

# CHAPTER 15

This chapter, which is mostly concerning sacrifice and offering, comes in between the story of two rebellions (one Numbers 14, the other Numbers 16), to signify that these legal institutions were typical of the gifts which Christ was to receive even for the rebellious, ~~PHS~~ Psalm 68:18. In the foregoing chapter, upon Israel's provocation, God had determined to destroy them, and in token of his wrath had sentenced them to perish in the wilderness. But, upon Moses' intercession, he said, "I have pardoned;" and, in token of that mercy, in this chapter he repeats and explains some of the laws concerning offerings, to show that he was reconciled to them, notwithstanding the severe dispensation they were under, and would not unchurch them. Here is,

- I.** The law concerning the meat-offerings and drink-offerings (v. 1-12) both for Israelites and for strangers (v. 13-16), and a law concerning the heave-offerings of the first of their dough (v. 17-21).
- II.** The law concerning sacrifices for sins of ignorance (v. 22-29).
- III.** The punishment of presumptuous sins (v. 30, 31), and an instance given in the sabbath-breaker (v. 32-36).
- IV.** A law concerning fringes, for memorandums, upon the borders of their garments (v. 37, etc.).

## ~~QRE~~ NUMBERS 15:1-21

### LAWS CONCERNING SACRIFICES

Here we have,

- I.** Full instructions given concerning the meat-offerings and drink-offerings, which were appendages to all the sacrifices of animals. The beginning of this law is very encouraging: *When you come into the land of your habitation which I give unto you, they you shall do so and so*, v. 2. This was a plain intimation, not only that God was reconciled to them

notwithstanding the sentence he had passed upon them, but that he would secure the promised land to their seed notwithstanding their proneness to rebel against him. They might think some time or other they should be guilty of a misdemeanour that would be fatal to them, and would exclude them for ever, as the last had done for one generation; but this intimates an assurance that they should be kept from provoking God to such a degree as would amount to a forfeiture; for this statute takes it for granted that there were some of them that should in due time come into Canaan. The meat-offerings were of two sorts; some were offered alone, and we have the law concerning those, <sup><OR1></sup>Leviticus 2:1, etc. Others were added to the burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, and constantly attended them, and about these direction is here given. It was requisite, since the sacrifices of acknowledgment (specified in v. 3) were intended as the food of God's table, that there should be a constant provision of bread, oil, and wine, whatever the flesh-meat was. The caterers or purveyors for Solomon's temple provided *fine flour*, <sup><102></sup>1 Kings 4:22. And it was fit that God should keep a good house, that his table should be furnished with bread as well as flesh, and that his cup should run over. In my Father's house there is bread enough. Now the intent of this law is to direct what proportion the meat-offering and drink-offering should bear to several sacrifices to which they were annexed. If the sacrifice was a lamb or a kid, then the meat-offering must be a tenth-deal of flour, that is, an omer, which contained about five pints; this must be mingled with oil, the fourth part of a hin (a hin contained about five quarts), and the drink-offering must be the same quantity of wine, about a quart and half a pint, v. 3-5. If it was a ram, the meat-offering was doubled, two tenth-deals of flour, about five quarts, and a third part of a hin of oil (which was to them as butter is to us) mingled with it; and the same quantity of wine for a drink-offering, v. 6, 7. If the sacrifice was a bullock, the meat-offering was to be trebled, three omers, with five pints of oil, and the same quantity of wine for a drink-offering, v. 8-10. And thus for each sacrifice, whether offered by a particular person or at the common charge. Note, Our religious services should be governed, as by other rules, so by the rule of proportion.

**II.** Natives and strangers are here set upon a level, in this as in other matters (v. 13-16): “*One law shall be for you and for the stranger* that is proselyted to the Jewish religion.” Now,

**1.** This was an invitation to the Gentiles to become proselytes, and to embrace the faith and worship of the true God. In civil things there was a

difference between strangers and true-born Israelites, but not in the things of God; *as you are, so shall the stranger be before the Lord*, for with him there is no respect of persons. See ~~288~~ Isaiah 56:3.

**2.** This was an obligation upon the Jews to be kind to strangers, and not to oppress them, because they saw them owned and accepted of God. Communion in religion is a great engagement to mutual affection, and should slay all enmities.

