

The Sin Of Nadab And Abihu

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Leviticus 9:22-10:7

The Old Testament is of great value to the Christian...

It is written for our learning, a great source of hope.

Rom. 15:4, *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”*

It is written for our admonition, that we might not make similar mistakes.

1 Cor. 10:11, *“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”*

This includes even the book of LEVITICUS. A dry book to many, but of value to all.

Its name is derived from LEVI, from which tribe came the priests.

It is primarily a handbook for priests under the Law of Moses.

Reading it helps the Christian to better understand the book of Hebrews.

Though primarily a book outlining priestly rituals, it does record an incident involving two sons of Aaron: Nadab and Abihu.

What happened to them can provide valuable lessons for us. What did happen and what we can learn from it will serve as the basis for this study.

Let’s begin by reading about...

The incident involving Nadab and Abihu

Circumstances leading up to their actions...

The consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests had just been completed (Leviticus, chapters 8 & 9).

In Lev. 9:22-24, the glory of the Lord appeared when Aaron blessed the people.

Lev. 9:22-24, *“And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them, and came down from offering of the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out, and blessed the people: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the people. And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and*

consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces.”

Fire came out from before the Lord.

The fire consumed the fat on the altar.

The people shouted and fell on their face.

The profane fire offered by Nadab and Abihu — They offered a fire not commanded by the Lord.

Lev. 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.”*

It is called a “*strange*” fire.

The NIV translates it as “*unauthorized*” fire.

It is important to note is that it was something the Lord had not commanded!

Fire went out from the Lord and devoured them.

Lev. 10:2, *“And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.”*

God accepted the fire in Lev. 9:24, but rejected the fire in Lev. 10:2

The one indicated God’s blessing; the other, God’s curse.

Why was God displeased? Several explanations have been offered:

They put hot coals in their censers which were not from the altar of burnt offering.

- Lev. 16:12, *“And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail.”*
- Exo. 30:9, *“Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon.”*

The prohibition against intoxicating drinks which followed lead some to believe they may have been drunk.

Lev. 10:8-10, *“And the LORD spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations: And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean;”*

Their attempt to enter the Holy Place at an inappropriate time.

Lev. 16:1-2, *“And the LORD spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered before the LORD, and died; And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.”*

Their sin may have been a combination of these things, but verse one notes that it was doing that which God had not commanded.

Moses’ explanation for what happened...

Those who approach God must regard Him as “sanctified”, or “holy”.

Lev. 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.”*

“Sanctified” means “to set apart, consecrated”; i.e., to treat as special.

Evidently, the actions of Nadab and Abihu did not so respect God.

God must be “glorified” before all.

Lev. 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.”*

This word means “to honor”.

The actions of Nadab and Abihu therefore did not honor God.

Moses’ further instructions.

Nadab & Abihu’s bodies to be removed outside the camp.

Lev. 10:4-5, *“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. So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moses had said.”*

Aaron and his surviving sons were not to grieve while still consecrated for service.

Lev. 10:6-7, *“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. 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.”

It must have been very difficult for Aaron to lose his two sons in this way, on an occasion that should have been a time of great rejoicing for him.

Since these things were written for our admonition (1 Cor. 10:11), what lessons might there be for us?

Lessons to be gleaned from this incident

Regarding the worship of God.

When we approach God in worship, we must do only what He has commanded.

This was the mistake that was made by Nadab and Abihu.

Lev. 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.”*

When we offer something God has not commanded...

We do not regard Him as “sanctified”, or “holy”.

Lev. 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.”*

We do not truly glorify Him.

Lev. 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.”*

If God is holy and truly worthy of glory...

How can sinful man know what God desires as acceptable worship?

Can sinful man read the mind of God?

If so, then God is not all that holy (set apart)!

If so, then God is not all that different from man and therefore not worthy of glory!

Indeed, man cannot know without Divine revelation how God ought to be worshipped and glorified unless He tells us.

Isa. 55:8-9, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher*

than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

This is one reason why we do not to use mechanical instruments in worship.

In the New Testament, only singing is specified.

- Eph. 5:19, “*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,*”
- Col. 3:16, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*”

To offer praise with mechanical instruments...

- Would be something God has not commanded.
- Would be presumptuous on our part.

To do so would be trying to second-guess God.

- If God wanted such, He would have told us.
- Since He didn’t, we respect Him by offering only what He commands.

This is why we use only one cup in the Lord’s Supper.

In the New Testament, only one cup is specified.

- Matt. 26:27-28, “*And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*”
- Mark 14:23-24, “*And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.*”
- Luke 22:14-21, “*And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread,*

and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table.”

- 1 Cor. 10:16-17, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.”

Since the Lord has already stated that we use one cup, He could just as easily have added one more line to the above verse:

“For we being many are one cup, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one cup.”

1 Cor. 11:25-28, “After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.”

Regarding the priority of God...

Service to the Lord comes before service to the family.

This we learned when Aaron was not allowed to grieve for his sons.

It was necessary for others to take the bodies out of the camp.

Lev. 10:4-5, “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. So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moses had said.”

Aaron had been consecrated, and service to the Lord came first.

Lev. 10:6-7, “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. 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.”

Jesus made a similar point on several occasions.

As He was calling people to follow Him.

Luke 9:59-62, “And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

As He addressed the multitudes following Him.

Luke 14:25-33, “And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”

As He prepared His disciples for their work.

Matt. 10:34-37, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

When a conflict arises between service to the Lord and commitment to the family, Christ must come first!

Example: Obeying the gospel despite the objection of family members.

Or: Putting the assemblies of the Lord’s church first when company comes.

This does not require that we be rude to our guests.

Invite them to go with you, or have them make themselves at home until you return.

This is what it means to “seek ye first the kingdom of God and *His righteousness*” (Matt. 6:33).

Conclusion

It is very easy for us to become complacent in our service to God. When this happens, it shows in our worship and service to the Lord.

We are to regard Him as Holy and glorify Him as He deserves by doing exactly as He commands.

When we begin to offer in worship HOW we want and WHEN we want, then our worship is one of convenience rather of conviction!

We need to be reminded of incidents like that which happened to Nadab and Abihu...

- To humble us in the presence of God.
- To remind us of the seriousness of serving God in a manner that He has shown us.

Do we regard God as holy, and properly glorify Him in our service to Him? Do we serve Him first? Even above those closest to us?

May the example of Nadab and Abihu encourage us to do that which honors God!

