

THE STUDY OF THE TYPES

PRIESTS AND LEVITES - A Type of the Church

BY

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CHAPTER 17

The Majesty in the Heavens

"Our God is a consuming fire"

WE have often dwelt with thankfulness on the wonderful contrast in Hebrews 12, "**Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest**" (vers. 18-21); . . . **but ye are come unto Mount Sion, . . . and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant**" (vers. 22-24). Our eyes are directed first to the terrors of dark Sinai, and then to the full sunshine of grace, the glories of present and future privilege.

But the passage does not close with these contrasted pictures. They are used to emphasise the solemn warning which immediately follows. If they escaped not who rebelled, then much more we shall not. The pronouns are emphatic. Although we do not need to fear "a palpable and kindled fire", "**our God is a consuming fire.**"

These words are quoted from Deuteronomy 4, the very chapter which tells of the burning mountain. He is still the same. We delight to quote the words in the next chapter, "**the Same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever**"; but do we remember that they are true of the holiness of GOD as much as of the grace of our Lord JESUS CHRIST? The holiness of GOD is not less because grace is reigning.

Men have tried to teach that the GOD of the Old Testament is a different Being from the GOD of the New Testament; but we know that it is not so. If, therefore, we would understand His character, we must study the two; and must remember that the incidents related in the Old Testament Scriptures form part of "**the oracles of God,**" because by them GOD revealed Himself.

Too often have we forgotten the reverence and godly fear which should characterise every approach into His presence.

There are seven instances of sudden judgment falling upon men in connection with the Tabernacle or the Temple, with its worship or its holy vessels; and when we study these together, we have a solemn picture of the majesty of GOD and the awfulness of His presence. The place on which we stand is holy ground whenever we draw near to Him, and we may learn many lessons from these incidents.

The seven are as follows:

1. Nadab and Abihu (two sons of Aaron) offer strange fire (Leviticus 10).
2. Korah (a Levite) and Dathan and Abiram (sons of Reuben), and "**two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown,**" offer incense (Numbers 16).
3. The Philistines carry away the Ark (I Samuel 5).
4. The men of Bethshemesh look into the Ark (I Samuel 6:19, 20).
5. Uzzah, the son of Abinadab (probably a Levite), takes hold of the Ark (II Samuel 6:1-11; I Chronicles 13:1-14).
6. Uzziah (king of Judah) offers incense (II Chronicles 26:16-23).
7. Belshazzar (king of Babylon) uses the candlestick and other vessels from the temple at his feast (Daniel 5).

Three of these have to do with the offering of incense, three have to do with the Ark, and one with the candlestick.

The Philistines are smitten with pestilence and destruction; Uzziah with leprosy, leading to death; and in all the other cases death falls in judgment upon those who recklessly and presumptuously put forth their hands to these holy things.

1. Nadab and Abihu were probably the very first to die in the wilderness. "**There was not one feeble person**" among the tribes of the children of Israel when they left Egypt (Psalm 105:37). Strong and healthy they started, and at the first numbering soon after their journey began, the total was 603,550 (Exodus 38:26; Numbers 1:46); exactly the same as at the numbering of the people on the first day of the second month of the second year.

The Levites were not included in either of these numberings, and the figures prove that no one had died in all the other tribes of Israel. Nadab and Abihu were the first; and it was their death that had defiled their cousins Mishael and Elzaphan, who carried their dead bodies out of the Tabernacle (Leviticus 10:4, 5), and were therefore debarred from keeping the passover (Numbers 9:6, 7). See *Blunt's Coincidences*.

Nadab and Abihu were the sons of Aaron, and, next to Moses and Aaron, had been the most highly privileged of all the redeemed people. They were singled out to accompany Moses and their father, when with seventy of the elders of Israel they were called to "**come up unto the Lord**" (Exodus 24:1, 9-11). "**Nadab and Abihu . . . saw the God of Israel; and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of Heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel He laid not His hand; also they saw God and did eat and drink.**" And yet, a few months after, they attempted to do what was forbidden, and they died before the Lord.

In the eighth and ninth chapters of Leviticus we have an account of the consecration of Aaron and his sons, and the commencement of their priesthood. A wonderful eight days' experience had been theirs - a week of consecration, a day of ministry, and then sudden death!

