

NOTES
ON
THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

by

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"Things new and old."

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by

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Numbers 17 - Numbers 18

These two chapters form a distinct section in which we have presented to us the source, the responsibilities, and the privileges of priesthood. Priesthood is a divine institution. **"No man taketh this honour unto Himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron."** This is made manifest, in a most striking manner, in chapter 17.

"The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes according to the house of their fathers twelve rods: write thou every man's name upon his rod. And thou shalt write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi: for one rod shall be for the head of the house of their fathers. And thou shalt lay them up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, where I will meet with you. And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you. And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, and every one of their princes gave him a rod apiece, for each prince one, according to their father's houses, even twelve rods: and the rod of Aaron was among their rods" (Verses 1-6).

What matchless wisdom shines in this arrangement! How completely is the matter taken out of man's hands and placed where alone it ought to be, namely, in the hands of the living GOD! It was not to be a man appointing himself, or a man appointing his fellow; but GOD appointing the man of His own selection.

In a word, the question was to be definitively settled by GOD Himself, so that all murmurings might be silenced for ever, and no one be able again to charge GOD's high priest with taking too much upon him. The human will had nothing whatever to do with this solemn matter. The twelve rods, all in a like condition, were laid up before the Lord; man retired and left GOD to act. There was no room, no opportunity, because there was no occasion, for human management. In the profound retirement of the sanctuary, far away from all man's thinkings, was the grand question of priesthood settled by divine decision; and, being thus settled, it could never again be raised.

"And Moses laid up the rods before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness. And it came to pass that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds."

Striking and beautiful figure of Him who was "**declared to be the Son of God with power by resurrection from the dead!**" The twelve rods were all alike lifeless; but GOD, the living GOD, entered the scene, and, by that power peculiar to Himself, infused life into Aaron's rod, and brought it forth to view, bearing upon it the fragrant fruits of resurrection.

Who could gainsay this?

- the rationalist may sneer at it, and raise a thousand questions.
- faith gazes on that fruit-bearing rod, and sees in it a lovely figure of the new creation in the which all things are of GOD.
- infidelity may argue on the ground of the apparent impossibility of a dry stick budding, blossoming, and bearing fruit in the course of one night.

But to whom does it appear impossible? To the infidel - the rationalist - the skeptic, and why? Because he always shuts out GOD. Let us remember this. Infidelity invariably shuts out GOD. Its reasonings are carried on and its conclusions reached in midnight darkness. There is not so much as a single ray of true light in the whole of that sphere in which infidelity operates. It excludes the only source of light, and leaves the soul wrapped in the shades and deep gloom of a darkness that may be felt.

It is well for the young reader to pause here, and deeply ponder this solemn fact. Let him calmly and seriously reflect on this special feature of infidelity - rationalism - or skepticism. It begins, continues, and ends with shutting out GOD. It would approach the mystery of Aaron's budding, blossoming, fruit-bearing rod with a godless, audacious "How?" This is the infidel's great argument. He can raise ten thousand questions; but never settle one. He will teach you how to doubt, but never how to believe. He will lead you to doubt everything; but gives you nothing to believe.

Such, beloved reader, is infidelity. It is of Satan who ever has been, is, and will be, the great question raiser. Wherever you trace Satan, you will always find him raising questions. He fills the heart with all sorts of "ifs" and "hows," and thus plunges the soul in thick darkness. If he can only succeed in raising a question, he has gained his point. But he is perfectly powerless with a simple soul that just believes that GOD is, and GOD HAS SPOKEN. Here is faith's noble answer

to the infidels questions - its divine solution of all the infidel's difficulties. Faith always brings in the very One that infidelity always shuts out. It thinks with GOD; infidelity thinks without Him.

Hence, then, we would say to the Christian reader, and specially to the young Christian, never admit questions when GOD has spoken. If you do, Satan will have you under his foot in a moment. Your only security against him is found in that one impregnable, immortal sentence, "**It is written.**" It will never do to argue with him on the ground of experience, of feeling, or of observation; it must be absolutely and exclusively on the ground of this - that GOD is, and that GOD has spoken. Satan can make no hand of this weighty argument at all. It is invincible. Everything else he can shiver to pieces; but this confounds him and puts him to flight at once.

We see this very strikingly illustrated in the temptation of our Lord. The enemy, according to His usual way, approached the blessed One with a question - "**If thou be the Son of God.**" How did the Lord answer Him? Did He say, "I know I am the Son of GOD - I have had a testimony from the opened heavens, and from the descending and anointing Spirit - I feel, and believe, and realize that I am the Son of GOD?" No; such was not His mode of answering the tempter. How then? "**It is written.**" Such was the thrice repeated answer of the obedient and dependent Man; and such must be the answer of every one who will overcome the tempter.

Thus, in reference to Aaron's budding rod, if any inquire, "How can such a thing be? It is contrary to the laws of nature; and how could GOD reverse the established principles of natural philosophy?" Faith's reply is sublimely simple. GOD can do as He pleases. The One who called worlds into existence, could make a rod to bud, blossom, and bear fruit in a moment. Bring GOD in, and all is simple and plain as possible. Leave GOD out, and All is plunged in hopeless confusion. The attempt to tie up - we speak with reverence - the Almighty Creator of the vast universe, by certain laws of nature, or certain principles of natural philosophy, is nothing short of impious blasphemy. It is almost worse than denying His existence altogether. It is hard to say which is the worse, the atheist who says there is no GOD, or the rationalist who maintains that He cannot do as He pleases.

