He said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come-- it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.'"<sup>137</sup> The fact that God Himself became man and that He would carry away the sin of the world in His own body and that His death would atone for us is as much a surprise for us as it is for angels. In his book *Out of a Silent Planet*, C. S. Lewis tells the story of a certain Dr. Ransom who went to Mars and told the archangel of that world what had happened on our planet. In our world the tremendous fact of our hope is so great that even today most Jews cannot believe it. We, who know the truth, have even more reason to humble ourselves before God than did the Jews who only saw the blood of animals being shed.

We are not expected to cry over spilled milk. God does not want us to keep on making an inventory of old sins that have been confessed and forgiven. When God came into my life, I understood very clearly that He said to me: "We do not talk about the past any more." Self-denial, or, as the KJV calls it "affliction of the soul," does not mean digging up what is dead and buried. We do not have to perform a spiritual autopsy on what God has covered before we can be purified. Humbling oneself means breaking down constructions we ourselves have erected on a non-existent foundation, or of things we built upon a foundation that God meant to be used for something else. In Jesus Christ, God placed us upon the foundation of grace. The Holy Spirit has erected a building of honor and righteousness upon that basis. We have a tendency to build our own buildings; therefore, humbling ourselves means the collapse of those structures, since what God builds makes us humble. What we have built ourselves has to come down. Somehow, we always manage to introduce foreign elements in what God has begun to build in us. Therefore, we ought to examine ourselves, and to confess what we added or altered in God's work, so that what He did will remain pure.

This chapter started with a reference to the death of Aaron's sons, who had entered the sanctuary on their own terms. It concludes with a reminder of what a priest should be when he enters on God's terms. So the picture of Jesus Christ appears before our eyes.

The verses 32-34 repeat the significance of the cleansing of the sanctuary and of man. From this we understand that impurity starts with man and affects the sanctuary. The fact that these rites had to be repeated yearly proves that the rituals did not alter the source of evil. The sacrifices did not take the sinful nature out of man's heart. Every time a man sinned, a sin offering had to be brought, and added to this there had to be a yearly ceremony of cleansing for the collective guilt of the people. The writer to the Hebrews makes this clear when he says: "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming-- not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."<sup>138</sup>

Man never lost his sense of guilt through these sacrifices. He was cleansed outwardly in a ritual sense, but that was all. The real cleansing had to wait. That is why we read elsewhere: "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"<sup>139</sup> In this way the rituals of the Day of Atonement showed what could be cleansed and what could not. This reinforced the longing for the coming of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>137</sup> Ps. 40:6-8

<sup>138</sup> Heb. 10:1-4

<sup>139</sup> Heb. 9:13-14

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### 6. About the Place to Sacrifice and about Blood 17:1-16

#### a. The Place of Sacrifice 17:1-9

This is an interesting portion of Scripture. The point is not, in the first place, where the sacrifice was to be brought but to whom it should be sacrificed. In Deut. 12 we read certain ordinances regarding the place where the burnt offering altar was to be placed later when Israel had entered the land. That is not the point here. The Israelites had been enticed by the habits of the surrounding nations to bring sacrifices to demons. We read in vs. 7, "They must no longer offer any of their sacrifices to the goat idols to whom they prostitute themselves." The KJV uses the term "sacrifices unto devils." The RSV calls them "satyrs" and TLB, "evil spirits." The Dutch translation uses the equivalent of "spirits of the open field."<sup>140</sup> The literal meaning of the Hebrew word used is "the hairy ones."

Among the mountain tribes of Irian Jaya, we find the concepts of different kinds of spirits. The Me tribe knows its "spirits of the earth,"<sup>141</sup> "spirits of the water,"<sup>142</sup> etc. These spirits were pacified with bloody sacrifices. Evidently, the Israelites in Moses' day did the same thing. God calls this "prostitution."

The Israelites were not required to be vegetarians, but God wanted them to see a connection between the forgiveness of their sins and their daily food. The blood of their fellowship offerings had to be sprinkled around the altar and the fat had to be burned upon the altar. The breast of the animal was given to the priest. We find these regulations in chapter 3 and 7. The meat had to be eaten as an act of fellowship with God.

Eating meat is, of course, an act that is the result of man's fall into sin. Before death entered God's creation, that is before the fall, there was no question of anybody eating meat. The consumption of meat is an accommodation to man's fallen state. It is important to remember this because the verses of this chapter draw their power from this fact.

I feel sympathy toward vegetarians. It seems to be a more pacific attitude for a Christian to abstain from eating meat. The Hindu Mahatma Gandhi and the atheist George Bernard Shaw were vegetarians because they abhorred the killing of animals. This attitude seems to be more morally correct than that of Christians who eat meat. God, however, wants us to live with the reality of the presence of sin and, consequently, with the atonement for sin by the shedding of blood. The philosophy of the vegetarian denies the reality of God's revelation. Opposed to the humane view of life we find the attitude of most Christians who have no qualms at all about the slaughter of animals. It seems that Gandhi's abhorrence of death is closer to God's attitude than that of many Christians who hunt and kill animals for sport.

The important lesson of this section is that we consider sin and death as realities to be reckoned with. This does not mean that we should welcome sin and death as friends and that we should accept our condition as normal.

According to what God says to Moses, Aaron, and the Israelites, the killing of animals in itself, without the recognition of sin and atonement, is murder. Eating of meat is a dilemma that is only resolved in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Golgotha. It could be that in the paradox of eating meat, which we experience as tasty, God wants us to understand something of the paradox of the cross. The murder of Jesus Christ is at the same time the greatest crime in history as well as the greatest revelation of God's love and the only way to fellowship with God.

Most people were shocked when Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink."<sup>143</sup> But they ate their saddle of lamb or their roast beef without blinking an eye. Albert Schweitzer was partly right when he proposed his "reference for life."<sup>144</sup> But he too denied the reality of sin.

For the Israelites the problem was a different one. Their concern was whether they should sacrifice to demons or to YHWH. This problem lies outside our field of vision. The only thing we have in common with them on this level

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<sup>140</sup> "veldgeesten."

<sup>141</sup> maki ka eniya

<sup>142</sup> uwo ka eniya

<sup>143</sup> John 6:53-55

<sup>144</sup> "Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben."

is our fellowship with God. Everyone who does not love God with “all his heart and with all his soul and with all his mind and with all his strength,”<sup>145</sup> commits adultery in whatever sense it may be.

#### **b. The Prohibition against Eating Blood 17:10-16**

There is a direct connection between this section and the preceding one; they treat the same subject. I do not know if the verse: “For the life of a creature is in the blood,” can be taken as a scientific definition (vs. 11). The Dutch translation read: “For the soul of the flesh is in the blood.”<sup>146</sup> This can be rather misleading. It all depends on what we understand when we use the word “soul” as to how we would interpret the above. Medical science tends to lean in the direction that the seat of our emotions and our will is in the brain. But the brain does not function without blood either. As long as science does not know what life is, scientists do not have any grounds for attacking the Biblical statement that “the life of a creature is in the blood.”

The point of this section is that man forfeited his life when he disobeyed God’s commandments. God demands the blood of man, that is, his life. Under the Old Testament dispensation, the blood of animals was acceptable to God instead of the blood of the man who sinned. This is the lesson God wants man to learn from the commandment that is given here. A man who eats blood indicates that he rejects God’s way of salvation. He acts as if he has a right to his own life.

The question for us who live under the dispensation of the New Testament is whether we are subject to the same prohibition of eating blood. After all, we live no longer under the shadow of atonement when sin was covered by animal blood, but we live under the reality of atonement by the blood of Christ. There are two possibilities: One can respect the blood of animals because it provided atonement for human sin in the past. One can also say that since the blood of Christ has cleansed us once for all from sin, the blood of an animal has no longer any significance in the context of atonement. The latter possibility suggests that it makes no difference whether we want to use it for human consumption or not. I lean toward the latter view.

A hunter was allowed to eat the animal he shot as long as he covered the blood with earth. The eating of an animal that had died by itself or had been killed by another animal was not forbidden, but it caused the eater to be temporarily unclean.

Against the background of this chapter, it is interesting to read the epistle the Synod of Jerusalem wrote to the church in Antioch. In the account in Acts we read: “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.”<sup>147</sup>

I presume that the reason for James’ judgment here was the matter of the testimony of the Gospel to the Jews who lived in the various pagan cities and who were not ready to set aside the commandments of Leviticus chapter 17. Even after hearing about the significance of the blood of Christ for the cleansing of sin, they would regard pagans who had been converted to Christianity and who ate blood, as people who sinned against God’s commandments. It must have taken time before the full significance of the blood of Christ penetrated to the new Christians and influenced their attitude toward the blood of animals.

We find the same prohibition against the consumption of animal blood in Genesis, Leviticus, and Deuteronomium.<sup>148</sup>

## **CHAPTER EIGHTEEN**

### **Purity in Sexual Relations 18:1-30**

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<sup>145</sup> See Mark 12:30

<sup>146</sup> "Want de ziel van het vlees is in het bloed."

<sup>147</sup> Acts 15:19-21, 28,29

<sup>148</sup> Gen. 9:4; Lev. 3:17; 7:27; 19:26 and Deut. 12:16,23; 25:23.

The main point of this section is a warning against perversion of any sort. During our missionary work among the mountain tribes of Irian Jaya, people have often come to me to ask for explanations about this chapter, because they felt that it confirmed their cultural restrictions by which people of one moiety were not allowed to marry people from another moiety. In their case blood-relations often played no role in the matter, at least not along the female line. But what they worried about is not the issue in this chapter.

The most important verses are 1-5 and 24-30. We read in the opening verses of the chapter: "The LORD said to Moses, 'Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the LORD your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God. Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.' " And the chapter ends with the words: "'Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you. Everyone who does any of these detestable things-- such persons must be cut off from their people. Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the LORD your God.' "

Sexual perversion was common in Egypt as well as in Canaan. Certain practices were accepted as normal because they were common. In that respect the contents of this chapter is very relevant for our time and for our Western world, which suffers from "sexual liberation."

The problem for Israel at that time was that this generation had grown up in a surrounding in which every thing "went" in sexual matters. There were no rules or restrictions. The lifestyle of Egypt had become their model, and they would have a hard time to rid themselves of this. However strong the Word of God against these practices, it would be very difficult for them to forget what they had grown up with. They would have to make a clear personal decision to accept the norm of God's Word in order to break out of their past with its experiences and memories.

I do not remember who was the young German who said this, but it captures the issue: "He who says a strong 'No' should also say a strong 'Yes.' "149 Only he who would say a strong "Yes" to God's commandments, could say a strong "No" to the customs and practices of Canaan.

We have arrived here at the point of which God prophesied to Abraham in Genesis: "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."<sup>150</sup> The sin of the Amorites had reached its full measure. We are given a glimpse of the kind of sin with which the Amorites filled up their measure in the events that led to the destruction of Sodom when we read the Genesis account of God's judgment upon the cities.

In the first five verses we read three time the sentence: "I am the LORD your God," or "I am the LORD." (That is YHWH). (vs.1, 4 and 5). The chapter ends with the same declaration. The central issue is God's covenant, because the name JHWH is connected with the covenant, that is God's relationship with us and ours with Him. That is why the words "*your* God" are added.

The point is obedience to a commandment and the recognition of a statute. Obedience is not necessarily linked to understanding and comprehension of the reason for the commandment, but to observe the statutes one has to understand the situation and the relationships God created. It is on the basis of our recognition of who God is and of our relationship with Him that God expects us to know why we have to observe the rules. What I mean is that it is impossible to understand why these commandments were given, if we do not understand the nature and meaning of sexuality.

In connection with chapter 15 we have seen that sexual relations are a mirror of the spiritual relationship between God and man. Sometimes this meaning is emphasized in a negative sense. So says Paul, for instance, in the first Corinthian epistle, "Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.' But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit."<sup>151</sup>

The repeated phrase "I am the LORD" implies that a thorough understanding of who God is will keep us from perversion. After all, holiness is nothing else but the bringing in line of one's life with the glorious character of

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149 "Wer ein starkes 'nein' sagt, soll auch ein starkes 'Ja' sagen."

150 Gen. 15:16

151 I Cor. 6:16,17

God. In the same way is sin a deviation from God's character and a missing of this glory. Paul's definition of sin is: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."<sup>152</sup> Several times in the book of Leviticus we find the exhortation: "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."<sup>153</sup>

The fourfold repetition of "I am the LORD" in this chapter is important because, in his sexuality, man is faced with an urge which becomes stronger than he is, once he passes the point of self-control. If we do not rule our sexual desires, our sexual desires will rule us. We are only safe from ourselves if we put our bodies under God's protection. Since, however, our sexuality is a picture of our spiritual relationship with God, there ought to be a point where we can let go of our self in the spiritual realm in order to be overtaken by an ecstasy which sweeps us off our feet. We will only understand what deviation is if we can compare it with the original.

Following the description of sexual sins in the verses 6-20, we read about the perversion of idolatry, homosexuality and sexual relations with animals or bestiality. The emphasis here is on the difference in gender and kind. God's intention of our relationship with Him is expressed, by way of image, in the relationship between husband and wife. In the relationship with God, He is the male partner and we are female. At this point it makes no difference whether we are male or female in our earthly bodies. In comparison with God every man is female. That is why homosexuality is a perversion because it denies this pattern. Implicit in the picture is the fact that, in our relationship with God, we take the female attitude of giving ourselves in love and that we leave the initiative to Him and let ourselves be guided by Him.

In vs. 21 we read: "Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD." This kind of sacrifice describes more than mere idolatry. This is, probably, the grossest perversion of religion every invented by the devil. It is also a perversion of parenthood. Parents give up their own children to be killed and burned. This kind of sacrifice makes a caricature of parental love but, more than anything else, it makes a caricature of God's character. After all, our love and care and concern for our children is a reflection of God's love for us. The thought that God would be pleased with that kind of murder and perversion is the greatest insult we could make of Him. That is why God calls it "profane the name of your God." "I am the LORD" is a majestic declaration of love and holiness that contrasts immediately how completely contrary the above mentioned practices are to the character of God. They are a demonic perversion.

Vs. 22 is a clear prohibition against homosexuality. "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable." TLB puts it more clearly as: "Homosexuality is absolutely forbidden, for it is an enormous sin." The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in itself is enough of an indication as to what God thinks about homosexuality. But years ago I read in a Dutch Christian newspaper that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah had nothing to do with homosexuality. It was gang-rape that had brought down God's wrath upon the cities, the article said. The Bible did not condemn homosexuality, it said. The article was an effort to accommodate Biblical teaching to the morality of our times. The interesting part of this effort is that people who reject the authority of the Bible would appeal to the Bible for the justification of certain perversions in our present society. Evidently the Bible sometimes *does* have use "for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."<sup>154</sup> It is clear, however, that God calls homosexuality "detestable" and, so far, I have not read of any effort by theologians to circumvent this verse. It has only been ignored.

Why is homosexuality detestable? If heterosexual relations in the context of a marriage express the spiritual relationship between God and man, which Jesus describes as "worship in spirit and in truth,"<sup>155</sup> then what does homosexual relations express?

First of all, a homosexual relation can never be legal in the sense that a normal marriage is legal, in spite of any laws that are passed. Legality is important because it expresses the legal basis of our relationship with God, which is expressed in the covenant He made with man.

Secondly, homosexuality denies the difference between male and female. In the spiritual realm this means that man presents himself as "male" in his relationship with God and thus he denies his role in this relationship. This is detestable to God, who wants our surrender to Him in love; He is not interested in "gay rights."

If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he has lost sight of all relationships. In doing this man, throws overboard all his dignity as bearer of God's image; he is only out to satisfy his sexual urges. In modern times people

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<sup>152</sup> Rom. 3:23

<sup>153</sup> Lev 11:44,45:19:2; 20:7,26

<sup>154</sup> II Tim. 3:16

<sup>155</sup> John 4:24

have started to experiment with taboos, but even this perversion is, at least not yet, officially accepted. More than anything else this kind of conduct is detestable.

According to the last verses of this chapter, man does not only defile himself in doing these things but also the land in which he lives. In vs. 25 God says: "Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants." This expression "the land vomited out its inhabitants," should not be seen as merely a poetical way of describing judgment, but as an indication that there is a unity between land and people. God intended that there be a relationship between the two; man and land belong together. Originally man was taken from the ground-Adam was formed from the dust of the earth. Man is born on the land where he lives and the land sustains him. The sentence does not convey an animistic world view, as if the god of the earth would turn against man. But in turning against God, man has disturbed the equilibrium. In extreme cases, such as in Sodom and Gomorrah and in the Babylonian captivity, the upsetting of the balance is demonstrated in the expulsion of the people from the land which was their home.

