

## Two Priests Struck Dead (Leviticus 9-10)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Leviticus

---

### I. Review from Prior Lessons

- a. In **Leviticus 1-7**, we discussed the rules and regulations regarding five different types of sacrificial offerings that the priests would make.
- b. In the previous lesson, which covered **Leviticus 8**, we learned about the process of ordaining Aaron (the high priest) and his four sons (the priests).
- c. While we are no longer under the Levitical rules (which were abolished at the cross, with the death of Christ), all of these things still have significance for us, since they foreshadowed things that were yet to come.
  - i. The High Priest, Aaron, foreshadowed Jesus, as explained in **Hebrews 8-10**.
  - ii. His sons, the priests, foreshadowed us, the Christians. As Peter stated in **1 Peter 2:1-10**, we have become the new priesthood.
  - iii. The ordination and ministry of the sons of Aaron (**Leviticus 8**) foreshadowed the markings of our own priesthood. We, like they, have been:
    1. *Washed* (foreshadowing baptism),
    2. *Clothed* with special clothing (foreshadowing our being clothed with Christ, with humility, etc.)
    3. *Anointed* (foreshadowing our being anointed with the Holy Spirit);
      - a. The Christ is *the* Anointed One, and we as Christians have become the *anointed ones of God*, as well.
    4. Offer different types of *sacrifices and prayers* to the Lord (foreshadowing how we, as Christians, now offer ourselves as living sacrifices, as Paul said in **Romans 12:1**).
  - iv. These four aspects of the ordination and ministry of the priests are also summarized in **Exodus 40**. The ordination and beginning of the ministry of the priests, discussed in **Leviticus 8-9**, is an expansion of certain aspects of the events described in **Exodus 40** (the completion and commissioning of the tabernacle).

1. Read **Exodus 40:1-2, 40:10-15 and 40:28-32**.
2. Note how *all four* of the things we discussed in **Leviticus 8** (the distinctive aspects in the ordination and ministry of the priests) are mentioned here.
3. The cloud overshadowed the tabernacle, and it was filled with the “glory of the Lord”.

## II. Priestly Service Begins; the Glory of the Lord Appears at the Tabernacle

### a. Read **Leviticus 8:33-9:7**.

- i. The ordination process for Aaron and his four sons takes *seven days*. They are required to remain within the tabernacle for seven days and nights.
- ii. On the eighth day, the elders of the people are told to bring offerings to the priests, to be sacrificed to the Lord.
- iii. *On the eighth day* they are told, “Today the Lord will appear to you.”
  1. Note: This statement that the Lord would “appear to the people” on the eighth day might possibly be a prophetic statement foreshadowing the resurrection of Jesus.
    - a. He arose from the dead and appeared to people on Sunday, the day after the Sabbath (which was “the seventh day”).
    - b. Therefore, one could say that Jesus rose “on the eighth day”. Some of the early Christians, with this in mind, pointed to the significance of the number “8” in connection with the resurrection of Jesus.
  2. From Justin Martyr, an early Christian writer originally from Samaria, writing c. 160 AD:
    - a. “The command of circumcision, again, bidding [them] always circumcise the children on the eighth day, was a type of the true circumcision, by which we are circumcised from deceit and iniquity through Him who rose from the dead on the first day after the Sabbath, [namely through] our Lord Jesus Christ. For the first day after the Sabbath, remaining the first of all the days, is called, however, *the eighth*, according to the number of all the days of the cycle, and [yet] remains the first.”

- i. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 41; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 215)
  - b. “For righteous Noah, along with the other mortals at the deluge, i.e., with his own wife, his three sons and their wives, being eight in number, were a symbol of the *eighth day*, wherein Christ appeared when He rose from the dead, for ever the first in power.”
    - i. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 138; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 268)
- 3. From the Epistle of Barnabas, written c. 70-100 AD:
  - a. “...we keep the *eighth day* with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead. And when He had manifested Himself, He ascended into the heavens.”
    - i. (Source: *Epistle of Barnabas*, chapter 15; found in ANF vol. 1, pp. 146–147)
  - iv. All the people are gathered to the tabernacle to witness what is about to happen.
- b. In **Leviticus 9:8-21**, we find details regarding the sacrifices that were offered at the commissioning of the tabernacle.
- c. Read **Leviticus 9:22-24**.
  - i. Aaron makes the offerings and blesses the people.
  - ii. Moses and Aaron go into the tabernacle and come out, then bless the people (again).
  - iii. “Glory of the Lord” appears to all the people; fire comes out from the Lord and consumes the offerings.
    - 1. The people, who see this event, are amazed and fall on their faces.
    - 2. This scene is very similar to when Solomon dedicated the temple 400 years later. The temple was a permanent, immobile structure that replaced the portable, tent-like tabernacle. Read **2 Chronicles 7:1-3**.
  - iv. Fire from the Lord consumes the sacrifices, just as at the beginning (when the tabernacle was commissioned).