We feel the immense importance of being able to see the real roots of all the plausible theories which are afloat at the present moment. The mind of man is busy forming systems, drawing conclusions, and reasoning in such a manner as virtually to exclude the testimony of Holy Scripture altogether, and to shut out GOD from His own creation. Our young people must be solemnly warned as to this. They must be taught the immense difference between the facts of science, and the conclusions of scientific men. A fact is a fact wherever you meet it, whether in geology, astronomy, or any other department of science; but men's reasonings, conclusions, and systems are another thing altogether. Now, Scripture will never touch the facts of science; but the reasonings of scientific man are constantly found in collision with Scripture. Alas! alas! for such men! And when such is the case we must, with plain decision, denounce such reasonings altogether, and exclaim with the apostle, "**Let God be true, and every man a liar.**"

Gladly would we dwell upon this point though it be a digression, for we deeply feel its seriousness. But we must, for the present, be content with solemnly urging upon the reader the necessity of giving to Holy Scripture the supreme place in his heart and mind. We must bow down, with absolute submission, to the authority of, not "Thus saith the Church" - "Thus say the fathers" - "Thus say the doctors;" but "**Thus saith the Lord,**" "**It is written.**" This is our only

security against the rising tide of infidelity which threatens to sweep away the foundations of religious thought and feeling throughout the length and breadth of Christendom. None will escape save those who are taught and governed by the Word of the Lord. May GOD increase the number of such!

We shall now proceed with our chapter.

"and Moses brought out all the rods from before the Lord unto all the children of Israel: and they looked, and took every man his rod. And the Lord said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not. And Moses did so: as the Lord commanded Him, so did he" (Verses 9-11).

Thus the question was divinely settled. Priesthood is founded upon that precious grace of GOD which brings life out of death. This is the source of priesthood. It could be of no possible use for man to take any one of the eleven dead rods and make it the badge of the priestly office. All the human authority under the sun could not infuse life into a dead stick, or make that stick the channel of blessing to souls. And so of all the eleven rods put together; there was not so much as a single bud or blossom throughout the whole. But where there were precious evidences of quickening power - refreshing traces of divine life and blessing - fragrant fruits of efficacious grace - there and there alone was to be found the source of that priestly ministry which could carry not only a needy but murmuring and rebellious people through the wilderness.

And here we may naturally inquire, "What about Moses' rod? Why was it not amongst the twelve?" The reason is blessedly simple. Moses rod was the expression of power and authority. Aaron's rod was the lovely expression of that grace that quickens the dead, and calls those things that be not as though they were. Now, mere power or authority could not conduct the congregation through the wilderness. Power could crush the rebel; authority might strike the sinner; but only mercy and grace could avail for an assembly of needy, helpless, sinful men, women, and children. The grace that could bring almonds out on a dead stick, could bring Israel through the wilderness. It was only in connection with Aaron's budding rod that the Lord could say, **"Thou shalt quite take away the murmurings of the children of Israel from me, that they die not."** The rod of authority could take away the murmurers; but the rod of grace could take away the murmurs.

The reader may refer, with interest and profit, to a passage in the opening of Hebrews 9. in connection with the subject of Aaron's rod. The apostle, in speaking of the ark of the covenant, says, **"wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant."** This was in the wilderness. The rod and the manna were the provisions of divine grace for Israel's desert wanderings and desert need. But, when we turn to I Kings 8:9, we read, **"There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt."** The wilderness wanderings were over, the glory of Solomon's day was sending forth its beams over the land, and hence the budding rod and the pot of manna are omitted, and nothing remains save that law of GOD, which was the foundation of His righteous government in the midst of His people.

Now, in this we have an illustration, not only of the divine accuracy of Scripture, as a whole but also of the special character and object of the Book of Numbers. Aaron's rod was in the ark during its wilderness wanderings. Precious fact! Let the reader seek to lay hold of its deep and blessed significance. Let him ponder the difference between the rod of Moses and the rod of Aaron. We have seen the former doing its characteristic work in other days and amid other scenes. we have seen the land of Egypt trembling beneath the heavy strokes of that rod. Plague after plague fell upon that devoted scene, in answer to that outstretched rod. We have seen the waters of the sea divided in answer to that rod. In short, the rod of Moses was a rod of power, a rod of authority. But it could not avail to hush the murmurings of the children of Israel; nor yet to bring the people through the desert. Grace alone could do that; and we have the expression of pure grace - free, sovereign grace - in the budding of Aaron's rod.

Nothing can be more forcible, nothing more lovely. That dry, dead stick was the apt figure of Israel's condition, and indeed of the condition of every one of us by nature. There was no sap, no life, no power. One might well say, "What good can ever come of it?" none whatever, had not grace come in and displayed its quickening power. So was it with Israel, in the wilderness; and so is it with us now. How were they to be led along from day to day? How were they to be sustained in all their weakness and need? How were they to be borne with in all their sin and folly? The answer is found in Aaron's budding rod. If the dry dead stick was the expression of nature's barren and worthless condition; the buds, blossoms, and fruit set forth that living and life-giving grace and power of GOD on which was based the priestly ministry that alone could bear the congregation through the wilderness. Grace alone could answer the ten thousand necessities of the militant host. Power could not suffice, authority could not avail. Priesthood alone could supply what was needed; and this priesthood was instituted on the foundation of that efficacious grace which could bring fruit out of a dry rod.

