

Parashah Eighty-Two

Leviticus 9:1–11:47; 1Kings 8:54–61; Mark 7:9–23

notes by Tim Hegg

In these three chapters we have three clear divisions: chapter nine relates the first sacrifices for the congregation of Israel by the hand of Aaron and his sons, and the appearance of God’s glory in the Mishkan (Tabernacle), including the consuming fire that burned up the offering on the altar. Chapter 10 records the sin of Aaron’s sons, Nadav and Avihu and the death sentence that God administered on the spot. Finally, chapter 11 outlines the prohibited species that form the definitions for what characterizes kosher food.

One may ask if the arrangement of these chapters has any coherence or theme-related unity. It would seem that chapter nine is related to ten by the theme of sacrifice: the joyous occasion of the first sacrifices in the new Mishkan are connected to the death of Aaron’s sons as a clear reminder that the sacrifices were holy—*sanctum* to the Lord. Violation of the laws and regulations of the sacrifices were thus a direct disregard for God and His commandments with the result that His holiness is compromised. This could not be allowed. God was not seeking innovation of the priests, but obedience. He had instructed them regarding the divine service—their duty was to carry out His commands.

Some have thought that since chapter 10 ends with a discussion of why the surviving sons of Aaron did not eat their priestly portion of the sin offering, there is a thematic bridge to the discussion of appropriate food, but this “bridge” seems contrived. The sages saw a stronger connection—they argued that maintaining a kosher diet was connected with worship, and since the destruction of the Temple, a substitute for the obligation of sacrifices.

As followers of Yeshua, we believe and know that there is no substitute for sacrifices, and in fact, the events of chapter 10 (the death of Nadav and Avihu) should warn us away from innovation when it comes to God’s requirements. But then why does Moses arrange the chapters this way? Perhaps we are being asked to understand sacrifices in a wider perspective. Sacrifices can be a merely external ritual, in which case they are without effect, as Isaiah taught the people of his day (Isaiah 1). Perhaps the link to a kosher diet is that the person who intends to bring a true offering to God must have committed himself to a life of holiness, not just a religious act. Nothing defines the continuity of life as much as our food, and anyone who keeps kosher knows that to commit oneself to God’s principles in food affects one’s entire life. Perhaps the connection, then, with chapter 11 is to teach us that our corporate religious expressions should not be separated from our individual, daily lives. Our corporate worship is seen to be nothing more than a charade if our daily living does not match it. Sacrifices are to be an outward display of one’s inner motivations to honor God in all of life, not just in religious ritual. To put it simply, the inner connection of this entire *parashah* is a call to make the meaning of our corporate worship an all inclusive one, something that applies to one’s entire being and life, not to just a day, a time or an event.

The primary issue of chapter nine (as emphasized by the repeated motif) is the appearance of God’s glory to the people (cf. vv. 5, 6, 23, 24) in connection with the sacrifices and the service of Aaron and his sons as priests. God’s purpose in redeeming Israel, even in choosing her in the first place, was that He might dwell in her midst. Covenant fellowship, this is the goal—that God and man might once again experience a genuine friendship as with Adam in *gan Eden*. (Note that the events of chapter nine occur “on the eighth day,” a motif that foreshadows the final reign of God in the world to come.) God wants to enjoy the beauty of His creation, and to receive His proper praise from it. This requires that His creation be holy, for He cannot dwell in the presence of sin. Thus, to dwell in the midst of mankind, indeed, to dwell in companionship with any one of us, it was

necessary for us to be made clean—to be righteous by God’s standards, to have our sins covered by the blood of an innocent sacrifice. Nothing is more fundamental to the over arching theology of the Tanach than this axiom: God desires to dwell with His people, and thus He has made a way for them to be holy. The sacrifices are seen, then, not first and foremost as a remedy for man’s plight, but as the necessary means by which God’s purpose to dwell with man is realized. Sacrifice, at its primary level, is Godward.

