

CHAPTER 24

In this chapter we have,

I. A repetition of the laws concerning the lamps and the show-bread (v. 1-9).

II. A violation of the law against blasphemy, with the imprisonment, trial, condemnation, and execution, of the blasphemer (v. 10-14, with 5:23).

III. The law against blasphemy reinforced (v. 15, 16), with sundry other laws (v. 17, etc.).

LEVITICUS 24:1-9

LAWS CONCERNING THE LAMPS

Care is here taken, and orders are given, for the decent furnishing of the candlestick and table in God's house.

I. The lamps must always be kept burning. The law for this we had before, ~~(27)~~Exodus 27:20, 21. It is here repeated, probably because it now began to be put in execution, when other things were settled.

1. The people were to provide oil (v. 2), and this, as every thing else that was to be used in God's service, must be of the best, *pure olive-oil, beaten*, probably it was double-strained. This was to *cause the lamps to burn*; all our English copies read it *lamps*, but in the original it is singular in v. 2 — to *cause the lamp to burn*; but plural in v. 4 — *he shall order the lamps*. The seven lamps made all one lamp, in allusion to which the blessed Spirit of grace is represented by *seven lamps of fire before the throne* (~~(4)~~Revelation 4:5), for there are *diversities of gifts, but one Spirit*, ~~(4)~~1 Corinthians 12:4. Ministers are as burning and shining lights in Christ's church, but it is the duty of people to provide comfortably for them, as Israel for the lamps. Scandalous maintenance makes a scandalous ministry.

2. The priests were to tend the lamps; they must snuff them, clean the candlestick, and supply them with oil, morning and evening, v. 3, 4. Thus

it is the work of the ministers of the gospel to *hold forth that word of life*, not to set up new lights, but, by expounding and preaching the word, to make the light of it more clear and extensive. This was the ordinary way of keeping the lamps burning; but, when the church was poor and in distress, we find its lamps fed constantly with *oil from the good olives* immediately, without the ministry of priest or people (~~30D~~ Zechariah 4:2, 3); for, though God has tied us to means, he has not tied himself to them, but will take effectual care that his lamp never go out in the world for want of oil.

II. The table must always be kept spread. This was appointed before, ~~(25D)~~ Exodus 25:30. And here also,

1. The table was furnished with bread; not dainties nor varieties to gratify a luxurious palate, but twelve loaves or cakes of bread, v. 5, 6. Where there is plenty of bread there is no famine; and where bread is not there is no feast. There was a loaf for every tribe, for *in our Father's house there is bread enough*. They were all provided for by the divine bounty, and were all welcome to the divine grace. Even after the revolt of the ten tribes this number of loaves was continued (~~43D~~ 2 Chronicles 13:11), for the sake of those few of each tribe that retained their affection to the temple and continued their attendance on it.

2. A handful of frankincense was put in a golden saucer, upon or by each row, v. 7. When the bread was removed, and given to the priests, this frankincense was burnt upon the golden altar (I suppose) over and above the daily incense: and this was for a memorial instead of the bread, an offering made by fire, as the handful of the meat-offering which was burnt upon the altar is called the *memorial thereof*, ~~(88D)~~ Leviticus 2:2. Thus a little was accepted as a humble acknowledgment, and all the loaves were consigned to the priests. All God's spiritual Israel, typified by the twelve loaves, are made through Christ a sweet savour to him, and their prayers are said to come up before God *for a memorial*, ~~(400D)~~ Acts 10:4. The word is borrowed from the ceremonial law.

3. Every sabbath it was renewed. When the loaves had stood there a week, the priests had them to eat with other holy things that were to be eaten in the holy place (v. 9), and new ones were provided at the public charge, and put in the room of them, v. 8. The Jews say, "The hands of those priests that put on were mixed with theirs that took off, that the table might be

never empty, but the bread might be *before the Lord continually*." God is never unprovided for the entertainment of those that visit him, as men often are, ^{<2116>}Luke 11:5. Every one of those cakes contained two tenth-deals, that is, two omers of fine flour; just so much manna every Israelite gathered on the sixth day for the sabbath, ^{<2152>}Exodus 16:22. Hence some infer that this show-bread, which was set on the table on the sabbath, was intended as a memorial of the manna wherewith they were fed in the wilderness. Christ's ministers should provide new bread for his house every sabbath day, the production of their fresh studies in the scripture, that *their proficiency may appear to all*, ^{<5401>}1 Timothy 4:1, 5.