Thus it was as to priesthood of old; and thus it is as to ministry now. All ministry in the Church of GOD is the fruit of divine grace - the gift of CHRIST, the Church's Head. There is no other source of ministry whatsoever. From apostles down to the very lowest gifts, all proceed from CHRIST. The grand root principle of all ministry is embodied in those words of Paul to the Galatians in which he speaks of himself as "**an apostle, not of man, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead**" (Galatians 1:1).

Here, be it noted, is the sublime source from whence all ministry emanates. It is not of man, or by man, in any shape or form. Man may take up dry sticks and shape and fashion them according to His own will; and he may ordain and appoint, and call them by certain high-sounding, official titles. But of what use is it? We may justly say, They are only dry, dead sticks.

"Where is there a single cluster of fruit Where is there a single blossom? Nay, where is there one solitary bud?" Even one bud will suffice to prove that there is something divine. But in the absence of this there can be no living ministry in the Church of GOD: It is the gift of CHRIST and that alone that makes a man a minister. Without this it is an empty assumption for any one to set himself up, or be set up by others to be a minister.

Does the reader thoroughly own this great principle? Is it as clear as a sunbeam to his soul? has he any difficulty respecting it? If so, we entreat him to seek to divest his mind of all preconceived thoughts, from what source soever derived; let will rise above the hazy mists of

traditional religion; let him take the New Testament, and study as in the immediate presence of GOD, I Corinthians 12; 14; and also Ephesians 4:7-18. In these passages he will find the whole subject of ministry unfolded; and from them he will learn that all true ministry, whether it be apostles, prophets, teachers, pastors, or evangelists, all is of GOD - all flows down from CHRIST the exalted Head of the Church. If a man be not possessed of a bona fide gift from CHRIST he is not a minister. Every member of the body has a work to do. The edification of the body is promoted by the proper action of all the members, whether prominent or obscure, "comely" or "uncomely." In short, all ministry is from GOD, and not from man; it is by GOD, and not by man. There is no such thing in Scripture as a humanly ordained ministry. All is of GOD.

We must not confound ministerial gifts with office or local charge. We find the apostles, or their delegates, ordaining elders and appointing deacons; but this was quite a distinct thing from ministerial gifts. Those elders and deacons might possess and exercise some specific gift in the body; the apostle did not ordain them to exercise such gift, but only to fulfil the local charge. The spiritual gift was from the Head of the Church, and was independent of the local charge altogether.

It is most necessary to be clear as to the distinction between gift and local charge.

There is the utmost confusion of the two things throughout the entire professing church,, and the consequence is that ministry is not understood. The members of the body of CHRIST do not understand their place or their functions. Human election, or human authority in some shape or another, is deemed essential to the exercise of ministry in the Church. But there is really no such thing in Scripture. If there be, nothing is easier than to produce it. We ask the reader to find a single line, from cover to cover of the New Testament in which a human call, human appointment, or human authority, has anything whatsoever to do with the exercise of ministry in its very fullest range. We boldly assert there is no such thing. *

* Even in the matter of appointing deacons, in Acts 6, we see it was an apostolic act. **"Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business."** The brethren were allowed to select the men, inasmuch as it was their money that was in question. But the appointment was divine. And this, be it remembered, had reference merely to the business of deacons who were to manage the Church's temporal affairs. But as regards the work of evangelists, pastors, and teachers, it is wholly independent of human choice and human authority, and rests simply upon the gift of CHRIST, Ephesians 4: 11.

Ah, no; blessed be GOD, ministry in His Church is **"not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead."** **"God hath set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him"** (I Corinthians 12:18). **"But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. wherefore He saith, When he ascended up on High, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men . . . and he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of**

the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:7-13).

Here all the grades of ministerial gift are placed on one and the same ground, from apostles down to evangelists and teachers. They are All given by the Head of the Church and, when bestowed, they render the possessors responsible, at once, to the head in Heaven, and to the members on earth. The idea of any possessor of a positive gift from GOD waiting for human authority, is as great an insult to the divine majesty as if Aaron had gone with his blooming rod in his hand, to be ordained to the priesthood by some of his fellows. Aaron knew better. He was called of GOD, and that was quite enough for him, and so now, all who possess a divine gift are Called of GOD to the ministry, and they need nothing more save to wait on their ministry, and cultivate their gift.

Need we add that it is vain for men to set up to be ministers unless they really do possess the gift? A man may fancy he has a gift, and it may be only a vain conceit of his own mind. It is quite as bad, if not worse, for one man to go to work on the strength of his own foolish imagination, as for another to go on the strength of the unwarrantable authority of his fellows. What we contend for is this - ministry is of GOD as to its source, power, and responsibility. We do not think that this statement will be called in question by any who are disposed to be taught exclusively by Scripture. Every minister, whatever be his gift, should be able, in his measure, to say, "**God has put me into the ministry.**" But for a man to use this language without possessing any gift, is, to say the least of it, worse than worthless. The people of GOD can easily tell where there is real spiritual gift. Power is sure to be felt. But if men pretend to gift or power without the reality, their folly shall speedily be manifest to all. All pretenders are sure to find their true level, sooner or later.