The Bible does not describe in much detail the sins the peoples in Canaan committed. If we read the Scriptures superficially we get the impression that the conquest of Canaan by Israel was a random political maneuver. Vs. 24-30 of this chapter are some of the rare instances in which God gives the actual reason for the extermination of the Hittites, the Perizzites, and other nations. The tragedy of Israel is that, not only did they become contaminated by the sins of Canaan, but also they actually surpassed the Canaanites in evil. The prophet Ezekiel testifies: "You not only walked in their ways and copied their detestable practices, but in all your ways you soon became more depraved than they."<sup>156</sup>

8. The chapter ends with the same words that opened it: "I am the LORD your God." This statement determines all human relations. In the first place it defines man's relationship with God; subsequently, the relationship of man to man and the relationship of man to demons and, finally, the relationship between man and the ground on which he lives. This chapter shows us what happens when the equilibrium is disturbed and from this we can deduct what the situation would be if the relationship between God and man is what it should be.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### Holiness in Social Intercourse 19:1-37

In this chapter we find two commandments that form the basis for the life of a child of God: Vs. 2 - "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy." Vs. 19 - "Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD." Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel: "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."<sup>157</sup>

The first commandment is the great paradox of the Bible, and, at the same time, it is the key to the understanding of the book Leviticus. Holiness is God's exclusive characteristic. God alone is holy. A dictionary definition of "holy" includes: "pure, sinless, perfect..." The problem is that man is *not* holy. Even Adam, before his fall, was not holy in the complete sense of the word. God demands that man becomes what he cannot bring up by himself. We should, therefore, pay close attention to the little word "because." God is holy. This means that He will never demand less than holiness. If God were ever satisfied with less than absolute holiness from anyone, He would diminish His own holiness.

The word "because" also means that God's holiness is the measure of all moral judgment. Man's character and his acts are placed next to the perfection of God's character, and all that falls short is not holy. That is the thought Paul expresses in Romans: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."<sup>158</sup>

Thirdly, the word "because" implies that the relationship between God and man has a purifying and sanctifying effect upon man. God calls Himself "the LORD your God," which means that He has a claim upon our lives. If He is our God, we are His people, and what belongs to God becomes holy, pure, and perfect. This is clear from other verses, such as ch. 20:26, "You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own," and ch. 21:8, "I the LORD am holy-- I who make you holy." God demands that we be holy because He is the source of our holiness.

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<sup>156</sup> Ezek. 16:47

<sup>157</sup> Matt. 22:40

<sup>158</sup> Rom. 3:23

This demand for holiness is expressed in 24 different requirements. Keeping the Sabbath is mentioned twice in this context: first in vs. 3 in the same breath with honoring mother and father and then in vs. 30 in connection with respect for the sanctuary. These links should give us insight into the character of the Sabbath.

It seems strange that the first application of this principle of holiness is related to honoring mother and father. Evidently, the way a man enters the world and receives life reflects his relationship with God. Impregnation which results in birth, as well as growing into adulthood, are closely connected, in God's plan, to love between husband and wife in the bonds of marriage. It is in that atmosphere that man is born and grows and learns to understand what love and holiness is, both in human relations as well as in fellowship with God.

But even stranger is the fact that the fifth commandment is mentioned in the same breath with the fourth, as if there were a link between honoring father and mother and the keeping of the Sabbath. Obviously, this must be the case. The Sabbath expresses God's satisfaction about creation, and it stands for the real joy of life, which the writer to the Hebrews calls "God's rest." Undoubtedly, there is a connection between God's love and God's rest. This divine harmony is basic to our experience of salvation. In order to keep the balance, we have to run ahead of ourselves to vs. 30: "Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the LORD." God ties the observance of the Sabbath to reverence for the sanctuary, that is to the place where atonement is administered. The original divine harmony God had incorporated in creation was disrupted; therefore a dear price has to be paid.

Reference to the sanctuary implies, of course, more than atonement alone. Not even the purification of the sanctuary as a copy of the heavenly things, as the Hebrew epistle calls it,<sup>159</sup> is the most essential thing. After all, heaven does not depend on the fact that sin exists and that we are sinners! Reverence for the sanctuary means reverence for God. This is the heavenly reality of which the honoring of father and mother on earth is the image. The Pharisees missed this point completely, and Jesus reproached them sharply for this. "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it."<sup>160</sup> The Sabbath testifies particularly about the reality of God's presence.

The topic of the second commandment in vs. 4 is a dedication to God alone. This commandment seems to have little significance for us, modern materialistic Westerners. But our present situation may change with the entrance of Eastern religions. Israel, however, lived in a world in which idols represented the only spiritual reality for men. Some theologians see in this commandment a notion of an evolution from original polytheism to the first traces of monotheism. This, of course, we reject. In the days of Abraham the knowledge of the only God was an option. Adam had known God, of course; then in the days of the flood, Noah was the only one who still knew Him. What would have remained of this knowledge throughout the centuries, had God not called Abraham? We saw two or three traces of the truth that remained in the primitive religion of Stone Age tribes in Indonesia: the Me of Irian Jaya, for instance, remembered the Name of the Creator.<sup>161</sup>

The eating of the fellowship offering in vs. 5-8 is an expression of God's holiness in the life of man. The sacrifice itself is described in chapter 3. The stipulations given here correspond to what we read about the votive or free-will offering we read about in ch. 7:16-21. It is also related to what we read about the place where the fellowship offerings should be brought in ch. 17:1-9. We saw there that the eating of meat was an accommodation to a condition which had deviated from God's original plan because of the coming of sin in the world. The eating of the fellowship offering expressed a three-fold confession: of sin, of forgiveness and of obedience. The fact that the meat could be eaten during a period of two days made the sacrifice into a votive offering. God's holiness is expressed in this three-fold recognition.

Eating of meat on the third day would have been a very unhygienic thing to do in the sub-tropical climate in which Israel lived. The eating of spoiled meat makes man impure, both physically and spiritually. Rotten meat is a type of the condition of sin and death in which we live. Without sin there would have been no death and corruption. God wanted the Israelites, as holy people, to take a clear stand on the side of life.

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<sup>159</sup> Heb. 9:23

<sup>160</sup> Matt. 23:16-22

<sup>161</sup> They called Him "Ugatame."

Also, the vow, and the keeping of it were important. According to ch. 7:16,17 the reference to the meat being eaten during the first two days and burnt on the third shows that the sacrifice was connected to a vow. Part of our sanctification consists of our doing what we promise to God. Solomon has some wise things to say about this in Ecclesiastes, "When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the messenger, 'My vow was a mistake.' Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?"<sup>162</sup> Being holy means being reliable, both in our relationship with God as with men.

The verses 9-18 deal with the relationship between a man and his neighbor. The first admonition suggests affluence and plenty. The man who reaps his harvest should not be penny-pinching and stingy. God does not specifically promise a rich harvest in vs. 9 and 10, but we should act as if we have inexhaustible resources at our disposal. Dr. Jantzen, a professor who taught at the University of Basel, Switzerland, used to say: "A Christian can always afford to pay." The phrase, "I am the LORD your God," at the end of vs. 10 is the guarantee of our sustenance. Holiness and generosity are complementary. God's promises are generous. We read in Hebrews: "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'"<sup>163</sup> And Paul says: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."<sup>164</sup>

We should be careful not to spiritualize these laws, but I cannot help thinking of the picture of the field of grain and the vineyard as symbols, not only of provision for our physical needs, but also our spiritual ones. The Flemish poet Guido Gezelle expressed this so beautifully in his poem:

"Who can see wheat and not remember,  
who can see grapes and not remember,  
who can be a Christian and not remember  
how Christ's flesh and blood sustains him,  
and not remember."<sup>165</sup>

It is on the basis of His provision of bread and wine for us that we can afford to be generous with our bread and wine for others.

Vs. 11 should not give us any problems of interpretation. It is impossible to have fellowship with God and at the same time steal, lie, and cheat. Everybody knows that. We understand enough of God's character to realize that these things do not fit the picture. Most people, even if they do not believe in God, know more than they realize.

The swearing falsely, in vs. 12, fits into the same category. When we swear by the Name of God we make a statement which says that we are just as reliable as God is. The person who commits perjury suggests that the eternal God is not reliable. Not making the Name of the Lord profane, or sanctifying the Name, therefore, is a confirmation of His reliability. We do this as we establish a reputation of reliability for ourselves.

In vs. 13 we read: "Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him. Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight." If this were the business ethics of a capitalistic society, Utopia would have arrived. It is not against the law of God to make a profit, but the structure of a capitalistic society would, in my opinion, not change if a Christian set a ceiling for himself, and if he did not make more money than he needed. The excess could be put on the account of the Kingdom of Heaven. Such a suggestion, however, would go against the grain of everything capitalism stands for. "To defraud [y]our neighbor" means that we force him to spend more money than he can afford. Such pressure can be either physical or psychological. I consider this verse to contain a condemnation of much of the advertising we are exposed to in our modern society. God wants us to be compassionate in our business relations. Years ago TIME magazine quoted, with considerable amazement, from *The Christian Science Monitor* a paragraph that said that people should demonstrate more neighborly love for one another in their business relations. This kind of relationship is implicit in the statement: "I am the LORD." The wages of a hired man is his daily bread. We may not tell a laborer that his family has to wait till tomorrow to eat because we do not have time to pay him today.

It could be that cursing a deaf man was a custom in Israel because people were under the impression that deafness and blindness were a punishment for certain sins. So people would take it upon themselves to confirm God's

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<sup>162</sup> Eccl. 5:4-6

<sup>163</sup> Heb. 13:5,6

<sup>164</sup> Phil. 4:6

<sup>165</sup> "Wie kan er koren zien en niet gedenken, wie kan er druiven zien en niet gedenken. Wie kan er Christen zijn en niet gedenken hoe Jezus vlees en bloed hem nut en niet gedenken!"

curse upon such a person. God distances Himself from such a curse in vs. 14. This throws a different light upon the mystery of suffering. God takes the side of the deaf and the blind. This verse also contains a warning against that mean trait in human character which finds pleasure in sadistic activity instead of loving his neighbor. God loves the deaf and the blind. It is in connection with this commandment that the Lord says: "Fear your God. I am the LORD." Not only does God love the deaf and the blind, He identifies Himself with them. Anything we do to a handicapped person, we do to Him. Jesus says: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." and "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."<sup>166</sup> In connection with this we read in Isaiah: "Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the LORD?"<sup>167</sup>

Vs. 15 deals with the court of justice. Justice is an absolute value. Everything that is congruent with the character of God is just. Interestingly, in connection with this topic we would expect to read: "I am the LORD." But this is omitted here. Maybe, God thought that this connection was so obvious that there was no need to state it specifically. Abraham calls God "the Judge of all the earth" when he says: "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"<sup>168</sup>

Surprisingly, the verse does not say, what we would expect it to say. We tend to root for the underdog. We would expect God to take the side of the poor, but what we read is: "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly." Justice is the important topic, not social status. It is no less un-Christian if we show favoritism to the poor at the expense of the rich, thinking that the rich have enough compensation for injustice. It is upon this faulty philosophy that *liberation theology* was based. The brute force and injustice committed by the poor is, in God's sight, just as horrible as oppression by the rich. Peaceful demonstrations are the only legitimate means of protest. Our philosophy is often colored by a one-sided interpretation of James' epistle. God is the God of both the rich and the poor.

Vs. 16 mentions two kinds of murder: slander and endangering the life of a neighbor. God places the emotional and physical destruction of life on the same level. Every form of death goes against the character of God. God is the God of the living.<sup>169</sup> God is love. These two go together, just as vs. 17 goes together with vs. 16. Read this: "Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the LORD. Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people." The rebuke mentioned in the last verse presupposes that there could be feelings of hatred or revenge which are not tolerated by God. The rebuke may be private or public. Obviously, our relationship with our fellow human beings should be determined by our relationship with God. The Lord Jesus emphasizes this when He says: "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."<sup>170</sup> We cannot have fellowship with God if something is lacking in our fellowship with people. The verse concludes with the words, "Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."

Much has been written about loving oneself in connection the new fad about one's self-image. The underlying thought of this verse is, in fact, that it is good and healthy for man to love himself. A poor self-image is the result of sin. If we love God, we also ought to love God's image in ourselves and in others. Our self respect and self appreciation are the standard for our relationship with others. It is also true that many of our bad relationships and jealousies can be traced back to the disturbance of our own equilibrium. We are jealous because we think that the other person is what we are not or what we aspire to be, but cannot achieve. If the balance is right, we will love God above all else, then ourselves, and finally our neighbor. God demands that we love our neighbor as ourselves because He is the LORD. God is love. He is the source of our love. As Christians we are connected to the source and His love flows out of us to others.

Vs. 19 is, probably, the strangest verse in this chapter. We read, "Keep my decrees. Do not mate different kinds of animals. Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed. Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material." The introductory phrase "Keep my decrees" probably refers to the laws of nature which God installed in His creation. In most cases, it is impossible to mate certain animals. It is possible that this commandment is meant to be a

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<sup>166</sup> Matt 25:40,45

<sup>167</sup> Isa. 42:18-19

<sup>168</sup> Gen 18:25

<sup>169</sup> Matt. 22:32

<sup>170</sup> Matt. 5:23,24

restraint in “genetic engineering.” In the *Commentary on Genesis* by Gray and Adams, we find an amazing reference to some great inventions from the time before the flood. Since my reading of the book *In His Image (The Cloning of Man)*, I have started to ask myself the question seriously as to whether the “marriage of the sons of God with the daughters of men,”<sup>171</sup> could not have been a successful experiment in genetic engineering. The result of the experiment was then the birth of the Nephilim, or giants. If the above is true, this commandment could be given in order to prevent the antediluvian conditions.

On the other hand, it is possible that the word “mate” has no sexual connotation in this context. In Deuteronomy, in more or less the same context, we read: “Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together.”<sup>172</sup> That commandment has nothing to do with the breeding of animals. It is difficult to determine from this distance in time what was intended. We also read in Deuteronomy about the planting of two different kinds of seed in the field and in the vineyard.<sup>173</sup> The NIV says that the crop would be defiled. The RSV translates this differently with: “Lest the whole yield be forfeited to the sanctuary, the crop which you have sown and the yield of the vineyard.”<sup>174</sup>

The prohibition against wearing garments made with two different kinds of stuff, such as wool and linen, did not pertain to the priests. The solution of this question is probably to be found in the direction of the sanctuary and the relationship with God. The Israelites had to live a simple lifestyle. The complications of life are for the Lord to solve. These verses are hard to understand.

It is also possible to see this verse in the light of the place man had originally as the king of creation. We have very little understanding about what man’s mandate over nature was before the fall. We know that when man fell, nature also fell and that, under the present condition, man has little or no authority over nature. Man tries to manipulate nature, but that is not the same as to rule over it in the name of the Creator. The commandment, probably, forbids this manipulation. Such manipulation could very well open a door for far-reaching demonic influence over creation. I believe that these could have been the conditions that caused God to send the flood to cover the earth.

Punishment for adultery was severe in Israel. In vs. 20-22 we read: “If a man sleeps with a woman who is a slave girl promised to another man but who has not been ransomed or given her freedom, there must be due punishment. Yet they are not to be put to death, because she had not been freed. The man, however, must bring a ram to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting for a guilt offering to the LORD. With the ram of the guilt offering the priest is to make atonement for him before the LORD for the sin he has committed, and his sin will be forgiven.” These verses form the exception to the rule. Normally, both the man and the woman had to be killed, that is, if the woman was a consenting partner. Here, the woman was not married, and she was not free, being a slave. Inevitably, we have to refer to Jesus’ verdict of the woman who was caught in adultery.<sup>175</sup> One of the reasons for the “not guilty” verdict there was not that Jesus took the law lightly, but that the accusation was hypocritical. The purpose was to put a trap for Jesus. We read: “They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.”<sup>176</sup> The woman had been caught in the act, but where was the man? Our modern society has an aversion to capital punishment, even in the case of premeditated murder: how much more then as punishment for adultery! If, in our present day, adultery were punishable by death, the world population would decrease rapidly. It would be good, though, that Christians would live as if adultery were punishable by death. Our social values have changed so much that ch. 19:20-22 has little significance to contemporary society. Only when we realize the importance of our acts before God do we recognize true values. .

The importance in the application of capital punishment was not the sexual aspect of the relationship, but the fact that the woman belonged to another man. We have completely lost this perspective in our time. The subservient role of the woman, which is implicit in the fact that a woman would belong to a man, is a result of the fall. Part of the curse was: “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”<sup>177</sup> On the other hand, we have to understand that much of our loss of perspective is the result of the preaching of the Gospel. Without realization of

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<sup>171</sup> See Gen 6:1-4

<sup>172</sup> Deut. 22:10

<sup>173</sup> See Deut. 22

<sup>174</sup> Vs. 9

<sup>175</sup> John 8:1-11

<sup>176</sup> vs. 6

<sup>177</sup> Gen. 3:16

forgiveness and redemption, slavery would never have been abolished and there would have been no emancipation of women.

