

LESSONS FROM NADAB AND ABIHU

Leviticus 10:1-3

The book of Leviticus is an interesting book. As you read through your Bible, this sometimes becomes one of those books that you skim through and move on. But realize that it was there for a reason and an integral part of the Law of Moses. In fact, this book was so important to Judaism that it was the first book taught to Jewish children. And there is great reason for that.

Leviticus is about a holy relationship with God. From the sacrifices, to the garments and functions of the priesthood, to the various feasts, to laws governing morality, to the dietary and cleanliness laws (this is where you read about leprosy, discharges and impurities) there is a powerful lesson – as His people, God wants you to be different than the world.

But in the midst of all these writings, other than the consecration and beginning of the Aaronic priesthood, we find a single event of history recorded. That is the text we want to address in this lesson.

I. The account – Leviticus 10:1-3

- a. Who were Nadab and Abihu? They were two of the four sons of Aaron. Together, they were to be the priesthood of Israel, as appointed by God.

Up to this point in both Exodus and Leviticus we see they are chosen and very specific plans are made for the tabernacle, their garments and their work.

- b. The priesthood consecrated – Just prior to the events of our text, Leviticus 8-9 record Aaron and his 4 sons, being consecrated with sacrifices for 8 days. Chapter 9 records the 8th day when the priesthood begins. Another sin offering is made for them to purify themselves, and then sacrifices were prepared for the people.

OF interest in these chapters (between the details of the sacrifices) is how they followed the instructions of YHWH exactly and that their efforts were approved. Consider Leviticus 9:23-24 where we find a spectacular scene as the people were blessed, *“Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people, and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat of the altar.”* The response of the people was AWESOME – *“When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.”*

THE POINT: Up to this point, they had acted properly, and the LORD was pleased with what they did.

- c. The death of Nadab and Abihu
- i. BUT then we read of the tragic event of Nadab and Abihu.
 1. Then – contextually, this happened the same day (see 10:19) where a little later that day Aaron refers to the tragic event.
 2. Nadab and Abihu offered profane fire. The word means unauthorized or unexpected. The NASB uses the word “strange.” The NIV uses the word, “unauthorized”. Whatever this fire was, it was NOT the fire God wanted.
 3. It was something the LORD had NOT commanded (or authorized)
 4. Thus fire went out from the LORD and devoured them and they died before the LORD.
 5. Vs. 3 - Following this, YHWH declared through Moses, *“By those who come near Me, I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people, I must be glorified.”*
Vs. 6-7 – Aaron and his sons were not even permitted to mourn (at that time) because their job of consecrating the people was not completed.

- ii. Vs. 4-5 - After their deaths, two men – relatives, were told to carry the bodes from before the sanctuary to some place outside the camp. The carried them by their (likely Nadab and Abihu’s) tunics where they were instructed.
- iii. Why did God strike them dead?
 1. The specific reason is not given in the text.
 2. It could have been that the fire was from an unauthorized source – this would fit the usage of the term “profane” or “strange’ fire. At some point they had been given instructions about where the fire for their censers (firepans) was to come from OR specifics of how it was to be offered.
Exodus 30:9 as instructions were given for the altar of incense, they were told, *You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it.*
 3. It could have been that they did not offer it in the prescribed manner that God said – that would certainly apply as we find on other extreme occasions (Uzzah, Lot’s wife, etc.)
 4. IT could have been offered irreverently – especially when you consider what is said in vs. 3 about approaching Him with holiness.
 5. It could have been that they were drunk, based on vs. 9-10 of this text. This is likely not the cause, but is worthy of consideration as one in that state is incapable of distinguishing between what is proper and what is not.
 6. What we ARE told is that the fire was “profane” and we KNOW God was not pleased. This action was intended to send a message to all of Israel (and to us)