Such expiation of sin could be accomplished by mediatorial sacrifice alone, and then only according to God’s own prescriptions. The work of Aaron and his sons could not, in and of itself, effect such a cleansing. Is it not striking that until a priest was clean himself, he could not effect atonement for anyone else? Yet how could he become clean? If he, being unclean, could make himself clean, then why couldn’t any Israelite do this for himself? If an unclean priest could perform a ritual and by this ritual become clean, then it seems logical that anyone could follow suit and make himself clean! But this is the point: God intended that we learn a primary lesson from the priestly ritual: one can only be made clean through the mediation of God’s appointed priest. This is Messianic.

Consider this: how could an unclean priest make himself clean though sacrifice? As someone unclean, would he not render the sacrifice also unclean? How does atonement get its beginning? Yet in the symbolic metaphor of the Mishkan, the priest is able to “start the whole process” by which others could be made clean. This is a foreshadowing of the Messiah who, though a man, was never unclean and could therefore offer a true sacrifice for sinners since He did not need first to offer one for Himself. Essential to the whole ritual of the priestly service was this truth: one cannot make himself clean—only God’s appointed priest can effect atonement for the sinner. Thus, when it is stated that Yeshua would “bring us to God” (1Peter 3:18), the meaning of the word *qorban* (קָרְבָּן) is apparent. *Qorban* describes those elements set aside for sacrifice, and the hifil of the verb קָרַב (*qarav*) is used regularly of offering a sacrifice. Yet the root meaning of this verb is “to draw close.” Sacrifice, as envisioned in the Tanach, had as its primary purpose the drawing together of man and God. In other words, sacrifice has as its ultimate purpose the restoration of fellowship between God and His creation.

Many may simply accept the theological axiom that God dwells with man. One may simply accept this as an intellectual truism. But if this is as far as it goes, one has lost the heart of the matter. Because the dwelling of God with man is not merely a philosophical reality—some kind of theological words on a page. God actually does dwell with us. We are simply too often numbed by our self-serving, self-centered existence to recognize His presence. If, however, we lift our eyes from our self-absorbed existence, and contemplate the reality of God’s dwelling with us, we are overwhelmed by His greatness. For if the very purpose of the sacrifices was to teach us that God and man draw close (קָרַב), then most assuredly the zenith of all sacrifices, that is, the selfless sacrifice of our own Messiah Yeshua, has forever drawn us together with the Almighty.

This helps to explain the severe actions taken by God against Nadav and Avihu, Aaron’s sons. They spoiled the picture that God had given regarding the unique place of the high priest, the foreshadowing of Yeshua. Note what they did: (1) they took coals (presumably from the altar of sacrifice which had been ignited by God Himself, so Targum PJ understands it as well as Ibn Ezra, though Milgrom [*Leviticus, Anchor Bible*] thinks they took coals from some unauthorized source) and put incense upon them. This was wrong. The coals should have been taken from the altar of incense, but the text might indicate that Nadav and Avihu were outside of the Mishkan. For all of the activities of chapter nine take place at the brazen altar of sacrifice, and chapter ten appears to continue without any sense that the venue has moved into the holy place. (2) Only the high priest was to put incense on the coals. Nadav and Avihu appear to have usurped the duties of Aaron. In

other words, they took to themselves something that had been specifically reserved for the High Priest. While they were of the High Priestly family, the duties for the High Priest were to be carried out by an individual. There was not to be more than one concurrent High Priest. Again, this is Messianic. (3) Milgrom has shown that the language may indicate that Aaron's sons had moved outside of the Mishkan and court, attempting to burn incense in an unholy place. He shows the linguistic correspondence between our text and Numbers 16, the death of Korah, who stood "at the door of the tent of meeting." Likewise, the fire that consumed them "came forth" (exited) from the Tent, indicating they were outside of it. Furthermore, Moses commands Mishael and Elzaphan to "come forth" (קָרְבוּ) rather than "go in" (בָּאוּ), meaning that they were most likely in the Tent and were summoned to come out in order to carry the corpses outside of the camp. All of this may mean that Nadav and Avihu were attempting to offer incense to the Lord in an unholy place, i.e., outside of the Mishkan.

