LEVITICUS

Chapter 10

*The Death of Nadab and Abihu*

**Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. 2 So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. 3 Moses then said to Aaron, “This is what the Lord spoke of when he said: “ ‘Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored.’ ” Aaron remained silent. 4 Moses summoned Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Aaron’s uncle Uzziel, and said to them, “Come here; carry your cousins outside the camp, away from the front of the sanctuary.” 5 So they came and carried them, still in their tunics, outside the camp, as Moses ordered.6 Then Moses said to Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, “Do not let your hair become unkempt, and do not tear your clothes, or you will die and the Lord will be angry with the whole community. But your relatives, all the house of Israel, may mourn for those the Lord has destroyed by fire. 7 Do not leave the entrance to the Tent of Meeting or you will die, because the Lord’s anointing oil is on you.” So they did as Moses said. 8 Then the Lord said to Aaron, 9 “You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the Tent of Meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. 10 You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, 11 and you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given them through Moses.” 12 Moses said to Aaron and his remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, “Take the grain offering left over from the offerings made to the Lord by fire and eat it prepared without yeast beside the altar, for it is most holy. 13 Eat it in a holy place, because it is your share and your sons’ share of the offerings made to the Lord by fire; for so I have been commanded. 14 But you and your sons and your daughters may eat the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented. Eat them in a ceremonially clean place; they have been given to you and your children as your share of the Israelites’ fellowship offerings. 15 The thigh that was presented and the breast that was waved must be brought with the fat portions of the offerings made by fire, to be waved before the Lord as a wave offering. This will be the regular share for you and your children, as the Lord has commanded.” 16 When Moses inquired about the goat of the sin offering and found that it had been burned up, he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s remaining sons, and asked, 17 “Why didn’t you eat the sin offering in the sanctuary area? It is most holy; it was given to you to take away the guilt of the community by making atonement for them before the Lord. 18 Since its blood was not taken into the Holy Place, you should have eaten the goat in the sanctuary area, as I commanded.” 19 Aaron replied to Moses, “Today they sacrificed their sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord, but such things as this have happened to me. Would the Lord have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?” 20 When Moses heard this, he was satisfied.**

**Ch 10** Nadab and Abihu bring unauthorized fire into God’s presence and pay with their lives for failing to distinguish between holy and common, a priestly requirement (v 10). (TLSB)

**10:1** *censers.* Ceremonial vessels containing hot coals and used for burning incense (see 16:12–13; 2Ch 26:19; Rev 8:3–4). (CSB)

Ceremonial container holding hot coals for burning incense. Cf 16:12–13. (TLSB)

*unauthorized fire*. Not authorized by God for use in the Divine Service. The character of the offense is not fully clear. Irenaeus of Lyons: “The heretics, indeed, who bring strange fire to the altar of God—namely, strange doctrines—shall be burned up by the fire from heaven, as were Nadab and Abihu” (*ANF* 1:497). (TLSB)

**10:2** *fire came out*. Holy fire from the Most Holy Place. (TLSB)

*consumed them*. Ironically, God’s earlier sign of blessing (9:24) here expresses condemnation. He does not tolerate man’s arbitrary worship procedures. He alone provides the ordinances governing divine worship. Cf Ex 40; Nu 7. (TLSB)

*died before the Lord*. Aaron’s older sons are mentioned also in Ex 6:23; 24:1, 9; 28:1; Nu 3:2–4; 26:60–61; 1Ch 6:3; 24:1–2. They are regularly remembered as having died before the Lord and as having had no sons. Their death was tragic and at first seems harsh, but no more so than that of Ananias and Sapphira (Ac 5:1–11). (CSB)

**10:3** *sanctified* … *glorified*. God, the source of all holiness expects His priests to treat Him as holy, and then God’s people will do so as well. (TLSB)

*Aaron held his peace*. He accepted God’s decision. (TLSB)