II. Lessons for us to consider

- a. **A lesson about authority** – a clear lesson to learn from this text is that God means what He says and says what He means. we must follow God’s pattern in what we do. That is the ONLY way to guarantee that you are correct. Consider Colossians 3:17 – do all in the name of the LORD, by His authority.
That is why we must not only do what God says, which ought to be a given, we must also respect His SILENCE. When God gives specific instructions, that excludes everything else.
- b. **We must worship God on His terms** –
 - i. This is a specific application of the last point on authority.
 - ii. Clearly the occasion of the death of Nadab and Abihu was associated with worshipping God HIS way. And in whatever they transgressed, they were NOT following His pattern. God expects us to follow His patter in our worship.
 - iii. We continually emphasize when we gather to worship God, it is about Him FIRST. When done properly we are certainly edified but that is a byproduct of true worship. John 4:24- we worship Him in spirit and in truth.
 - iv. There are many examples of wrongful worship including the rejection of Cain’s offering that led to him murdering his brother Abel (Genesis 4).
 - v. That is why we do not use instrumental accompaniment when we worship God in song. The New Testament emphasizes both in passage (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, 1 Corinthians 14:15, etc.), and example (Acts 16:25, Hebrews 2:12, Matthew 26:30, etc.) that we are to sing – we praise God with our voices.
This also accords with historical documentation of the early disciples. WHEN God specifies HOW to worship Him, we need to respect that pattern.
 - vi. Are we not thankful that we do not receive immediate retribution when we fail to follow God’s pattern, as Nadab and Abihu did? But God’s message was clear – we must worship

Him His way. A study of the details associated with the tabernacle, sacrifices, feast days and priestly actions confirm this.

c. Excitement and emotion do NOT dismiss the need to follow God's pattern.

- i. Recall the order of events. The later part of chapter 9 clearly shows an excitement as God lights the fire that consumes the offerings. The people are fearful. RIGHT after this we read about Nadab and Abihu. In their excitement, could they acted hastily.
- ii. Many today get caught up in emotions and think that it will substitute obedience. They reason that as long as the heart is sincere, that is all that matters. I will tell you, a proper heart IS important, but it is NO substitute for obedience.
- iii. Emotions often BLIND one to truth.

d. The importance of holiness in our lives –

- i. This is probably the greatest lesson to glean from this event.
- ii. Recall vs. 3, And Moses said to Aaron, "*This is what the Lord spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be **regarded as holy**; And before all the people I must be **glorified.**' "* So Aaron held his peace"
- iii. We need to give serious consideration to holiness. Holiness is associated with purity of heart, sanctification (being set apart and in the NT a derivative of the same Greek word as holy, AND the Hebrew word as well), and godliness.
- iv. Holiness is one of those fundamental principles that will govern what we do and how we do it. It will govern HOW we worship God (we follow His pattern because that is what it is about), our spirit (demeanor and heart) as we worship, AND even our preparations – including our appearance.

Friends, what preparations do we make to come to worship? Do we prepare our minds with adequate rest, pure living, prayers and studying? Do we dress appropriately. NOTE: This is not about some "dress code", but it is about realizing that meeting to worship God is different than going to the movies or a dinner outing with friends.

OFTEN, appearance reflects attitude!

NOTE: Consider this as we worship God at home, since we are only meeting once together right now. Is our approach to what we do as a family more casual and relaxed than when we are together? Does this really reflect the holiness of the occasion? Just something for us to think about right now.

v. The Bible calls for:

1. **Holiness** (sanctification) – 1 Peter 3:15 tells us that we are to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts; 1 Thessalonians 4:3 God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. 1 Peter 1:15-16 – as He is holy, so we are also to be holy
2. **Glorifying God** – Romans 15:6 notes that we with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of Jesus.
1 Peter 4:11, in whatever we do – speak as the oracles of God, minister with our ability, "that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ..."
Matthew 5:16 – this is also seen in our example.
3. **Reverence** – Hebrews 12:28-29 – we serve Him acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Hebrews 13:15 – our worship is to be a sacrifice of praise to God.
2 Peter 1:5 – high up the list of development of our faith is godliness – a word associated with piety and reverence toward God.
4. **And many other qualities** –

- vi. Truly in the example of Nadab and Abihu, we find the SERIOUSNESS of holiness. You might also consider the example of Ananias and Saphira in Acts 5. They were struck dead on the spot (much like Nadab and Abihu) for their failure to treat God as holy!

- e. ***The seriousness of spiritual leadership*** – another quick lesson to mention. There is a seriousness associated with leadership.
- i. Teachers are told they will receive a stricter judgment and therefore we must take heed to what we teach – James 3:1.
 - ii. Hebrews 13:17 – elders watch out for souls and they will give an accounting.
 - iii. 1 Timothy 4:12, 16 – preachers are entrusted with the word and are to continue in it to save themselves and those who hear.

And thus we see some lesson from Nadab and Abihu. They were part of a priesthood that has been fulfilled and replaced with a much greater priesthood (of Jesus). And while we are not under that law anymore, it is written for our learning (Romans 15:4). God's character has not changed, and that is a FUNDAMENTAL truth we must glean, even from the Old Law. What about you? How do you view God? If He is not holy in your sight, let me encourage you to do whatever you need to do to change that. And as always, if I can help, let me know. Think about it!