Thus much as to ministry and priesthood. The source of each is divine. The true foundation of each lies in the budding rod. Let this be ever borne in mind. Aaron could say, "GOD put me into the priesthood;" and if challenged for his proof, he could point to the fruit-bearing rod. Paul could say, "**God put me into the ministry;**" and when challenged for his proof, could point to the thousands of living seals to his work. Thus it must ever be in principle, whatever be the measure. Ministry must not be merely in word or in tongue; but in deed and in truth. GOD will not know the speech, But the power.

But, ere we turn from this subject, we deem it most necessary to impress upon the reader the importance of distinguishing between ministry and priesthood.

The sin of Korah consisted in this, that, not content with being a minister, he aimed at being a priest; and the sin of Christendom is of the same character. Instead of allowing ministry to rest upon its own proper New Testament basis, to exhibit its proper characteristics, And discharge its proper functions, it is exalted into a priesthood, a sacerdotal caste, the members of which are distinguished from their brethren by their style of dress and certain titles. There is no foundation whatsoever for these things in the New Testament. According to the plain teaching of that blessed book, all believers are priests.

Thus, in Peter we read, "**But ye** [not merely the apostles, but all believers] **are a chosen**

generation, a royal priesthood" (I Peter 2:9) so also in Revelation "**Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father"** (Revelation 1:5, 6).

GOD, in pursuance of the truth set forth in the foregoing passages, we find the Apostle Paul, by the Holy Ghost, exhorting the Hebrew believers to draw nigh, and enter with boldness into the very holiest of all (Hebrews 10:19-22). And further on he says, "**By him therefore [i.e., JESUS] let us offer the sacrifice of praise to GOD continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. But to do good, and to communicate, forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased"** (Hebrews 13:15, 16).

How marvellous it must have appeared to Jewish saints - to those trained amid the institutions of the Mosaic economy, to be exhorted to enter into a place to which the very highest functionary in Israel could only approach once a year, and that but for a moment! And there to be told that they were to offer sacrifice, that they were to discharge the peculiar functions of the priesthood. All this was wonderful. But thus it is, if we are to be taught by Scripture, and not by the commandments, the doctrines, and the traditions of men. All Christians are priests. They are not all apostles, prophets, teachers, pastors, or evangelists; but they are all priests. The very feeblest member of the Church was as much a priest as Peter, Paul, James, or John. We speak not of capacity or spiritual power, but of the position which all occupy in virtue of the Blood of CHRIST. There is no such thing in the New Testament as a certain class of men, a certain privileged caste, brought into a higher or nearer position than their brethren. All this is flatly opposed to Christianity - a bold traversing of all the precepts of the Word of GOD, and the special teachings of our blessed Lord and Master.

Let no one suppose that these things are unimportant. Far from it. They affect the very foundations of Christianity. We have only to open our eyes and look around us in order to see the practical results of this confounding of ministry and priesthood. And we may rest assured that the moment is rapidly approaching when these results will all assume a far more awful character, and bring down the very heaviest judgments from the living GOD. We have not yet seen the full antitype of "**the gainsaying of Core;**" but it will soon be manifested: and we solemnly warn the Christian reader to take heed how he lends his sanction to the serious error of mixing up two things so entirely distinct as ministry and priesthood.

We would exhort him to take this whole subject up in the light of Scripture. We want him to submit to the authority of GOD's Word, and to abandon everything that is not founded thereon. It matters not what it is; it may be a time-honoured institution; an expedient arrangement; a decent ceremony supported by tradition, and countenanced by thousands of the very best of men. It matters not. If the thing has no foundation in Holy Scripture, it is an error, and an evil, and a snare of the devil, to entice our souls, and lead us away from the simplicity that is in CHRIST.

For example, if we are taught that there is, in the Church of GOD, a sacerdotal caste, a class of men, more holy, more elevated, nearer to GOD, than their brethren - than ordinary Christians; what is this but Judaism revived and tacked on to Christian forms? And what must be the effect of this, but to rob the children of GOD of their proper privileges as such, and to put them at a distance from Him, and place them under bondage?

We shall not pursue this subject any further just now. Enough, we trust, has been suggested to lead the reflecting reader to follow it up for himself. We only add, and that with special emphasis, let him follow it up only in that light of Scripture. Let him resolve, by the grace of GOD, to lay aside everything which rests not upon the solid and sacred basis of the written word. Thus, and thus alone, can he be preserved from every form of error, and led to a sound conclusion on this most important and interesting question.

The closing lines of chapter 17 furnish a remarkable illustration of how quickly the human mind passes from one extreme to another.

"The children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die: shall we be consumed with dying?"

In the preceding chapter, we see bold presumption in the very presence of the majesty of the Lord, where there should have been profound humility. Here, in the presence of divine grace and its provisions, we observe legal fear and distrust. Thus it is ever. Mere nature neither understands holiness nor grace. At one moment we hearken to such accents as these, "**All the congregation are holy;**" and the next moment, the word is, "**Behold we die, we perish, we all perish.**" The carnal mind presumes where it ought to retire; it distrusts where it ought to confide.