In the sacrifice of the ram as a guilt offering, that is as an atonement for the sinful act, there is forgiveness and restoration. The words atonement and forgiveness are repeatedly used in this context.

A missionary in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, decided to apply the law in the verses 23 - 25 on the pineapple garden he had planted. The natives of the area had been stealing his pineapples as soon as they were ripe for harvest. He decided to let them have the harvest for the first three years. The story came to be known as *The Pineapple Story*.<sup>178</sup> Bill Gothard picked it up and used it in his seminars for *Basic Youth Conflicts*. I understand that this kind of application of Old Testament law upon modern life agrees with Gothard's philosophy, but I would hesitate to advocate such application as the rule for Christian life. I cannot imagine modern growers of fruit and produce applying this to their business.

The word for "forbidden" is translated in the ASV and KJV as "uncircumcised." *Adam Clarke* warns us not to spiritualize the word in this context. But the Holy Spirit would not have used the word here, if there were no connection at all between this law about the harvest and the covenant which was sealed by circumcision. Evidently, God expected that man would consecrate his fruit trees to Him in the same manner as the body of an Israelite man was consecrated to Him in the rite of circumcision. The person who would eat "uncircumcised" fruit, acted as if he was personally responsible for the growth of his trees. The dedication of the fruit to the Lord as an offering of praise in the fourth year was an act of recognition of God's right upon the whole of creation. It also confirmed the fact that we humans are just as much a fruit of the earth as the trees.

There are also practical considerations in the commandment. The first fruit of a tree is often not the best. The crop of the fourth year would be the first one that could be offered to the Lord without apologies for its quality. Many trees do not even bear fruit the first year!

The commandments in the verses 26 - 31 are best seen as one whole series related to fellowship with demons. The word "idolatry" is not specifically mentioned, but that is the theme of all that is said. The prohibition to eat blood is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible in connection with the worship of God.<sup>179</sup> In this passage it is mentioned in the same breath with divination and sorcery. This would indicate that blood was consumed during the practice of divination and sorcery.

For several centuries the topic of involvement with evil spirits was given little attention in our Western society. There were spiritists, but very few Westerners took spiritism serious. In the last decades of our century, spiritism has made a powerful come-back. Centuries of Christianity had driven demonism underground. Now spiritism has lost its illegal status. The terror of Nazi Germany would have been impossible without a massive invasion from the kingdom of darkness. Maybe many Christians have lived in isolation in a demon possessed world. There are many practices that are leftovers from previous demonic involvement. Shaving of head and tattoos are examples. Prostitution, probably, started as part of idol worship and not as an accommodation to sexual desires. If that is true, prostitution is not "the oldest profession in the world" as it is often called. Modern spiritism is the grossest form of demonic involvement, at least in cases in which demons actually reveal themselves. There are many cases of spiritism that are nothing more than a hoax. God says that people who seek contact with demons defile themselves; therefore a person who yields himself to demons abases himself.

It is in connection with demonism that God speaks about the Sabbath and the sanctuary. The Sabbath was given to man as an interruption of the curse. Fellowship with God lifts man up and makes him honorable. Whoever serves God becomes a partaker of the divine nature; whoever seeks contact with the devil contaminates himself with filth.

Vs. 32 which reads: "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD" is a variation on the theme "honor your father and your mother."<sup>180</sup> Old age comes with its failures. Some young people are tempted to mock older people, but God wants us to recognize His image in people whose "earthly tent is being destroyed," as the apostle Paul calls it.<sup>181</sup> Our vision of the dignity of man will determine our attitude towards older people. This vision is the essence of the poetical beauty of Ecclesiastes ch. 12. It is not a matter of dust returning to dust but of a bearer of God's image who prepares himself for the day of resurrection. The shadow

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<sup>178</sup> The Pineapple Story, by Otto Koning.

<sup>179</sup> Gen. 9:4; Lev. 7:26, 27

<sup>180</sup> Ex. 5:12

<sup>181</sup> II Cor. 5:1

of death gives an aristocratic character to the elderly. If we honor the elderly, we honor God, who is called the “Ancient of Days” by the prophet Daniel.<sup>182</sup>

The verses 33 and 34 contain some deeply moving thoughts. We read: “When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” These verses draw a lesson from Israel’s slavery in Egypt. They felt in their bodies what it meant to be an alien and to be mistreated by the inhabitants of the land. This lesson ought to keep them from treating others as they were treated themselves. Their father, Abraham, had been an alien. The alien is a picture of the Christian. Man has become a stranger on his own planet because he fell into sin. But some of us are aliens in the double sense of the word. God, however, does not treat us as aliens. This commandment places aliens on the same level as the neighbor. We read in vs. 18 “Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.” Verses 18 and 34 are identical. We should love our brother and our neighbor as ourselves. The citizens of the Netherlands have set a good example of this. They have gained a reputation as a harbor of freedom. This has its good and its bad aspects since both the Huguenots as well as the drug addicts had free access. Holland is full of people from Ambon, Indonesia, from Surinam and Turkey. In contrast to their open and friendly reputation, the Dutch can be very critical of other people, mocking them and not really accepting them. I say this as a Dutchman. The liberal churches in Holland refrain from evangelizing aliens on humanitarian grounds and the churches that could bring the Gospel to the aliens living in the country do not do it either.

The situation is different in the United States of America. But the USA is a country of aliens. Whoever sees himself as an alien, even in the country of his birth, will be able to show love to the uprooted, the displaced persons, and the refugees. He awaits the city that has foundations.<sup>183</sup> The vision of the country where we will forget that we were aliens, the country of our pilgrimage, will determine our attitude toward aliens on earth.

Repression and persecution are always signs of insecurity. It is important to remember Egypt. The memory of what God did for us in our redemption will determine our vision of our fellow human beings. Redemption delivers us also of our insecurities. There is a paradox in the fact that when we are saved we become conscious of being an alien, and the tension that results from this disappears at the same time, so that we establish the right relationship with fellow aliens. The solution comes, of course, not from an analysis of the present situation but from our hope of the future. We will arrive at the place where we will have forgotten that we were aliens once and where we will find that we have arrived at home.

The last verses sound the same as the beginning of vs. 15. There the topic is the social status of man, here it is commerce. Our relationship with God makes us honest in commerce. This implies that we should not sell things at a marked-up price which we know are no good. We should be known in our commerce, and relationships as Christians. This kind of honesty is sometimes a problem in our society.

The chapter concludes in the same way it began, with that which is the basis for all the commandments: “Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am the LORD.” The opening verse spoke about God’s character, which is the model to which we must conform and it presents God’s acts of salvation which must form the basis of our conduct.

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<sup>182</sup> Dan. 7:9

<sup>183</sup> Heb. 11:10

## CHAPTER TWENTY

## 9. Purity from Gross Immorality 20:1-27

Several of the commandments in this chapter have been given in the preceding chapters 18 and 19. The theme of vs. 2 - 5 is the worship of Molech. Vs. 6 - 8 deal with contacts with evil spirits. Vs. 9 is the other side of the coin of 19:3 which deals with honoring father and mother. Vs. 10 - 24 cover a whole gamut of sexual sins, along the same line as ch. 18. Vs. 25 and 26 give a brief summary of ch. 11. Vs. 27 goes with vs. 6 - 8, with the difference that here the warning is given to the medium. The chapter hinges on the vs. 7 and 26: "Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God," and "You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own." These verses give the reason for the prohibitions in this chapter in two declarations of God's holiness and its effect upon our lives.

## Vs. 2 - 5 Molech

It is not clear whether Molech is a name or a concept of a certain kind of sacrifice, according to the *Dutch Biblical Encyclopedia*. *Smith's Bible Dictionary* calls Molech the God of the Ammonites. He is the god of fire, represented as a brass image with outstretched arms, hollow on the inside. Fire was kindled in its cavity and in some cases children were sacrificed to him as a burnt offering. In these verses God reacts against this kind of gruesome murder.

It is hard for us to understand how man can be so utterly blinded and debased that he would commit such horrible things. God calls it a defiling of His sanctuary and a profaning of His holy Name. It is obvious that man could never come to this point without direct demonic influence.

While I was in Bible school in Brussels, one of my teachers spoke about the enormous weight of consciousness of sin people must have felt in order to come to the place that they were actually willing to sacrifice their own children to expiate their guilt. I do not believe this. I rather think that these people had an animistic sense of wanting to defend themselves at all cost against evil powers, even if the price were the life of their own children. It is this summit of egoism, demonstrated by a willingness to give their own children against which God protests so vehemently. Conversely, parents should be willing to sacrifice their own lives for their children. When parents sacrifice their children for their own safety, the image of God in them is totally destroyed.

In spite of commandment, Israel gave herself completely to this terrible sin, especially during the reign of King Manasseh. We read about him, "[Manasseh] did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had demolished; he also erected altars to the Baals and made Asherah poles. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshipped them.... He sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger"<sup>184</sup> During his reign Israel outdid the Canaanites in practicing this sin. We read, "Manasseh led them astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites. The LORD said through his servants the prophets: 'Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols.'<sup>185</sup>

Several years ago *Readers' Digest* carried an article that, supposedly, illustrated the "Generation Gap." A young man became estranged from his parents. He came back home and turned against them. According to the father who wrote the article the boy came in with a weapon. The father shot and killed him before the boy attacked. He was cleared in court, because it was considered an act of self defense. The whole problem could, probably, traced back to the father's self defense throughout the years. Instead of sacrificing himself for his child, this father maintained himself at the price of his child. This is the attitude that makes Molech fat, then and now.

Vs. 6 is another warning against demonism which takes the form of the occult in this passage. Consulting the spirit of a departed loved one is an illusion. God has shut that door, and no contact is allowed. The devil speculates in the cruelest way with the feelings of man in the face of death of which he is the author. We can easily understand the feeling of bereavement and loss man feels at the death of a loved one. The desire to restore the broken contact is natural. But the Evil One manipulates these feelings and gives the grieving and naive person stone for bread. Other than the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there will be no restoration of relationships with departed ones. The only relationship we will establish if we try to contact the spirit of the dead is a relationship with evil spirits. This may,

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<sup>184</sup> II Chr. 33:1-3,6

<sup>185</sup> II King 21:9-11

initially, be experienced as a soothing comfort, but the person who gets involved in this kind of contact gets more than he bargains for. Ultimately, he will be deceived.

What is true of spiritism goes for divination also. The devil himself does not know the future. What he says via a medium or soothsayer is hog wash. Man's desire to know the future betrays a lack of confidence in God. In cases in which God reveals to man what will take place, man's responsibility becomes the heavier. Jesus' foreknowledge of His suffering, death, and resurrection is a good example. Knowing our future is no blessing in itself. It is part of our living within the confinements of time and space that we only know the past and the present. It is a mystery to me that, at some instances, God breaks through this confinement and reveals His plans to man, in order to gain a strategic advantage over the enemy. Such knowledge, however, would be life endangering without fellowship with God. Man's desire to know the future is, of course, a desire for autonomy. In practice, however, it becomes a being dominated by evil spirits. Knowledge cannot be separated from fellowship. Divination means having contact with evil spirits. The fact that the Evil One who is not omniscient himself makes the prediction nonsense, and the man, who allows himself to be the channel becomes the victim. This goes against the holiness to which we have been called.

The call to holiness in vs. 7 and 8 gives the impression that the previous verses form a rounded off unit. The renewal of the call "Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God. Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy," is more important than all the previous prohibitions. "Consecrate yourselves and be holy" or as the KJV puts it "Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy," points to an act of man. It is the essence of obedience to all these commandments. It implies the recognition that man soils himself if he meddles in things that are forbidden to him. This goes deeper than it seems. The difference between good and bad lies in the relationship between things and the character of God. That which is in accordance with God's character, is good; that which deviates from the character of God is bad. Since holiness is the essence of God's being, good is congruent with holy. We become holy by distancing ourselves from that which is incongruent with the nature of God's being and by doing things that are in accordance with His character. The commandment "be holy!" accentuates not only that there are some things we should do and others from which we should abstain, but also that the habit of doing good should become our second nature.

The key to the secret is found in vs. 8. "I am the LORD, who makes you holy." It is God Himself, who starts the process in us and brings it to completion. The preceding verses prove that holiness will not come about without our active participation; but we cannot produce it. If we live in fellowship with God, His characteristics will be transferred to us. We have no reason to pride ourselves on our holiness. If we run ahead to vs. 26, we see a fine difference in shading. "You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own." The words "You are to be holy *to Me*" indicate that holiness is a slow process that is stimulated by fellowship with God. There is a difference between "you are to be holy to Me" and the more impersonal demand "be holy." God involves Himself personally in our sanctification because He loves us. The phrase "to be my own" speaks about total possession on the basis of a surrender in love. Possession of a wife by her husband in a marriage is basically a correct picture of this, in spite of the fact that, in practice the image is flawed. In our relationship with God, we are the female element. But no man possesses his wife as God possesses us. Holiness is impossible without love. If we look at the commandments against this background, they all take on a new significance.

According to vs. 9, our relationship with our parents is an important factor in the process of our sanctification. It is also important for our emotional balance and our inner health. In God's perfect plan of creation the relationship of a child to his father and mother is the natural channel through which he learns of the love of God. It is also through our parents that we can trace our existence back to God Himself. According to the Gospel of Luke, Adam was the son of God.<sup>186</sup> Sin distorted and ruined much of this relationship. If we do not recognize the reality of our relationship and we if curse our parents, if we hate them instead of loving them, if we do not receive forgiveness and forgive, we forfeit our lives. God puts this kind of curse on the same level as murder.

This is not the place to elaborate on the psychological effects upon our lives if things go wrong in our relationship with our parents. It is enough to say that fellowship with God will result in essential holiness and that this will bring about love for our father and mother. This is, probably, the most important lesson to be drawn from this verse.

Father and mother are an image of God to a child. This fundamental truth is often the reason that children who have been adopted tend to search for their natural parents. If we come to the point at which we understand the difference between that relationship which is an image of reality and the one that is reality, much frustration can be avoided. Here it makes a difference as to whether we know the Lord or not.

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<sup>186</sup> Luke 3:38

The verses 10 - 21 are, partially, a repetition and an elaboration of chapter 18. The greatest difference is the background against which the warnings are placed. In ch. 18 the things described were the accepted norm in Egypt, from where Israel came, and in Canaan, where they were going. In ch. 20 the background is fellowship with God and the forbidden acts are shown to be incongruent with His holiness. It is clear that the Canaanites committed gross sexual immorality, among which were incest, homosexuality and bestiality. This life style is repugnant to God. He compares the beauty of the country with the filth of its inhabitants, and He demands the return of the land back to give it to another nation, that is to Israel.

If we look at this from a human viewpoint, we could ask ourselves if God was not too idealistic in His choice of Israel. The question is, of course, a superficial one. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, emphasizes the depth of God's wisdom and the unsearchableness of His judgments. "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."<sup>187</sup>

Vs. 27 belongs with vs. 6. In this case, however, the medium is addressed. Evidently, the spirit of a departed one or of a spirit cannot speak through a person without his permission. God holds the medium responsible for his contact with evil spirits. According to the law this kind of contact was punishable by death. For twentieth century man, who remembers the burning of witches in previous centuries, there does not seem to be much difference between the two. We should, however, not compare the Biblical revelation according to the excesses of a superstitious century and Israel's theocracy in which there was to be no place for contact with demons or for sexual perversion. The expression "their blood will be on their own heads" is found six times in this chapter. This exonerates the ones who carry out the execution. The Jews who condemned Jesus to death turned this around. They cried out: "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"<sup>188</sup>

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### 10. Holiness in the Life of the Priests Ch. 21, 22

In these chapter we can distinguish five part that each start with the sentence: "The LORD said to Moses."

- a. Ch. 21: 1-15 Uncleaness of the priests and the High Priest.
- b. Vs. 16-24 Physical defects of priests.
- c. Ch. 22:1-16 Physical impurities of priests.
- d. Vs. 17-25 Perfection in sacrificial animals.
- e. Vs. 26-33 Humane treatment of sacrificial animals.

