

What’s going on here?

Nadab and Abihu were the two older sons of Aaron.

They had been with Moses and Aaron and the 70 elders on Mt. Sinai in Ex. 24.

Now – they offer strange fire before the LORD –
and fire comes out from the LORD and consumed them.

We have seen that Aaron failed *catastrophically* in making a golden calf.

Yet God forgives *that sin* – and allows Aaron to become High Priest.

But Nadab and Abihu offer “strange fire” and are burnt to a crisp on the spot!

Whatever happened to getting a “second chance”?

Whatever happened to “the LORD is merciful and gracious”?!

What we are seeing is the fact that *yes*, the LORD is merciful and gracious –
but the LORD is also *holy*.

And these two things are not opposed to each other!

Moses has been laying out clearly the importance of *doing what God says*.

When the priests are bringing God’s people into the holy place –
they themselves need to be *holy*.

When God says “do it this way” –

don’t do it some other way!!

But the fundamental difference is a difference of timing.

Nadab and Abihu offer strange fire – *at precisely the moment*
when humanity is returning into the presence of God!

At precisely the moment when the new creation is dawning –

the old creation strikes back.

The serpent had said to Eve –

“you shall not die”!!

The lie of the devil is that God does not really mean what he says!

Here in Leviticus 8-10,

the LORD is opening a way back to himself
(or better yet, *forward* to himself!).

We saw last time how the eighth day was a sort of “new creation”!

Humanity has a path back to God.

Who can ascend the hill of the LORD?

God has told the priests how to ascend the hill of the LORD –
how they can enter his presence!

For the first time since Eden – there is a place where man can meet with God.

We heard in chapter 8 of the ordination offerings,

the seven days of preparation for entrance into the priestly service of God.

In chapter 9, we heard of the first day of the new creation!

This day–this eighth day–was the dawn of a new creation.

Or from our perspective (on this side of the cross),

the dawn of the shadow of the new creation.

But for Aaron and his sons–and for all Israel–this day was the dawning of a new creation.

The eighth day had come.

The LORD had promised to appear to them.

First they offered the sacrifices for the priests (9:8-14)

The priests must be in a right relation to God before they can mediate for the people.

Even after seven days of consecration,

they must continue to offer sin offerings and burnt offerings.

Then they offered the sacrifices for the people (9:15-21)

After being purified themselves, the priests could now make atonement for the people.

They do this through the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offering.

After offering the sacrifices, Aaron blessed the people (9:22)

Having received God’s blessing, he now mediates that to the people.

Then for the first time, Aaron joins Moses in the Tabernacle,

and when they came out they blessed the people (9:23-24).

And then the glory of Yahweh appeared to all the people.

Fire came out from the presence of the Lord, and it consumed the burnt offering

and the fat of the peace offering.

God had accepted the sacrifices.

More precisely, God had accepted Aaron’s priesthood.

A new day had dawned.

The new creation had come—at least in a picture.

A new Adam has entered the Garden!

Only God can open the way for humanity to enter his presence.

But only man can walk the path.

1. “Strange Fire” – The Death of Nadab and Abihu (v1-7)

a. “Among Those Who Are Near Me, I Will Be Sanctified” (v1-3)

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.

Here on the first day of the new creation –
as humanity has entered the presence of the living God in the new holy place –
the sons of Aaron decide to go off script.

But God is a holy God.

You cannot treat the new creation as a trivial thing.

Nadab and Abihu found that out the hard way.
Nadab and Abihu had stood on Mt Sinai
with Moses, Aaron, and the 70 elders of Israel in Exodus 24.
They had partaken of the covenant meal with God on the mountain.

Yet on this day –
the first day of their service as priests –
they did not regard Yahweh as holy.
They did not honor him or obey his Word.
They offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command.

What did they do?
They offered incense before the LORD,
which was something that only the High Priest was allowed to do.
Exodus 30:7-9 specified that the High Priest was to offer incense
every morning and every evening,
on the altar of incense;
and that “you shall not offer unauthorized incense on it.”

Nadab and Abihu had no business offering incense before Yahweh.
And so fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them.
Fire had come from the presence of the LORD in a sign of approval that morning.
But now, it came a sign of divine displeasure.

Someone may ask, “how can you tell whether fire from heaven is a good thing or a bad thing?”
Well, it’s pretty obvious.
Does the fire consume the offering?
Or does it consume the priest?!!