**3.** It was a mortification to the pride of the Jews, who are apt to be puffed up with their birthright privileges. "We are Abraham's seed." God let them know that the sons of the stranger were as welcome to him as the sons of Jacob; no man's birth or parentage shall turn either to his advantage or his prejudice in his acceptance with God. This likewise intimated that, as believing strangers should be accounted Israelites, so unbelieving Israelites should be accounted strangers.

**4.** It was a happy presage of the calling of the Gentiles, and of their admission into the church. If the law made so little difference between Jew and Gentile, much less would the gospel make, which broke down the partition-wall, and reconciled both to God in one sacrifice, without the observance of the legal ceremonies.

**III.** A law for the offering of the first of their dough unto the Lord. This, as the former, goes upon the comfortable supposition of their having *come into the promised land*, v. 18. Now that they lived upon manna they needed not such an express acknowledgment of God's title to their daily bread, and their dependence upon him for it, the thing spoke for itself; but in Canaan, where they should eat the fruit of their own industry, God required that he should be owned as their landlord and their great benefactor. They must not only offer him the first-fruits and tenths of the corn in their fields (these had already been reserved); but when they had it in their houses, in their kneading trough, when it was almost ready to be set upon their tables, God must have a further tribute of acknowledgment, part of their dough (the Jews say a fortieth part, at least, of the whole lump) must be heaved or offered up to God (v. 20, 21), and the priest must have it for the use of his family. Thus they must own their dependence upon God for their daily bread, even when they had it in the house with them; they must then wait on God for the comfortable use of it; for we read of that which was brought home, and yet God did blow upon it, and it

came to little, <sup><3009></sup>Haggai 1:9. Christ has taught us to pray not, *Give us this year our yearly harvest*, but *Give us this day our daily bread*. God by this law said to the people, as the prophet long afterwards said to the widow of Sarepta (<sup><1173></sup>1 Kings 17:13), *Only make me thereof a little cake first*. This offering was expressly kept up by the laws of Ezekiel's visionary temple, and it is a commandment with promise of family-mercies (<sup><3449></sup>Ezekiel 44:30): *You shall give unto the priest the first of your dough, that he may cause the blessing to rest in thy house*; for, when God has had his dues out of our estates, we may expect the comfort of what falls to our share.

## <sup><4152></sup>NUMBERS 15:22-29

### SACRIFICES FOR SINS OF IGNORANCE

We have here the laws concerning sacrifices for sins of ignorance; the Jews understand it of idolatry, or false worship, through the error of their teachers. The case here supposed is that they *had not observed all these commandments*, v. 22, 23. If they had failed in the offerings of their acknowledgment, and had not brought them according to the law, then they must bring an offering of atonement, yea, though the omission had been through forgetfulness or mistake. If they failed in one part of the ceremony, they must make it up by the observance of another part, which was in the nature of a remedial law.

**1.** The case is put of a national sin, committed through ignorance, and become customary through a vulgar error (v. 24) — *the congregation*, that is, the body of the people, for so it is explained (v. 25): *All the congregation of the children of Israel*. The ceremonial observances were so numerous, and so various, that, it might easily be supposed, some of them by degrees would be forgotten and disused, as particularly that immediately before concerning the heave-offering of their dough: now if, in process of time, upon consulting the law, there should appear to have been a general neglect of that or any other appointment, then a sacrifice must be offered for the whole congregation, and the oversight shall be forgiven (v. 25, 26) and not punished, as it deserved, with some national judgment. The offering of the sacrifice *according to the manner, or ordinance*, plainly refers to a former statute, of which this is the repetition; and the same bullock which is there called *a sin-offering* (<sup><4943></sup>Leviticus

4:13, 21) is here called a *burnt-offering* (v. 24), because it was wholly burnt, though not upon the altar, yet without the camp. And here is the addition of a *kid of the goats for a sin-offering*. According to this law, we find that Hezekiah made atonement for the errors of his father's reign, by *seven bullocks, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven he-goats*, which he offered as a *sin-offering for the kingdom, and for the sanctuary, and for Judah* (~~4021~~ 2 Chronicles 29:21), and *for all Israel*, v. 24. And we find the like done after the return out of captivity, ~~5885~~ Ezra 8:35.

