

LEVITICUS

Chapter 10

The Death of Nadab and Abihu

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[a] 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.” 12 Moses spoke to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his surviving sons: “Take the grain offering that is left of the LORD’s food offerings, and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy. 13 You shall eat it in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons’ due, from the LORD’s food offerings, for so I am commanded. 14 But the breast that is waved and the thigh that is contributed you shall eat in a clean place, you and your sons and your daughters with you, for they are given as your due and your sons’ due from the sacrifices of the peace offerings of the people of Israel. 15 The thigh that is contributed and the breast that is waved they shall bring with the food offerings of the fat pieces to wave for a wave offering before the LORD, and it shall be yours and your sons’ with you as a due forever, as the LORD has commanded.” 16 Now Moses diligently inquired about the goat of the sin offering, and behold, it was burned up! And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the surviving sons of Aaron, saying, 17 “Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the place of the sanctuary, since it is a thing most holy and has been given to you that you may bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD? 18 Behold, its blood was not brought into the inner part of the sanctuary. You certainly ought to have eaten it in the sanctuary, as I commanded.” 19 And Aaron said to Moses, “Behold, today they have offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD, and yet such things as these have happened to me! If I had eaten the sin offering today, would the LORD have approved?” 20 And when Moses heard that, he approved.

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)

10:7 *Do not go outside the entrance.* 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 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 *its blood was not brought 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)