

[R4030 : page 219]

## **OFFERERS OF STRANGE FIRE**

***- LEVITICUS 10:1-11. - AUGUST 11. -***

**Golden Text: – "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging,  
and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."**

**– Prov. 20:1**

ABOUT a year had passed since the Israelites had left Egypt – a year of training under the direction of the Lord through his servant Moses – a year of special evidence of divine mercy and favor toward Israel. Their first-born, miraculously delivered from the tenth plague, had been accepted by the Lord as his priestly tribe, to serve the cause of the Lord and to minister to the people as his representatives. Mount Sinai's experiences with the giving of the Law were in the past. The setting up of the Tabernacle, with its symbolical posts and curtains and furnishings, had been accomplished; the glory of the Lord had rested upon it, as indicating that he was with his people to guide in all their affairs and to bring them eventually to the promised land. The priests had been installed in office and the service of the Tabernacle started.

At this time, while the Israelites were rejoicing in their divinely appointed religious arrangements and the priests in their special relationship to the divine program, an incident occurred which caused an awe and reverence for the holy things: a disobedience to the minute instructions of the priests brought upon the two eldest sons of Aaron condign punishment – instant death. Awe-stricken and fearful, Aaron and his other sons would have gladly relinquished all further service of the Tabernacle lest they themselves should similarly suffer death through some transgression of the divine commands.

But Moses, the mediator and direct representative of God, commanded that they must not do this – they must not desert their service. He pointed out to them that the holy anointing oil was upon them, and that their entire danger lay in deserting, and that they were entirely safe so long as they heeded carefully the divine regulations. He forbade that they should even make lamentation over the deceased, since their death was a divine judgment, and to have bewailed them would have implied a rebellion against their great King, who had undoubtedly dealt justly with them. Thus at the beginning of their religious services the people of Israel were taught that they must approach the Lord with reverence and that obedience is better than sacrifice.

### **WHERE JUSTICE AND MERCY MEET**

A similar lesson, we recall, was taught at the beginning of this Gospel Age, when Ananias and Sapphira were stricken dead because of false pretense in misrepresenting their gifts to the Lord and his cause. Both of these judgments seem to be severe. There is a seeming lack of mercy in both instances. We are inclined to ask, Why did not God have compassion upon these first transgressors, and merely reprove them and give them a second opportunity? We answer that the lessons taught in these two judgments were much more impressive than they could otherwise have been; and as for a second chance, it is our opinion that **[R4030 : page 220]** both parties will be thus favored. For instance, in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, we doubt if they ever had the full consecration of heart, or ever really came to the full knowledge of the truth which would make them responsible for their conduct and liable to the Second Death. Our surmise is that they were well-intentioned, but not begotten of the holy Spirit, and that the Lord made an illustration of them without special injury to themselves, but for the advantage of his consecrated people at that time and ever since, illustrating the facts that the Lord knoweth them that are his, that nothing is

hidden from his sight, and that it is in vain that any would attempt to deceive him.

Similarly we have no thought that the two sons of Aaron passed into the Second Death. Theirs was only a typical anointing to the typical priesthood, and their death we similarly understand to be typical, an illustration of some of the antitypical priests who will perish from the priesthood because of disobedience to the divine direction. As for Nadab and Abihu, our supposition is that in the resurrection morning they will be amongst the great world of mankind who will come forth unto a resurrection by judgments – by disciplines. By disobedience they merited the loss of the present life, and God made use of the circumstances to give a lesson to the people of that time that would hinder them from being careless in the handling of holy things, to the intent that the types and shadows of their dispensation might be handed down to us in their purity, and as a type or illustration to us of the Royal Priesthood respecting two classes amongst us represented by these two priests.

### **TWO CLASSES REPRESENTED BY NADAB AND ABIHU**

Since the priests, the Tabernacle and all the services connected were particular types, foreshadowings of higher and better things, it follows that the death of these two sons of Aaron must have a typical signification. They must typify persons who lose their standing in the antitypical priesthood, some who fail to make their calling and election sure, some who were originally accepted and anointed as members of the Body of the great High Priest, but who lose that glorious position because of failure to follow the divine directions. The Scriptures tell us of three ultimate divisions of those originally accepted of the Lord as members of the Body of Christ and anointed with the holy Spirit.

(1) The faithful, who will come off more than conquerors and constitute the Very Elect, the Royal Priesthood of the Millennial Age.

(2) A "great company, whose number is known to no man" – who, failing to be of the little flock, rejected from the priestly office, but nevertheless refusing to deny the Lord, will ultimately constitute the servants of Christ in glory, the antitypical Levites.