#### a. 21: 1-15 Uncleaness of the Priests and the High Priest

Vs. 1-9 deal with the regular priests and vs. 10-15 with the High Priest. The command "make himself ceremonially unclean for any of his people who die," is not clear. The Amplified Bible says: "None of them shall defile himself for the dead among his people [by touching a corpse or assisting in preparing it for burial]." In our Western culture we know very little of mourning practices as they are still observed among other cultures. It is clear from passages in Genesis<sup>189</sup> and Ecclesiastes<sup>190</sup> that among Israel there were elaborate mourning practices. The context suggests that those practices were accompanied by mutilation of the body. Among the Mountain Papua people of Irian Jaya, fingers of relatives were cut off in mourning. It could be that similar practices were common among the Israelites also. God wants His priests to keep their distance from this, at least in most cases. Mutilation of the body was always forbidden, not only for priests, but also for laymen.<sup>191</sup> We could ask ourselves why God did not forbid all mourning ceremonies; perhaps He planned to reveal more as the hope of the resurrection was revealed in the Old

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<sup>187</sup> Rom. 11:33-36

<sup>188</sup> Matt. 27:25

<sup>189</sup> Gen. 50:10,11

<sup>190</sup> Eccl. 12:5

<sup>191</sup> Deut. 14:1

Testament. The mourning customs indicate that there was little understanding about life after death and even less of resurrection and a new life. In these prohibitions for the priests, we see the suggestion that God and death are enemies. Remember Jesus' majestic declaration about the Father: "He is not the God of the dead but of the living."<sup>192</sup> The priest was to render testimony to this fact in his attitude toward death.

The fact that the priests were, in a sense, responsible for the death of their fellow men, implied in the substitutionary death of the sacrificial animals, required that they, themselves, put death in its right perspective. God wanted them to understand the meaning of what they did and of who they were. The holiness of God's Name and the abhorrence of death are diametrically opposed to each other. Yet, the priests were daily involved in death in the killing of the animals. This paradox is resolved in the cross of Christ. There, God surrendered Himself to death in order to conquer death.

The prohibition in vs. 5, "Priests must not shave their heads or shave off the edges of their beards or cut their bodies," undoubtedly, refers to the mourning practices also. Apparently, they were also part of idol worship. We read about the priests of Baal, "So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed."<sup>193</sup>

As we said before, this vision of death was related to their sanctification. Holiness and life go together. Any deviations would profane the Name of God. In this context, this means that their testimony would be affected. It amazes us that God would link His Name to the conduct of His servants and that when we stand on the Lord's side we are responsible for His testimony.

It is also noteworthy that, in this connection, the offerings made by fire are mentioned. This also contains a paradox. The offerings are the five sacrifices which are pictures of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is the basis of our reconciliation and our victory over death. This is the mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven which culminates in the annihilation of death as the last enemy.

Verses 7 and 8 reveal another precious mystery of the Kingdom: the purity of marriage. The marriage of a priest was to give a pure image of the reality which is expressed in every marriage, that is the fellowship of redeemed men with God. Every marriage is a shadow of the marriage of the Lamb. The woman he married had to be a virgin who never let herself be used by anyone else, whether once or repeatedly. These verses do not explain the problem of divorce, but they present it in a negative sense as something to be avoided. Celibacy is not even suggested. Just as in the New Testament, an elder of the church was to embody and example of a monogamous marriage in a polygamous society, so was the marriage of a priest to be a beacon to which Israel could look as a model for guidance.

In our eyes, it seems that the burning of a priest's daughter who lived an immoral life was a cruel and unusual punishment. It does not say, however, that she was to be burned alive. The execution was usually carried out by stoning. I suppose that the burning was in place of a burial. The implication is that holiness is not a private affair but that it pertains to the whole family.

The key to the understanding of the process of holiness is found in the last part of vs. 8, "I the LORD am holy-- I who make you holy." When God says: "Regard them as holy," it does not mean that the priest would never commit a sin, but that he was holy because of his relationship with the Lord. The relationship was more important than the acts. David's relationship with Saul was not determined by Saul's acts, but by the fact that Saul had been anointed by God. David said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD."<sup>194</sup> This does not mean that there would be no connection between the anointing by the Holy Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit. We have to be careful, though, not to judge people subjectively. It is of vital importance that a man agrees to become God's property. That is the essence of holiness.

The interesting part of the eighth verse is that God does not say: "Consider them holy, because I the LORD am holy-- I who make them holy," but "Consider them holy, because I the LORD am holy-- I who make you holy." What God does for the priest is intended for us; it is for our benefit. It is through the sanctification of the priests that we become holy. If we consider the priest holy, we do that for our own benefit. The author of Hebrews says: "Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers."<sup>195</sup> So the priest becomes an image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>192</sup> Matt. 22:32

<sup>193</sup> I Kings 18:28

<sup>194</sup> I Sam. 24:6

<sup>195</sup> Heb. 2:11

Vs. 10-15 deal with the High Priest. The striking feature of these verses is, first of all, the detailed description of those things that make the High Priest the highest among his brethren. He is the one who has been anointed and who wears the priestly garments. Both of those features are outward signs of holiness; they are not inner qualities of character. The unction and clothing make him the clearest image of Christ, but they do not make him the Christ. He knows the signs that make him an image, but he does not possess them inwardly. His holiness is borrowed. That is why these verses, with all their greatness and dignity, are a loud cry for Him who is to come, who is perfect forever, our Lord Jesus Christ. He possesses a holiness that is not borrowed but one that is His own. "For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever."<sup>196</sup>

Yet, the image also speaks of joy and life. The High Priest was not allowed to mourn or be sad. The outward signs of mourning, such as letting his hair become unkept or tearing his clothes were not allowed. When the High Priest, Caiaphas, tore his clothes in the court case against Jesus, he sinned against this commandment.<sup>197</sup> Or, maybe, without realizing what he did, Caiaphas gave back the garments he had borrowed to the real High Priest who stood before him. It was not the only thing he did without knowing the significance of what he was doing. John says: "Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, 'You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.' He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one."<sup>198</sup>

The High Priest was not allowed to attend any funeral service, not even for his own father or mother. It is very interesting to note that Jesus never attended a funeral. It is supposed that Jesus began His public ministry after Joseph died, but we do not actually read this anywhere. It is difficult to prove anything in the absence of evidence. We do know, though, that in the three incidents when Jesus was confronted with a dead body, that is Jairus' daughter,<sup>199</sup> the son of the widow at Nain,<sup>200</sup> and Lazarus,<sup>201</sup> He raised the dead. We, furthermore, understand that Jesus entered the priesthood after His own resurrection.<sup>202</sup> So in this law, according to which the High Priest had to keep his distance from the dead, we see the picture of Jesus as the Lord of Life. This law expresses a longing after the resurrection.

We read in vs. 12 that the High Priest was not allowed to leave the sanctuary. Whether this is meant literally, we do not know. It is clear, however, that he was limited in his liberty to move about. Whenever the people wanted to consult the High Priest, they had to come to the sanctuary. In connection with this, we think of the beautiful words of the psalm: "Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. Selah Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion."<sup>203</sup>

There is also a dark side to this picture. The priests' routine and lack of freedom to move about must have made for a frustrating condition, especially afterwards, when the cloud was no longer a physical indication of the presence of God. But if the High Priest came to the place where he was really able to quiet his heart in God's presence and lead a life of praise and adoration, he would become a source of refreshment to his people. The above quoted Psalm declares that: He would "make the Valley of Baca into a place of springs."

The High Priest was a picture of Christ. And yet, because he was only an image of the reality, he knew less than we, who have received the Holy Spirit Himself do. "He who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Heb. 7:28

<sup>197</sup> Matt. 26:65

<sup>198</sup> John 11:49-52

<sup>199</sup> Mk. 5:22-24,36-43

<sup>200</sup> Luke 7:11-16

<sup>201</sup> John 11:1-44

<sup>202</sup> See Hebr. 4:5,6

<sup>203</sup> Ps. 84:4-7

<sup>204</sup> Matt. 11:11

The requirements for the marriage of the High Priest were the same as for the priest, with one exception: the High Priest was specifically forbidden to marry a widow. His marriage had to reflect explicitly the union between Christ and the church.

In this case, God considered all forms of sexual relations, within the bond of marriage and outside, as impure. The virginity of the church is proof of her pure dedication to the Lord, both in the spiritual and in the moral sense. It is difficult to explain the physical proof of virginity. It is a strange phenomenon. If one adheres to the theory of evolution, the virginal membrane must be a complete mystery that, actually, refutes the theory. If it does not have a moral connotation, it is senseless, and human life is not senseless. Sometimes young Christians struggle with the question as to why pre-marital sex is morally wrong. We see only the right perspective if we understand the reality of which marriage is the image. Just as the marriage of a High Priest had to be the expression of the spiritual reality, so should the marriage of every child of God be. Marriage is holy matrimony because God is holy and the relationship between God and man is holy. Our relationship with God sanctifies us and our marriage and our children.

#### **b. Physical Defects of Priests 16-24**

The verses 16-24 seem to be a discrimination against physically handicapped persons. The idea is repulsive to us, as Christians, because, on the basis of the Gospel, we consider people with a physical handicap no less the object of God's love and grace than anybody else. In some cases God even assumes the responsibility for human handicaps. God said to Moses: "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"<sup>205</sup> These verses, therefore, seem to present us with an unfair paradox. We have to realize, however, that this section does not deal with God's love or the lack of it toward the physically handicapped but with the purity of the image as compared to the spiritual reality which it represents. The true High Priest, Jesus, is the perfect Son of God. To insinuate that His role could be played by someone on earth who is physically handicapped is an insult to the perfection of God. Handicaps are the result of sin; they are a distortion by the devil of God's perfect character.

God does not consider the physically handicapped to be ritually impure; this is obvious from the fact that they were allowed to eat of the sacrifices that were the priest's portion. The presence of the Lord sanctified them just as much as anybody else. Vs. 23 says specifically: "I am the LORD, who makes them holy." The point was not discrimination against the physically handicapped, but the keeping pure of the image of God.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO**

### **22:1-33**

In this chapter we continue the topic of the previous one and consider:

- c. Physical impurities of priest vs. 1-16
- d. Perfection in sacrificial animals. vs. 17-25
- e. Humane treatment of sacrificial animals. vs. 26-33

#### **c. Physical Impurities of Priest vs. 1-16**

The priest had to examine himself before he could eat the meat that had been sacrificed and which had been, rightfully, given to him. His rights did not come to him automatically. His right only applied if he was, actually, in a state of purity. If he incurred any ritual impurity, he had to abstain from the eating of the holy food. The eating of holy food could be for the priest either a feast or a capital crime. The same also applied to the common man.<sup>206</sup> We have to keep in mind that the intent of the emphasis on the difference between pure and impure is to point to the direction of salvation and sanctification in Jesus Christ. We see some of this reflected in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Whoever does not place himself under the protection of the blood of Christ, who "eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord."<sup>207</sup> The whole commandment is summed up in vs. 3, "For the generations to come, if any of your descendants is ceremonially

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<sup>205</sup> Ex. 4:11

<sup>206</sup> See Lev. 7:20,21

<sup>207</sup> I Cor. 11:27

unclean and yet comes near the sacred offerings that the Israelites consecrate to the LORD, that person must be cut off from my presence. I am the LORD.”

In vs. 49 the details of uncleanness are worked out. A priest would be unclean if he was afflicted with leprosy or if he had an emission of semen. Also, touching objects that had been defiled by others would make him unclean. Purification consisted in bathing with water and abstaining until sundown.

Vs. 10-16 elaborate on who would qualify to eat the holy food. Only those who could be counted to belong to the priest's family, either by birth or purchase, as in the case of a slave, would qualify. Inadvertently eating of holy food was treated as theft and had to be atoned for with a guilt offering and restitution. Eating of holy food by anyone else, other than the priest or his family, would desecrate the food. We have to think of what David did in Nob, when he and his men ate the consecrated bread.<sup>208</sup> Jesus justifies David's deed.<sup>209</sup> I do not know if the Talmud condemns David's behavior, but Jesus' justification of what David did is a revolutionary act which introduces a new order of priesthood.

The phrase: “I am the LORD, who makes them holy,” in vs. 9 pertains to the priests who, in principle, were allowed to eat the holy food but who had to abstain, temporarily, because of defilement. The same words in vs. 16 apply to people who were not allowed to eat this food because they were not priests. To eat or not to eat does not influence the actual sanctification. The distinction is a temporary one that has only symbolical significance. Sanctification comes from God and applies to both the authorized and the unauthorized.

**d. Perfection in Sacrificial Animals** vs. 17-25

Vs. 17-25 deal with the condition of the sacrificial animals. A sacrificial animal had to be without defect or blemish. The only exception was when its legs were too short or too long. That animal could be brought as a free will offering. What is meant is, probably, the burnt offering. The sacrificial animal had to reflect the perfect human nature of Jesus Christ. God reproaches the priests of Malachi's days that they show contempt for His name by offering crippled or diseased animals. God says: “Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?”<sup>210</sup> Honoring God is a form of elementary politeness.

**e. Humane Treatment of Sacrificial Animals** vs. 26-33

Vs. 26-28 strike us because of their concern with the fate of the animal. Paul asks, mockingly, “Is it about oxen that God is concerned?”<sup>211</sup> We could answer, “Yes, He who created the animals is concerned about their condition.” And He wants us to be concerned. A sacrificial animal may not be killed the day of its birth. It could, also, not be killed on the same day as its mother. It is true that the animal itself will, probably, have had no feelings about this, but God wants us to be aware of the pain sin has caused in this world. The prohibition, “Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk,” which we find three times in the Pentateuch,<sup>212</sup> probably, falls into the same category. God wants us to be aware of the contradictory and torn condition of this world that has been put out of joint by the sin of man. It is not a matter of not being allowed to drink a glass of milk with a roast beef sandwich, as the Jewish rabbis interpreted it.

It is interesting to note that these warnings were given in the same breath with the mention of the thank offering. This accentuates the absurdity of the situation even more. It also contains a confession that the present situation is not permanent and that we believe in a God Who will make all things new. God does issue a warning, however, that our thank offering is subject to corruption. We read in vs. 29,30, “When you sacrifice a thank offering to the LORD, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf. It must be eaten that same day; leave none of it till morning. I am the LORD.” This is the same commandment as in ch. 7:15.

The last three verses of the chapter give the contents of the Christian life in a nutshell. Obedience has to do with the person of God. The point is our testimony to the holiness of God. Holiness flows from God to us. The basis of our redemption and the purpose of it is fellowship with God. All of this is contained in the character of God the One without an equal.

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<sup>208</sup> I Sam. 21:1-6

<sup>209</sup> Mark 2:25,26

<sup>210</sup> Mal. 1:6-8

<sup>211</sup> I Cor. 9:9

<sup>212</sup> Ex. 23:19; 34:26 and Deut. 14:21

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### III. The Feasts Ch. 23; 24:1-9

#### ch. 23:1-44

This section, together with the first seven chapters about the sacrifices and the sixteenth chapter about the Day of Atonement, form the high points of this book. The part about the oil for the lampstand and the show bread does not strictly belong to this section, but it fits even less with the following one about the young man who blasphemed God's Name.

If we do not count the Sabbath, in vs. 1-3 with these feasts there are seven in all. The outline is as follows:  
The Sabbath-- weekly on the seventh day (vs. 1-3)

1. The Passover-- on the fourteenth day of the first month (Nissan) ± April. According to TLB "The end of March" (vs. 5)
2. The Feast of Unleavened Bread-- from the fifteenth through the twenty-second of Nissan (vs. 6-8)
3. The First Sheaf of the Grain of Harvest - no date mentioned, except that it be on the day after the Sabbath (vs. 9-14)
4. Pentecost-- Fifty days after the presentation of the first sheaf of grain (vs. 15-22)
5. The Feast of the Trumpets-- on the first day of the seventh month (Ethanim) ± October. According to TLB "Mid September" (vs. 23-25)
6. The Day of Atonement-- on the tenth of the seventh month (vs. 26-32)
7. The Feast of Tabernacles - on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. According to TLB "The last day of September" (vs. 33-44)

From this calendar we see that the high point of the Israelite year was on the seventh month, that is about October on our calendar, a little past the half-way mark of the year. With the exception of the Day of Atonement, the feasts were an occasion for joy. The keyword for the Day of Atonement was self denial. The Hebrew word is *'anah* which, according to *Strong's Dictionary*, means "looking down or browbeating; to depress literally or figuratively." Self-denial is not the same as mourning. In a sense the Day of Atonement was a feast also, but a more solemn one.

Vs. 1-3. The phrase, "The LORD said to Moses," which appears three times in this chapter, (vs. 1,9 and 23) places this section that deals with the feasts under the heading of divine revelations. The feasts are announced as "the appointed feasts of the LORD." And God emphasizes the fact that they are His by saying: "These are my appointed feasts." This implies that God has to be the central point, the focus of all the activities. It is not man's initiative, but God's. God celebrates and we are invited. With this in mind, we should read Jesus' words: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son."<sup>213</sup> And, remembering the joy in Heaven, Jesus speaks about the joy in Luke, when one sinner repents. "I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. .... In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. .... But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."<sup>214</sup>

The feasts of the Lord are celebrated on account of His Son. That is why man may participate in them. The fact that this involves the salvation of man gives to the feast a contradictory character of sadness and joy. There is no unadulterated joy because the price that was paid for salvation was so high. At the same time the sadness gives a depth to the joy that can only be experienced in the presence of God.