However, all this becomes the occasion, through the goodness of GOD, of unfolding to us, in a very full and blessed manner, the holy responsibility as well as the precious privileges of the priesthood. How gracious it is - how like our GOD, to turn His people's mistakes into an occasion of furnishing deeper instruction as to His ways! It is His prerogative, blessed be His name, to bring good out of evil; to make the eater yield meat, and the strong, sweetness. Thus "**the gainsaying of Core**" gives occasion for the copious volume of instruction furnished by Aaron's rod; and the closing lines of chapter 17 call forth an elaborate statement of the functions of Aaron's priesthood.

To this latter we shall now proceed to direct the reader's attention.

"And the Lord said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons, and thy father's house with thee, shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary; and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood. All thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring them with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee: but thou and thy sons with thee shall minister before the tabernacle of witness. And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of all the tabernacle: only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, that neither they, nor ye also, die. And they shall be joined unto thee, and keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, for all the service of the tabernacle: and a stranger shall not come nigh unto you, and ye shall keep the charge of the sanctuary, and the charge of the altar: that there be no wrath any more upon the children of Israel. And I, behold, I have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel: to you they are given as a gift for the Lord, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office for every thing of the altar, and within the veil; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest's office unto you as a service of gift: and the stranger that cometh nigh

shall be put to death" (Numbers 18:1-7).

Here we have a divine answer to the question raised by the children of Israel, "**Shall we be consumed with dying?**" "No," says the GOD of all grace and mercy. And why not? Because "**Aaron and his sons with him shall keep the charge of the sanctuary, and the charge of the altar; that there be no wrath any more upon the children of Israel.**" Thus the people are taught that in that very priesthood which had been so despised and spoken against, they were to find their security.

But we have to notice particularly that Aaron's sons, and his father's house are associated with him in His high and holy privileges and responsibilities.

The Levites were given as a gift to Aaron, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. They were to serve under Aaron, the head of the priestly house. This teaches us a fine lesson, and one much needed by Christians at the present moment. We all want to bear in mind that service, to be intelligent and acceptable, must be rendered in subjection to priestly authority and guidance.

"And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee."

This stamped its distinct character upon the entire range of Levite service. The whole tribe of workers were associated with and subject to the great high priest. All was under his immediate control and guidance. So must it be now, in reference to all GOD's workers. All Christian service must be rendered in fellowship with our great High Priest, and in holy subjection to His authority. It is of no value otherwise. There may be a great deal of work done, there may be a great deal of activity; but if CHRIST be not the immediate object before the heart, if His guidance and authority be not fully owned, the work must go for nothing.

But, on the other hand, the smallest act of service the meanest work done under the eye of CHRIST, done with direct reference to Him, has its value in GOD's estimation, and shall, most assuredly, receive its due reward. This is truly encouraging, and consolatory to the heart of every earnest worker. The Levites had to work under Aaron. Christians have to work under CHRIST. We are responsible to Him. It is very well and very beautiful to walk in fellowship with our dear fellow-workmen, and to be subject one to another, in the fear of the Lord. Nothing is further from our thoughts that to foster or countenance a spirit of haughty independence, or that temper of soul which would hinder our genial and hearty co-operation with our brethren in every good work.

All the Levites were "**joined unto Aaron,**" in their work, and therefore they were joined one to another. Hence, they had to work together. If a Levite had turned his back upon his brethren, he would have turned his back upon Aaron. We may imagine a Levite, taking offence at something or other in the conduct of his fellows, and saying to Himself, "I cannot get on with my brethren. I must walk alone. I can serve GOD, and work under Aaron; but I must keep aloof from my brethren inasmuch as I find it impossible to agree with them as to the mode of working." But we can easily see through the fallacy of all this. For a Levite to adopt such a line of action would have produced nothing but confusion. All were called to work together, how varied soever their

work might be.

Still, be it ever borne in mind, their work did vary and, moreover, each was called to work under Aaron. There was individual responsibility with the most harmonious corporate action. We certainly desire, in every possible way, to promote unity in action; but this must never be suffered to trench upon the domain of personal service, or to interfere with the direct reference of the individual workman to his Lord. The Church of GOD affords a very extensive platform to the Lord's workers. There is ample space thereon for all sorts of labourers. We must not attempt to reduce all to a dead level, or cramp the varied energies of CHRIST's servants by confining them to certain old ruts of our own formation. This will never do. We must, all of us diligently seek to combine the most cordial unanimity with the greatest possible variety in action. Both will be healthfully promoted by each and all remembering that we are called to serve together under CHRIST.

Here lies the grand secret. Together, under CHRIST! May we bear this in mind. It will help us to recognize and appreciate another's line of work though it may differ from our own; and, on the other hand, it will preserve us from an overweening sense of our own department of service, inasmuch as we shall see that we are, one and all, but co-workers in the one wide field; and that the great object before the Master's heart can only be attained by each worker pursuing his own special line, and pursuing it in happy fellowship with all.

There is a pernicious tendency in some minds to depreciate every line of work save their own. This must be carefully guarded against. If all were to pursue the same line, where were that lovely variety which characterizes the Lord's work and workmen in the world?