**10:4–5** *Mishael and Elzaphan*. Nadab and Abihu’s cousins. (TLSB)

**10:6–7** Aaron and his surviving two sons are not to mourn or attend the funeral; God has anointed them as priests, and their service is confined to the tent of meeting. At Jesus’ trial, the high priest tore his clothes (Mt 26:65), contrary to Mosaic Law. As the temple curtain was ripped apart at Christ’s death, so, too, was the priestly office ripped apart. (TLSB)

**10:6** *tear your clothes.* See 21:10; see also note on Ge 44:13. (CSB)

**10:7** *Do not leave.* To join the mourners (see 21:11–12). (CSB)

**10:9** Priests were not allowed to drink intoxicating beverages before or during the time they carried out their liturgical duties. Some commentaries suggest that Nadab and Abihu were drunk in v 1, but most likely intoxicating drink is mentioned here because drinking from the “cup of consolation” was part of the funeral service (Jer 16:7). (TLSB)

**10:10** *between the holy and the common.* The distinction between what was holy (sacred) and what was common (profane) was carefully maintained (see Eze 22:26; 42:20; 44:23; 48:14–15). (CSB)

God’s OT priests were responsible for determining what was God’s (holy) and what was not (common). All rituals were performed to safeguard God’s holiness and protect His people from the consequences of desecrating His holiness. (TLSB)

**10:11** *teach the people*. God’s priests were to share instruction and ritual knowledge with God’s people. (TLSB)

**10:12–15** See 7:28–36; Nu 18:8–20; Dt 18:1–5. (CSB)

Sacrifices begun (ch 9) before the deaths of Aaron’s two sons were not made unclean by their deaths. God commanded use of these sacrifices as food for Aaron and his children. (TLSB)

**10:16** *burned up!* Moses becomes angry after learning that a sin offering was burned instead of eaten. (TLSB)

**10:17** *bear the iniquity*. A chain of accountability was established. The Levites bore the iniquity of the people (Nu 18:23). The Aaronic priests bore the iniquity of the whole priesthood (Nu 18:1). The high priest bore the iniquity for acts of sacrilege during divine worship (Ex 28:38). Then, on the Day of Atonement, which God instituted because of Nadab and Abihu’s actions, a scapegoat bore the iniquities of people and priests, lest any should die for a sacrilege to God’s holiness (Lv 16:21–22). (TLSB)

**10:18** *Since its blood was not taken into the Holy Place, you should have eaten.* There were two types of sin offerings: (1) those in which the blood was sprinkled within the tabernacle, and (2) those in which it was sprinkled only on the great altar. Portions of the second type normally should have been eaten (see note on 4:5). But Moses was satisfied when he learned that Aaron had acted sincerely and not in negligence or rebellion (vv. 19–20). (CSB)

The law governing sin offerings was broken. When blood of the sin offering was used to atone for a priest and the blood was sprinkled in the tent of meeting, the offering was then burned. However, when the sin offering was not for priestly atonement, the meat was eaten. In this instance, the priests confused the two offerings. (TLSB)

**10:19** *such things as this have happened to me.* Perhaps referring to the death of his two oldest sons (v. 2), for which he mourned by fasting. Or possibly something had occurred that made him ceremonially unclean. (CSB)

After the death of his sons, Aaron was extra cautious in his actions. (TLSB)

**10:20** Moses was satisfied that Aaron’s actions were sincere and not an act of rebellion against the Lord. (TLSB)

**Ch 10** The story of Nadab and Abihu’s thoughtlessness shows us that God is present in grace and in wrath. The God who justifies sinners also condemns those who will not sanctify the Lord. God’s people, the beneficiaries of His grace, should serve the Lord in reverence and awe (Heb 12:28–29). Jesus Christ, who bore the sins of all, declares us acceptable to God (1Pt 2:24). Scripture calls this justification. • Lord, how awesome is Your almighty power. Thank You for Your grace, which justified sinners like us and made us holy through the body and blood of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)