^{<0210>}LEVITICUS 24:10-23

THE BLASPHEMY OF SHELOMITH'S SON

Evil manners, we say, beget good laws. We have here an account of the evil manners of a certain nameless mongrel Israelite, and the good laws occasioned thereby.

I. The offender was the son of an Egyptian father and an Israelitish mother (v. 10); his mother was of the tribe of Dan, v. 11. Neither he nor his father is named, but his mother only, who was an Israelite. This notice is taken of his parentage either,

1. To intimate what occasioned the quarrel he was engaged in. The Jews say, "He offered to set up his tent among the Danites in the right of his mother, but was justly opposed by some or other of that tribe, and informed that his father being an Egyptian he had no part nor lot in the matter, but must look upon himself as a stranger." Or,

2. To show the common ill effect of such mixed marriages. When a daughter of Israel would marry an idolatrous malignant Egyptian, what could be the fruit of such a marriage but a blasphemer? For the children will be apt to take after the worse side, whichsoever it is, and will sooner learn of an Egyptian father to blaspheme than of an Israelitish mother to pray and praise.

II. The occasion of the offence was contention: He *strove with a man of Israel*. The mixed multitude of Egyptians that came up with Israel

(¹⁰²⁸Exodus 12:38) were in many ways hurtful to them, and this was one, they were often the authors of strife. The way to preserve the peace of the church is to preserve the purity of it. In this strife he broke out into ill language. Note, When quarrels begin we know not what mischief they will make before they end, nor how treat a matter a little fire may kindle. When men's passion is up they are apt to forget both their reason and their religion, which is a good reason why we should not be apt either to give or to resent provocation, but leave off strife before it be meddled with, because the beginning of it is *as the letting forth of water*.

III. The offence itself was blasphemy and cursing, v. 11. It is supposed that his cause came to be heard before the judges, who determined that he had no right to the privileges of an Israelite, his father being an Egyptian, and that, being enraged at the sentence,

1. He *blasphemed the name of the Lord*. He blasphemed *the name*, that is, he blasphemed God, who is known by his name only, not by his nature, or any similitude. Not as if God were a mere name, but his is a name above every name. The translators add *of the Lord*, which is implied, but not expressed, in the original, for the greater reverence of the divine Majesty: it is a shame that it should be found on record that the very name of Jehovah should be blasphemed; *tell it not in Gath*. It is a fond conceit of the superstitious Jews that his blasphemy was in pronouncing the name of *Jehovah*, which they call ineffable: he that made himself known by that name never forbade the calling of him by that name. It is probable that finding himself aggrieved by the divine appointment, which separated between the Israelites and strangers, he impudently reproached both the law and the Law-maker, and set him at defiance.

2. He cursed either God himself (and then his cursing was the same with blaspheming) or the person with whom he strove. Imprecations of mischief are the hellish language of hasty passion, as well as of rooted malice. Or perhaps he cursed the judges that gave sentence against him; he flew in the face of the court, and ridiculed the processes of it; thus he added sin to sin.

IV. The caution with which he was proceeded against for this sin. The witnesses or inferior judges brought him and his case (which was somewhat extraordinary) unto Moses (v. 11), according to the order settled (¹⁰³⁰Exodus 18:22), and Moses himself would not give judgment hastily,

but committed the offender into custody, till he had consulted the oracle in this case. Note, Judges must deliberate; both those that give the verdict and those that give the sentence must consider diligently what they do, and do nothing rashly, for *the judgment is God's* (^{<3117>}Deuteronomy 1:17), and before him there will be a rehearing of the cause. They waited to know what was *the mind of the Lord*, whether he was to be put to death by the hand of the magistrate or to be left to the judgment of God: or, rather, they wanted to know whether he should be stoned, as those were to be that only cursed their *parents* (^{<3319>}Leviticus 20:9), or whether, the crime being so much greater, some sorer punishment should be inflicted on him. Note, Those that sit in judgment should sincerely desire, and by prayer and the use of all good means should endeavour to *know the mind of the Lord*, because they *judge for him* (^{<3406>}2 Chronicles 19:6) and to him they are accountable.

V. Sentence passed upon this offender by the righteous Judge of heaven and earth himself: *Let all the congregation stone him*, v. 14. God could have cut him off by an immediate stroke from heaven, but he would put this honour upon the institution of magistracy to make use of it for the supporting and vindicating of his own glory in the world. Observe,

1. The place of execution appointed: *Bring him forth without the camp*. To signify their detestation of the crime, they must thus cast out the criminal as an abominable branch, and separate him from them as an unclean thing and unworthy a place in the camp of Israel.