The feasts are called "sacred assemblies" because the presence of the Lord sanctifies the activity of the humans. When the Lord is present there is holy joy, even sanctified fun; truly, seriousness and enjoyment are compatible.

#### **The Sabbath** vs. 1-3

The first feast is the weekly Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. It is the only feast that is mentioned on the Stone Tablets of the Ten Commandments.<sup>215</sup> The Pentateuch establishes the connection between the Sabbath and the

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<sup>213</sup> Matt. 22:2

<sup>214</sup> Luke 15:7,10,32

<sup>215</sup> Ex. 20:8-11

order of creation. In that connection the Sabbath is mentioned in Genesis. "Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."<sup>216</sup> The study of the Sabbath throughout the whole Bible would be a rich undertaking. The Sabbath is the only feast that had, originally, nothing to do with man's fall into sin. It is the expression of God's approval of the creation He made. "And God saw that it was good."<sup>217</sup> Then we read: "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy."<sup>218</sup> The eternal God takes possession of time and blesses that element of life on earth that forms the basis of all human experience. So, there is no contradiction between time and eternity, because in the Sabbath, that which is divine and eternal, is linked to time, which is the essence of human life. Both are brought together in perfect harmony. I wonder if, in Heaven, the Sabbath will be based upon the same principle.

The enjoyment of the Sabbath is, evidently, the feature that is lacking in the book of Ecclesiastes. The "vanity" of the book consists in the fact that man is unable to enjoy nature and life and his possessions.<sup>219</sup> So the Sabbath is God's gift to man. That is why Jesus takes possession of the Sabbath with the words: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."<sup>220</sup>

Obviously, sin has drastically changed the character of the Sabbath. In Numbers we read how a man who did not keep the Sabbath received the death penalty.<sup>221</sup> For the man who lives in sin, the Sabbath becomes a curse. For Jesus the Sabbath had, especially, the character of a day of restoration and renewal. When the Jews accused Him for breaking the Sabbath when He healed the man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years, He said: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."<sup>222</sup> Following this statement, Jesus preached His great sermon about the resurrection from the dead which is the fulfillment of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is also an interruption of the curse which man brought upon himself when he sinned. God said to him: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."<sup>223</sup> From a day of enjoyment at the accomplishment of creation, the Sabbath became a pointer to the time of rest that would be the result of complete redemption. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews treats the Sabbath specifically as the rest of faith.<sup>224</sup> Man shares in God's Sabbath through the redemption in Jesus Christ.<sup>225</sup> The tragedy of life in sin is that the Sabbath, which was intended to be a blessing for man, became a curse to him. Jesus was in the grave on the Sabbath day. In this way, He took our curse upon Himself.

Our most important day is the day after the Sabbath, the eighth day. The young church began immediately to celebrate the day after the Sabbath as the day on which Jesus conquered death and rose from the grave. The eighth day is the real Sabbath. That is why in Lev. 23 the Sabbath is not strictly counted among the feasts. The actual feasts start with vs. 4.

**The Passover Feast** Vs. 4-5 The date is the fourteenth of Nissan. We find the detailed description of this feast in Exodus.<sup>226</sup> The time indicated, "at twilight," "at even," (KJV) is less precise than it appears. It could be translated as "between the evenings" leaving a rather large space of time. The Passover was a commemoration of the exodus from Egypt, when the blood of the Passover lamb had to be applied to the door posts of the Israelite homes to protect them from the plague that would kill all the firstborn sons of Egypt. The meat of the lamb had to be roasted. Only the circumcised, that is those who had entered the covenant that God had made with Abraham, were allowed to eat of it.

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<sup>216</sup> Gen. 2:1-3

<sup>217</sup> Gen. 1:10,12,18,21,25 and 31

<sup>218</sup> Gen. 2:3

<sup>219</sup> Eccl. 2:24-26; 5:17-19

<sup>220</sup> Mark 2:27-28

<sup>221</sup> Num. 15:32-36

<sup>222</sup> John 5:17

<sup>223</sup> Gen. 3:17-19

<sup>224</sup> See Heb. Ch. 4

<sup>225</sup> Heb. 4:10

<sup>226</sup> Ex. 12:1-28,43-51

The main point of the feast was not the commemoration of the departure from Egypt but the fact that Israel was saved and Egypt was punished. The amazement of this fact still rings in the words: "It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians."<sup>227</sup> The Israelites understood that these events were not self-evident. This was not something God owed them.

The Passover is merely mentioned in one sentence probably because for the Israelites in the desert, the facts of that last night were still fresh in their memory when this law was given.

#### **The Feast of Unleavened Bread Vs. 6-8**

Immediately following the Passover, even partly overlapping it, was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The eating of this bread began during the Passover celebration.<sup>228</sup> This was the bread Jesus took and broke during the celebration of the first Lord's Supper. The feast celebrates the consequences of our redemption; that is the purification of our sins. It began and ended with a Sabbath. According to Exodus, all the yeast in the house had to be removed and the man who ate bread with yeast forfeited his life.<sup>229</sup> The seven-day-long celebration is an image of daily life. God wanted to impress upon His people that the consequences of their escape from God's wrath and of their deliverance from the slavery of Egypt was to lead a life in which the people would no longer feed themselves with sin. For the average Israelite whose heart had not been renewed by the Holy Spirit, this must have been a source of endless frustration. He got "from the frying pan into the fire." For a Christian the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a feast in the true sense of the word. The apostle Paul puts it this way: "Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast-- as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth."<sup>230</sup> "Let us therefore celebrate the feast!"

Just as the Passover, so also the Feast of Unleavened Bread was the Lord's feast. In celebrating it we share our Master's happiness.<sup>231</sup> God celebrates with us the fact that we were transferred from the power of darkness into His wonderful light. Thus we partake of His divine nature.

#### **The First Sheaf of the Grain of Harvest vs. 9-14**

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread show us the "What" of salvation; the Feast of the First Sheaf of the Grain of Harvest and the Feast of Pentecost speak to us about the "how" of our redemption. Just as the first two feasts belong together so also do the first sheaf and the harvest.

The Feast of the First Sheaf of the Grain of Harvest is, in the first place, a fulfillment of God's promises. It could only be celebrated after the conquest of Canaan. The basis of the feast is victory. Paul calls Christ's resurrection "the firstfruits." He says: "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."<sup>232</sup> And John calls Him "the firstborn from the dead."<sup>233</sup> So, the Feast of the First Sheaf of the Grain of Harvest is a shadow of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This resurrection signifies the complete defeat of the devil who "holds the power over death"<sup>234</sup> and who was dethroned by the death of Christ. There is no clearer proof that the *Strongman* has been bound than the resurrection of Christ.

The conquest and occupation of Canaan and the harvest of the land belong together. The waving of the sheaf had to take place on the day after the Sabbath, that is the first day of the week, the day of resurrection! The bloody sacrifice that had to be brought that same day was a burnt offering. This most sublime of all sacrifices could not be brought on a more appropriate day. When Jesus died on the cross, He gave Himself to the Father, but when He rose from the dead, He did not belong to Himself either. As the Risen One He gave Himself anew to the Father in an act of perfect surrender of love. The sheaf was waved before the Lord, but it was not burned. The waving of the sheaf is, of course, a picture. In the reality which it portrays, the Priest and the Sheaf are one and the same. In the picture, an

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<sup>227</sup> Ex. 12:27

<sup>228</sup> See Ex. 12:8

<sup>229</sup> Ex. 12:15

<sup>230</sup> I Cor. 5:7-8 (NAS)

<sup>231</sup> See Matt. 25:21

<sup>232</sup> I Cor. 15:20

<sup>233</sup> Rev. 1:5

<sup>234</sup> Heb. 2:14

earthly priest holds a sheaf in his hands, which is the symbol of the basis and right of his priesthood. This sheaf is his “raison d’être.” It stands for the One, Who is addressed by God as “priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”<sup>235</sup>

The offering up of the grain offering consisting of fine flour mixed with olive oil, both substances ground and crushed, establishes a relationship between the whole of creation and the resurrection.

In the law on the grain offering, given in ch. 2, no wine is mentioned. Wine would, of course, not have been available during Israel’s trek through the desert. After the entrance into Canaan, wine became one of the elements of the daily sacrifice.<sup>236</sup> The prescribed ¼ of a hin must be the equivalent of ± 1 ½ liter or pint. The drink offering was another pointer to victory and the conquest of the land God had promised.

Wine is a symbol of joy. We have to keep a distance from the modern picture that wine evokes: drunkenness and licentiousness. The biblical image of wine is that of heavenly joy. “You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.”<sup>237</sup> “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”<sup>238</sup> “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”<sup>239</sup> In these quotes, both the positive as well as the negative character of wine is emphasized. The pouring out of wine as a sacrifice reminds us that our daily joys, also, have to be poured out before God. We have the tendency to bring our sorrow before the Lord and to keep our joy to ourselves. The drink offering restores the balance. Joy will be a constant element in our lives only if we share it consistently with the Lord. Wine is, after all, an image of the joy of the Holy Spirit, which is only found in the presence of God. David says: “You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”<sup>240</sup> And Nehemiah encouraged the people by saying: “Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”<sup>241</sup> And, finally, Jesus knew the source of joy. We read: “At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.’”<sup>242</sup> What will stimulate our joy more than the realization that God broke the bonds of death, also for us, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? That is why God is called “The God, my joy and my delight.”<sup>243</sup> We are not allowed to eat of the new harvest before we have gone through the resurrection.

#### **Pentecost vs. 15-22**

It was on the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus from the grave, that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the first group of believers in Jerusalem. The church is the spiritual harvest. The special feature of the feast of Pentecost is the bringing of the two loaves of bread made with yeast. Together with the fellowship offering of thanksgiving in ch. 7:13, these are the only two instances in which bread with yeast was presented. The bread made with yeast is a beautiful picture of the church. The church consists of sinful people who are redeemed and who have been made into one body by the fire of God’s Spirit. God used the fallen condition to create a monument of His grace. There is a sense in which the church is also the first fruit. James calls the church “a kind of firstfruits.” He says: “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.”<sup>244</sup>

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235 Ps. 110:4

236 See Num. 15:5,6,10; 28:7

237 Ps. 4:7

238 John 15:1-8

239 Eph. 5:18

240 Ps. 16:11

241 Neh. 8:10

242 Luke 10:21

243 Ps. 43:4

244 James 1:18

We, who consider ourselves to be crucified with Christ, are also partakers of His resurrection. In principle we also belong to the sheaf of first grain. We should, therefore, consider the harvest to be more than the church alone. The relatively small group upon which the Holy Spirit came in Acts was only the beginning of the harvest. The total harvest will, ultimately, include the whole of creation.

It is remarkable that the two loaves are a symbolic presentation of the whole harvest. John sees another harvest in the book of Revelation, where the grapes are harvested and are thrown into the winepress of God's wrath.<sup>245</sup> Another account of the same event is found in Isaiah. But there it is silently implied that the treading of the winepress was done by God alone on Golgotha. We read: "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing."<sup>246</sup> In one way does the harvest precede the first fruit!

The loaves of bread were not sacrificed in the sense that they were burned upon the altar. They were waved before the Lord, or rather they were presented to the Lord as an acknowledgment of His right of ownership. Added to this, a rather large number of animals were to be sacrificed: seven male lambs, one young bull and two rams, together with the accompanying grain offerings and drink offerings. In addition to these, one male goat had to be brought for a sin offering and two lambs, each a year old, for a fellowship offering. The last two animals were, first, waved before the Lord and subsequently given to the priest. It is not stated specifically that this present was meant for consumption, but the word "sacred offering" suggests slaughtering. Of the five categories of sacrifices, four had to be brought on the feast of Pentecost. Only the guilt offering was omitted.

The day had to be celebrated with a convocation to a sacred assembly. The New Testament name for the church in Greek is *ekklesia*. The church of Jesus Christ consists of people who have responded to the convocation and have left their place in the world to appear before the Lord. They were forbidden to do any work. The Hebrew word is *abodah* which the KJV translates with "servile labor." It could mean work of any kind, but the intent is, probably, that nothing except absolutely essential chores could be performed. The day should symbolize liberation, and celebrate liberty from the powers of sin and death in our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we appear before the Lord of the harvest, we can hardly forget Jesus' words about how great the harvest is. "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."<sup>247</sup> So, the celebration of the feast of Pentecost should, at the same time, be a Missions Feast. This emphasis may also be detected in the reference to the poor and the alien in vs. 22. The church must be careful that her compassion for the poor and the alien does not cool off. There is a pitfall in a plentiful harvest from which the church must keep its distance. A plentiful harvest, in the literal sense of the word, is a blessing. But plenty tends to dull the edge of our vision. All blessing is given to be shared, not to be enjoyed egocentrically. Only shared blessings are a benefit to mankind.

We should note, however, that the grain is not delivered at the doorstep of the poor and the alien. The corners of the fields are for them, but they have to do their own reaping. The Lord is God!

#### **The Feast of the Trumpets** Vs. 23-25

It is difficult to determine the clear meaning of the Feast of the Trumpets. It is not based on any historical event, as far as we know. In this it differs from the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. It is not linked to any event of nature like the Feast of the first Sheaf or Pentecost. Yet, it is not without foundation.

The trumpet blast gives a festive character to the celebration and it suggests victory and completion. Victory in a general sense cannot be celebrated if there is no victory in a particular sense. Victorious living has to be based upon a factual victory. It may be that the sounding of the trumpet points to the sounding of the last trumpet. We find a more elaborate description of the feast in Num. 29:1-6 but, also, without reference to any historical event. *William Smith's Bible Dictionary* states that there is insufficient ground to doubt the common understanding of both Jews and Christians that the feast celebrates the first day of the civil New Year, the day on which the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee began. The dictionary mentions Ps. 81 in this connection. In the text of Leviticus we find, however, no indication of this. This makes us believe that, although the feast was generally celebrated in connection with the New Year, God had a greater New Beginning in mind in ordering this feast. We can see beyond the horizon of the New Year to a new Heaven and earth and we may reach forward to the promise of Him who is "seated on the throne [and who] said, 'I am making everything new!'"<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Rev. 14:14-20

<sup>246</sup> Isa. 63:3 (see also vs. 1-6)

<sup>247</sup> Matt. 9:37-38

<sup>248</sup> Rev. 21:5

We do hear the sound of a trumpet more often in the New Testament. In connection with the rapture of the church of Christ, Paul says: "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first."<sup>249</sup> Paul says that the raising of the dead will be accompanied by the sound of the trumpet. We read: "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."<sup>250</sup>

In the celebration of the Feast of the Trumpet we may, therefore, celebrate the hope of the resurrection. This feast of resurrection is, at the same time, a preparation for the Day of Atonement. The fact that the dead will rise is the basis for our humbling ourselves and for our self-denial.

#### **The Day of Atonement** Vs. 26-32

The significance of this day is not discussed here since it has already been treated in detail in ch. 16. The punishment for disregarding the work prohibition is death, and the Sabbath rest has to begin on the day before, which is the ninth day of the seventh month. The most important feature symbolized in the Day of Atonement is the bringing of the blood of Christ before the throne of the Father in Heaven. Chronologically viewed this day should be observed between the Feast of the First Sheaf and Pentecost. But that is earth time; the clock of Heaven runs differently from the one on earth.

#### **The Feast of Tabernacles** Vs. 33-44

The Feast of Tabernacles is described in more detail in Numbers and Deuteronomy<sup>251</sup> where more specific instructions regarding the sacrifices to be burned by fire on each day are given. The number of one-year-old bulls was reduced from thirteen on the first day to seven on the seventh day and to one on the eighth day. The number of two rams and fourteen male lambs one-year-old remained the same until the eighth day when only one of each of the animals was sacrificed, with the exception of the male lambs.

The large number of animals to be slaughtered and the living in booths made of leafy branches for seven days were the most characteristic features of this festival. The feast of tabernacles is the most exuberant of all celebrations. A large quantity of meat was eaten. In New Testament times the pouring out of water from the pool of Siloam was added as part of the ceremony of this feast. On the last day of this feast, Jesus stood in the temple and said: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."<sup>252</sup>

The Feast of Tabernacles was a commemoration of the journey through the desert. The moment of its celebration was well chosen: after the harvest had been gathered in. For the people who grew up during the desert journey, the first harvest in the promised land must have been an overwhelming confirmation of the fact that they had arrived. In ordering the observance of this feast, the Lord confirms this first unforgettable experience. It is, indeed, something they should never forget. If the following generations were to lose their sense of history they were doomed to live as a nation without roots. In this sense the Feast of Tabernacles is a picture of Heaven since it is difficult for us to imagine what life in glory will be like. But it is likely that there will be reminders of things on earth. Our journey through life's wilderness, our hunger and thirst and all the hardships we went through will not be erased from our memory. Neither will the remembrance of moments of deliverance and miraculous provision be forgotten.

