

Leviticus 10:1-3 | Sunday April 13, 2025

Last week we saw the 8-day consecration ceremony for Aaron and his sons. God had gone to great lengths to dwell with His people again. The eight-day ceremony that was filled with offerings finished with God's affirmation.

Leviticus 9:23-24 ESV

(23) And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and **the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people.** (24) And **fire came out from before the LORD** and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, **they shouted** and fell on their faces.

God sent fire to show His acceptance of all that had been done. The tabernacle was dedicated, the priests were ready and God's presence was in the holy of holies. God's people were dwelling in His presence and knew how to worship Him. As great as this moment was, it was not perfect. There were many veils between God and the people, to protect them from His holiness. Even with these protections the sinfulness of man will be put on display.

Leviticus 10:1-11 ESV

(1) Now **Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron**, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. (2) And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. (3) Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Among those who are near Me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron held his peace.

(4) And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near; carry your brothers away from the front of the sanctuary and out of the camp." (5) So they came near and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said. (6) And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons, "Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation; but let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning that the LORD has kindled. (7) And do not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting, lest you die, **for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you.**" And they did according to the word of Moses. (8) And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying, (9) "Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. (10) You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, (11) and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses."

The story does not say for sure but the impression is that this happened on the eight day of the consecration or very shortly thereafter. **Aaron still had the anointing oil on Him.** It reveals so much about who we are as people that the tabernacle was not in Israel's presence for any length of time before someone misused it and died. A time to celebrate God's goodness had been turned to mourning. Another principal is here, **after a spiritual triumph, comes temptation.** After Elijah watched God defeat the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18, he was suicidal by chapter 19. Jesus left His baptism to head out to the wilderness to be tempted. Our walk with God does not pause or stop

after a spiritual high, we need to keep walking with Him. Meaning Nadab and Abihu followed God's instructions for 8 days but then let their guard down and sinned. To better understand what happened it is helpful to know who **Nadab and Abihu** are.

Exodus 6:23 ESV

(23) **Aaron** took as his wife Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab and the sister of Nahshon, and she bore him **Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar**.

Exodus 24:1 ESV

(1) Then He said to Moses, "**Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu**, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar.

Aaron had four sons Nadab, was the firstborn, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. These four were to be priests and God instructed for them to be included in the consecration. They wore priestly robes, had blood dipped on their right ear, thumb, and toe, and even had the anointing oil and blood sprinkled on them. God even specifically tells Moses to bring Nadab and Abihu closer up on mount Siani to worship Him as Moses went further up the mountain. **They had been near the power and holiness of God.**

Leviticus 10:1 ESV

(1) Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took **his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it** and offered **unauthorized fire** before the LORD, which **He had not commanded them**.

A censer was a portable pot that the priest would put coals into and then burn incense in. Some were on long handles and others on chains. They served in a sense as a portable altar, to bring the burning incense wherever the priest went (Num 16:46). On the Day of Atonement Aaron was to fill his censer from the altar of incense before entering into the Holy of Holies. It is not the censer or even the act of burning incense that was sin for Nadab and Abihu. What went wrong for these two is that they did it in such a way that God had not commanded. The fire used was unauthorized, the word means **strange, prohibited, illegitimate**. This could mean everything from the **type** of fire used, **where** they got it, **what** they were burning on it, or even **when** they were offering it.

Without the specifics God is very clear it was not commanded.

God revealed His will through the Word and we figure out so many creative ways to violate what He wants. A great example of this is with the discovery of **Tel Arad** in the 1960's. This was a fortress that both the Canaanites and Israelites occupied and the site includes a temple. It is about **35 miles away** from Jerusalem and sits elevated. This would have been one of the **high places** that God judges Israel so much for. Archeologists have found the room that would have been used as the holy of holies. It is a perfect cube (mimicking God's instructions) at 7 feet by 7 feet. In it there are **two stones one for Yahweh and one for asherah**, and two pillars to burn incense to both deities. Through testing archeologists have found remnants of frankincense and cannabis. God was clear in what type of incense was allowed to be burned on His true altar of incense.

Exodus 30:7; 9 ESV

(7) **And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it.** Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it,

(9) **You shall not offer unauthorized incense on it,** or a burnt offering, or a grain offering, and you shall not pour a drink offering on it.

Notice how humanity counterfeits God and entirely misses what God desires in the process. The altar of incense was to be wood overlaid in gold to speak of Jesus who is fully man and fully God. At Tel Arad the altar of incense was made out of stone. God specifically warns not to offer unauthorized or strange incense on it. God's Altar of incense stood before the Holy of Holies, if this line was crossed anytime other than the day of atonement the person would be killed. **These warnings were not empty.**

Exodus 28:33; 35 ESV

(33) On its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, around its hem, **with bells of gold between them,**

(35) And it shall be on Aaron when he ministers, and **its sound shall be heard when he goes into the Holy Place** before the LORD, and when he comes out, **so that he does not die.**

These bells announced Aarons presence in the Holy Place. They also served as an indicator to those on the outside **that Aaron was still alive.** These warning became very real for **Nadab and Abihu.** We have so many questions about specifically what they did wrong, and what their motivations were. Yet, God is very clear, they tried to offer something to Him that He did not command. **The fire coming from God that had verified the priest was now used to judge them** (it is the same phrase used in 9:24).

