

Numbers

For our admonition. I Corinthians 10:11

29 November 2023

Lesson: 12

Numbers 18:25-19:22

The Failure of Israel in the Wilderness

Once again, the main outline is from the Open Bible, slightly edited.

Role of the Priests

Levitical tithing instructions (18:25-32)

The tithe was the first ten percent of the produce of the field and flock. However, the Levites had no fields or flocks. Instead, God gave them the tithe of the people. This was their wages.

The Levites were then to offer their tithe of the tithe given them. Note the last phrase of (18:27). God will consider it *“as though it were the corn of the threshingfloor, and as the fulness of the winepress.”* Though they had not grown these crops, it was as if they had.

Their tithe of the tithe was a heave offering given to Aaron and the priests (18:28). Their tithe was to be of the best of the tithes they receive (18:29).

God approved of the Levites and their families eating of the tithes received. As long as they tithed on the tithe they received, it was not a sin to eat of this produce (18:32). What was the penalty if they did not tithe on their tithe? DEATH

The purification of the Red Heifer

Burning of the red heifer.

This red heifer was a young female cow, not yet having borne a calf. She was to be reddish in colour, without spot, with no blemish, and never having worn a yoke. Stop and picture this in your mind.

She was to be given to Eleazar the priest (Aaron's son). Where was he to take her? (19:3) Without the camp. There, one was to kill her while Eleazar watched.

Eleazar was to take her blood and sprinkle it before the tabernacle seven times (19:4). Then they were to burn her entire carcass with fire while Eleazar watched (19:5). He was then to take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the fire with the heifer (19:6).

Before returning to the camp, both the priest and the man who burned the beast must wash their clothes and take a bath (19:7-8). They would be unclean until the evening.

Ashes of the red heifer.

Numbers 19:9 is the key to the chapter. After

the fire is cool, a clean person must gather up all of the ashes from the red heifer. They were to be stored in a clean place outside the camp. Those ashes were to be used in a cleansing ceremony for impurities among the people.

The ashes were used to purify a person who had touched a dead body (19:11-16).

The procedure for the purification was to mix some of the ashes in running water in a vessel. A clean person was then to dip hyssop in the water and sprinkle it on the tent, the vessels, and the person, all that was exposed to the dead body (19:17-18). He was to repeat this ritual on the third and seventh day (19:19).

Failure to purify himself with the ashes was punishable by death.

Principles for Us Today

Tithe in the Old Testament was an efficient means of supporting the Levites and priests who did the ministry of the Lord.* Those who claim that the tithe is no longer God's choice for supporting local churches today must identify a biblical alternative that adequately replaced it. The New Testament examples of collections for the needy have nothing to do with the support of God's ministry. Those who oppose the tithe today likely do not give nearly that much to their local church, yet they expect the work to flourish. If every Christian gave at least 10% of his gross income to the Lord, whether they call it a tithe or not, churches and pastors would not be struggling financially. What can we learn from this? _____

Touching a dead was potentially unhealthy. Perhaps God ordained the red heifer ritual to separate the exposed person for a few days. Can you think of any other reasons the Lord might have made this law? _____

*Tithe Gen 14:20; Le 27:30-32; Nu 18:24, 26, 28; Deu 12:6, 11, 17; 14:22-23, 28; 26:12. Tenth Ge 28:22; Le 27:32, Nu 18:21, 26. The tithe began long before the Law, and was not among the Ten Commandments nor even listed among the regular commands. It was simply a duty to support God's ministry (cf., Mal 3:8, 10).