(3) Another class of the consecrated who will fail to appreciate and properly use the Lord's favors, and under the tests prove entirely unworthy of eternal life, and fall into the hands of the living God for utter destruction in the Second Death.

If an attempt were made to indicate these three classes amongst the sons of Aaron by proportionate numbers it would apparently have necessitated one of the five representing the little flock, three of the five representing the "great company," and the other one to represent those who would go into the Second Death. But such an illustration [R4031 : page 220] was not made and would not have been consistent with the divine plan, for it evidently was not intended to indicate in any manner what proportion would go into the Second Death nor what proportion would fail of the priesthood and go into the "great company." On the other hand, to suppose that both the priests who died typified those who would go into the Second Death would imply that two-fifths of all the consecrated would perish. Besides, it would leave the type incomplete in that it would make no showing of the "great company," who consecrated and were accepted as priests, but who failed to prove faithful to the end, failed to become members of the Royal Priesthood of the Kingdom.

It is for these reasons that we understand the two priests set before us in this lesson to represent the two classes who will fail to make their calling and election sure as members of the Body

of the great High Priest of glory. Nadab we understand to represent those who will fall from the priestly office to the Levitical, as members of the "great company." In allowing one priest to represent each of these classes nothing is indicated respecting the proportionate numbers of either, but simply the fact that there will be two classes who will fail of the grace of God after they have been anointed with the holy anointing oil for membership in the Royal Priesthood.

It seems to us consistent to thus represent by one person each two classes, whose numbers are not definitely fixed by the divine decree, but merely composed of those who fail to give heed and to rightly use their blessings and opportunities. The names of these two sons who died may be construed in harmony with these suggestions. Nadab signifies spontaneous, self-acting, and suggests to us the class who will go into the Second Death because of their self-will – their failure to hold the Head. As for the one who we believe represented the "great company," his name, Abihu, signifies son of God. This, too, seems appropriate. The "great company," like the little flock, are begotten of the holy Spirit and will be born of the Spirit – sons of God on a spirit plane, though not on the divine plane. They are thus, as well as the little flock, differentiated from the remainder of mankind, who will be recognized as the sons of Christ – receiving their lives by restitution from him who bought them with his precious blood.

### **OFFERING STRANGE FIRE – NOT COMMANDED**

The crime for which the two sons of Aaron died is described in the same terms yet not with particularity. We do not know whether their transgression consisted in taking an improper kind of *incense* or in failing to take *fire* from the altar or burning the *incense* in the wrong *place* – perhaps in the court instead of the holy – or whether it may have been the proper *incense* with

the proper *fire* and in the proper *place* at the wrong *time*; nor can we know that both of the offending priests did exactly the same thing.

Some have surmised that the error was in respect to attempting to enter the Most Holy on the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest alone was permitted to enter with the [R4031 : page 221] blood of the sin-offering. The lesson to the remaining priests in the type was the necessity for greater carefulness, greater reverence for the Lord and the particular directions by which they might be his servants and come into his presence and be his ministers to the people. The lesson to us, the antitypical priesthood, would be a similar one – that obedience is better than sacrifice, and that the sacrifices we offer in order to be acceptable must be presented in harmony with the divine will, and that any other procedure on our part will cause the loss of our membership in the Royal Priesthood.

There is a similarity as well as a difference between the errors of those who will constitute the "Great Company" and the errors of those of the consecrated who will be condemned to the Second Death. Their errors are the same in that they fail to sufficiently respect the stipulations of the divine arrangement. Both fail to offer the kind of incense that the Lord directed – self-sacrifice and praise to him, with which sacrifice God is well pleased. (Heb. 13:15,16.) The difference, however, between those who will constitute the "Great Company" and those of this age who will die the Second Death is that the latter ignore Christ and the merit of his sacrifice on their behalf, counting his blood a common thing, and doing despite to the favor brought to them thereby. The other class escape the Second Death and become the "Great Company," not because they have offered proper incense unto the Lord, but because they do not deny, do not reject, but maintain their hold upon the foundations of their faith, the merit of Christ's sacrifice on their behalf.

## **"SHE MADE ALL NATIONS DRUNK"**

The fact that immediately after this narrative of the death of Nadab and Abihu the command was given to Aaron and his sons that they should drink no wine nor strong drink, etc., gives some ground for the supposition that the two sons who perished had been somewhat intoxicated, or at least stupefied through strong drink, and that thus their senses were more or less beclouded in respect to the commands of the Lord concerning the offering of incense. This putting away of intoxicants is described as putting a difference between the holy and the common, between the clean and the unclean.