The deep lesson of it all is "that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."<sup>253</sup> This fact will be celebrated exuberantly throughout eternity.

Just as with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Tabernacles had to be celebrated for seven days. A seven-day-long celebration indicates that the truth that is commemorated is not something transient, but a principle for life. After the Passover the Israelites had to eat unleavened bread for seven days. In the same way, after the harvest, they had to live in booths for seven days. The lesson expressed is that the result of redemption ought to be that we live a life of holiness. The result of entrance into a state of victory ought to be that our roots will not sink too deeply in the earth on which we live. We should always remember that we are aliens in this world and that our citizenship is in Heaven. This consciousness will maintain for us the joy of living day by day. The more we are detached from things of this life, the more we will enjoy each day we live on earth.

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<sup>249</sup> I Thes. 4:16

<sup>250</sup> I Cor. 15:51,52

<sup>251</sup> See Num. 29:12-40 and Deut. 16:13-16

<sup>252</sup> John 7:37,38

<sup>253</sup> Deut. 8:3

Evidently, the Lord wanted the Israelites to take a week's vacation at least twice a year.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

**The Lampstand and the Show Bread** Ch. 24:1-9

Strictly speaking this paragraph is not part of the feasts. Yet, there is something festive in the care for the lampstand and the preparation of the showbread. The lampstand had a unique function in the service of God. Light is the loveliest expression we know of God's holy presence. John says: "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."<sup>254</sup> This is the message the lampstand proclaims. The lampstand is also the perfect image of the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Zechariah sees in a vision a lampstand which is fed organically by two living olive trees, which conveys the message: "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty."<sup>255</sup> And in the book of Revelation Jesus reveals Himself to John as *Lord of the lampstands*.<sup>256</sup> There, too, the lampstand stands for the testimony of the Holy Spirit. We gather this from the Lord's warning to the church in Ephesus: "If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."<sup>257</sup> This same conclusion can be drawn from what John writes in Revelation where we read: "These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth."<sup>258</sup>

God does not need human hands to keep His lamps burning. Yet, this is the topic of these verses. The lampstand in the tabernacle, and later in the temple, was an earthly image of a heavenly reality. It is man's task to keep the image pure. What we do on earth has to be the perfect shadow of the original in Heaven. There is a heavenly antitype of all human relationships and responsibilities-- beginning with our birth, our marriage, our procreation, our relationships with our children and with our fellow human beings to our actions and responsibilities. All we do on earth is an expression of a heavenly antitype. It is our responsibility to see to it that our type does not become a caricature but that it is a pure expression of the heavenly reality.

So it is with the lampstand. The Israelite who picked and crushed the olives and who brought the oil to the tabernacle and the priest who filled the lamps and trimmed the wicks, did work on earth that had eternal significance. What he did was meaningful, and it made him a human being who had meaning.

At the same time this work is more than a mere copy of something in Heaven. The lampstand is an image of the witness of the Holy Spirit, not apart from man, but through him. What is done on earth is a strange mixture of type and antitype, of image and reality. We find fulfillment in life if we follow the pattern that God shows us. God said to Moses: "Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you."<sup>259</sup> We see the practical application of this principle in Jesus' life. He gave the Jews this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."<sup>260</sup>

We know what the lampstand must have looked like, since a copy of it is still visible on Titus' arch in Rome. It is one of the two objects used in the Old Testament worship service of which we have a picture, the second one being the table for the showbread, which is also depicted on Titus' arch.

The second task of the Israelites consisted of the baking of twelve loaves of showbread, or bread of the Presence, as the NIV calls it. *Smith's Bible Dictionary* observes correctly that the ritual of the showbread is one of the mysteries of the Old Testament. No further explanation as to the use and purpose are given, but we find ample instructions regarding the making of the table which was made especially to display the loaves of bread.<sup>261</sup>

The showbread or bread of the Presence was baked fresh every Sabbath using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf which is, according to a footnote in the NIV, "probably about 4 quarts (about 4.5 liters)." The loaves from the previous week were eaten by the priests. We are not looking at little cakes, but large loaves of bread, weighing several pounds or kilos each. We read nowhere whether this was to be unleavened bread or whether yeast was to be used. It

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<sup>254</sup> I John 1:5

<sup>255</sup> Zech. 4:6

<sup>256</sup> Rev. 1:12,13

<sup>257</sup> Rev. 2:5

<sup>258</sup> Rev. 11:4

<sup>259</sup> Ex. 25:9. See also Ex. 25:40; 26:30; 27:8; Heb. 8:5

<sup>260</sup> John 5:19

<sup>261</sup> See Ex. 25:23-30; 37:10-16

probably was not. Leavened bread would not have lasted for a week or two. The older loaves would be eaten two weeks after they had been baked.

The incense that had been on the loaves was burned on the altar the moment the loaves were exchanged. Opinions differ among scholars as to the meaning of all this. The *Dutch Encyclopedia*, which has strong liberal tendencies, sees in this ceremony with the bread a leftover from previous customs in which bread was sacrificed to idols. We will not comment on such “form historical” nonsense. MacIntosh, in his *Notes on Exodus*, believes that this is a clear picture of Christ in His human nature.

Just as in the preparation of the oil, so here in the baking of the bread, we see the product of human effort which has a spiritual significance. It was, first of all, a promise of the entrance into the promised land. Without wheat harvest there would be no bread. Bread symbolizes man’s daily need for food. “Give us today our daily bread,”<sup>262</sup> pertains to the needs of our physical life. The showbread has, clearly, a more earthly character than the lampstand. Yet the loaves are placed on a table of pure gold and incense is placed on top of them. This gives an aura of glory to these loaves as they are placed before the Lord.

It is stated emphatically that “the bread [is] to be an offering made to the LORD by fire.” Only the incense was burned every week but this was, obviously, done as a symbolic gesture for the whole. And so, although the bread was not burned upon the altar, it was considered by the Lord to be an offering made by fire.

We have to see this ritual in the light of Jesus’ majestic sermon about the bread of life.<sup>263</sup> When Jesus calls Himself “the bread of life,” He refers to His death on the cross. Here also is the bread part of the offerings made by fire. MacIntosh puts it correctly when he says that this bread represent the nourishment God provides for us in the most inclusive sense of the word. Moses reminded the people “that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”<sup>264</sup> Jesus quotes these words to Satan during His temptation. This “word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” is Jesus Himself. The showbread on the table of gold is an image of the real bread, it is a picture of reality.

We are reminded of the incident in David’s life when he ate five of the loaves of this bread during his flight from Saul.<sup>265</sup> Jesus uses this story as an argument in His discussion with the Pharisees in Matthew.<sup>266</sup> It is clear that what David did was unlawful. Otherwise, Jesus’ quotation of this Scripture would not have refuted the accusation of the Pharisees. The bread was for the priests alone, and David was not a priest. But David was, as Jesus, one anointed by God, and he was about to lose his life. We could put it negatively and say that the death of David would have been a greater evil than the eating of the showbread. But we can also say, positively, that there are emergency situations in which a higher law kicks in which temporarily overrules other laws. God’s intention was that the whole world would be kept alive by His bread of life. Jesus said: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”<sup>267</sup> The law which stated that only Aaron and his sons were allowed to eat this bread was a temporary one. When God says that this is a “lasting covenant,” He did not refer to the fact that consumption of the bread was limited to Aaron and his descendants, but to the day when the whole of mankind would consist of priests. Some of this eternal feature broke through in David’s trespass and in the disciples’ eating of the grains of wheat on the Sabbath.

#### **IV. Punishment for Blasphemy An Object Lesson 24:10-23**

This section is one of the most difficult parts of the Bible. We tend to revolt morally and emotionally against what we read here, and our aversion is based on what the Bible, as a whole, teaches! This kind of “witch-burning” seems to be contrary to the whole message of the Bible, especially the New Testament. Does not Jesus react against the kind of doctrine that is taught in this lesson in the Sermon on the Mount, when He said: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also?”<sup>268</sup> If people who cursed would be executed in our day and age, the world population would be decimated.

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<sup>262</sup> Matt. 6:11

<sup>263</sup> John 6:22-59

<sup>264</sup> Deut. 8:3

<sup>265</sup> I Sam. 21:1-6

<sup>266</sup> Matt. 12:3,4

<sup>267</sup> John 6:51

<sup>268</sup> Matt. 5:38,39

First of all, we have to realize that this law was made within the framework of a theocracy, not in a democratic republic or a monarchy. There are countries, in our time also, where one risks facing the firing squad when one slanders the government. As a matter of fact, there are not many places where one is free to do so. We should, therefore, be careful, as twentieth century people, not to lose our balance in our criticism of the event reported here. Obviously, this law could not be applied in our present society. We can hardly imagine the impact of this law upon a theocratic society. Our thinking has been conditioned in such a way by the secular world in which we live that we cannot envision ourselves in a society where God would occupy the central place. Even for Christians who believe that God created the universe in an open system, God often stands at the edge of life. But the majority of twentieth century men live in a closed system, independently from God, without God and without hope. A theocracy can function only if God occupies the center of every individual life. If the son of Shelomith had gone unpunished, the theocratic system would have collapsed. So, much more was involved than a person using strong language. That is why the whole nation had to be involved in this execution. The fact that the offender was taken outside the camp symbolically cut him off from his people. Those who had heard him pronounce the curse had to place their hands on the head of the accused, and the curse he had uttered came back upon his own head. Then he was stoned to death by all the people. God did not take his life, the people did.

We have to understand that the curse was not considered to be the utterance of words that would, eventually, lose their meaning, as is the case in our time. The curse this young man pronounced was taken literally as the statement of a principle. Cursing and blaspheming means, literally, that the speaker wants good to be conquered by evil: that God would be dethroned by Satan.

In our contemporary society, we tend to emphasize the rights of the offender. While this can be good, this Scripture portion stresses the rights of society. The keyword is found in vs. 22, "You are to have the same law for the alien and the native-born." Both the alien and the native had the same right to be protected against evil, violence, and those influences that can unhinge society.

Cursing the Name of the Lord was viewed as an attack upon the basis of ethics. If God does no longer occupy the central place in society and if He is no longer honored and served then the foundation for man to act ethically is gone. That is why cursing is mentioned in the same breath with murder, theft, and violence. Man's right relationship with God protects him and society against evil. Everyone who does not allow God to occupy the central place in his life opens the door to all kinds of immorality. On the other hand, we can say that a society in which injustice is prevalent is a society that has cursed God, and the death sentence has already been pronounced upon it. In the course of history, Israel has not managed to protect itself against corruption, but that does not detract from the fact that the verdict and the execution of the sentence which are described in this section are basically correct.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### V. Regulations Regarding Possession Ch. 25:1-55

The commandments given in this chapter were presented by God to Moses during his forty-day stay on Mount Sinai. So these commandments are older than some of the other ones we find in this book. They date from the same period as the Ten Commandments.

There was no question yet of the forty years wandering in the desert as a result of the people's disobedience. This chapter reaches toward the future to what would happen after Israel entered the promised land. The battle had not been fought yet, but God considers the victory to be an accomplished fact. None of the Israelites could see that far ahead; not even Moses. "Higher Criticism" would refer this portion to a period after the captivity. The problem in this, however, is that, as far as we know, the Year of Jubilee and even the Sabbath Year were never celebrated. What would be the point of incorporating these laws in the book and predating them if they served no practical purpose? This is even more reason for us to take literally the opening verse of this chapter which says: "The LORD said to Moses on Mount Sinai...."

1. Vs. 2-7 deal with the Sabbath Year, as do vs. 18-22.
2. Vs. 8-17 deal with the Year of Jubilee.
3. Vs. 23-28 pertain to redemption of the land.
4. Vs. 29-34 pertain to redemption of houses, and
5. Vs. 35-55 deal with the poor in the land.

#### 1. The Sabbath Year Vs. 2-7, 18-22

God shares with Moses His vision of the future. "When you enter the land ..." The use of the Sabbath Year for the fields and the vineyards is not specifically mentioned here. God wanted His people to understand that He is the owner of the land and the Lord of the harvest. He is the one Who does the work. Man can sow and fertilize and irrigate, but he cannot make seeds grow. God is the Lord of the harvest. Just as much as the weekly observation of the Sabbath Day is a reminder that God is the Creator of Heaven and earth, so is the celebration of the Sabbath Year a reminder of the fact of God's lordship over the fields and the vineyards. The land did not belong to the people; God only loaned it to man.

The Sabbath command was a test of obedience for the Israelites. God ordered them to leave the land alone. It was much harder to obey the commandment to leave the land alone than to work on it and sweat over it. It is much more difficult to keep quiet than to be busy. Waiting for God is a commandment few people obey. It takes strength of character and courage to wait for the Lord. David said: "Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the LORD."<sup>269</sup> Man needs to rest and interrupt his routine from time to time and to recharge his batteries. The land needs rest also. The question is an academic one, but one wonders what the world economy would look like if the farmers kept the Sabbath.

This Sabbath command was also a test of faith for the Israelites. They had to trust God to give them a harvest in six years that would last them eight. That would be a challenging experience! It might have seemed, sometimes, that the reserves would be insufficient. God puts people often to the test in this way in order to prove that His promises carry more weight than visible reality. Promises to this extent were given clearly in vs. 18-22. We read: "Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety. You may ask, 'What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?' I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in."

The important part is not our reserves but our obedience. We tend to turn this around. God does not only promise abundance as a result of obedience but also safety. A student in the Bible School in Irian Jaya, where we taught, believed that he would never be bitten by a poisonous snake because he had never committed adultery. I doubted the solidity of his conviction when I heard him say this, but he may have been more correct than I gave him credit for.

There is a factor in the fertility of the land which modern man knows nothing about, a factor which some might call ridiculous superstition. This factor is the farmer's relationship with God. Many farmers feel a kinship with

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<sup>269</sup> Ps. 27:14 (NAS)

the ground they cultivate. This kinship between a farmer and his land represents only two sides of a triangle. Obedience and prayer are just as important as fertilizer and pesticide.

## 2. The Year of Jubilee Vs. 8-17

The Year of Jubilee occupies a unique place in the Israelite law and, probably, in the world's legal system as a whole. It had to be celebrated once every fifty years; once in a lifetime. It was closely related to the Day of Atonement. The Year of Jubilee followed the seventh Sabbath Year. This meant that once every fifty years the farmers had a two year vacation and were not allowed to work their fields.

The year opened with the sounding of a trumpet in all the land. Everyone who had been reduced to poverty and who had been obliged to sell himself or his property, was given back his liberty and his dignity. Nowhere in the Old Testament do we read that the Year of Jubilee has ever been seriously observed.

The name Jubilee is derived from the Hebrew word for ram's horn, *jobel*. The fact that the celebration of the Year of Jubilee was connected to observation of the Day of Atonement indicates its spiritual character. Much more was at stake than cancellation of debts and social independence. The material and physical aspects of the feast were the result of God's forgiveness of sins and of the purification of the Sanctuary. The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, makes us free and honorable human beings who can celebrate and rejoice. Isaiah speaks about the Year of Jubilee in spiritual terms. He calls it "the year of the LORD's favor." We read: "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn."<sup>270</sup> Jesus quoted these words in the synagogue of Nazareth and thus announced the beginning of the real Year of Jubilee. He closed the book at one point and did not read the words "and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn."<sup>271</sup> In Nazareth also, as well as everywhere else, the Jews did not want to have anything to do with "the year of the LORD's favor." They tried to assassinate Jesus after He made His proclamation.

The verses 14-17 show us how this hope of redemption and rehabilitation should govern the trade relations among people. If everyone takes his or her salvation seriously, the whole economy of a country will change. Yet among Christians it is not considered immoral to ask a price that is too high if the buyer is foolish enough to pay it. But whoever takes the Year of Jubilee seriously will not take advantage of his neighbor.

The Year of Jubilee also changes our concept of property. God is the owner and we are the tenants. This puts the phrase "aliens and tenants" (vs. 23), or, as the KJV has it: "strangers and sojourners," in a new light. The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes this feature of our life on earth. Speaking about the faith of Abraham and his descendants, he says: "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth."<sup>272</sup>

We demonstrate how real our faith is in the way we handle our possessions. *God Owns My Business*<sup>273</sup> ought to be the normal attitude of every Christian businessman, or woman. Strictly speaking, we cannot transfer our business to God because He owns everything to begin with. The most we can do is to accept this reality and act accordingly.