The Tabernacle itself had only just been set up. In the chapter which describes how, on the first New Year's Day after leaving Egypt the work was completed, the words are repeated seven times, "**as the Lord commanded Moses.**" It was made according to the pattern; and when all was finished, the "**cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle**" (Exodus 40:34).

But there must be just as close adherence to the commands of the Lord in the setting apart of those who are to serve in the Tabernacle as in the meeting-place itself; and so we find the same words, "**as the Lord commanded Moses,**" repeated again and again in Leviticus 8 and 9. And again GOD signifies His approval by a visible sign, "**the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people,**" and fire fell upon the altar and consumed the offerings (Leviticus 9:23, 24).

Nadab and Abihu, with their two brothers, were brought nigh with Aaron, they were clothed in priestly raiment and anointed as he had been. They remained for seven days at the door of the Tabernacle, and on the eighth day helped him to offer for the first time the offerings that are described in the opening chapters of Leviticus - a sin-offering and a burnt-offering for Aaron and his sons; and sin-offering, burnt-offering, peace offerings, and meat-offering for the people.

They stood by and shared in the blessing that was pronounced upon the people by Moses and Aaron, they witnessed the fire fall on the altar. They, too, must have been filled with awe at the sight. And then - how quickly the scene changes!

We do not know exactly what their sin was; but moved perhaps by a false zeal, excited, it may be, by strong drink (Leviticus 10. 9), they did something that had been expressly forbidden.

They offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not.

It may be that they not only lit the fire themselves instead of taking it from the altar, but mixed a strange incense of their own. This is forbidden in Exodus 30. 9, 10.

- Had they become too familiar with their sacred privileges?
- Did they think to improve on GOD's plan?
- Did they think that it did not matter what they did, as long as they were in earnest?

We cannot tell; but surely we may learn the solemn lesson.

We live in a day of grace and not of law, and therefore sudden death does not fall on those who attempt to approach other than in His own appointed way; but the GOD we worship is the same who dwelt between the cherubim.

Those who have had the highest privileges are probably in the greatest danger of transgressing after the manner of Nadab and Abihu; and who can tell what blessings have been lost because of such things!

2. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16).

The next miraculous display of GOD's majesty in connection with the Tabernacle Service is shown in the terrible judgment that fell upon Korah and his company.

"The Kohathites upon their shoulders bear
The holy vessels covered with all care."

Korah was not satisfied with this the service allotted to his family, but sought "**the priesthood also**." He wished to offer incense, and this belonged only to the priests. He was joined in his rebellion by two sons of Reuben, the tribe whose tents were pitched near those of the Kohathites; and "**two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown**" (ver. 2).

When Moses called upon GOD to show forth His power, Dathan and Abiram, refusing to stand at the door of the Tabernacle, remained outside their own tents; and there the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their families.

Korah and the rest of his companions perished as Nadab and Abihu had done, by a fire from the Lord. And this was not all. The people of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron; and in the plague that followed, 14,700 people died. The rebellion started with one man; but nearly 15,000 were involved in the judgment that followed - affording us another solemn lesson as to the majesty of GOD, and the solemnity of approach into His presence.

The next three events on the list have to do with the history of the Ark, and have already been noticed (pp. 67-69).

3. Judgment fell on the Philistines who had carried the Ark into their own country;

4. Upon the men of Bethshemesh who looked into the Ark, and (5) upon Uzzah who touched it.

It is remarkable that the Ark was three days in the temple of Dagon (I Samuel 5:2-4).

On two successive "morrrows" we read that the idol fell before it, and on the second occasion was broken in pieces. It is not likely that the Philistines allowed it to remain longer in the temple, and we know how they were obliged to send it back at last.

We cannot doubt that as Jonah's "**three days and three nights in the whale's belly**" were a type of the "**three days and three nights spent by the Lord Himself in the heart of the earth**" (Matthew 12:40), so also were the three days spent by the Ark in the house of the fish-god.

5. The Ark had been in the home of Abinadab for twenty years; and it is sad indeed that at last that home should be plunged into sorrow on account of Uzzah's presumption. Had the Ark by long familiarity lost its sacredness to him?

