

Leviticus Chapter 10

Verses 1-7

“Nadab and Abihu ... his censer”:

The censers were fairly flat pans in which burning coals were carried.

The “strange fire” has many different interpretations:

- (1) Coals that were not taken from the altar as required in 16:12;
- (2) Offering it at the wrong time of day (compare Exodus 30:7-9), which prohibits “strange incense”;
- (3) Apparently, no one except the High-Priest himself should place incense on a censer of coals and present it to God; or
- (4) That Nadab and Abihu were even intoxicated, thus making the prohibition of (verse 9), significant.

Whatever the case may have been, it is clear that it was strange fire “which he commanded them not;” they certainly knew that it was in violation of God’s Word.

God’s words “I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified”, set the theme for the whole book.

The whole nation was called to be holy (19:2).

A clearer translation would be”:

Among those who approach Me I will show Myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored”.

Any disobedience of God’s commands detracted from His glory!

Those who begin to approach God must know that He is “separate from everyone else” and must approach Him on His terms.

Even in a time of great calamity, the priests of the LORD must set an example to the nation of strict obedience to the will of God: “and ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle ... lest ye die (verse 7).

Nothing must be allowed to interfere with the work of the ministry.

Leviticus 10:1 "And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not."

“Nadab and Abihu”:

These were the two oldest sons of Aaron.

“His censer”:

The vessels in which the incense was burned in the Holy Place (its features are unknown), was to be used only for holy purposes.

“Strange fire”:

Though the exact infraction is not detailed, in some way they violated the prescription of offering incense (compare Exodus 30:9, 34-38), probably because they were drunk (see verses 8-9).

Instead of taking the incense fire from the brazen altar, they had some other source for the fire and thus perpetrated an act, which, considering the descent of the miraculous fire they had just seen and their solemn duty to do as God told them, betrayed carelessness, irreverence, and lack of consideration for God.

Such a tendency had to be punished for all priests to see as a warning.

God’s service requires the right approach to God, the right source for God’s power, and the right spiritual attitude.

Nadab and Abihu failed to see the mind of God and acted in self-will.

The act typifies the use of carnal means to kindle fires of true devotion and praise.

The word strange, in the verse above, means profane or commit adultery.

In this case, this would be spiritual adultery.

Nadab and Abihu had been instructed in the things of the sanctuary along with Aaron.

They knew how important it was to keep every little detail.

Perhaps they were so excited by the presence of God that they forgot this training.

Verse 1 above begins with an “and”, which indicates that this happened at the same time as the happenings in chapter 9.

We do not know where they got the fire from in the verse above.

We really do not know what was wrong about the offering at all.

Perhaps they had made an offering to God that only the high priest was to give.

As we read on in this chapter, Aaron is warned of God not to allow anyone ministering in the sanctuary to drink alcoholic beverages.

To say for sure, just what the offence was, would be an error on our part.

We do know that whatever they did, it was not offered God's way.

We ended the last chapter by saying that the important thing was for these offerings to be done God's way and not man's way.

There is a verification of this in the book of Numbers.

Numbers 26:61 "And Nadab and Abihu died, when they offered strange fire before the LORD."

Whatever this sin was, they each committed it.

The Scripture says either of them took his censer.

Leviticus 10:2 "And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD."

"Went out fire":

The same divine fire that accepted the sacrifices (9:24), consumed the errant priests.

That was not unlike the later deaths of Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:6-7), or Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5, 10).

God was quick in His judgement of them.

He killed them.

Many believe that these two priestly sons of Aaron had indulged in alcoholic beverages and were attempting to minister in the tabernacle under the influence of this alcohol.

This could certainly be the case.

Not only would God not let them minister in the tabernacle under the influence of alcohol, but their judgement would be greatly impaired on how they were to go about the service to the LORD.

It really doesn't matter what was the problem, they were guilty of sin and God killed them.

These sons of Aaron had been trained in the ways of the sanctuary, and they were without excuse.

These were not just any young men, but were in authority in the tabernacle, just under Aaron.

For sure, this would make a never ending impression on the onlookers.

Most people want to believe in Jesus and believe He is their Savior, but very few want to acknowledge the fact that He is also Judge.