Nor is it merely a question of the line of work, but actually of the peculiar style of each workman.

You may find two evangelists, each marked by an intense desire for the salvation of souls, each preaching, substantially, the same truth; and yet there may be the greatest possible variety in the mode in which each one seeks to gain the self-same object. We should be prepared for this. Indeed we should fully expect it. And the same holds good in reference to every other branch of Christian service. We should strongly suspect the ground occupied by a Christian assembly if there were not ample space allowed for every branch and style of Christian service - for every line of work capable of being taken up in individual responsibility to the great Head of the priestly house. We ought to do nothing which we cannot do under CHRIST, and in fellowship with Him. And all that can be done in fellowship With CHRIST can surely be done in fellowship with those who are walking with Him.

Thus much as to the special manner in which the Levites are introduced in our chapter, in connection with Aaron and his sons.

To these latter we shall now turn for a few moments, and meditate on the rich provision made for them, in the goodness of GOD, as well as the solemn functions devolving upon them, in their priestly place.

"And the Lord spake unto Aaron, Behold, I also have given thee the charge of mine heave-offerings of all the hallowed things of the children of Israel; unto thee have I given them, by

reason of the anointing, and to thy sons, by an ordinance for ever. This shall be thine of the most holy things, reserved from the fire: every oblation of theirs, every meat-offering of theirs; and every sin-offering of theirs, and every trespass offering of theirs, which they shall render unto me, shall be most holy for thee and for thy sons. In the most holy place shalt thou eat it; every male shall eat it: it shall be holy unto thee" (Verses 8-10).

Here we have a type of the people of GOD looked at in another aspect. They are here presented, not as workers, but as worshippers; not as Levites, but as priests, all believers - all Christians - all the children of GOD, are priests.

There is, according to the teaching of the New Testament, no such thing as a priest upon earth, save in the sense in which all believers are priests. A special priestly caste - a certain class of men set apart as priests, is a thing not only unknown in Christianity, but most positively hostile to the spirit and principles thereof. We have already referred to this subject, and quoted the various passages of Scripture bearing upon it. We have a great High Priest who has passed into the heavens, for if He were on earth He should not be a priest (Compare Hebrews 4:14 and 8:4).

"Our Lord sprang Out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood." Hence, therefore, a sacrificing priest on the earth is a direct denial of the truth of Scripture, and a complete setting aside of the glorious fact on which Christianity is based, namely, accomplished redemption. If there is any need of a priest now, to offer sacrifice for sins, then, most assuredly, redemption is not an accomplished fact. But Scripture, in hundreds of places, declares that it is, and therefore we need no more offering for sin.

"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:11, 12).

So also, in Hebrews 10 we read, **"By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."** And again, **"Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin."**

This settles the great question as to priesthood and sacrifice for sin. Christians cannot be too clear or decided in reference to it. It lies at the very foundation of true Christianity, and demands the deep and serious attention of all who desire to walk in the clear light of a full salvation, and to occupy the true Christian position. There is a strong tendency towards Judaism - a vigorous effort to engraft Christian forms upon the old Jewish stem. This is nothing new; but, just now, the enemy seems peculiarly busy. We can perceive a great leaning towards Romanism, throughout the length and breadth of Christendom; and in nothing is the leaning more strikingly apparent than in the institutions of a special priestly order in the Church of GOD. We believe it to be a thoroughly antichristian institution. It is the denial of the common priesthood of all believers. If a certain set of men are ordained to occupy a place of peculiar nearness and sanctity, then where are the great mass of Christians to stand?

This is the question. It is precisely here that the great importance and gravity of this whole subject are made apparent.

Let not the reader suppose that we are contending for some peculiar theory of any particular class or sect of Christians. Nothing is further from our thoughts. It is because we are convinced that the very foundations of the Christian faith are involved in this question of priesthood that we urge its consideration upon all with whom we have to do.

We believe it will invariably be found that in proportion as Christians become clear and settled on the divine ground of accomplished redemption, they get further and further away from the Romanism and Judaism of an order of priests in the Church of GOD. And, on the other hand, where souls are not clear, not settled, not spiritual; where there is legality, carnality and worldliness, there you will find a hankering after a humanly appointed priesthood. Nor is it difficult to see the reason of this.

If a man is not himself in a fit state to draw nigh to GOD, it will be a relief to him to employ another to draw nigh for him. And, most certainly, no man is in a fit state to draw nigh to a holy GOD who does not know that his sins are forgiven - has not got a perfectly purged conscience - is in a dark, doubting, legal state of soul. In order to come boldly into the holiest of all, we must know what the Blood of CHRIST has done for us; we must know that we ourselves are made priests to GOD; and that, in virtue of the atoning death of CHRIST, we are brought so near to GOD that it is impossible for any order of men to come between.

- **"He hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us priests unto God and his Father"** (Revelation 1).

- **"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."** and again,

- **"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ"** (I Peter 2:5, 9).

- **"By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate, forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased"** (Hebrews 13:15, 16).