2. The executioners: *Let all the congregation* do it, to show their zeal for the honour of God's name. Every man should have a stone to throw at him that blasphemes God, reckoning himself nearly concerned in the reproaches cast on God, ^{<3319>}Psalms 69:9. Thus also the greater terror would be cast upon the congregation; those that once helped to stone a blasphemer would ever after dread every thing that bordered upon blasphemy, that looked like it or looked towards it.

3. The solemnity of the execution; before the congregation stoned him, the witnesses were to *lay their hands upon his head*. The Jews say that this was used in the execution of no criminals but blasphemers; and that it was done with words to this purport, "*Thy blood be upon thy own head, for thou thyself hast occasioned it*. Let no blame be laid on the law, judges, juries, or witnesses; *if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.*"

VI. A standing law made upon this occasion for the stoning of blasphemers, v. 15, 16. Magistrates are the guardians of both tables, and ought to be as jealous for the honour of God against those that speak contemptuously of his being and government as for the public peace and safety against the disturbers of them.

1. A great stress is laid upon this law, as in no case to be dispensed with: *He shall surely be put to death; they shall certainly stone him.* Those that lightly esteemed God's honour might think it hard to make a man an offender for a word (words are but wind); but God would let them know that they must not make light of such words as these, which come from malice against God in the heart of him that speaks, and must occasion either great guilt or great grief to those that hear.

2. It is made to extend to the strangers that sojourned among them, as well as those that were born in the land. God never made any law to compel strangers to be circumcised and embrace the Jewish religion (proselytes made by force would be no honour to the God of Israel), but he made a law to restrain strangers from speaking evil of the God of Israel.

3. He that was put to death for blasphemy is said to *bear his sin*, in the punishment of it; no sacrifice being appointed, on the head of which the sin might be transferred, he himself was to bear it upon his own head, as a sacrifice to divine justice. So *his own tongue fell upon him* (^{<150>}Psalm 64:8), and the tongue of a blasphemer will fall heavily.

VII. A repetition of some other laws annexed to this new law.

1. That murder should be punished with death (v. 17, and again 5:21), according to an ancient law in Noah's time (^{<106>}Genesis 9:6), and the very law of nature, (^{<100>}Genesis 4:10).

2. That maimers should in like manner be punished by the law of retaliation, v. 19, 20. Not that men might in these cases be their own avengers, but they might appeal to the civil magistrate, who should award suffering to the injurious and satisfaction to the injured as should be thought fit in proportion to the hurt done. This law we had before, (^{<224>}Exodus 22:4, 5. And it was more agreeable to that dispensation, in which were revealed the rigour of the law and what sin deserved, than to the dispensation we are under, in which are revealed the grace of the gospel and the remission of sins: and therefore our Saviour has set aside

this law (^{405B}Matthew 5:38, 39), not to restrain magistrates from executing public justice, but to restrain us all from returning personal injuries and to oblige us to forgive as we are and hope to be forgiven.

3. That hurt done wilfully to a neighbour's cattle should be punished by making good the damage, v. 18, 21. Thus the divine law took not only their lives, but their goods also under its protection. Those beasts which belonged to no particular person, but were, as our law speaks, *ferae naturae* — *of a wild nature*, it was lawful for them to kill; but not those which any man had a property in. Does God take care for oxen? Yes; for our sakes he does.

4. That strangers, as well as native Israelites, should be both entitled to the benefit of this law, so as not to suffer wrong, and liable to the penalty of this law in case they did wrong. And, it should seem, this is it that brings in these laws here, to show how equitable it was that strangers as well as Israelites should be punished for blasphemy, because strangers as well as Israelites were punishable for other crimes. And there may be this further reason for the recognition of these laws here, God would hereby show what provision he had made for man's safety, in punishing those that were injurious to him, which should be an argument with magistrates to be jealous for his honour, and to punish those that blasphemed his name. If God took care for their comfort, they ought to take care for his glory.

VIII. The execution of the blasphemer. Moses did, as it were, sign the warrant or it: He *spoke unto the children of Israel* to do it, and they *did as the Lord commanded Moses*, v. 23. This teaches that death is the wages of sin, and that blasphemy in particular is an *iniquity to be punished by the judges*. But, if those who thus profane the name of God escape punishment from men, yet the Lord our God will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgments. This blasphemer was the first that died by the law of Moses. Stephen, the first that died for the gospel, died by the abuse of this law; the martyr and the malefactor suffered the same death: but how vast the difference between them!