And this is where the story of Nadab and Abihu takes an unexpected twist.
Because what does Jesus say in Luke 12:49-50?

⁴⁹“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! ⁵⁰I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!

What did Jesus come to do?

He came to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.
But unless there is a sufficient sin offering,
the fire of God’s wrath would consume all humanity –
just like it did to Nadab and Abihu!

So first, Jesus himself must be *baptized* with the Holy Spirit and with fire.
The fire of God’s wrath must consume Jesus.

I realize that *at first* it looks like Nadab and Abihu are destroyed for their wickedness.
And in a sense, it is true.
Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire – contrary to God’s command.
So, yes, they sinned.

But Nadab and Abihu thereby became a picture of Christ.
Like all OT pictures of Christ, they are *flawed* pictures!
For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God!

But on that first day of the new creation –
the Spirit and fire was poured out on the temple –
and on the priests.

This is what happens when the Spirit and fire are poured out on the sons of Adam.

Why do I say that they are a picture of the outpouring of Spirit and fire?

First notice that they *died before the LORD*.
When Korah’s rebellion takes place –
and the followers of Korah offer incense *before the LORD* –
fire came out from the LORD and consumed them, period!

It doesn’t say that they died “before the LORD.”
There is a difference between dying in rebellion against God –
and dying as a sinner before God.

This also makes sense of the interaction between Aaron and Moses:

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.

First of all – we need to remember that the text does not tell us everything that happened,
or everything that was said on that day!

There is no discussion of the emotional response.

It does not say that Aaron suppressed his grief!

It does not say that Aaron wailed – or that Aaron did not wail!

If you want to know about Aaron’s emotional state that day,
you'll have to ask him when you meet him!

The Psalms are full of the emotions.

Leviticus is not!

This story is only part of the book of Leviticus

because it illustrates the point that Moses is making here!!

Namely, for Israel to enter the presence of God,

we need a holy priest – one who sanctifies the LORD –

who treats the LORD and the LORD’s things as holy.

Otherwise – we are *all toast!*

Those who dwell near the LORD are in a privileged position –

but they are also in a perilous position.

The higher office involves a greater degree of responsibility,

“for the danger of falling short and experiencing the Lord’s punishment on sin
is proportionate to the grace that one has received.”

(See Amos 3:12, Luke 12:48, and 1 Peter 4:17)

Aaron’s response *here* is a powerful silence.

He acknowledged God’s right to do this.

He knew that he had no just claim against God.

His sons had sinned.

They had violated the holiness of God.

And so he kept silent.

(Verses 4-7)

b. “The Anointing Oil of the LORD Is upon You” (v4-7)

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.

Since the priests were engaged in the worship of God,
Aaron and his sons were not allowed to mourn.

Their cousins were chosen to bear the bodies of Nadab and Abihu
out of the courtyard of the sanctuary.

The priests could not be defiled by touching a corpse.

They could not even go to the funeral.

Moses assures them that the rest of the family may mourn,
but they have had the holy oil of anointing poured upon them.

If they leave the temple service, then they too will die.

Do you remember Jesus’ words?

When one disciple said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father,” Jesus replied,
“Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.” (Matthew 8:21-22)

You have the holy anointing upon you.

You must not be distracted from your service to Christ.

This first day of the New Creation has demonstrated that we haven’t gotten very far yet!

In one sense, everything is pointing to Jesus –

and yet in another sense, everything seems to be just the way it was before!

But when Jesus came – he came in order to baptize with the Spirit and with fire –
he came in order to kindle the blaze that had consumed Nadab and Abihu.

But when Jesus took that fire upon himself –
he endured!

And so, on the day of Pentecost –

on the fiftieth day – on the 7x7 +1 day – the ultimate eighth day! –

Jesus finally poured out the Spirit and fire upon the church.

And guess what?!

No one got toasted!!

The Spirit came – and the people of God proclaimed the wondrous works of God!

Of course, some of you may be thinking of what happened a few weeks later...

Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit –

and the Spirit struck them dead.

It is still true that God requires holiness of his people!

Holiness is not optional!

God's standards haven't changed.
Instead, he sent his Son to bear our sin and guilt!

2. "And the LORD Spoke to Aaron" – Direction for the Priests (v8-11)

a. The Prohibition of Wine (v8-9)

⁸ *And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying,*

Verse 8 is unique.
And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying...