The text notes that Nadav and Avihu offered "strange fire" (אֵשׁ זָרָה, *'eish zarah*). The word *zarah* means "illicit," "prohibited," but can also mean a "non-Israelite," or even a "non-priest" in certain contexts. What might this indicate about the fire offered by Aaron's sons? Rashi, following Midrash Rabbah (which quotes R. Ishmael), teaches that the sons of Aaron were intoxicated. This is derived from the fact that following their death, the text specifically mentions that priests are not to be intoxicated while performing their service (10:8-9). The Sifra (early rabbinic commentary on Leviticus) suggests that Nadav and Avihu took incense into the Most Holy place. Other Sages, including Ramban, simply interpret their sin as burning incense on the inner altar when they had not yet been commanded to do so. The word "foreign" could possibly envision a use of pagan worship, or pagan priestly practices. Some have even suggested fertility rituals as the sin of Aaron's sons. When all the options are considered, the best we can say is that Aaron's sons performed priestly acts which were not commanded by God, and which, in some measure, went contrary to the service He had prescribed. They invented their own way of worship and thought it would be acceptable to God.

Where did they come up with these ideas? God had not commanded such a thing. Indeed, He had given clear and concise instructions and had warned Moses and Aaron that they should be followed carefully "lest you die." But consider the possible thinking of Nadav and Avihu—the fire had come out from the presence of the Lord, and had consumed the sacrifice. This was divine fire and everyone had witnessed it. Therefore, the coals which resulted were holier than usual—they were endowed with the divine energy itself. Who would not have thought that these coals were special, different, something to be utilized while the moment existed? And here is the lesson for us: God desires to be worshipped as He has prescribed, not by our creative innovations. And a second lesson is important to learn as well: sometimes our own inventive "worship" contradicts what God has given, and is therefore not only rejected but may incur His wrath. We must conclude that the reason God is so strict with regard to the regulations of the Mishkan and sacrifice is because these rituals were given as a foreshadowing of His own Son, Yeshua, and the work He would accomplish in securing the salvation of His people. To change these foreshadowing rituals was to alter the revelation and skew it, rendering it ineffective. In the end, the *sanctum* of the Mishkan and its service was to reveal Messiah. It therefore could not be changed.

Here we see a stark contrast: God desires to dwell among His people—that is His ultimate purpose in the grand scope of salvation. Yet He is also a "consuming fire," as the people of Israel knew from the events of Sinai (cf. Ex 24:17), and witnessed again in the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. It may seem, then, that this whole enterprise of having a friendship with God is risky business. Who really wants a friend Who is a "consuming fire?" Herein lies the grand truth of the Gospel: the wrath of God has been consumed upon the altar of Golgatha. The sacrifice was perfectly made,

without any defect or improper procedures—the fire went forth from the Almighty and consumed our Substitute. As such, we need never fear that we will be victims of His wrath. The price for our sin was paid, and we are given the gift of eternal, unchanging, friendship with God.

At the end of the tenth chapter a dispute between Moses and Aaron (and Aaron's remaining sons, Elazar and Ithamar) is recorded. The sin-offering had been burned before Aaron's sons ate the priestly portion and Moses was therefore distraught that yet another breach of the instructions given to the priests had occurred. Aaron makes an explanation (10:19): "Such things befell me" (וַתִּקְרַא אֹתוֹ בְּאֵלֶיךָ), and then gives a rhetorical question: "would it have been good in the eyes of HaShem?" to which the rhetorical answer is implied: "certainly not!" The logic persuades Moses: "he heard" (from HaShem?) and approved.

A number of explanations have been given by the Sages: 1) that the priests were in mourning, and therefore forbidden to eat the sacred parts of the sacrifice (based upon Deuteronomy 26:14), or 2) that they had contracted ritual impurity because of the corpses of Nadav and Avihu, and therefore could not eat. Yet they were forbidden to mourn the deaths of Nadav and Avihu (10:6ff), and the text indicates that by removing the corpses, (those who carried them did so by touching only the tunics, a note added apparently to suggest that somehow impurity was not transmitted), the impurity was dealt with.

