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Introduction

Directions how the lamps are to be lighted, Numbers 8:1-3. How the candlestick was formed, Numbers 8:4. The Levites to be consecrated to their service by being cleansed, sprinkled, shaved, purified, and their clothes washed, Numbers 8:5-7. To offer a meat-offering and a sin-offering, Numbers 8:8. The people to put their hands upon them, Numbers 8:9, Numbers 8:10. Aaron is to offer them before the Lord, Numbers 8:11. The Levites to lay their hands on the heads of the bullocks, etc., Numbers 8:12. The Levites are taken to assist Aaron and his sons in the place of all the first-born of Israel, Numbers 8:13-19. Moses and Aaron do as they were commanded, the Levites are presented, purified, and commence their service, Numbers 8:20-22. They are to begin their service at twenty-five years of age, and leave off at fifty, Numbers 8:23-25. After this they shall have the general inspection of the service, Numbers 8:26.

Verse 2

The seven lamps shall give light - The whole seven shall be lighted at one time, that seven may be ever burning.

Verse 4

This work of the candlestick, etc. - See many curious particulars relative to this candlestick, See the note on Exodus 25:31 and Exodus 25:39 (note). The candlestick itself was an emblem of the Church of Christ; the oil, of the graces and gifts of the Spirit of God; and the light, of those gifts and graces in action among men. See Revelation 1:12-20. God builds his Church and sends forth his Spirit to dwell in it, to sanctify and cleanse it, that it may be shown unto the world as his own workmanship. The seven lights in the candlesticks point out the seven Spirits of God, the Holy Ghost being thus termed, Revelation 3:1, from the variety and abundance of his gifts and influences; seven being used among the Hebrews to denote any thing full, complete, and perfect. A candlestick or lamp without oil is of no use; oil not burning is of no use. So a Church or society of religious people without the influence of the Holy Ghost are dead while they have a name to live; and if they have a measure of this light, and do not let it shine by purity of living and holy zeal before men, their religion is neither useful to themselves nor to others. Reader, it is possible to be in the Church of God and not be of that Church; it is possible to have a measure of the Spirit and neither profit nor be profited. Feel this dreadful possibility, and pray to God that thou be not a proof of it.

Verse 7

Sprinkle water of purifying - מֵי טָהוֹרָה (mey chattath), water of sin, or water of the sin-offering. As this purifying water was made by the ashes of the red heifer, cedar-wood, hyssop, and scarlet; and the heifer herself was sacrificed, and her blood sprinkled seven times before the tabernacle, Numbers 19:3-6; she may be considered as a proper sacrifice for sin, and consequently the water thus prepared be termed the water of the sin-offering. As the ashes were kept ready at hand for purifying from all legal pollutions, the preparation might be considered as a concentration of the essential properties of the sin-offering, and might be resorted to at all times with comparatively little expense or trouble, and no loss of time. As there were so many things by which legal pollution might be contracted, it was necessary to have always at hand, in all their dwellings, a mode of purifying at once convenient and inexpensive.

As the water by which the Levites were here purified must have been the water prepared from the ashes of the red heifer, this ordinance was undoubtedly instituted before this time, though not described till Numbers 19:1-10 of this book; but that chapter might be in connection with any of the preceding ordinances, as well as where it is now found.

We see from Hebrews 9:13, Hebrews 9:14, that these ashes mingled with water, and sprinkled on the unclean, and which sanctified to the purification of the flesh, were intended to typify the blood of Christ, which purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God, Hebrews 9:15; for as without this sprinkling with the water of the sin-offering the Levites were not fit to serve God in the wilderness, so without this sprinkling of the blood of Christ no conscience can be purged from dead works to serve the living God. See the notes on Numbers 19:1-10 (note).

Verse 10

Shall put their hands upon the Levites - It has been argued from this that the congregation had a part in the appointment of their own ministers, and that this was done by the imposition of hands. However that may be, it appears that what was done on this occasion meant no more than that the people gave up this whole tribe to God in place of their firstborn; and that by this act they bound themselves to provide for them who, because of their sacred service, could follow no secular work. And surely it was right, that they who served the altar should live by the altar. The ministers of God perform offices for the people which the people cannot perform for themselves; and nothing can be more reasonable than that the people should give them the necessaries and

comforts of life while they are thus employed in their behalf.

Verse 17

For all the first-born - are mine - See the manner of redeeming the first-born, Numbers 18:6.

Verse 21

And Aaron made an atonement for them - Though the Levites had been most solemnly consecrated to the Lord's service, and though all legal washings and purifications were duly performed on the occasion, yet they could not approach God till an atonement had been made for them. How strange is it, after all these significations, of the will and purpose of God relative to man, that any priest or any people will attempt to draw nigh to God without an atonement! As sure as God hath spoken it, there is no entrance into the holiest but through the blood of Jesus, Hebrews 10:19, Hebrews 10:20.

Verse 24

From twenty and five years old - See the note on Numbers 4:3, where the two terms of twenty-five and thirty years are reconciled.

Verse 26

To keep the charge, and shall do no service - They shall no longer be obliged to perform any laborious service, but act as general directors and counsellors; therefore they were to be near the camp, sing praises to God, and see that no stranger or unclean person was permitted to enter. So the Jews and many other persons have understood this place.

1.If it required so much legal purity to fit the Levites for their work in the tabernacle, can we suppose that it requires less spiritual purity to fit ministers of the Gospel to proclaim the righteousness of the Most High, and administer the sacred ordinances of Christianity to the flock of Christ? If these must be without spot, as the priests before without blemish, and these were only typical men, we may rest assured that a Christian minister requires no ordinary measures of holiness to prepare him for an acceptable and profitable discharge of his office.

2.If the Christian ministry be established to prepare men for the kingdom of God, of the holiness of which the purity of the camp was but a faint emblem, how can any man expect to enter that place of blessedness, who has not his heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, and his body washed with pure water; his life and conversation agreeable to the sacred precepts laid down in the Gospel of Christ? If the law of Moses were more read in reference to the Gospel, the Gospel itself and its requisitions would be much better understood.

Reader, however it may be with thee, Antinomianism is more general among religious people than is usually imagined. What multitudes of all denominations are expecting to enter into the kingdom of God without any proper preparation for the place! Without holiness none shall see the Lord; and from this decision of the Divine justice there shall never be any appeal.