Here we have the two great branches of spiritual sacrifice which, as priests, we are privileged to offer, namely, praise to GOD, doing good to men. The very youngest, the most inexperienced, the most unlettered Christian is capable of understanding these things. Who is there in all the family of GOD - in all the priestly household of our divine High Priest, who cannot, with his heart, say, "The Lord be praised" And who cannot, with his hand, do good to His fellow? And this is priestly worship, and priestly service - the common worship and service of all true Christians. True, the measure of spiritual power may vary; but all the children of GOD are constituted priests, one as much as another.

Now in Numbers 18 we are presented with a very full statement of the provision made for Aaron and his house; and, in that provision, a type of the spiritual portion of the Christian priesthood. And surely we cannot read the record without seeing what a royal portion is ours.

"Every oblation of theirs, every meat offering of theirs, and every sin offering of theirs, and every trespass offering of theirs, which they shall render unto me, shall be most holy for

thee and for thy sons. In the Most holy place shalt thou eat it; every male shall eat it: it shall be holy unto thee."

It demands a very large measure of spiritual capacity to enter into the depth and meaning of this marvellous passage.

To eat the sin offering, or the trespass offering is, in figure, to make another's sin or trespass one's own. This is very holy work. It is not every one who can, in spirit, identify himself with the sin of his brother. To do so in fact, in the way of atonement, is, we need hardly say, wholly out of question. There was but one who could do this; and He - adored for ever be His name! - has done it perfectly.

But there is such a thing as making my brother's sin my own, and bearing it in spirit before GOD, as though it were my own.

This is shadowed forth by Aaron's sons eating the sin offering, in the most holy place. It was only the sons who did so. **"Every male shall eat it."** *

* As a general principle, the **"son"** presents the divine idea; the **"daughter,"** the human apprehension thereof: **"the male"** sets forth the thing as GOD gives it; the **"female"** as we realize and exhibit it.

It was the very highest order of priestly service. **"In the most holy place shalt thou eat it."**

We need to be very near to CHRIST in order to enter into the spiritual meaning and application of all this. It is a wonderfully blessed and holy exercise; and it can only be known in the immediate presence of GOD. How little we really know of this the heart can testify. Our tendency is, when a brother has sinned, to sit in judgment upon him; to take the place of a severe censor, to look upon his sin as a something with which we have nothing whatever to do. This is to fail sadly in our priestly functions. It is refusing to eat the sin offering in the most holy place.

It is a most precious fruit of grace to be able so to identify oneself with an erring brother as to make his sin one's own - to bear it in spirit before GOD. This truly is a very high order of priestly service, and demands a large measure of the spirit and mind of CHRIST. It is only the spiritual who really enter into this; and alas! how few of us are truly spiritual!

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1, 2).

May the Lord give us grace to fulfil this blessed **"law!"** How unlike it is to everything in us! How it rebukes our harshness and selfishness! Oh! to be more like CHRIST in this as in All beside!

But there was another order of priestly privilege, not so high as that which we have been considering.

"And this is thine: the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel: I have given them unto thee, and to thy sons, and to the daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: every one that is clean in thy house shall eat of it" (Verse 11).

The daughters of Aaron were not to eat of the sin offerings or the trespass offerings. They were provided for according to the utmost limit of their capacity; but there were certain functions which they could not discharge - certain privileges which lay beyond their range - certain responsibilities too weighty for them to sustain. It is far easier to have fellowship with another in the presentation of a thank offering than it is to make his sin our own. This matter demands a measure of priestly energy which finds its type in Aaron's "sons," not in his "daughters."

We must be prepared for those varied measures amongst the members of the priestly household. We are all blessed by GOD, on the same ground; we all stand in the same title; we are all in the same relationship; but our capabilities vary; and while we should all aim at the very highest standard of priestly service, and the very highest measure of priestly capacity, it is of no possible use to pretend to what we do not possess.

One thing, however, is clearly taught in verse 11 and that is, we must be "**clean**" in order to enjoy any priestly privilege, or eat of any priestly food - clean, through the precious Blood of CHRIST applied to our conscience - clean, through the application of the Word, by the Spirit, to our habits, associations, and ways. When thus clean, whatever be our capacity, we have the richest provision made for our souls, through the precious grace of GOD. Harken to the following Words: "**All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the Lord, them have I given thee. And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the Lord, shall be thine; every one who is clean in thy house shall eat of it**" (Verses 12, 13). *

* Let the reader consider what the moral effect must be of taking the above passage literally and applying it to a certain priestly class in the Church of GOD: Take it typically and spiritually, and you have a striking and beautiful figure of the spiritual food provided for all the members of the priestly family, which is, in one word CHRIST in all His preciousness and fullness.

Here, assuredly, we have a princely portion provided for those who are made priests unto GOD. They were to have the very best, and the very first of everything which the Lord's land produced. There was "**The wine which maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart**" (Psalm 104:15).

What a figure have we, in all this, of our portion in CHRIST! The olive, the grape, and the finest of the wheat were pressed and bruised, in order to feed and gladden the priests of GOD; and the blessed antitype of all these has, in infinite grace, been bruised and crushed in death, in order that by His flesh and blood, He might minister life, strength, and gladness to His household. He, the precious corn of wheat, fell into the ground and died, that we might live; and the juices of the living vine were pressed to fill that cup of salvation of which we drink, now, and shall drink for ever, in the presence of our GOD.

