

## SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**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.

**2** And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.

**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.

**4** 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.

**5** So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moses had said.

**6** 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.

**7** 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.

### NOTES

# Death of Nadab and Abihu

Lesson Text: Leviticus 10:1-7

Related Scriptures: I Samuel 2:12-17; Joshua 7:1-20;  
Acts 5:1-11; Psalm 2:10-12

TIME: 1445 B.C.

PLACE: plain before Mount Sinai

GOLDEN TEXT—"Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (Psalm 2:11).

## Lesson Exposition

Parents of faith desire their children to be saved and faithfully follow the Lord. Parents who have been called to full-time Christian ministry have an additional desire that their children would follow in their ministry footsteps. In both cases, parents soon discover their children are personally responsible for their own spiritual decisions.

In this week's lesson text, two of Aaron's sons made decisions that resulted in gut-wrenching tragedy. The death of Nadab and Abihu is a powerful reminder of the need to serve the Lord with godly obedience.

### DISOBEDIENCE AND DEATH— Lev. 10:1-3

**Strange fire offered (Lev. 10:1-2).** Nadab and Abihu were Aaron's oldest sons (cf. Ex. 6:23). As they commenced their priestly ministry, they committed multiple acts of disobedience. First, Nadab and Abihu had not received a command from God to offer incense using their ceremonial dishes, or pans, that held burning coals and ashes. Aaron only, as high priest, had the singular responsibility for this priestly act (cf. 30:7-9).

Second, Nadab and Abihu both "of-

fered strange fire before the Lord" (Lev. 10:1). The phrase "strange fire" has several possible interpretations. Some believe the phrase is descriptive of burning coals and ashes not taken from the brazen altar (cf. 16:12).

Others believe the phrase describes incense offered at an unauthorized time of the day. Additionally, commentators connect Leviticus 10:9 with the context and conclude Nadab and Abihu were intoxicated and, motivated by pride, sought to impress the people and garner their praise with an impressive display of devotion.

It seems best to allow the comment in Leviticus 10:1, "which he commanded them not," to supply an accurate interpretation. The phrase "strange fire" is best interpreted to mean an irregular, illegitimate, and therefore disobedient incense offering not commanded by the Lord.

The Lord's response to Nadab and Abihu's disobedient actions was swift and decisive. In an act of irony, a lightning-like fire originated from God's presence. This destructive fire originated either from heaven or from God's earthly presence between the cherubim within the holy of holies. In either

case, God's fiery judgment "devoured" (vs. 2) Nadab and Abihu. This term can mean to destroy or completely consume. In the context (vss. 4-5), the term means simply to cause death.

As you contemplate this material, you may find Nadab and Abihu's disobedience easier to comprehend than God's judgment of death on them. We should remind ourselves that living life as fallen creatures in a fallen world yields occasional acts of disobedience. This reality does not justify disobedience, but it helps us deal with it honestly and authentically.

Moreover, acts of disobedience usually arise when faith is under devilish attack. The good news is that disobedience does not have to consume us. God has provided us with every conceivable measure of strength to overcome Satan's deceitful attacks (cf. II Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:10-11). Our salvation equips us to reject sinful defiance and to experience the victory of godly obedience.

God's decisive act of judgment may be more difficult to comprehend. Some would argue that Nadab and Abihu's deaths are not compatible with God's loving character. But this decisive judgment by God was not a singular biblical event (cf. II Sam. 6:7; Acts 5:1-11). Also, it was a graphic reminder of God's sovereign holiness and the accompanying responsibility of His servants to obey His commands in every respect.

**Revelation and response (Lev. 10:3).** Following God's judgment of death, Moses explained God's judgment to the grieving father, Aaron. First, God had consecrated Aaron and his sons to the sacred Levitical priesthood. God expected them, therefore, to reciprocate and reveal His holiness through the obedient performance of their priestly tasks. When this did not happen, God's punishment itself confirmed His holy, righteous, and jealous character.

Second, the obedient ministry

of Aaron and his sons would bring honor and glory to God in the sight of His chosen people. When Nadab and Abihu chose to irreverently disobey God's commands, God's punishment of death achieved this purpose.

When Moses finished speaking, Aaron had only one response—awe-struck silence. The grieving father realized God was justified in His judgment, and he humbly yielded to His will (cf. Ps. 39:9).

The supremacy of personal rights has engulfed our culture. As a result, God's sovereignty is in the process of being dismissed as irrelevant.

We have sacred opportunities to contest cultural norms. One of the most powerful opportunities is our response to difficult life situations. When others observe the confusion and despair that result from our culture's abandonment of biblical principles, we can leave them awestruck by our obedient yielding to God's sovereign plan for life.

### RELATIVES, REVELATION, AND RESPECT—Lev. 10:4-7

**The supportive contributions of Aaron's cousins (Lev. 10:4-5).** Uzziel, Aaron's uncle, had three sons (cf. Ex. 6:22). Moses commanded two of Uzziel's sons, Mishael and Elzaphan, to approach the scene of death. As Kohathites, Mishael and Elzaphan had sacred responsibilities concerning the holy things of the tabernacle (cf. Num. 4:1-20). Because they were not priests, though, Mishael and Elzaphan were prohibited from entering the holy place without special permission.

After receiving special permission from Moses, Mishael and Elzaphan obediently entered the holy place. They removed their kinsmen's dead bodies, which were still clothed in priestly garments, from the tabernacle and relocated them to a field outside the camp.

Even in the midst of severe punishment, God demonstrates His compas-



sionate character. This is evident first in the fact that God allowed Nadab and Abihu's priestly garments to not be destroyed. Even though Nadab and Abihu had committed egregious acts of disobedience, the garments were visible signs of God's compassionate respect for the ministry of the Levitical priesthood.