There is no other place where the LORD spoke only to Aaron.
But in this moment – where undoubtedly, he is grieving the death of his sons –
the LORD himself addresses Aaron.

And the LORD then gives Aaron certain regulations for the priesthood:

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.*

First, when they were to enter the tent, they were not to drink any alcoholic beverage.
This is not necessarily *saying* that Nadab and Abihu were drunk,
(though it could be a hint that such was the case!).

But whether they were or not –
it is certainly the case that alcohol loosens one's inhibitions;
and inhibitions are rather useful for humanity.

We all have tendencies and desires that would lead us in dangerous paths.

Alcohol doesn't *make* you sin.
But it does make you less guarded against sin!

And so God prohibits of the use of alcohol
while the priests were to go inside the tent.

You may wonder – what about the priest's portion of the drink offering?
They could drink that when they were in the courtyard – at the altar.
Because their duties at the altar are not in view.

The statute is very clear:
the prohibition against drinking wine and strong drink
only applies to when the priest goes into the tent of meeting.

That is when he bears the people into the presence of God.

And for such a task, one needs to be sober – in every sense of the word!

But then God says that Aaron and his sons are:

b. The Holy, the Clean, and the Teaching Responsibility of the Priests (v10-11)

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.”

We will be working through these things in the coming weeks.

Distinguish between the holy and the common –
between the unclean and the clean.

The priests were the judges of religious matters in Israel.

They had to understand the distinction between the holy and the profane,
the unclean and the clean.

And they were to teach the Israelites all the decrees of the LORD.

Not only were the priests the judges of religious matters,
they were also to be the teachers of Israel.

Nadab and Abihu had failed to distinguish between the holy and the common.

Verse 12 reminds us that we are still in the middle of the rituals of the eighth day!

3. Partaking of the Offerings (v12-20)

a. The Priest’s Portion of the Grain and Peace Offerings (v12-15)

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.”

Moses now reminds Aaron and his remaining sons

of their responsibilities to partake of the grain and fellowship offerings (10:12-15).

The priests were to eat the most holy things in the *holy* place (the court of the tabernacle).

But the peace offering (the breast that is waved and the thigh that is contributed)
were to be eaten in a clean place –
so for instance, they could eat that at their homes,

together with their families.

Notice that this is one of the first distinctions between the *holy* and the *clean*.

Distinguishing between holy and common is one thing.

Distinguishing between clean and unclean is another.

And teaching Israel to make these distinctions is also important!

b. The Priest's Portion of the Goat of the Sin Offering (v16-20)

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.

Then in v16, Moses inquired after the goat of the sin offering,
which had been offered for the people (10:16-20).

When he discovered that Aaron and his sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, had not eaten the meat,
but had burned it in the fire, he was very angry—and no doubt afraid.

God had already struck down two of Aaron's sons for their failure to make proper distinctions!

Would the whole priesthood be destroyed in a day?!

But Aaron explained that in the light of the events of the day,
they believed that God would not be pleased
if the priests had eaten the sin offering.

And Moses was satisfied with this explanation.

They did not disobey out of rebellion.

Rather, they believed that their somewhat unorthodox practice
was justified by the unusual events of the day.

When the priests sin, it creates a real conundrum.

What do you do when the mediator is unworthy?

This is why Hebrews delights in Jesus.

Turn over to Hebrews 7:11-28

¹¹ Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? ¹² For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. ¹³ For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that

tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

¹⁵ This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek,
¹⁶ who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent,
but by the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is witnessed of him,

“You are a priest forever,

after the order of Melchizedek.” (a quote from Psalm 110)

¹⁸ For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and
uselessness ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is
introduced, through which we draw near to God.

²⁰ And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such
without an oath, ²¹ but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him:

“The Lord has sworn

and will not change his mind,

‘You are a priest forever.’”

²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from
continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost^[b] those who draw near to God through him,
since he always lives to make intercession for them.

²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained,
separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests,
to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this
once for all when he offered up himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints men in their weakness as high
priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been
made perfect forever.

We have a high priest who has passed through the fire of God’s wrath –
who now lives at the right hand of God,
so that we might draw near to God through him.

If the eighth day of Aaron’s consecration brought the glory of the new creation –
only to fall back into the shadows of this age –

then the eighth day of Jesus’ consecration –
the resurrection on the first day of the new creation,
indeed brings the new and better covenant!