There is no doubt whatever that literal intoxicants were referred to by our Lord in this command, but applying it antitypically we find that a different kind of intoxicants is likely to affect the antitypical priests. We agree, of course, that the words of the Apostle are applicable to all of the Royal Priesthood, "Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be ye filled with the Spirit." We cannot, however, apply the matter literally to the Royal Priesthood and say that no one who is connected with the antitypical Tabernacle and its services could taste of wine without a violation of the divine law; because our great High Priest himself partook of wine. In seeking, therefore, for the antitypical significations of the command that they should use neither wine nor strong drink, we find it intimated in the declaration of Revelation that Great Babylon made all nations drunk with the wine of her false doctrine and confusion of spiritual and political interests.

Undoubtedly the confusion of doctrine which prevails is to some extent responsible for the failure of the "great company" class to offer acceptable incense. As we get rid of the confusion of mind introduced by the false doctrines of the "dark ages" – the "doctrines of devils" as the Apostle describes them – we find that



our clearer thoughts are indeed a great advantage to us in respect to a proper understanding of what would be pleasing and acceptable to the Lord our God as our sacrifices or incense before him. Intoxicated with the errors of the past, many of us doubtless offer to the Lord "strange fire," strange incense, such as he has not commanded. To continue so to do would seem to imply that we would ultimately be amongst those who would fail to reach the glorious priesthood. Most heartily, therefore, do we thank the Lord that we are getting sobered up – that to us is returning through the nutriment of his Word the spirit of a sound mind, that more and more we are coming to comprehend with all saints the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of his love, and thus are the better qualified day by day to know the good, the acceptable, the perfect will of God, and to make our offerings in harmony therewith.

### **WHOSOEVER IS DECEIVED BY WINE IS NOT WISE**

While the "Royal Priests" are in more danger from the symbolic wine than from the natural, and hence need to be more on guard against it, nevertheless an occasional reminder of the dangers that lurk in the literal wine is safe. It is especially well that all see clearly the value of example, particularly upon the young. And the better the Christian and the greater his knowledge of God's Word, the greater his influence either for good or evil. Hence the force of the Apostle's words, "What manner of persons ought we to be?" On this phase of the subject we content ourself with quotations from the pens of others, as follows: –

Prof. Marcus Dods says of College athletics: – "Trainers for athletics act according to St. Paul's rule, 'Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.' Not only during the contest, but during the long preparation for it. The one in training



must not touch cigarettes or liquor. The little indulgences which some men allow themselves he must forego. Not once will he break the trainer's rules, for he knows that some competitors will refrain from even that once, and gain strength while he is losing it. He is proud of his little hardships and fatigues and privations, and counts it a point of honor scrupulously to abstain from anything which might in the slightest degree diminish his chances of success."

Coleman in the *Independent* says: – "A number of gentlemen in the State of New York came together to value certain parcels of land which were to be offered at public sale. They agreed unanimously upon the sum they were worth; but upon the day of the sale the owner cunningly treated them to alcoholic drinks, and one of them bid and actually paid four times as much for the property as he or any other man in his right senses thought it worth. A temperance man, having some standing timber to be disposed of at public sale, decided that he would not furnish alcoholic liquors to the bidders, as was the custom in that day. The auctioneer replied: 'I am sorry, for you will lose a great deal of money. I know how it works, for after the men have been drinking the trees look much larger to them than they did before.' A vendue master in Connecticut said: 'I have often in this way got more than ten times [R4032 : page 222] the value of the drinks I have furnished.' Horse jockeys, gamblers, thieves, wholesale merchants and commercial travelers often furnish alcoholic drinks for the same purpose."

"Doctor Arnot, the famous Scotch preacher, once used this striking illustration on the total abstinence question: There are plenty of men, and women, too, who proudly say, 'I am not obliged to sign away my liberty in order to keep on the safe side.' To such people Dr. Arnot says: 'True, you are not obliged; but here is a river we have to cross. It is broad, and deep, and rapid; whoever falls into it is sure to be drowned. Here is a narrow

footbridge, a single timber extending across. He who is lithe of limb and steady of brain and nerve, may skip over it in safety. Yonder is a broad, strong bridge. Its foundations are solid rock, and its passages are wide. All may cross it in perfect safety – the aged and feeble, the young and gay, the tottering wee ones – there is no danger there. "Now," you say, "I am not obliged to go yonder. Let them go there who cannot walk this timber." True, true, you are not obliged; but we know that if we cross that timber, though we may go safely, many others who will attempt to follow us will surely perish, and we feel better to go by the bridge! Walking a narrow footbridge over a raging torrent is risky business, but it is safety itself compared with tampering with strong drink."

-----