Second, God's compassion was displayed in His choice of Aaron's cousins to remove Nadab and Abihu's dead bodies. The obvious choice would have been their priestly brothers, Eleazar and Ithamar, since the law did allow for defilement through contact with a dead body for immediate family members (cf. Lev. 21:1-4). Sensing their grief, though, God commanded Moses to replace Eleazar and Ithamar with their cousins.

When you face difficult life situations that test your faith, remember God's compassion (cf. Ps. 86:15). God is not a cold and distant Deity. When He sees His children suffering and in need, God is moved to enter into their lives and offer them His help (cf. Matt. 9:36).

**The stringent claims on Aaron and his surviving sons (Lev. 10:6-7).** In the midst of their deep grief, Moses gave Aaron and his surviving sons challenging commands. Moses' first command dealt with the customary, visible expressions of mourning. Aaron and his sons were forbidden to let their hair become disheveled or to rip open their garments (cf. 21:10). Expressions of genuine mourning were not totally forbidden but were limited to the general populace.

Disobedience to Moses' first command would yield two severe consequences. To begin with, Aaron and his surviving sons would experience the same judgment of death Nadab and Abihu had experienced. Additionally, God's universal displeasure would extend to the general populace of His chosen people.

Moses' second command dealt with

the importance of unimpeded ministry responsibilities. Aaron and his sons were not permitted to relinquish their priestly duties to participate in Nadab and Abihu's burial. The reason for this denial was God's consecration of Aaron and his sons to priestly ministry.

From a strictly human perspective, God's stringent commands seem harsh and cruel, almost offensive.

When God sovereignly allows difficult life situations to test our faith, He takes no pleasure in our emotional struggle. His Son, our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, sympathizes with the depth of our distress (cf. Heb. 4:14-16). Jesus completely understands us and compassionately offers Himself to us. In response, we should approach the Lord with spiritual confidence and discover His amazing grace to help in our time of need.

—Thomas R. Chmura.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Disobedience, especially in the context of spiritual ministry, is always deserving of God's judgment (Lev. 10:1-2).
2. The highest priority of God's consecrated servants is endorsing His holy and honorable character (vs. 3).
3. When family members die, the supportive, selfless assistance of living family members is invaluable (vss. 4-5).
4. During extraordinary seasons of personal loss, God's servants may have to choose spiritual obedience to His commands above expressions of personal emotions (vs. 6).
5. Consistent faithfulness to spiritual ministry validates God's anointed calling (vs. 7).

—Thomas R. Chmura.

## FOR DAILY MEDITATION

**MONDAY, Sept. 6. Lev. 10:8-11.**

**The duty of teaching.** God is serious about His holiness. He taught Aaron and the priests clear rules that would set them apart from other people in order to teach everyone a clear difference between what is holy and unholy and what is clean and unclean (vs. 10). This week, we will see several biblical accounts of God's reaction to His servants blurring those lines. Do we do the same thing, sometimes forgetting what God's holiness truly means?

**TUESDAY, Sept. 7. 1 Sam. 2:12-17.**

**Eli's sons displease God.** Even though they served as priests, the sons of Eli did not know the Lord. Instead of following God's protocol for their daily provisions, they forcefully took a large share of the people's sacrifices. This showed contempt for God's command and God's provision. First Samuel 2:17 says, "The sin of the young men was very great." Do we see our own sins as very great? Or do we convince ourselves that our sins are small?

**WEDNESDAY, Sept. 8.  
1 Sam. 4:11-17.**

**The death of Eli's sons.** God's holiness could not tolerate the sins of Eli's sons. Eventually, while Eli's sons were going through the motions of being priests, God allowed the Philistine army to kill them and to capture the ark of the covenant, which represented God's presence with the Israelites. The sins of Eli's sons did not go unpunished. God is still holy today. He still abhors sin as much as He did then.

**THURSDAY, Sept. 9. Josh. 7:1-20.**

**Achan displeases the Lord.** Because God is holy, He could not overlook even one sin among the Israelites as they

conquered the Promised Land. Joshua sent troops to conquer a small city, Ai. But the men of Ai chased them away and killed thirty-six Israelite soldiers. Joshua asked the Lord why this had happened. God said there was sin in their camp. God commanded Joshua to find the guilty person and destroy him and his plundered treasure from Jericho. God was making a point that He is holy, and He demands that we be holy also.

**FRIDAY, Sept. 10. Acts 5:1-11.**

**Ananias and Sapphira displease God.** Ananias and Sapphira conspired to deceive the apostles and God. It was just a part of the money they kept from God. But God saw deeper than the money to greed and deceit. He punished it with death. We forget that a holy God cannot overlook our sins either. The blood of Jesus covers our sins so that they do not offend our holy God.

**SATURDAY, Sept. 11. Ps. 2:10-12.**

**Serve God with fear.** What does it mean to fear God? Must we tiptoe through life afraid we will anger Him? Must we hide from Him? No. It means we must hold Him in reverence and awe. We must bow to His authority, His power, and His holiness. We must submit ourselves to Him through Jesus Christ, His provision for our salvation.

**SUNDAY, Sept. 12. Lev. 10:1-7.**

**Honor God's awesome holiness.** Aaron's two sons abused God's calling on their lives. They tried to make their own way to worship God rather than obey His commands. Upon their blatant disobedience, God had to punish their sins. Today we often forget that God is still holy and just. But Jesus took that punishment for us on the cross. His blood cleanses us from our sins and makes us holy in God's presence.

—Jean Matthew Hall.