

INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS CHAPTER 22

In this chapter we have divers laws concerning the priests and sacrifices all for the preserving of the honour of the sanctuary.

I. That the priests should not eat the holy things in their uncleanness, #Le 22:1-9.

II. That no stranger who did not belong to some family of the priests should eat of the holy things (#Le 22:10-13), and, if he did it unwittingly, he must make restitution, #Le 22:14-16.

III. That the sacrifices which were offered must be without blemish, #Le 22:17-25.

IV. That they must be more than eight days old (#Le 22:26-28), and that the sacrifices of thanksgiving must be eaten the same day they were offered, #Le 22:29-33.

Ver. 1. thru Ver. 9.

Those that had a natural blemish, though they were forbidden to do the priests' work, were yet allowed to eat of the holy things: and the Jewish writers say that

"to keep them from idleness they were employed in the wood-room, to pick out that which was worm-eaten, that it might not be used in the fire upon the altar; they might also be employed in the judgment of leprosy:"

but,

I. Those that were under any ceremonial uncleanness, which possibly they contracted by their own fault, might no so much as eat of the holy things while they continued in their pollution.

1. Some pollutions were permanent, as a leprosy or a running issue, #Le 22:4. These separated the people from the sanctuary, and God would show that they were so far from being more excusable that really they were more abominable in a priest.
2. Others were more transient, as the touching of a dead body, or any thing else that was unclean, from which, after a certain time, a man was cleansed by bathing his flesh in water, #Le 22:6. But whoever was thus defiled might not *eat of the holy things*, under pain of God's highest displeasure, who said, and ratified the saying, *That soul shall be cut off from my presence*, #Le 22:3. Our being in the presence of God, and attending upon him, will be so far from securing us that it will but the more expose us to God's wrath, if we dare to draw nigh to him in our uncleanness. The destruction shall come *from the presence of the Lord* (#2Th 1:9), as the fire by which Nadab and Abihu died came *from before the Lord*. Thus those who profane the holy word of God will be cut off by that word which they make so light of; it shall condemn them. They are again warned of their danger if they eat the holy thing in their uncleanness (#Le 22:9), *lest they bear sin, and die therefore*. Note,

(1.) Those contract great guilt who profane sacred things, by touching them with unhallowed hands. Eating the holy things signified an interest in the atonement; but, if they ate of them in their uncleanness, they were so far from lessening their guilt that they increased it: They shall *bear sin*.

(2.) Sin is a burden which, if infinite mercy prevent not, will certainly sink those that bear

it: They shall *die therefore*. Even priests may be ruined by their pollutions and presumptions.

II. As to the design of this law we may observe,

1. This obliged the priests carefully to preserve their purity, and to dread every thing that would defile them. The holy things were their livelihood; if they might not eat of them, how must they subsist? The more we have to lose of comfort and honour by our defilement, the more careful we should be to preserve our purity.
2. This impressed the people with a reverence for the holy things, when they saw the priests themselves *separated from them* (as the expression is, **#Le 22:2**) so long as they were in their uncleanness. He is doubtless a God of infinite purity who kept his immediate attendants under so strict a discipline.
3. This teaches us carefully to watch against all moral pollutions, because by them we are unfitted to receive the comfort of God's sanctuary. Though we labour not under habitual deformities, yet actual defilements deprive us of the pleasure of communion with God; and therefore *he that is washed needeth to wash his feet (#Joh 13:10), to wash his hands, and so to compass the altar, #Ps 26:6*. Herein we have need to be jealous over ourselves, lest (as it is observably expressed here) we *profane God's holy name in those things which we hallow unto him, #Le 22:2*. If we affront God in those very performances wherein we pretend to honour him, and provoke him instead of pleasing him, we shall make up but a bad account shortly; yet thus we do if we profane God's name, by doing that in our uncleanness which pretends to be hallowed to him.

Ver. 10. thru Ver. 16.