What, therefore, remains? What do we want, save an enlarged capacity to enjoy the fullness and

blessedness of our portion in a crucified, risen, and glorified Saviour? We may well say, "**We have all and abound.**" GOD has given us all that even He could give - the very best He had. He has given us His own portion. He has called us to sit down with Himself, in holy, happy fellowship, and feast upon the fatted calf. He has caused our ears to hear, and our hearts, in some small degree, to enter into these most marvellous words, "**let us eat and be merry.**"

How wonderful to think that nothing could satisfy the heart and mind of GOD but to gather His people round Himself and feed them with that in which He Himself delights! "**Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ**" (I John 1).

What more could even the love of GOD do for us than this? And for whom has He done it? For those who were dead in trespasses and sins - for aliens, enemies, guilty rebels - for dogs of the Gentiles - for those who were far from Him, having no hope, and without GOD in the world - for those who, had we our deserts, should lie now burning in the eternal flames of hell. Oh! what wondrous grace! What profound depths of sovereign mercy! And, we must add, what a divinely precious atoning sacrifice, to bring poor self-destroyed, guilty, hell-deserving sinners into such ineffable blessedness! - to pluck us as brands from everlasting burnings, and make us priests to GOD! - to take away all our "**filthy garments**" from us, and cleanse, clothe, and crown us, in His own presence, and to His own praise! May we praise Him! May our hearts and lives praise Him! May we know how to enjoy our priestly place and portion, and to wear our mitre well!

We can do nothing better than praise GOD - nothing higher than to present to Him, by JESUS CHRIST, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name. This shall be our everlasting employment in that bright and blessed world to which we are hastening, and where we shall soon be, to dwell for ever with Him who has loved us and given Himself for us - our own blessed Saviour GOD - to go no more out for evermore.

*In verses 14-19 of our chapter we have instruction as to "**the firstborn of man and beast.**"*

We may remark that man is placed on a level with the unclean beast. Both had to be redeemed. The unclean beast was unfit for GOD; and so was man, unless redeemed by blood. The clean animal was not to be redeemed. It was fit for GOD's use, and was given to be the food of the entire priestly household - sons and daughters alike. In this we have a type of CHRIST in whom GOD can find His perfect delight the full joy of His heart - the only object, throughout the wide universe, in which He could find perfect rest and satisfaction. And - wondrous thought - He has given Him to us, His priestly household, to be our food, our light, our joy, our all in all for ever.
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* For further remarks on the subject presented to Numbers 18: 14-19, the reader is referred to "*Notes on Exodus,*" chapter 13 we are anxious to avoid, as much as possible any repetition of what has been gone into in previous volume.

"JESUS, of thee we ne'er would tire:
The new and living food
Can satisfy our heart's desire,
And life is in thy blood."

The reader will notice, in this chapter, as elsewhere, that every fresh subject is introduced by the words, "**And the Lord spake unto Moses,**" or "**unto Aaron.**"

Thus, from verses 20-32, we are taught that the priests and Levites - GOD's worshippers and workers, were to have no inheritance among the children of Israel, but were to be absolutely shut up to GOD Himself, for the supply of all their need. Most blessed position. Nothing can be more lovely than the picture here presented. The children of Israel were to bring their offerings, and lay them down at the feet of the Lord, and He, in His infinite grace, commanded His workers to pick up these precious offerings - the fruit of His people's devotedness - and feed upon them, in His own blessed presence, with thankful hearts. Thus the circle of blessing went round. GOD ministered to all the wants of His people; His people were privileged to have the rich fruits of His bounty with the priests and Levites; and these latter were permitted to taste the rare and exquisite pleasure of giving back to GOD of that which had flown from Him to them.

All this is divine. It is a striking figure of that which we should look for in the Church of GOD now. As we have already remarked, GOD's people are presented, in this book, under three distinct phases, namely, as warriors, workers, and worshippers; and in all three they are viewed as in the attitude of the most absolute dependence upon the living GOD. In our warfare, in our work, and in our worship, we are shut up to GOD. Precious fact. "**All our springs are in Him.**" What more do we want? Shall we turn to man or to this world for relief or resource? GOD forbid! Nay, rather let it be our one grand object to prove, in our entire history, in every phase of our character, and in every department of our work, that GOD is enough for our hearts.

It is truly deplorable. to find GOD's people, and CHRIST's servants, looking to the world for support, and trembling at the thought of that support being withheld. Only let us try to imagine the Church of GOD, in the days of Paul, relying upon the Roman government for the support of its bishops, teachers, and evangelists. Ah! no, dear reader; the Church looked to its divine Head in the heavens, and to the divine Spirit upon earth, for all its need. Why should it be otherwise now? The world is the world still; and the Church is not of the world, and should not look for the world's gold and silver. GOD will take care of His people and of His servants, if they will only trust Him. We may depend upon it, GOD's gift is far better for the Church than the government gift - no comparison in the estimation of a spiritual mind.

May all the saints of GOD, and all the servants of CHRIST, in every place, apply their hearts, earnestly, to the consideration of these things! And may we have grace to confess, practically, in the face of a godless, Christless, infidel world, that the living GOD is amply sufficient for our every need, not only while passing through the narrow archway of time, but also for the boundless ocean of eternity. GOD grant it for CHRIST's sake!

~ end of chapter 17, 18 ~

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