

Numbers 15:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And if ye have erred, and not observed all these commandments, which the LORD hath spoken unto Moses,

Analysis

And if ye have erred, and not observed all these commandments—this introduces the critical distinction between unintentional sin (shegagah, שְׁגָגָה) and high-handed rebellion. "Erred" (shagag, שָׁגָג) means to stray, go astray, commit error—sin done in ignorance or inadvertence, not deliberate defiance. The comprehensive phrase **all these commandments** acknowledges the law's extensive demands, making inadvertent violations inevitable for fallen humans.

This provision revealed God's mercy: He provided atonement for unintentional transgressions, recognizing human frailty. However, verses 30-31 make clear that defiant, high-handed sin (beyad ramah—"with raised hand") brought no sacrifice—only divine judgment. This distinction between covered and uncovered sin anticipates Hebrews 10:26: "if we sin wilfully after receiving knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." Christ's sacrifice covers our inadvertent failures, but presumptuous rejection of His atonement leaves no other recourse.

Historical Context

This legislation balanced God's holiness (requiring punishment for sin) with His mercy (providing atonement for inadvertent transgression). The sacrificial system couldn't cover all sins—murder, adultery, and blasphemy brought death penalty, not sacrifice. The system taught Israel that sin required blood atonement (Leviticus 17:11), but also that God graciously provided that atonement for those

who didn't deliberately defy Him. This prepared for understanding Christ's atonement: comprehensive for the repentant, unavailing for the defiant.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 – Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 2:1 – Judging others

Revelation 20:12 – Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does distinguishing between inadvertent and defiant sin shape your understanding of God's character?
 2. What sins might you be treating as "inadvertent" that God sees as deliberate?
 3. How does this passage inform the "unforgivable sin" teaching in the gospels?

Interlinear Text

כָּל אָתָּת תְּשַׁגַּד וְלֹא תְּפַعַש וְלֹא תְּכַרְחֵם
H3588 **And if ye have erred** H3808 **and not observed** H853 H3605
H7686 H6213

מֹשֶׁה:
unto Moses

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 4:2 (Word): Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which ought not to be done, and shall do against any of them:

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