6. The leprosy of Uzziah.

This again has to do with the offering of incense. Uzziah the king, like Korah the Levite, wished to offer incense. He was of the tribe of Judah, **"of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood,"** and **"no man gave attendance at the altar."**

Uzziah sought for increased honour; but the high priest withstood him, and told him **"neither shall it be for thine honour from the Lord God."** **"The leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord from beside the incense altar."** **"They thrust him out from thence";** but it was not necessary for them to do so, for, covered with shame, **"himself hasted also to go out."** He remained a leper to the day of his death.

We learn therefore from these three solemn scenes, that it is no light thing to approach into the presence of GOD, for this was typified by the offering of incense; and GOD will not permit men presumptuously to draw near in any way but that which He has ordained.

The other three which have to do with the Ark, teach us something concerning the power that dwells in the Lord Himself, and the reverence with which He should be treated. The lesson is concerning the sacredness of His Person.

7. The handwriting on the wall.

The last on our list is a scene in Babylon, and it is closely associated with the candlestick. Belshazzar sought to decorate his table with the vessels which had been taken from the Temple. The sacred candlestick stood against the wall, and shed its light on the scene of revelry.

And **"in the same hour came forth fingers of a Man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick"** the sentence of judgment. In Daniel's indictment of Belshazzar, he mentions as a proof of his having lifted up himself against the Lord of Heaven that he had made use of these sacred vessels. That which is consecrated to the Lord must not be used for the service of the world.

In view of these solemn pictures, with what joy do we turn to the words of Hebrews 7:24, 25, **"This Man . . . hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them"** - coming unto GOD as worshippers, for the word is translated in chap. 10:22, **"draw near."**

The Majesty in the heavens is the same as in the days of old; but we have **"such an High Priest"** who is set on the right hand of the throne.

But there is another series of brighter pictures which we may place side by side with these seven.

1. Aaron the high priest, in full acceptance, offers on the day of atonement in the holiest of all the right kind of incense and the right kind of fire (Leviticus 16:12, 13). As though to mark the contrast, the chapter opens with a mention of the death of Nadab and Abihu.

2. In Luke 1:8-11, we have an example of a priest offering incense. **"According to the custom**

of the priest's office, his (Zacharias) lot was to burn incense"; and while doing so, **"there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the altar of incense"** - not in order to smite with judgment, but to give a promise of blessing. Though Korah might not offer, GOD had His chosen priests who were called to the service.

3. In Joshua 6 we read how the Ark, borne round Jericho on the shoulders of the priests, brings victory to the people of the Lord instead of pestilence and death, as in the case of the Philistines. The walls fall at His presence, as Dagon fell afterwards, but the Ark brought no death among those who carried it.

4. When the people passed over Jordan, the Ark was in the midst of the river, covered with the vail of the Tabernacle, the badgers' skins, and the cloth of blue. There was no looking into it. And that which afterwards brought death to the men of Bethshemesh, brought safety to Israel.

5. The house of Obed-edom was blessed by the presence of the Ark; whereas the house of Abinadab had been devastated. We can picture with what reverence and godly fear it was treated; it was the savour of life unto life in one home, and death unto death in the other.

6. We read in Isaiah 6 that it was **"in the year that King Uzziah died"** that the wonderful vision was given to Isaiah.

The reference was evidently intended, as in the case of Leviticus 16:1, to emphasise the contrast. Isaiah saw **"the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the Temple."** He saw the seraphim, he heard their voices; and as he remembered the judgment that had fallen on Uzziah, he felt that he too was a leper before GOD. **"I am a man of unclean lips,"** he cried, comparing himself to the leper who put a covering upon his lip and cried, **"Unclean, unclean"** (Leviticus 13:45). But in the very place where Uzziah was struck with leprosy, Isaiah received cleansing by the **"live coal . . . from off the altar."**

And so the two went forth - The king to living death, and lonely pain; The prophet to the errands of His Lord.

7. The call of the child Samuel is associated with the candlestick of the Tabernacle; for we are told, the voice of the Lord came to him **"ere the lamp went out."** What a different scene from that depicted in Daniel! The candlestick was in its right place, serving its right purpose; and instead of a handwriting of judgment, came a call to GOD's young servant.

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