I offer a possible explanation: that the remaining sons of Aaron (and perhaps Aaron himself) did, in fact, mourn the death of their brothers in disobedience to the Divine injunction not to mourn, perhaps because they were unable to overcome their own emotional weakness in the situation. As such, they were guilty and did not know how to proceed, having disobeyed. There is no clear remedy for their actions, and thus they took extra precautions in light of the severe penalty administered to their brothers when they disobeyed. They erred on the side of caution and did not eat the sacred portions. This explanation satisfied Moses, and perhaps was approved by God when Moses inquired. If this explanation has warrant, then the fact that they did not eat the priestly sacred portions was seen as their attempt to do what was right in the face of these extraordinary events. If so, their motivations for maintaining the holiness of the sacrifice were viewed as worthy.

Additionally, if this explanation fits, then the immediate description of what may and may not be eaten in general (chapter eleven) continues the theme of life lived out in the recognition of God's prescriptions for those who are set apart to God, even in everyday life. The worship of the Holy (a term used to describe the priestly activity within the Mishkan) must be modeled by all. Put simply, a kosher diet is nothing more or less than the expression of a "kosher" life. The restrictions of common food to that which is "clean" and "unclean" marks those who have already been "set apart" or declared holy to the Lord—it does not make one "holy." Obedience to God is not a means of righteousness, but the mark or characteristic of those who have been sanctified or set apart unto the Holy One.

All of this brings us to the primary teaching of our portion: God expects that His people live their lives as constantly "before the Lord." As those set apart to Him, we are to display in all of our actions that we belong to Him, and that His ways have become our manner of living. Nothing is mundane or common—all is sacred because He has taken up His dwelling with us. He has made us a dwelling place fit for His presence, and we therefore recognize every part of our lives to be an act of worship. There is no "secular" for us, as though there were some part of our existence that is outside of our need to be holy. Our homes, our work, our entertainment—all of it must be offered to Him as worship.

This, of course, is revolutionary if we are willing to receive it. Such a perspective gives to each and every part of our daily living a sacred value. We find a new motivation for how we work, how we treat each other, and how we approach all of our activities. It gives to us a proper motivation for

every decision. It was likewise this perspective that motivated the Sages to find a proper *halachah* for every detail of life. It is this perspective that helps define loving God with all of one's heart, soul, and might. Surely Paul had this in mind when he wrote: "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1Corinthians 10:31).

Chapter 11 details the matter of what is kosher meat, and what is not. The text proceeds along various classes of animals: those that walk upon the land (quadrupeds), fish that live in the water, birds that fly, flying insects, and swarming animals that live upon the ground.

Quadrupeds – of all four-legged animals, only those that have a split hoof *and* chew cud are acceptable for food. The sacrificial animals (cattle, sheep, goats) are not listed (cf. Deut 14:4–5) because these are taken for granted as permissible. Any quadruped that has one of the characteristics but not the other is prohibited and is classed as *טָמֵא*, *tamei*'. *Tamei*' is a class of unclean things whose uncleanness can never be reversed. In other words, that which is *tamei*' is always *tamei*'. No ritual of purification can render it *טָהוֹר*, *tahor*, "clean." The examples given of those animals that have one but not both of the characteristics are done so on the basis of observation, not dissection. In other words, the rock badger (*הַשֶּׁפַּח*, *hashaphan*) chews by a sideward motion of the jaw, like ruminants, even though it does not have multiple stomachs. The same is true of the hare that regurgitates its food and eats it again, but does not have multiple stomachs. They bring their food back up for regurgitation, but they do not have divided hooves, and are therefore prohibited. The pig is particularly singled out (it alone having a divided hoof of the forbidden quadrupeds listed), most likely because it was a favorite animal for pagan, sacrificial rituals (as Milgrom has shown).