The holy things were to be eaten by the priests and their families. Now,

I. Here is a law that no stranger should eat of them, that is, no person whatsoever but the priests only, and those that pertained to them, **#Le 22:10**. The priests are charged with this care, not to *profane the holy things* by permitting the strangers to eat of them (**#Le 22:15**) or *suffer them to bear the iniquity of trespass (#Le 22:16)*; that is, suffer them to bring guilt upon themselves, by meddling with that which they have no right to. Thus it is commonly understood. Note, We must not only be careful that we do not bear iniquity ourselves, but we must do what we can to prevent others bearing it. We must not only not suffer sin to lie upon our brother, but, if we can help it, we must not suffer it to come upon him. But perhaps there is another meaning of those words: the priests' eating the sin-offerings is said to signify their *bearing the iniquity of the congregation, to make an atonement for them, #Le 10:17*. Let not a stranger therefore eat of that holy thing particularly, and so pretend to *bear the iniquity of trespass*; for it is daring presumption for any to do that, but such as are appointed to do it. Those that set up other mediators besides Christ our priest, to *bear the iniquity of trespass*, sacrilegiously rob Christ of his honour, and invade his rights. When we warn people not to trust to their own righteousness, nor dare to appear before God in it, but to rely on Christ's righteousness only for peace and pardon, it is because we dare not *suffer them to bear the iniquity of trespass*, for we know it is too heavy for them.

II. Here is an explanation of the law, showing who were to be looked upon as belonging to the priest's family, and who not.

1. Sojourners and hired servants abode not in the house for ever; they were in the

family, but not of it; and therefore they might not eat of the holy things (#Le 22:10): but the servant that was born in the house or bought with money, being a heirloom to the family, though a servant, yet might eat of the holy things, #Le 22:11. Note, Those only are entitled to the comforts of God's house who make it their *rest for ever*, and resolve to *dwell in it all the days of their life*. As for those who for a time only believe, to serve a present turn. They are looked upon but as sojourners and mercenaries, and have *no part nor lot in the matter*.

2. As to the children of the family, concerning the sons there could be no dispute, they were themselves priests, but concerning the daughters there was a distinction. While they continued in their father's house they might eat of the holy things; but, if they married such as were not priests, they lost their right (#Le 22:12), for now they were cut off from the family of the priests. Yet if a priest's daughter became a widow, and had no children in whom she might preserve a distinct family, and returned to her father's house again, being neither wife nor mother, she should again be looked upon as a daughter, and might eat of the holy things. If those whom Providence has made sorrowful widows, and who are dislodged from the rest they had in the house of a husband, yet find it again in a father's house, they have reason to be thankful to the widows' God, who does not leave them comfortless.
3. Here is a demand of restitution to be made by him that had no right to the holy things, and yet should eat of them unwittingly, #Le 22:14. If he did it presumptuously, and in contempt of the divine institution, he was liable to be cut off by the hand of God, and to be beaten by the magistrate; but, if he did it through weakness in inconsideration, he was to restore the value, adding a fifth part to it, besides which he was to bring an offering to atone for the trespass; see #Le 5:15,16.

III. This law might be dispensed with in a case of necessity, as it was when David and his men ate of the show-bread, #1Sa 21:6. And our Saviour justifies them, and gives a reason for it, which furnishes us with a lasting rule in all such cases, that *God will have mercy and not sacrifice*, #Mt 12:3,4,7. Rituals must give way to morals.

IV. It is an instruction to gospel ministers, who are *stewards of the mysteries of God*, not to admit all, without distinction, to *eat of the holy things*, but to take out the precious from the vile. Those that are scandalously ignorant or profane are strangers and aliens to the family of the Lord's priests; and it is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to such. Holy things are for holy persons, for those who are holy, at least, in profession, #Mt 7:6.

Ver. 17. thru Ver. 33.

Here are four laws concerning sacrifices:--

I. Whatever was offered in sacrifice to God should be without blemish, otherwise it should not be accepted. This had often been mentioned in the particular institutions of the several sorts of offerings. Now here they are told what was to be accounted a blemish which rendered a beast unfit for sacrifice: if it was blind, or lame, had a wen, or the *mange* #Le 22:22, --if it was bruised, or crushed, or broken, or cut (#Le 22:24), that is, as the Jewish writers understand it, if it was, in any of these ways, castrated, if bulls and rams were made into oxen and weathers, they might not be offered. Moreover a difference is made between what was brought as a freewill offering and what was brought as a vow, #Le 22:23. And, though none that had any of the aforementioned blemishes might be brought for either, yet if a beast had any thing superfluous or lacking (that is, as the Jews understand it, if there was a disproportion or inequality between those parts that are pairs,

