

## 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*

### **THE FIRE OF THE LORD—**

#### **Lev. 10:1-3**

**Death of Aaron's sons (Lev. 10:1-2).** In last week's lesson, we studied the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests of Israel, establishing the Aaronic priesthood under the Mosaic covenant. God showed His approval by accepting Aaron's first sacrifice, as recorded in chapter 9.

What happened next, however, became a national tragedy witnessed by many. Two of Aaron's four sons who had just been ordained as priests, Nadab and Abihu, took their own censers, put incense in them, and offered "strange," or unauthorized, fire to the Lord (10:1). Their actions were not something God had commanded or mandated.

The strange fire offered by Nadab and Abihu apparently did not come from the altar where the burnt offering had been made (cf. 16:12). It had no association with atonement or sacrifice and was therefore profane to God, making it unacceptable. They tried to come to God their own way and were struck dead as a result.

**Aaron's silence before the Lord (Lev. 10:3).** God spoke to Moses next, telling him to remind Aaron that He

would be glorified before all the people. Had Nadab and Abihu not been punished, God's glory would have been diminished. Of all people, those chosen to come near Him as priests must come in a holy manner that reflected His own holiness.

After listening to Moses' words, Aaron remained silent. He did not dare to speak a word against the Lord in protest or dispute.

God had accepted Aaron's sacrifice with a fire of glory, but He condemned Aaron's sons with a fire of judgment. His judgment is always righteous, and God has every right to judge those who sin against Him.

### **OUR SERVICE TO THE LORD—**

#### **Lev. 10:4-5**

**Called to serve the Lord (Lev. 10:4).** God often calls us to do things that are unappealing, unappreciated, unnoticed, and emotionally difficult. Service to the Lord is not only for preachers, pastors, deacons, and missionaries. Everyone who is a follower of Jesus Christ is called to serve Him in whatever capacity the Lord desires. This was the case for Mishael and Elzaphan. These two men were the sons of

Moses and Aaron's uncle Uzziel, making them first cousins of Israel's two primary leaders.

Under the law, anyone who touched a corpse became ceremonially unclean for seven days (Num. 19:11). For Aaron and his two remaining sons, this would mean being unable to perform their priestly duties during that time. Therefore, Moses called on his relatives who were not from the priestly family to come and remove the bodies of Nadab and Abihu from the sanctuary and bury them outside the camp.

#### **Obedient servanthood (Lev. 10:5).**

Our devotion to the Lord is proved by our faithful, obedient service to Him. We should consider it a privilege to do anything God calls us to do, regardless of how demeaning others may consider it.

What area of ministry has God called you into? You may not think that what you are doing is very significant, but if God gave you the assignment you have, then it is worthwhile and a valuable means of honoring the Lord no matter what anyone else may think.

When Moses called on Mishael and Elzaphan to remove the dead bodies of Nadab and Abihu, they simply came forward and did what was expected of them. There was no protest or complaint on their part, and there was certainly no applause from others. This was a very somber occasion that required someone to simply step up and do what needed to be done.

Times of tragedy call for faithful people to step up and serve. With the sudden deaths of two of Israel's first priests, the people were undoubtedly in shock. Priests would naturally be considered the holiest people in the community, so to see two of them killed instantly was unsettling to say the least. Their remains had to be removed, so this was a very important

job even if it was not one that likely would have garnered many volunteers.

While we do not want to overstate the importance of what Mishael and Elzaphan did, we do not want to overlook it either. The work they did receives very little attention in commentaries, but removing the bodies of these two fallen priests was extremely significant at the time. That the two men obeyed when called on is worth mentioning, and there is something we can learn from their example.

#### **THE CALL OF THE LORD— Lev. 10:6-7**

As we have seen, God's call on those who follow Him is seldom easy, and at times it is quite difficult. This was especially true for Aaron in this situation, as he was not allowed to publicly grieve the loss of his sons. Any complaint on his part would have been considered further rebellion against the righteousness of God. Any type of public mourning would have actually shown sympathy to those who rebelled against God and incurred His just wrath.

How agonizing it must have been for Aaron, on the worst day of his life, to not be able to mourn the deaths of two of his sons. To do so may have given the impression that God was wrong in bringing about the deaths of the two rebellious priests, and this would have invited further wrath. Nothing, not even what we might see as understandable grieving on the part of a heartbroken father, was an excuse for challenging God's holiness.

Some may be asking whether this means it is wrong to publicly grieve the loss of a loved one today, and the answer is an emphatic no. Grieving the death of someone close to us is natural and is to be expected. God in no way will punish anyone for mourning a death. In this instance, however, the Lord was establishing a new nation He had called out of Egyptian bondage to

be a people separated from the world to Himself.