The same God, who blesses if His commandments are kept, will curse if they are not kept.

Leviticus 10:3 "Then Moses said unto Aaron, This [is it] that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace."

The experience of Nadab and Abihu is a staunch reminder that those who “come nigh” to the LORD must regard Him as “holy”, for as God says, “Before all the people I will be glorified”.

By his silence, Aaron acknowledges that the LORD was justified in slaying his sons.

“I will be sanctified ... I will be glorified”:

Nadab and Abihu were guilty of violating both requirements of God’s absolute standard.

The priests had received repeated and solemn warnings as to the necessity of reverence before God (see Exodus 19:22; 29:44).

“Aaron held his peace”:

In spite of losing his two sons, he did not complain, but submitted to the righteous judgment of God.

Moses was actually the uncle of these boys, and he hated what happened to them.

Moses quickly reminds Aaron that God is justified in this.

This tabernacle was not to be as the world, but was to be a separate place.

The high priest and his sons, the priests, were to glorify God in everything they did.

They could not glorify God, unless everything was done His way.

This tells us so much about how we should conduct services to God.

WE CANNOT BRING THE WORLD INTO THE CHURCH.

That does not glorify God.

Ministers are the only visible connection some people will ever have with God (here on the earth).

Just as Aaron represented God to the people in the tabernacle then, our ministers represent God to their congregation now.

The minister and his or her family, must live beyond reproach to be able to show the world Christ in them.

Aaron does not speak out against what God has done, because he knows it was justified.

Leviticus 10:4 And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp."

"Mishael and Elzaphan":

See Exodus 6:22 for their lineage.

This procedure prevented the priests from defiling themselves by handling the dead bodies (Leviticus 21:1), and allowed the whole congregation to see the result of such disregard for the holiness of God.,

"Out of the camp":

As this was done with the ashes of sacrificed animals (6:11), so it was done with the remains of these two priests who received God's wrath.

Moses, Aaron, or the other sons of Aaron could not touch a dead body while they were ministering in the temple.

Mishael and Elzaphan were cousins of the 2 dead and they were called of Moses to come and take the bodies away.

One of the Scriptures covering this is found in:

Leviticus 21:10-12 "And [he that is] the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes;" "Neither shall he go in to any dead body, nor defile himself for his father, or for his mother;" "Neither shall he go out of the sanctuary, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the crown of the anointing oil of his God [is] upon him: I [am] the LORD."

Leviticus 10:5 "So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moses had said."

To the place where the bodies lay, having an order from Moses so to do.

"And carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said":

Or bid them to do.

They took them up in their clothes as they found them, and carried them away in them.

Not that these men carried them in their own coats, but in the coats of the dead men, as Jarchi expresses it.

And took them without the camp, and there buried them.

Probably in the coats in which they had sinned, and in which they died.

The Targum of Jonathan says, they carried them on iron hooks in their coats, and buried them without the camp.

Had these two not been called to do this task, they would have been in trouble too.

The thing that saved them was the fact they were called.

They covered them up with their coats.

This had to be a sobering lesson, not only for Aaron and his sons, but for the congregation, as well.

Verses 6-7

The prohibition against the customary signs of mourning was usually reserved for the High-Priest only as prescribed in (21:10-12).

Here, Moses applies it to Eleazar and Ithamar also.

To "uncover" one's head and "rend ... clothes", were mourning practices at the time.

As priests who were ministering before the LORD (21:10-12), Aaron and his surviving sons, Eleazar and Ithamar", were to remain in the tabernacles and perform their work.

Others would mourn ("bewail the burning"), in their place.

Leviticus 10:6 "And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the LORD hath kindled."

“Eleazar and ... Ithamar”:

Aaron's youngest sons who yet lived.

Later, the line of Eleazar would be designated as the unique line of the High-Priest (compare Num. 25:10-13).

Aaron and his other 2 sons are not to mourn at all for the 2 brothers that were killed by God.

This would show that they believed the punishment of God was just.

The congregation would be allowed to grieve, but Aaron, Ithamar, and Eleazar could not show any signs of mourning, or the wrath of God would fall not, only on them, but on the entire congregation.

I believe the bewailing the congregation did was also a kind of trembling at the wrath of God in action.