Leviticus 10:1-2 ESV

(1) Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, **which He had not commanded them.**

(2) And **fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them,** and they died before the LORD.

Being in God's presence was a very serious thing and His commandments do not bend. Nadab and Abihu's specific sin cannot be replicated, because the tabernacle is no more. The heart behind their sin though, is one that is readily practiced today. **They tried to worship based on their own will and not the revealed will of God.** They thought they knew a better way, different way, or could help God in some way. Instead of trusting in what God had instructed they wanted to add or change it. We are in danger of doing this all the time. We let our thoughts and society dictate who we want God to be and how He will act. This goes from redefining what sin is, to redefining what God values. **In the end we want to tell God what to do and how to change and not submit to who He is.** God never accepts this form of worship. It would violate His very nature.

Numbers 23:19 ESV

(19) God is not man, **that He should lie, or a son of man, that He should change His mind.** Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not fulfill it?

Malachi 3:6 ESV

(6) **"For I the LORD do not change;** therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

James 1:17 ESV

(17) Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, **with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.**

Hebrews 13:8 ESV

(8) Jesus Christ **is the same** yesterday and today and forever.

God not changing is a truth found throughout the Word of God. From the Old Testament to the New Testament. **He has interacted with humanity in unique ways, at various times, but His nature and His character is the same at all times.** The God who is revealing Himself here in Leviticus is the same God who we are worshipping today. **The justice God shows by killing Nadab and Abihu is still in His character.** This may seem startling, because we are so prone to redefine God in our image. Especially today we tend to soften God's just wrath towards sin. Instead we are to look at how His word has revealed Him. A holy and just God.

Nahum 1:2-3 ESV

(2) **The LORD is a jealous and avenging God;** the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries and keeps wrath for His enemies.

(3) **The LORD is slow to anger and great in power,** and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet.

These truths seem to contradict each other but they are revealing the same God. He is jealous and avenging, wrathful and He is slow to anger! Our God is loving and just. He loved Nadab and Abihu and still dealt with their sin. It was so early in the use of the tabernacle true worship of God could have been corrupted if not dealt with swiftly. God still loves His church with this type of discipline.

1 Corinthians 11:20; 30-32 ESV

(20) When you come together, **it is not the Lord's supper that you eat.**

(30) That is why many of you are **weak and ill, and some have died.**

(31) But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.

(32) But when we are judged by the Lord, **we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.**

1 Peter 4:17 ESV

(17) **For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God;** and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

The Corinthian church was corrupting the Lord's Supper in the selfish flippant manner they were taking it in. Some in the church were sick because of their sin, some seriously sick and others had died. **Not all sickness and death are tied to specific sin, this judgment is rare but it does happen.** God has not changed. He disciplines His own. This discipline starts in the household of God. Believers will not face the judgment the world deserves because Jesus took our judgment. Yet He does discipline us. Nadab and Abihu were disciplined. Even though Nadab and Abihu were priests, and from an important family. God is too holy not to discipline them.

Romans 2:11 ESV

(11) For God shows **no partiality.**

In His holiness God could not let this sin pass by. It did not matter who they were sin must be dealt with. His Holiness had to be protected.

Leviticus 10:3 ESV

(3) Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has said: '**Among those who are near Me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.**'" And

| Aaron held his peace.

Just hours before God sent fire and the people shouted in joy. This time He sent fire and Aaron is silent. If you are going to be near God and in His presence then He needs to be sanctified, declared holy. **When we see worshipping God as a holy thing then the discipline is understandable**. As much as Nadab and Abihu tried to worship God from their own will He reminded them that He is holy and He is the one who declares what true worship looks like. He still does.

Psalms 51:17 ESV

| (17) The sacrifices of God are **a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart**, O God, you will not despise.

We want to worship God in our pride and our self-effort. He asks for our broken and contrite heart that rest on Him and Jesus finished work.

1 Peter 1:13-19 ESV

| (13) Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, **set your hope fully on the grace** that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

(14) As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance,

(15) **but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,**

(16) since it is written, **“You shall be holy, for I am holy.”**

(17) And if you call on Him as **Father who judges impartially** according to each one's deeds, **conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,**

(18) knowing that **you were ransomed** from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,

| (19) **but with the precious blood of Christ**, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

We are called to set our hope fully on the grace that Jesus offers. He is the one who made a way for us to worship the Holy God. He paid for our sin. God judges impartially, it does not matter who you are. We come to Him through Jesus. Our God is holy and He has called us to worship Him in holiness. He ransomed us from our life of sin, it took the blood of Jesus to secure our salvation. We should not continue to walk in our sin. **As believers we are called to have a healthy fear of our loving and gracious God.**

Hebrews 12:28-29 ESV

| (28) Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and **thus let us offer to God acceptable worship**, with reverence and awe,

| (29) **for our God is a consuming fire.**