when one eye, or ear, or leg, was bigger than it should be, or less than it should be)--if there was no other blemish than this, it might be accepted for a free-will offering, to which a man had not before laid himself, nor had the divine law laid him, under any particular obligation; but for a vow it might not be accepted. Thus God would teach us to make conscience of performing our promises to him very exactly, and not afterwards to abate in quantity or value of what we had solemnly engaged to devote to him. What was, before the vow, in our own power, as in the case of a free-will offering, afterwards is not, **#Ac 5:4**. It is again and again declared that no sacrifice should be accepted if it was thus blemished, **#Le 22:20,21**. According to this law great care was taken to search all the beasts that were brought to be sacrificed, that there might, to a certainty, be no blemish in them. A blemished sacrifice might not be accepted even *from the hand of a stranger*, though to such all possible encouragement should be given to do honour to the God of Israel, **#Le 22:25**. By this it appears that strangers were expected to come to the house of God from a *far country* (**#1Ki 8:41,42**), and that they should be welcome, and their offerings accepted, as those of Darius, **#Ezr 6:9,10 Isa 56:6,7**. The heathen priests were many of them not so strict in this matter, but would receive sacrifices for their gods that were ever so scandalous; but let strangers know that the God of Israel would not be so served. Now,

1. This law was then necessary for the preserving of the honour of the sanctuary, and of the God that was there worshipped. It was fit that every thing that was employed for his honour should be the best of the kind; for, as he is the greatest and brightest, so he is the best of beings; and he that is the best must have the best. See how greatly and justly displeasing the breach of this law was to the holy God, **#Mal 1:8,13,14**.
2. This law made all the legal sacrifices the fitter to be types of Christ, the great sacrifice from which all these derived their virtue. In allusion to this law, he is said to be a *Lamb without blemish and without spot*, **#1Pe 1:19**. As such a priest, so such a sacrifice, became us, who was harmless and undefiled. When Pilate declared, *I find no fault in this man*, he did thereby in effect pronounce the sacrifice without blemish. The Jews say it was the work of the sagan, or suffragan, high priest, to view the sacrifices, and see whether they were without blemish or no; when Christ suffered, Annas was in that office; but little did those who brought Christ to Annas first, by whom he was sent bound to Caiaphas, as a sacrifice fit to be offered (**#Joh 18:13,24**), think that they were answering the type of this law.
3. It is an instruction to us to offer to God the best we have in our spiritual sacrifices. If our devotions are ignorant, and cold, and trifling, and full of distractions, we offer *the blind, and the lame, and the sick, for sacrifice*; but cursed be the deceiver that does so, for, while he thinks to put a cheat upon God, he puts a damning cheat upon his own soul.

ii. That no beast should be offered in sacrifice before it was eight days old, **#Le 22:26,27**. It was provided before that the firstlings of their cattle, which were to be dedicated to God, should not be brought to him till after the eighth day, **#Ex 22:30**. Here it is provided that no creature should be offered in sacrifice till it was eight days old complete. Sooner than that it was not fit to be used at men's tables, and therefore not a God's altar. The Jews say,

"It was because the sabbath sanctifies all things, and nothing should be offered to God till at least one sabbath had passed over it."

It was in conformity to the law of circumcision, which children were to receive on the eighth day. Christ was sacrificed for us, not in his infancy, though then Herod sought to slay him, but in the prime of his time.

III. That the dam and her young should not both be killed in one day, whether in sacrifice or for common use, #Le 22:28. There is such a law as this concerning birds, #De 22:6. This was forbidden, not as evil in itself, but because it looked barbarous and cruel to the brute creatures; like the tyranny of the king of Babylon, that slew Zedekiah's sons before his eyes, and then put out his eyes. It looked ill-natured towards the species to kill two generations at once, as if one designed the ruin of the kind.

IV. That the flesh of their thank-offerings should be eaten on the same day that they were sacrificed, #Le 22:29,30. This is a repetition of what we had before, #Le 7:15 19:6,7. The chapter concludes with such a general charge as we have often met with, to *keep God's commandments*, and not to *profane his holy name*, #Le 22:31,32. Those that profess God's name, if they do not make conscience of keeping his commandments, do but profane his name. The general reasons are added: God's authority over them--*I am the Lord*; his interest in them--*I am your God*; the title he had to them by redemption--

"I brought you out of the land of Egypt, on purpose that I might be your God;"

the designs of his grace concerning them--*I am the Lord that hallow you*; and the resolutions of his justice, if he had not honour from them, to *get himself honour* upon them--*I will be hallowed among the children of Israel*. God will be a loser in his glory by no man at last; but sooner or later will recover his right, either in the repentance of sinners or in their ruin.