Leviticus 10:7 "And ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: for the anointing oil of the LORD [is] upon you. And they did according to the word of Moses."

That is, they were not to relinquish the service of the sanctuary, on the account of the death of their relations.

And though in grief for it, they must go on.

Not Aaron on account of his children, nor his sons on account of their brethren.

From here, says Ben Gersom, we learn, that whatsoever priest leaves his service, and goes out of the sanctuary, is guilty of death.

Some think the seven days of consecration were not quite over, during which time Aaron and his sons were obliged to continue there, on fear of death (Lev. 8:33).

But it is pretty plain those days were over, and that it was the day after the consecration was finished (see Lev. 9:1 and notes on Lev. 10:2).

Wherefore this respects their continuance in the tabernacle on the day the above affair happened.

And they were obliged to continue in and go through the service of the day, notwithstanding that.

"For the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you":

A learned man infers from hence, that this affair happened within the days of consecration.

They being every day freshly anointed with oil, at least had it, with the blood of the sacrifices, sprinkled on them, and on their garments.

Taking it in the strict sense, for the oil being still upon them.

Whereas it seems only to signify, that inasmuch as they were consecrated with oil to the priest's office, they were under obligation to continue and perform their service without being hindered by what had happened.

"And they did according to the word of Moses":

They showed no tokens of mourning on account of the dead, and did not offer to go out of the tabernacle and leave their service.

The fear of God was greater than their desire to grieve.

They did as Moses told them.

They would not be able to bury their own dead.

It was a very serious thing to be anointed with the holy oil for service in the tabernacle.

A very good example of this is when Jesus said, let the dead bury their dead in Matthew.

Matthew 8:22 "But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead."

Another Scripture that indicates the calling of God is ahead of all other calls, is in:

Luke 9:60 "Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God."

I would tend to believe that this is saying, if a person is dead, there is nothing you can do for them.

Go to the living and preach the gospel, so that when they die, they will spend eternity in heaven.

This may seem to be a hard lesson, but I believe God is trying to drive home the fact that the call of God has to be above everything else.

A person who answers that call has to put the world behind them.

Their thoughts and deeds must be stayed on God.

The world must be able to see Jesus in you.

Even family must not stop you from serving God.

The call of God, is without repentance.

There are few pleasures in this life for those who choose to answer that call, but the rewards in heaven far outweigh any problems we might face here on the earth.

Once you have decided to serve, never look back, just move forward with God.

This next Scripture tells of how God feels about those who do not stay with their call.

Luke 9:62 "And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Leviticus Chapter 10 Questions

1. Who were the 2 sons of Aaron who offered strange fire before the LORD?
2. What does the word strange mean in verse 1?
3. What kind of adultery would this be?
4. What single word in verse 1 indicates that chapter 10 is a continuation of chapter 9?
5. What were 2 of the possible wrong-doings these sons did?
6. What important message did we end the last lesson with, that applies here?
7. In what other book of the Bible do we read of the wrong-doings of Nadab and Abihu?
8. How do we know that both of the sons committed this sin?
9. What killed Nadab and Abihu?
10. What do a great number of people believe the sin was, of these 2?
11. What position in the tabernacle did Nadab and Abihu hold?
12. We all want Jesus as our Savior, but we do not want to admit He is our _____.
13. Moses told Aaron that God wanted to be sanctified in whom?
14. Before all the people, God was to be _____.
15. What does, Aaron held his peace mean?
16. We cannot bring the _____ into the church.

17. Who represented God to the people in the tabernacle?
18. Which 2 did Moses call to take the dead bodies out?
19. What relation were these 2 to the 2 who died?
20. Why could not their other 2 brothers take them out?
21. What special rules prevailed over Aaron while the anointing of the tabernacle with the oil was upon him?
22. How did the 2 cousins carry the dead bodies out?
23. What other 2 sons of Aaron are mentioned in verse 6?
24. What warning did Moses give Aaron and his 2 remaining sons?
25. Who would the wrath of God fall on, if Aaron or his 2 remaining sons disobeyed God in this?
26. In what Scripture did Jesus say, "Let the dead bury the dead"?
27. What does the author believe this is really saying?
28. The call of God has to be above _____.