

Aaron's Sons - Strange Fire and An Unfinished Meal

Leviticus 10

Outline

- 1-3 | Nadab and Abihu offer strange fire before the Lord and die
- 4-7 | Moses instructs Aaron's family how to deal with the deaths
- 8-11 | Aaron told to avoid wine and strong drink prior to serving in the tabernacle—to be an example
- 12-15 | Moses instructs Eleazar and Ithamar to offer the sacrifices
- 16-20 | Moses rebukes while Aaron defends Eleazar and Ithamar for not eating the sin offering

Reflections

in the previous nine chapters, the Lord, through Moses, had outlined the duties of Aaron and his sons as the priests in relation to the various sacrifices that could be offered to the Lord. Aaron and his sons were then dedicated to the Lord and the Tabernacle was dedicated as well. Thus begins the covenant ministry under the Law.

Yet here we see in a very short time, Aaron's two oldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, deviate from the instructions given them by offering "strange fire." There are a couple of possible explanations for their being consumed.¹

First, directly from the text following the events, Moses instructs Aaron and his sons to never consume wine or strong drink prior to serving before the Lord. It could be that Nadab and Abihu were inebriated while serving in the tabernacle.

Second, that they used a fire source for their offering of incense with something other than coals from the altar. The restriction to using only coals from the altar isn't given until Leviticus 16:12 but it could have been given to them as an oral instruction by Moses prior to this.

Both possibilities serve as reminders that God is holy and wants His people, especially His leaders, to be holy. That is why Moses instructs Aaron with these words.

Leviticus 10:10-11 NASB "... and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean, **11** and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them through Moses."

The chapter ends with a contrasting event though.

The priests were to eat their portion of the sin offering, a goat, in the tabernacle compound when it was offered. However, Moses discovered that instead the sin offering was wholly burnt up on the altar. Moses then sets about to rebuke Aaron and his sons for not eating it. Yet here we see God's compassion.

Aaron makes a case for not eating it because he and his sons had already offered the sin offering for themselves and then Nadab and Abihu offered the strange fire, thus negating the sin offering. So Aaron and his sons were ceremonially "unclean" before the Lord, thus making it impossible to consume their portion of the sin offering. Moses agreed that this was the right thing to do.

God is holy and wants us to follow His commands and directions but also is willing to offer mercy when there is good reason. We would do well to remember the words of Hezekiah upon initiating the Passover after many years of not observing it.

¹ Orr, James, ed. "Strange Fire." *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1939. Print.

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2 Chronicles 30:6-9 NASB The couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with the letters from the hand of the king and his princes, even according to the command of the king, saying, "O sons of Israel, return to the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that He may return to those of you who escaped and are left from the hand of the kings of Assyria. **7** "Do not be like your fathers and your brothers, who were unfaithful to the LORD God of their fathers, so that He made them a horror, as you see. **8** "Now do not stiffen your neck like your fathers, but yield to the LORD and enter His sanctuary which He has consecrated forever, and serve the LORD your God, that His burning anger may turn away from you. **9** "For if you return to the LORD, your brothers and your sons will find compassion before those who led them captive and will return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate, and will not turn His face away from you if you return to Him."

Lord God, You are holy and desire for us to live holy lives. Forgive us in the times when we fall short and help us remember to be examples of faithfulness to Your people. Help us to offer mercy and grace when possible and encouragement to live holy lives. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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