The people of Israel needed to understand that God is uncompromisingly holy in His very nature. This meant that in times of extreme difficulty and hardship, they had to persevere in faith and obedience regardless of the circumstances. God was not unsympathetic to Aaron, but Aaron had to demonstrate the importance of revering God regardless of personal struggles and loss.

Those who serve the Lord as spiritual leaders and teachers bear great accountability to Him (cf. Jas. 3:1). They are entrusted with great responsibility but given the indwelling Holy Spirit to empower them to live differently from those around them and be examples to God's people. Since Aaron and his surviving sons had been anointed with the oil of the Lord (again, a picture of the Holy Spirit) as Israel's priests, they were not able to join the rest of the people in mourning.

The people had just endured a terrible tragedy, but the work of the high priest (Aaron) and the priests (his two living sons, Eleazar and Ithamar) could not be laid aside. They still had priestly duties that had to be conducted (cf. Lev. 10:12-15). The work of the Lord was not going to stop because of two rebellious priests. The remaining priests were still under the anointing of God and had to conduct themselves accordingly.

It must be noted here that although the command that prevented Aaron from publicly mourning his sons and that commanded him to continue to serve as priest between God and the people was grueling from a human standpoint, the anointing of the Lord was still on Aaron. In other words, God was still with him. The anointing had not left. God knew Aaron would not be able to continue on his own, and the Lord never abandoned him.

God may call us to an arduous task, but He will equip and empower us for whatever service He calls us to. He will not leave us alone. Even in the midst of the worst tragedies of life, He will be with us. As such, God expects us to be diligent in service and faithful to Him at all times.

Nadab and Abihu failed to respect the holiness of God. They tried to worship Him the way they wanted, and it cost them their lives. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are His servants. It is essential that we serve Him humbly, yielding always to His authority. God is holy and is to be treated as such.

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

## QUESTIONS

1. What was unacceptable about the fire that the two sons of Aaron brought before the Lord?
2. What did Moses immediately tell Aaron after the deaths of his two sons?
3. How did Aaron respond to Moses' words?
4. Who did Moses call on to remove the corpses of Nadab and Abihu, and why did he choose these men?
5. What was Aaron forbidden to do under these circumstances?
6. Is it improper to grieve the death of a loved one? Explain.
7. What was God teaching through the limits on Aaron and his sons?
8. Why could Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar not leave the tabernacle?
9. What did the anointing of Aaron and his sons indicate?
10. What lessons does this incident have for us?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We should follow the Lord's leading, not expect Him to follow us (Lev. 10:1).
2. God's judgment may not be immediate, but we will have to give an account of ourselves, so we should never use grace as license to sin (vs. 2).
3. Do not steal glory; it belongs to God alone (vs. 3).
4. A Christian's primary allegiance should be to the Lord, even above his family (Lev. 10:4; Luke 14:26).
5. We must respect God's judgments, trusting in His wisdom and goodness (Lev. 10:5).
6. Church leaders should be held to a high standard because they are examples for other Christians (vss. 6-7).

—Megan Hickman.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How should you respond when someone professes to be a believer but neglects His commands (Lev. 10:1)?
2. Why does God have mercy on some people but not on others?
3. In what way is God a "consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29; Lev. 10:2)?
4. Why does God's desire for glory not make Him an egomaniac (Lev. 10:3)?
5. How does knowing when to submit to authorities (especially to the Lord) show spiritual maturity (vs. 3)?
6. Why should Christians react differently from unbelievers to the trials of life (cf. Eph. 4:1)?

—Megan Hickman.

## Golden Text Illuminated

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

Our golden text for this week touches on a neglected aspect of the Christian life: the fear of the Lord.

The writer of Hebrews warns us, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (10:31), and again, "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire" (12:28-29). It has become fashionable nowadays for preachers and teachers to enfeeble these warnings of inspired holy Scripture by reassuring their audiences that what is really meant by "fear" is merely respect and by no means indicates that we should actually be afraid of God.

It is essential that we come to a Scriptural understanding of the fear of the Lord, for it is neither only respect nor is it an abject fear of punishment for sins.

In C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, there is a conversation between Susan, Lucy, and Mrs. Beaver about the nature of Aslan, the great lion. Mrs. Beaver explains that meeting Aslan is no joke.

When Lucy asks if Aslan is safe to meet, Mr. Beaver responds, "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

Fearing God comes from truly realizing who He is. When we know that He is good but not necessarily safe, that He has all power, and that He gives us every breath and heartbeat we have, we will truly understand what it means to fear God appropriately.

—John Lody.