## 3. The Redemption of the Land vs. 23-28

The main theme of this chapter is expressed most clearly and in its most elementary form in the redemption of the land. God owns the land; He is the proprietor. The promised land was given to the tribes of Israel as a life-lease; they were never the owners. This means that their enjoyment of their possessions was dependent upon their fellowship with God. Isn't that the main theme of Ecclesiastes? "For without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God ... I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil-- this is the gift of God ... Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him-- for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any

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<sup>270</sup> Isa. 61:1,2

<sup>271</sup> See Luke 4:16-21

<sup>272</sup> Heb. 11:13

<sup>273</sup> Title of a book by Stanley Tamm

man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work-- this is a gift of God."<sup>274</sup>

God emphasizes also in these verses that the economic depression which can force a man to sell his field is a temporary and passing phase. Just as the coming of sin into the world, through which man incurred a moral debt, this economic debt is not the normal condition in which God has called man to live. Man was created to be free and to rule, not to be enslaved by debts. The redemption of the land is an image of our redemption in Jesus Christ. It is true that our material possessions or the lack of them does not make us more human or less, but our spiritual possessions do. Without redemption we are poor beggars in the sight of God. God wants us to inherit the Kingdom.

The redeemer of the person who got himself in debt, had to be a close relative. He had to use his own means to buy back the field and return it to his brother. The writer to the Hebrews stresses this facet of our redemption. We read: "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, 'I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.' And again, 'I will put my trust in him.' And again he says, 'Here am I, and the children God has given me.' Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil-- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."<sup>275</sup> He partook of our flesh and blood as we partake of His. He is our closest relative.

The quotation from Hebrews also shows us the depth of our redemption. We are redeemed from death and, consequently, from the power of the devil. Jesus paid for us with His own means. Peter expresses this so beautifully when he says: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."<sup>276</sup> That is the true redemption, paid with the true price, based on true brotherly love.

In vs. 26 and 27 the image differs from the reality in that nobody would ever be able to pay for his spiritual debt with his own means. In the story Jesus tells to Simon, the Pharisee,<sup>277</sup> Jesus stresses the fact that none of the debtors were able to repay their debt. "What can a man give in exchange for his soul?"<sup>278</sup> Vs. 27 and 28 do put the hope for the Year of Jubilee in the foreground. The price of the land had to be calculated in relation to the Year of Jubilee. If there is no hope on the human level and all else fails, God makes it known that He will interfere and that we can expect a complete deliverance at the sounding of the last trumpet.

#### 4. The Redemption of Houses vs. 29-34

The right to redeem houses in an ordinary city was more restricted than that of houses elsewhere. The fact that men built houses, in which they could entrench themselves and separate themselves from other people groups (and from God), had a restricting effect upon redemption.

The history of cities in the Bible is related to man's fall into sin. The first city mentioned in the Bible is the one built by Cain after he murdered his brother. "So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch."<sup>279</sup> Cain built this city, obviously, to protect himself against the violence he had begun. This violence was a direct result of his rebellion against God. Every city in this world has a similar history attached to its existence.

This pre-history influenced redemption, both in a material and spiritual sense. Redemption was not an impossibility, but man had to act fast in order to make it possible. Redemption of city dwellers is an urgent matter, because people who live in a city live under a great amount of stress and it is easier to be lost in a city than outside.

<sup>274</sup> Eccl. 2:25,26; 3:12,13; 5:18,19

<sup>275</sup> Heb. 2:10-18

<sup>276</sup> I Pet. 1:18,19

<sup>277</sup> Luke 7:41,42

<sup>278</sup> Matt. 16:26

<sup>279</sup> Gen. 4:16,17

The cities of the Levites were an exception. We can see in those an image of the City of God, the New Jerusalem, the city of the redeemed.

Houses in villages that had no walls around them could be redeemed. We see in that condition an image of a life in which the condition God had created for man had not yet been destroyed completely. The house of a man in the village was the dwelling place of a man who worked the land, not an entrenchment where man defended himself against God and men.

The Good News Bible translates vs. 33 as follows: "If a house in one of these cities is sold by a Levite and is not bought back, it must be returned in the Year of Restoration." That is much clearer than the rendering of the KJV, which reads: "And if a man purchase of the Levites, then the house that was sold, and the city of his possession, shall go out in the year of jubilee." A footnote in the Good News Bible tells us that the Hebrew is unclear. The intent is, probably, that a house, originally owned by a Levite outside the Levitical city, could always be purchased back by a Levite. In that case there was no one year time limit. The fact that the owner was a Levite, a servant of God, included the right to redemption, regardless of the place.

The land surrounding the Levitical cities could never be sold; it was the heritage God had given to the Levites: a fixed possession in an alien world. There are always fixed positions for a child of God in a world in which he lives as a stranger and alien.

### 5. The Poor in the Land vs. 35-55

The principle that lies at the base of the preceding verses in this chapter is that the land of Israel belongs to God and that the Israelites leased the land. The principle that forms the basis of the present verses is that man himself belongs to the Lord, and, consequently, he cannot be the slave of men. This principle applies particularly to the people of Israel, whom God redeemed from slavery in Egypt. They are God's slaves because He freed them. As David said: "O LORD, truly I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant; you have freed me from my chains."<sup>280</sup> We have to bear this in mind; otherwise, we would wrongly interpret the verses 44-46 as a divine fiat for slavery in general.

Vs. 35 sums up the whole section: "If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you." As fellow aliens and temporary residents, God's children are under obligation to help others of God's children. This does not, necessarily, mean philanthropy, although that is not excluded. Food may be sold at cost, and money may be loaned without interest, and labor may be required as payment. These verses do not promote laziness. In the light of the present debate about unemployment benefits, this topic is very relevant to our time.

This section contradicts the concept that God wants all His children to have abundance; neither does it mean that God wants all of His children to be needy. Under the present fallen condition of this world, however, there will always be people who cannot keep their heads above the water financially. Whether they can be blamed for their condition or not is not deemed important, and the question is not even pertinent for discussion. The point of this Scripture portion is that there should be Christian compassion and charity.

We also have to remember Jesus' words in the context of these verses: "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me."<sup>281</sup> There is a danger that our "social concern" becomes detached from our love of the Person of our Lord. That is why the relationship to God is the focus of these verses. Vs. 38 declares: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God;" vs. 55: "The Israelites belong to me as servants. They are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God." All demonstrations of neighborly love that are not based upon our love for God is self deception.

As twentieth century people, we may have trouble with the verses 44-46. It sounds as if God does not object to exploitation as long as it does not concern Israelites. We have to keep two things in mind: firstly, there is a growing line of revelation of truth in the Bible and, secondly, the emphasis in this chapter is on redeemed man and his status in this world. The fact that God does not say much about slavery here does not imply that He approved of it. His words were directed to a world in which slavery was practiced.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

### VI. Blessing and Curse 26:1-46

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<sup>280</sup> Ps. 116:16

<sup>281</sup> Matt. 26:11

This chapter can be divided into four sections:

Vs. 1-2 give a concise statement of the whole law, broken down in three commandments.

Vs. 3-13 give an overview of the blessings that will follow obedience to the commandments.

Vs. 14-43 give an overview of the curse that will be loosened upon Israel if they disobey the commandments and they conclude with a prophecy regarding the captivity.

Vs. 44-46 contain a promise of restoration.

The school of Higher Criticism bases its hypothesis which says that the Pentateuch was written after the captivity, among others, upon the last two sections of this chapter. We, however, hold to the authenticity of vs. 46, which says: "These are the decrees, the laws and the regulations that the LORD established on Mount Sinai between himself and the Israelites through Moses." We find the parallel to this chapter in Deut. 28.

### 1. The Three Commandments vs. 1,2

Idolatry, such as was practiced by the nations that surrounded Israel, is foreign to us. For the Israelites it was the great temptation to which they were exposed and which, eventually, became their undoing. The making of idols and the reverence of them amounted to involvement with demons. In our Western culture the devil abandoned that practice for a long period of time, however, in our modern age the occult flourishes again in various manifestations which come close to the old pagan practices. Idolatry became the main reason for Israel's captivity. The remnant that eventually returned to Jerusalem never fell into this trap again. This does not mean that the demons were unable to regain their lost terrain. At the fullness of time, when God sent His Son into the world, demonic activity in Palestine was as strong as ever. Jesus cast out legions of demons from people. To the Jews of His time, Jesus said: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire."<sup>282</sup> Without the strong demonic influence of that time the crucifixion would never have become possible. We can also see the same influence behind the secularization and de-christianization of our age also. In these verses God forbids the Israelites to have intercourse with demons in any form or shape. This should be for us, as it was for them, a matter of obedience.

The second command, the keeping of the Sabbath, is even more foreign to us, unless we are Christians of Jewish descent, and unless we can see it in the context of our relationship to God as our Creator and our entering into His rest in Jesus Christ. This is the emphasis the writer to the Hebrews puts on it when he says: "Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. ....For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: 'And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.' ... Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' ... There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience."<sup>283</sup> So, this too is for us a matter of obedience to God's law.

When vs. 2 says: "Have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the LORD," this deals primarily with the tabernacle and later with the temple Solomon built. These were images of God's presence. We see this kind of reverence in Jesus, who lived on earth in the time when the "Shekina" was no longer a physically observable phenomenon. He gave proof of this reverence when He stayed behind in the temple as a twelve-year-old boy, saying to his parents: " 'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?' "<sup>284</sup> And in His rebuke to the Pharisees and Scribes of His time, Jesus appealed to all the temple stood for: "Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? .... Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? .... He who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it."<sup>285</sup> The tabernacle and temple are an image of the throne of God, and when we have reverence for the images, we recognize God's right to sit on the throne.

In an indirect way these commandments show us how sin has made man so blind that he would even consider not to revere the images of God's glory. No heavenly being, who sees the glory of God would ever get it in his head not to honor God, but man, in his arrogant stupidity, thinks that he can pass by an image of God's glory and not take off his hat.

### 2. The Blessing That Follows Obedience Vs. 3-13

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<sup>282</sup> John 8:44

<sup>283</sup> Heb. 4:1, 4, 7, 9-11

<sup>284</sup> Luke 2:49

<sup>285</sup> Matt. 23:17-22

The consequences of obedience are evident on three levels:

- a - in man's relationship to nature;
- b - in man's relationship to his fellow men; and
- c - in man's relationship to God.

#### **a - The Consequences of Obedience in Man's Relationship to Nature**

Obedience to the laws of God influences the climate of the land. This seems to us, modern men, like a primitive concept of natural phenomena. It could be, though, that modern man would do well to modify his scientific approach to those phenomena. As a matter of fact, there is no scientific explanation for bad weather. We can explain the "how," but not the "why" of these phenomena. We call certain occurrences "An Act of God." Why can we then not see the hand of God in the pattern of normal seasons and good weather? Years ago, when East Germany was still under a communist government, one particular year they had a very poor harvest, in spite of all the political propaganda. People blamed the condition of the country on the atheistic propaganda, so the government put up billboards with the slogan: "Without God and without sun, we harvest!"<sup>286</sup> But when the situation grew worse, the boards were removed. In a secular society the relationship between human moral behavior and the weather seems to have lost its meaning. The fact that it cannot be proved in no way annuls the principle. There is no doubt in my mind that the devil can manipulate weather, but God is the Creator who directs the wind, the sun and the clouds. Several times God has changed weather as an answer to prayer in biblical records and in other historical events. We can add our personal testimony to this.

The main point in these verses is that God guarantees enough food for people who want to be obedient to Him. A good harvest, however, means that God blesses labor; a harvest does not come spontaneously.

#### **b - The Consequences of Obedience in Man's Relationship to His Fellow Men**

A second blessing is security. God protects us against attacks by other men who are out to destroy us. "The sword will not pass through your country." God has the answer to the arms race. In this respect we face the same problem as with the weather: secularization. Then, there are the wild animals. In most parts of our modern world the problem has been reversed. Man needs no longer protection against wild animals, animals have to be protected against man. Man is no longer an endangered species, but the lion and the tiger are in danger of extinction. This law was issued when Israel was a pioneer nation to whom God promised protection at the opening and development of the promised land.

This does not mean that there would not be any enemies left, or that Israel would never be attacked. They would be a minority against an overwhelming foe. This we conclude from the words: "Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you." The relationship to the enemy is given in a ratio of 20:1 and 100:1. That sounds frightening enough. But God tells them that a minority plus God is an overwhelming majority, against which no enemy will be able to stand. The Lord Jesus applies this principle to weak Christians when He says: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."<sup>287</sup>

The following promise is fertility. Fertility, in modern times, is at best considered a mixed blessing. In Israel of old, birth control had not yet appeared on the horizon. The topic is a very complicated one to which we cannot do real justice in the context of this study. The perspective has changed throughout the ages. For Israel of old, having children was a matter of vital importance for the realization of the promise of possessing the land. The Roman Catholic Church has maintained that large families are a means to get souls into heaven. In some situations people may want large families for political reasons. In Irian Jaya, Indonesia, the Mountain Papua tribes endeavor to procreate large families in order to combat the transmigration of Javanese people into their area. In China and the USA birth control is practiced for economic and psychological reasons. The psychological factor plays, probably, a larger role in the USA than it does in China. It remains true, however, that when married couples decide not to have children, they lose one of God's greatest blessings. In Sheldon VanAuken's book *A Severe Mercy*, C. S. Lewis discusses this point in the strongest terms.

Fertility is a gift from God, but infertility does not always mean would a curse or even a withholding of blessing. Physical fertility is mentioned in the same breath with the confirmation of God's promise to Israel, because the fertility of the people meant the increase of the nation and the realization of the occupation of the land. This

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<sup>286</sup> "Ohne God und ohne Sonne hohlen wir die Ernte ein!"

<sup>287</sup> Luke 12:32

principle is expressed by the psalmist when he says: "Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate."<sup>288</sup>

We may certainly draw spiritual lessons from this. Spiritual fertility in the New Covenant is, undoubtedly, more important than physical procreation, because it means victory over the real enemy. Just as God promised the land to Israel, so He assured us that He would build His church and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it.<sup>289</sup> Spiritual fertility, the multiplication of spiritual offspring, is an important factor in the realization of this promise. The more spiritual sons and daughters we beget, the stronger the church will grow. God links the fulfillment of His promise to our fruitfulness. In vs. 9 we read: "I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you." We need such confirmation.<sup>290</sup>

### c - The Consequences of Obedience in Man's Relationship to God

The last promise concerns God's fellowship with His people. God spoke these words to Moses on Mount Sinai, according to ch. 25:1. At that point the tabernacle had not yet been built, and the plans for the construction had not yet been revealed. God reaches forward to the time when He will enjoy this fellowship with men. Fellowship with God is not a one-way street. We are always amazed when we realize that God's desire for fellowship with us is stronger than our desire for fellowship with Him. The consummation of God's desire is found in the promise John hears pronounced in the book of Revelation. He says: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'<sup>291</sup> The keyword in those words is consolation, as symbolized in the wiping away of tears. Considering the condition of man, it would have seemed understandable to us if God had abhorred man. As soon as man shows an inclination to obey God, however, as the prodigal son who set out to return to his father's house, the attraction of God's image in man to its original becomes so strong that God runs toward us, as did the father of the prodigal, even if we are still far away.

If it is so wonderful when fellowship between God and one single person is restored, how much more glorious will it be when God dwells among His people! It will mean a triangle of fellowship: a horizontal relation and a vertical one.

The basis of this relationship is redemption. God reminds His people of this fact in vs. 13: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high." Obedience is only possible for redeemed people, and fellowship cannot be detached from obedience.

### 3. The Curse That Follows Disobedience Vs. 14-43

We notice that the section that deals with disobedience is longer than the one about obedience. This does not necessarily show a negative tendency of the Bible, but it accentuates the importance of the warning. God does not delight in the fact that He must punish man's disobedience, and He wants man to take the warning seriously. Therefore He gives such a detailed description of the curse.

The first point that is stressed is man's rejection of God. It is not a matter of negligence. Note the words used: "reject my decrees," "abhor my laws," and "violate my covenant." The section deals with the moral consequences for people who consciously and purposely break off their relationship with God. These are people who break the law because they have surrendered their lives to do evil. At the end the Israelites fell into sin, worse than the Canaanites who had lived in the country before them. We are told that during the reign of Manasseh, "Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites."<sup>292</sup> The accusations against Israel are overwhelming.

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<sup>288</sup> Ps. 127:3-5

<sup>289</sup> See Matt. 16:18 (KJV)

<sup>290</sup> While I was writing this we received word from our son that his wife was expecting their first baby. God has a great sense of humor!