**2.** It is likewise supposed to be the case of a particular person: *If any soul sin through ignorance* (v. 27), neglecting any part of his duty, he must bring his offering, as was appointed, ~~0827~~ Leviticus 4:27, etc. Thus atonement shall be made *for the soul that sins, when he sins through ignorance*, v. 28. Observe,

**(1.)** Sins committed ignorantly need to have atonement made for them; for, though ignorance will in a degree excuse, it will not justify those that might have known their Lord's will and did it not. David prayed to be cleansed from his *secret faults*, that is, those sins which he himself was not aware of, the errors he did not understand, ~~5902~~ Psalm 19:12.

**(2.)** Sins committed ignorantly shall be forgiven, through Christ the great sacrifice, who, when he offered up himself once for all upon the cross, seemed to explain the intention of his offering in that prayer, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*. And Paul seems to allude to this law concerning sins of ignorance (~~5113~~ 1 Timothy 1:13), *I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly and in unbelief*. And it looked favourable upon the Gentiles that this law of atoning for sins of ignorance is expressly made to extend to those who were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel (v. 29), but supposed to be *proselytes of righteousness*. Thus the blessing of Abraham comes upon the Gentiles.

## ~~0150~~ NUMBERS 15:30-36

### DOOM OF PRESUMPTUOUS SINNERS

Here is,

**I.** The general doom passed upon presumptuous sinners.

**1.** Those are to be reckoned presumptuous sinners that sin *with a high hand*, as the original phrase is (v. 30), that is, that avowedly confront God's authority, and set up their own lust in competition with it, that sin for sinning-sake, in contradiction to the precept of the law, and in defiance of the penalty, that fight against God, and dare him to do his worst; see ~~1855~~ Job 15:25. It is not only to sin against knowledge, but to sin designedly against God's will and glory.

**2.** Sins thus committed are exceedingly sinful. He that thus breaks the commandment,

**(1.)** *Reproaches the Lord* (v. 30); he says the worst he can of him, and most unjustly. The language of presumptuous sin is, "Eternal truth is not fit to be believed, the Lord of all not fit to be obeyed, and almighty power not fit to be either feared or trusted." It imputes folly to Infinite Wisdom, and iniquity to the righteous Judge of heaven and earth; such is the malignity of wilful sin.

**(2.)** He *despises the word of the Lord*, v. 31. There are those who, in many instances, come short of fulfilling the word, and yet have a great value for it, and count the law honourable; but presumptuous sinners despise it, thinking themselves too great, too good, and too wise, to be ruled by it. *What is the Almighty that we should serve him?* Whatever the sin itself is, it is contumacy that incurs the anathema. It is rebellion added to the sin that is as witch-craft, and stubbornness as idolatry.

**3.** The sentence passed on such is dreadful. There remains no sacrifice for those sins; the law provided none: *That soul shall be cut off from among his people* (v. 30), *utterly cut off* (v. 31); and that God may be for ever justified, and the sinner for ever confounded, *his iniquity shall be upon him*, and there needs no more to sink him to the lowest hell. Thus the Jewish doctors understand it, that *the iniquity shall cleave to the soul, after it is cut off, and that man shall give an account of his sin at the great day of judgment*. Perhaps the kind of offence might be such as did not expose the offender to the censure of the civil magistrate, but, if it was done presumptuously, God himself would take the punishment of it into his own hands, and into them it is a fearful thing to fall. In the New Testament we find the like sentence of exclusion from all benefit by the great sacrifice passed upon the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and a total apostasy from Christianity.

## II. A particular instance of presumption in the sin of sabbath-breaking.

1. The offence was the gathering of sticks on the sabbath day (v. 32), which, it is probable, were designed to make a fire of, whereas they were commanded to bake and seeth what they had occasion for the day before, <sup>(2163)</sup>Exodus 16:23. This seemed but a small offence, but it was a violation of the law of the sabbath, and so was a tacit contempt of the Creator, to whose honour the sabbath was dedicated, and an incursion upon the whole law, which the sabbath was intended as a hedge about. And it appears by the context to have been done presumptuously, and in affront both of the law and to the Law-maker.

2. The offender was secured, v. 33, 34. Those that found him *gathering sticks*, in their zeal for the honour of the sabbath, *brought him to Moses and Aaron, and all the congregation*, which intimates that being the sabbath day the congregation was at that time gathered to Moses and Aaron, to receive instruction from them, and to join with them in religious worship. It seems, even common Israelites, though there was much amiss among them, yet would not contentedly see the sabbath profaned, which was a good sign that they had not quite forsaken God, nor were utterly forsaken of him.