Fish—The criteria for fish are two: they must have fins and scales. The ancient rabbis rule that even those fish that lose their scales in maturation are permitted (*Sifra*, Shemini §3.11). *M.Nid.6:9* states that "all fish that have scales also have fins," and thus one need only look for scales to determine if the fish is permissible (t.*Chul.* 3:9). The rabbis even suggest that the criterion of fins is superfluous (b.*Nid.* 51b). Later rabbinic *halachah* further defined this, however, ruling that scales must be easily removed in order to qualify.

Interestingly, the class of water animals that are forbidden are called *שֶׁקֶץ*, *sheqetz*, "abominable," and one is to "abominate" these (v. 11), yet the text never indicates that touching them makes one unclean. In other words, the carcass of the water animal does not convey impurity. Later in our text (vv. 36ff), it is clear that water is the prime conveyer of impurity. Yet the water in a spring or cistern remains pure: only water taken from the spring or cistern conveys impurity. This explains why the unclean water animal does not convey impurity while in its natural habitat. If it did, all water would become impure and unusable.

It should be noted that no species of fish are named, in contrast to the other sections that enumerate various kinds of animals. The reality is that ancient Israel has little acquaintance with marine life, "not because they had no contact with the sea, but, to the contrary, the sea with which they had contact was virtually devoid of fish" (Milgrom, pp. 660-61). In modern times, the opening of the Suez Canal has changed the ecological system and introduced fish which, in ancient times, were found only in the Aegean Sea and beyond. The fishing industry noted in the Apostolic Scriptures is in fresh water, not that of the Mediterranean (Matt 4:18, 21; Mk 1:16; Lk 5:1-10). Imported fish in the time of the Second Temple supported the fish markets of Jerusalem (cf. Neh 13:16).

Birds—The classification of birds that are clean and therefore edible is given by an extended list, 20 in all. The Karaites ruled that because no examples are given of what birds may be eaten, only those prescribed for sacrifice were allowed, i.e., pigeons and turtledoves. However, the rabbis responded that, as in the case of quadrupeds, where some that are not fit for sacrifice are still allowed for eating (Deut 14:5), so it is with birds. There are those fit for the table that are not allowed for sacrifices. The Sages noted the common denominator for all the unclean birds listed in

our text: they are דורש, *doresh*, that is, they “tread or attack with the claws” (m.*Chul.* 3:6). This general description was further defined in the rabbinic rulings, but the general consensus was that all forbidden birds are predatory carnivores (cf. also *Letter of Aristeas* 146). Modern scholars have suggested a two-fold criteria for unclean birds: they are either raptors (those who consume live prey) or those who eat carrion (dead animals). The last two listed, the hoopoe and bat, while being neither of these, were detested because of their dirty habits and inedibility.

Flying Insects—Of all the flying insects, only those that “leap” and have jointed legs are edible. All others are forbidden. The rabbi's criteria were: “four legs, four wings that cover the body, and knees” (m.*Chul* 3:7). Fried locust was a common meal of the bedouins, and still is today. We are reminded that John the Immerser ate “locusts and wild honey” (Matt 3:4; Mk 1:6).

Swarming animals that live on the ground—All such animals and crawling creatures, are forbidden. None are clean and therefore none are edible. Moreover, the swarming animals upon the ground convey impurity in most instances. A rodent found in grain stored for planting does not convey impurity to the grain. But if the grain has come in contact with water (and therefore it is in a state ready to sprout), contact with one of the swarming animals does convey impurity, and the seed would have to be discarded. But if the carcass of one of the swarming things comes in contact with an object, it conveys irreversible impurity. The object must be destroyed. Obviously, this class of animals was one which could easily find its way into the kitchen, and thus the place where food was prepared was to be kept especially clean and protected from such swarming animals, particularly rodents, lizards, and the like.

While surely there were matters of hygiene and nutrition that obtained through the observance of these kosher laws, the primary reason given is found at the end of our text: “For I am Adonai who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy” (v. 45). The dietary laws given to Israel were so given in order to sanctify her from the pagan nations, and to mark her out as God’s own possession. Throughout history, the kosher food laws have been extremely instrumental in maintaining the sense of community among the Jewish people. And why not? Eating together is an essential covenant privilege.