<sup>291</sup> Rev. 21:3,4

<sup>292</sup> II Chr. 33:9

The first consequence of their apostasy is sickness, then poverty and loss of independence and liberty, and finally, a psychopathic condition in which there is a loss of contact with reality: one flees for an enemy who isn't there. In vs. 18 we read: "If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over." In spite of its severe tone there is a hint in these words that God still hopes that the worsening of their condition will bring people to repentance, that they will come to their senses and return to God. If this is not the case, there will be crop failures and nature will turn itself against man; wild animals will attack him. In vs. 23 God, again, leaves open a door for conversion. We read: "If in spite of these things you do not accept my correction but continue to be hostile toward me..." God will increase the pressure if man reacts to punishment with an increase of resistance. The whole process indicates that God has a well calculated plan that intends to bring man to repentance. Vs. 27 speaks again about the possibility of return: "If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, ..." the cannibalism that is described in vs. 28 turns out to be a divine punishment for man's hardness of heart. This is to us an indication of the nature of punishment in general. God is not responsible for cannibalism and He certainly has not created the concept. If man comes to the point where he is willing to eat his fellow men, it shows that God has withheld the last ray of light, so that man's intelligence and his natural instincts have become dull to the point where he does things that go against his human nature. The last trace of God's image in him disappears and the last distinction between man and animal is wiped out. Only he is man in the real sense of the word who has fellowship with God. Breaking this bond of fellowship, ultimately, leads to a complete loss of one's humanness.

God will not only wipe out idolatry but any remnant of true religion will also disappear. God says in vs. 31: "I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings." God is not interested in sacrifices brought by people with a divided heart. To Him a divided allegiance has the same value as rejection.

God permits the destruction of the land and the cities. He is not the One who destroys, but He uses people with hostile intentions and gives them free rein. Those people who cause the destruction will themselves be horrified about the results of their hostility. The implication of this is that the evil which man does reaps consequences that go far beyond the evil man's expectations. Destruction turns out to have a life of its own. When man works evil, he loses control, and he cannot calculate the end results.

The scattering among the nations, which we read about in vs. 33-35 refers to the Babylonian captivity. The Sabbath years in which the land would lie desolate supposes a return to normal life, once the Sabbath is finished. There is a relation between man's immorality and the neglect of the Sabbath years. The writer to the Hebrews confirms this when he says: "For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."<sup>293</sup> In our current age we have lost completely the notion that there is a relationship between man and the ground he cultivates, as there is a relationship between man's moral behavior and the earth from which he is taken. If we would see this connection in our twentieth century, the world would, probably, not have the pollution problems it struggles with presently.

Vs. 36-39 deal with the psychology of the captives. The psychopathic behavior of the person who is afraid for that which is not there indicates that there is no longer any kind of fellowship with God which would provide a sense of comfort, of security and of reality. Man's emotional equilibrium depends on his relationship with God, with his fellowmen, and with the earth. Man cannot detach himself from this ordinance of creation without punishment.

The chapter ends with hope for conversion. Confession of sin is placed in the light of history. Not only personal sins have to be confessed, but also the sins of the fathers. After all, the sins of the fathers had brought about the captivity. Daniel understood this clearly. In his confession, he first mentioned Jeremiah's letter to the captives,<sup>294</sup> and then he referred to the portion of Leviticus that is before us. He said: "All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you. You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem. Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us, yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth."<sup>295</sup> Daniel's confession is the only one preserved for us. We do not know if anyone else confessed the sins of the fathers the way Daniel did; even if Daniel was the only one, his confession was enough to bring about a turn in the captivity.

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<sup>293</sup> Heb. 4:10

<sup>294</sup> See Jer. 29

<sup>295</sup> Dan. 9:11-13

We cannot detach ourselves from the sins of previous generations; otherwise, we become like the Pharisees in Jesus' days, whom He called, "sons of those who murdered the prophets."<sup>296</sup> There is, of course, a difference between confession of personal sins and confessing the sins of previous generations. We are not personally responsible for that which we have not done ourselves. But if we do not take our place clearly at the side of the Lord and draw a line between ourselves and the sins of our fathers, then we become their accomplices.

Daniel was ashamed of what his ancestors and his people had done. God had called the hearts of the Israelites "uncircumcised." Circumcision was the outward sign for a man who belonged to the covenant with God. Circumcision of the heart meant that God's covenant was a matter of the heart of man. Fellowship with God ought to be the center of our existence; an uncircumcised heart stands for a continuation of the rebellion against God. When a man with an uncircumcised heart humbles himself before God he repents of his sin and is converted. But conversion does not eradicate the consequences of sin. The Sabbath years man owed to God had to be paid back and the land had to be given its rest. How all this fits together I do not know. Evidently, the Israelites had tried to get out of their land what they could and thus had prematurely exhausted the ground. Fertilizer was not known at that time. By mistreating their land as they did, they turned it into the desert it is now. One does not mistreat "Mother Earth" with impunity. But there may be other factors involved that we do not know about; it may have been more than poor methods of cultivation. Greed had disturbed ecology and restitution was inevitable. There are also obvious spiritual lessons to be drawn from these verses.

The vs. 42-46 must have been a source of eternal consolation for the Israelites who, centuries later, lived through the Babylonian captivity. After the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the disappearance of the ark, there were no longer any visible proofs of God's presence on earth. God had ceased to reveal Himself. In a spiritual sense, the world was dead; the Spirit of the Lord no longer hovered over the earth. In his first vision, the prophet Zechariah sees four riders and their horses which are sent to go throughout the earth. They report that the whole world is quiet and at peace. The context indicates that the peace they see is the peace of death.<sup>297</sup> About one thousand years before the Babylonian captivity God prepared consolation for His people and communicated this to Moses.

In this section, starting with vs. 14, key words that typify Israel's attitude are, "reject," and "abhor." These words are repeated in vs. 43. The word "abhor" is used once of God's attitude towards people whose hearts were hardened, in vs. 30. But after the conversion and confession that is mentioned in vs. 40, God immediately changes His attitude. As soon as He sees a trace of repentance in man, God's compassion is kindled. Even in His wrath, God is not "a hard man, harvesting where He has not sown and gathering where He has not scattered seed."<sup>298</sup> Punishment is meted out in the hope for conversion, and with the first indication of repentance, and immediate revelation of God's love follows.

In vs. 42 God says: "I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land." This covenant is mentioned again in vs. 44. The covenant is only binding for people who obey. This fact is often overlooked among people who adhere to "Covenant theology." Human disobedience makes God's covenant ineffective. Part of the blessing in God's remembering the covenant is that man realizes anew the oneness of the human race. After all, we are included in a covenant God made with our ancestors. In our short-sightedness, we often think that we have nothing in common with the people who lived before we came into the world. It seldom penetrates our thinking that we have a physical, cultural, and spiritual heritage from which we cannot detach ourselves without hurt. If we do not live in fellowship with God ourselves, we will not be able to distinguish between God's covenant with the forefathers and "the empty way of life handed down to [us] from [our] forefathers."<sup>299</sup> There has to be a covenant between God and us in order for us to appreciate God's covenant with the forefathers.

When man repents, God will remember His covenant with the ancestors at the same time that He remembers the land that was abandoned. The essence of the Exodus was that God became the God of redeemed people. This was also the essence of the entrance into the promised land. That is the testimony to the world for the eyes of all the nations.

The section we study is part of the conversation between God and Moses during the forty days he spent on Mount Sinai.

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<sup>296</sup> Matt. 23:31 (NAS)

<sup>297</sup> Zech. 1:7-17

<sup>298</sup> Matt. 25:24

<sup>299</sup> I Pet. 1:18

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

### Vows and Dedications 27:1-34

A problem in the understanding of this chapter is that some of the information needed for a complete comprehension is withheld. We will have to reconstruct part of what is lacking in order to know what this chapter deals with. There was, evidently, a possibility for an Israelite to dedicate himself, or a person for whom he was responsible, to the Lord. This dedication could be conditional or unconditional, and is probably the same or a similar vow as the Nazarene vow which is described in Numbers 6. The dedication could apply to both man and animal, or to land and houses.

Vs. 1-8 deal with the evaluation of a person in connection with a vow that was made. We are not told whether the payment was meant to be released from the vow, or whether it was a payment made at the end of a certain period which had been determined beforehand, or whether payment and vow were one and the same thing; that is that the vow was made to pay a certain amount as an expression of gratitude, according to the sex and age group to which the person belonged. There is no doubt about the fact that the vows were made voluntarily. The money paid here was not the same as the ransom money that had to be paid during a census.

Vs. 1 reads in TLB: "When a person makes a special vow to give himself to the Lord, he shall give these payments instead." This suggests that the payment would be an expression of the dedication of a person to the Lord. This truth ought to give a new dimension to our financial dealings; Jesus asked: "What can a man give in exchange for his soul?"<sup>300</sup> This payment is not meant to be a ransom, but only a partial expression of gratitude. We should not think that we can buy our redemption.

TLB puts the value of 50 shekels at \$25 and 30 shekels at \$15 etc. We could ask the question why all this is spelled out in such detail. After all, every man was free to give to the Lord what he wanted. This precept, evidently, helps to give a person more insight into the "why" of his giving, that is, that there is a connection with his own value as a person. There also seems to be some discrimination between male and female, as well as between the age brackets. There is a sense in which all men have equal value before God. But in this context the value is determined in term of the defense of the country and the work of the Lord. The point of value seems to be the physical efforts a person can make.

It is also interesting to note that one could make a vow for another person. This must refer to persons for whom one bore legal responsibility. Yet, the main thought seems to be that one surrenders to God with body and soul. The man who makes the vow condemns himself to death before God, or rather he agrees with God's judgment upon his life. It is the Old Testament equivalent of counting oneself crucified with Christ. This is clear from the rendering TLB gives of vs. 29, which reads: "No one sentenced by the courts to die may pay a fine instead; he shall surely be put to death." The payment of a vow as a voluntary act, therefore, shows a deep insight on the side of man into his own human nature, the holiness of God and the depth of his sin. From God's side, this law indicates that God wants man to live as a redeemed and victorious person.

In a man's relationship with God whether a man is rich or poor makes no difference. It is not the amount paid that is important, but the spiritual principle that places man before God as a sinner who has forfeited his life. It is impossible for a man to evaluate himself objectively. God does this here by means of a priest's judgment. Our own evaluations are never balanced and correct. That is why Paul advises us not to evaluate ourselves. He says: "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God."<sup>301</sup>

Vs. 9-13 deal with the dedication of animals to the Lord. The topic returns in the verses 26 and 27. The animals mentioned in this context are probably the ones that are given to the Lord as freewill offerings. A man who dedicated an animal to the Lord could not change his mind half way. We see in this a hint of the craftiness of human nature, which, even in its relationship with God, tries to make a little profit on the side. God had already forbidden anyone to bring an animal with a defect as a sacrifice. The Lord had told the people: "Do not bring anything with a

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<sup>300</sup> Matt. 16:26

<sup>301</sup> I Cor. 4:3-5

defect, because it will not be accepted on your behalf.”<sup>302</sup> This commandment formed the basis for the trade of animals in the temple at a later time, a practice to which Jesus reacted so sharply.<sup>303</sup> The animal that was brought into the temple from the outside could easily be disqualified, which meant that the person who wanted to sacrifice was forced to buy another animal that had already been approved by the priest. Both animals, the one that was disqualified and the approved one, would then become temple property.

The unclean animal, mentioned in vs. 11, was probably a baggage carrier, such as a horse, a donkey or a mule; that would be an animal that could be used but not eaten.

In principle, a sacrificial animal could not be redeemed with money. This animal represented figuratively the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, for whom there was no possible substitute. The unclean animal could be used as a beast of burden by the priest. If the giver want to have his animal back, he had to pay the price at which it was evaluated plus 20%.

The distinction between clean and unclean animals is an image of people. God wanted Israel to understand the difference between those who had received God’s revelation and obeyed it and those who had not received it. The fact that a possibility of redemption of unclean animals is mentioned at all is a sign of hope for people who never heard the Gospel. According to this commandment, the heathen are not doomed to live in eternal slavery to sin. There is hope of redemption for them.

Vs. 14 and 15 deal with the matter of the surrender of the right of ownership of a house to the Lord. The Scripture does not state whether a priest would take over the house, or whether the original owner would remain in it and pay rent. TLB renders the text as follows: “If someone donates his home to the Lord...” That sounds like a good translation. The KJV says: “And when a man shall sanctify his house to be holy unto the LORD ...” This sounds too spiritual in the modern use of language. What is meant is that the house is set apart for the Lord’s service. That is the literal meaning of the word “holy.” It would be wonderful if holiness were as practical as this in our time. In the spiritual sense of the word it is also good to dedicate your house to the Lord as a place of which He takes possession. But if we spiritualize the text too much, we run into trouble with the part that speaks about buying back the house. In practice it would be possible to make a financial arrangement if one needed the space for some other purpose than direct use for the Lord’s service. There is also a possibility of surrendering a house to the Lord if one does not need it. If we would learn, as Christians, not to possess more than we need, the world would be a better place to live.

The same principle is valid for gifts of fields. It is interesting to see how the Lord binds Himself to the law of the Year of Jubilee. God presents Himself here to man as an equal partner, who is open for business transactions. Some people practice the principles that are expounded in this chapter. The business man Stanley Tamm, who wrote the book *God Runs My Business*, put it in practice.

The value of a field is determined by the amount of seed needed to cultivate it. TLB puts this as “ten bushels of barley seed at \$25.” The calculation of the value of the land is then made with a view to the number of harvests to be expected between the time of surrender and the Year of Jubilee. All this is very practical. In the Year of Jubilee the field is to revert back to the original owner, for whom it was part of his heritage.

Vs. 20 is not too clear in most translations. TLB adds between parentheses: “and has given to the Lord his rights to it at the Year of Jubilee.” This would mean that a person could sell his property to someone else, but that the right of heritage would be surrendered to the Lord. In that case, the field would not revert to the original owner, but become the property of the temple. That sounds logical.

Implied in all of this is the fact that in his spiritual and practical relation with God, man is allowed to make plans and decisions. Even though his life does not belong to him, this does not mean that he would have to take a passive attitude and accept things as they come. If a man chooses to be crucified with Christ and consequently his life is no longer his own, but that he has to live for Him who died for him and rose from the dead for him, he has to work this principle out in a practical way concerning with his earthly possessions. As far as I understand it, this is the deep lesson of this mysterious chapter.

Vs. 25 tells us that there has to be a standard against which all monetary values are set. My understanding of world economy is very limited. There used to be a gold standard which was the measuring stick of the currency of each country. This was no absolute standard, and it could be dropped if one country chose to. It was, in fact, dropped in the early thirties of this century. There is, however, an absolute standard for the measuring of absolute values, which is the holiness of God. TLB translates vs. 25: “All the valuations shall be stated in standard money.” The NIV says: “Every value is to be set according to the sanctuary shekel, twenty gerahs to the shekel.” The literal reading of “sanctuary shekel” is “holy shekel,” which makes more sense than meets the eye.

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<sup>302</sup> Lev. 22:20

<sup>303</sup> See John 2:13-25 and Matt. 21:12,13

The last verses of this chapter, beginning with vs. 26, deal with that what cannot be redeemed: the first-born, the condemned, and the tithes. For each of these categories, we find separate laws.

According to the law that existed already, all the first-born among the cattle belonged already to the Lord. It could, therefore, not be dedicated again to the Lord and subsequently redeemed; it had to be sacrificed. The first-born animal was an image of our Lord Jesus Christ and for Him there was no way out from undergoing death at the cross. The unclean animal, mentioned in vs. 27, had to be a beast of burden, just as in vs. 11; such as a donkey, a horse, a mule, or a camel. We find the law concerning these animals in Exodus.<sup>304</sup>

The word “devoted” in verses 28 and 29 seems to have the connotation of a ban. In vs. 29 it carries the meaning of a death sentence. How this would apply to a field is not clear. TLB translates vs. 29 as follows: “No one sentenced by the courts to die may pay a fine instead; he shall surely be put to death.” If this verse deals with judicial decisions by a court, it could be that the previous verse also deals with the same kind of situation.

Payment of tithes was an existing command already. One could not take his tithe and consecrate it to the Lord as a fellowship offering. All tithes already belonged to Him. The law described them as God’s property. But a man was allowed to redeem the tithe of the harvest of his field and give the value of the produce in money. The distance between the place of residence and the temple could be a problem for the transportation of large quantities of goods. Exchange of cattle that had to be sacrificed as tithes was also forbidden. A possibility of redemption is not even mentioned in this context.

This brings us to the end of our study.

Nabire, April 15, 1986

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<sup>304</sup> See Ex. 13:1,2, 11-16