3. God was consulted, *because it was not declared what should be done to him*. The law had already made the profanation of the sabbath a capital crime (<sup>(2814)</sup>Exodus 31:14, 35:2); but they were in doubt, either concerning the offence (whether this that he had done should be deemed a profanation or no) or concerning the punishment, which death he should die. God was the Judge, and before him they brought this cause.

4. Sentence was passed; the prisoner was adjudged a sabbath-breaker, according to the intent of that law, and as such he must be put to death; and to show how great the crime was, and how displeasing to God, and that others might hear and fear and not do in like manner presumptuously, that death is appointed him which was looked upon as most terrible: He must be *stoned with stones*, v. 35. Note, God is jealous for the honour of his sabbaths, and will not hold those guiltless, whatever men do, that profane them.

5. Execution was done pursuant to the sentence, v. 36. He was *stoned to death by the congregation*. As many as could were employed in the execution, that those, at least, might be afraid of breaking the sabbath, who

had thrown a stone at this sabbath-breaker. This intimates that the open profanation of the sabbath is a sin which ought to be punished and restrained by the civil magistrate, who, as far as overt acts go, is keeper of both tables. See <sup><4347></sup>Nehemiah 13:17. One would think there could be no great harm in gathering a few sticks, on what day soever it was, but God intended the exemplary punishment of him that did so for a standing warning to us all, to make conscience of keeping holy the sabbath.

## <sup><4157></sup>NUMBERS 15:37-41

### THE LAW CONCERNING FRINGES

Provision had been just now made by the law for the pardon of sins of ignorance and infirmity; now here is an expedient provided for the preventing of such sins. They are ordered to make fringes upon the borders of their garments, which were to be memorandums to them of their duty, that they might not sin through forgetfulness.

**1.** The sign appointed is a fringe of silk, or thread, or worsted, or the garment itself ravelled at the bottom, and a blue ribband bound on the top of it to keep it tight, v. 38. The Jews being a peculiar people, they were thus distinguished from their neighbours in their dress, as well as in their diet, and taught by such little instances of singularity not to be conformed to the way of the heathen in greater things. Thus likewise they proclaimed themselves Jews wherever they were, as those that were not ashamed of God and his law. Our Saviour, being made under the law, wore these fringes; hence we read of the hem or border, of his garment, <sup><4021></sup>Matthew 9:20. These borders the Pharisees enlarged, that they might be thought more holy and devout than other people. The phylacteries were different things; these were their own invention, the fringes were a divine institution. The Jews at this day wear them, saying, when they put them on, *Blessed be he who has sanctified us unto himself, and commanded us to wear fringes.*

**2.** The intention of it was to remind them that they were a peculiar people. They were not appointed for the trimming and adorning of their clothes, but *to stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance* (<sup><4012></sup>2 Peter 3:1), that they might *look upon the fringe and remember the commandments.* Many look upon their ornaments to feed their pride, but they must look



upon these ornaments to awaken their consciences to a sense of their duty, that their religion might constantly beset them, and that they might carry it about with them, as they did their clothes, wherever they went. If they were tempted to sin, the fringe would be a monitor to them not to break God's commandments: If a duty was forgotten to be done in its season, the fringe would remind them of it. This institution, though it is not an imposition upon us, is an instruction to us, always to *remember the commandments of the Lord our God*, that we *may do them*, to treasure them up in our memories, and to apply them to particular cases as there is occasion to use them. It was intended particularly to be a preservative from idolatry: that you *seek not after your own heart, and your own eyes*, in your religious worship. Yet it may extend also to the whole conversation, for nothing is more contrary to God's honour, and our own true interest, than to *walk in the way of our heart* and in *the sight of our eyes*; for the *imagination of the heart is evil*, and so is the *lust of the eyes*.

After the repetition of some ceremonial appointments, the chapter closes with that great and fundamental law of religion, *Be holy unto your God*, purged from sin, and sincerely devoted to his service; and that great reason for all the commandments is again and again inculcated, *I am the Lord your God*. Did we more firmly believe, and more frequently and seriously consider, that God is the Lord, and our God and Redeemer, we should see ourselves bound in duty, interest, and gratitude, to keep all his commandments.