- d. **Question:** *What would you think* if you were one of the people who saw that happen (cloud of the glory of the Lord appeared, sacrifices consumed by fire coming out of the tabernacle, etc.)?
- i. **My Reaction Would Have Been:** I would be feeling a great fear of the Lord. This was a similar lesson as when the Lord first came down upon Mount Sinai (shaking the earth, fire like a furnace, etc.). I would be thinking:
1. I had better do *whatever* He says!
    - a. Don't take His commands casually. Do *exactly* what He says.
  2. Pay attention to Moses and Aaron (and the priests), and follow what they tell us.
  3. If this God is with me, I should not have any fear of men (including other kings and their armies, nor of other 'gods').
    - a. With this God on my side, I could have great confidence in the face of adversity and challenges.

### III. Nadab and Abihu Struck Dead

- a. Read **Leviticus 10:1-11**.
- i. Nadab and Abihu are the oldest two of Aaron's four sons. They had just been anointed as priests and had undergone the seven-day ordination process.
1. These two sons died childless, so their lineage is eliminated. **(Numbers 3:1-4)**
- ii. They offered "strange fire" before the Lord and were struck dead. Fire comes out from the Lord and consumes them.
- b. **Questions:** What was the sin of these two brothers? Why was the Lord so angry with them? If the High Priest foreshadowed Christ and the priests foreshadow us, *what are we supposed to learn* from this story?
- i. They were doing something wrong regarding the incense that they offered before the Lord.
- ii. What they offered is referred to, based on different translations, as:
1. *Strange fire,*
  2. *Alien fire, or*

3. *Unauthorized* fire.
  - iii. It is not identified what the specific problem was that made this offering unacceptable before the Lord. **Question:** What did they do that was so offensive to the Lord? A few possibilities include:
    1. Perhaps they offered an incense that was not the prescribed special incense referred to in **Exodus 30:34-38**.
    2. Perhaps they were offering it the wrong place, or the wrong time, or with the wrong heart.
    3. Perhaps they were offering incense while being drunk from alcohol.
      - a. Notice that the post-mortem commandment in **Leviticus 10:8-11** is that no priests henceforward could drink wine or strong drink when ministering at the tabernacle, lest they also be killed.
  - c. It was critical that the priests be fully sober while ministering, in order to:
    - i. Distinguish between the clean and unclean;
    - ii. Distinguish between the holy and unholy; and
    - iii. Teach the children of Israel all the ordinances of the Lord given through Moses.
  - d. The bodies of the two fallen priests are carried out by relatives, as instructed by Moses. Aaron and his other two sons are warned to:
    - i. *Not remove any* of their priestly garments (as might be expected in mourning), and
    - ii. *Not leave* the tabernacle,
      1. “lest you die,
      2. for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you” (**Leviticus 10:6**).
  - e. **Questions:** Again, what lessons should we learn from this sobering story? What might apply to us?
    - i. The anointed ones, those who draw near to God, need to be especially vigilant and careful. Never assume that because we are in a favored position with God that we can neglect our personal righteousness.

1. Two (of four) priests, direct descendants of the High Priest, who had been “washed, clothed and anointed”, were struck dead.
  - a. Similar to lessons from the “Exodus map” in **1 Corinthians 10:1-15**. Only a righteous few of those who were “baptized”, “drank from the rock...Christ” and “ate the spiritual food and drank the spiritual drink” made it to the Promised Land. This is a lesson for us!
  - b. Similar also to the point Paul makes in **Romans 11** with the parable of the olive tree. If we have been grafted into the tree: “Do not be haughty, but fear!” (**Romans 11:20**)
    - i. We, too, can be broken off, like the Jews!
- ii. The Lord *expects more* of those who are drawing near to Him.
  1. Moses told Aaron, immediately after Aaron’s sons were struck dead, that the Lord told him, “By those who come near Me I shall be sanctified; and before all the congregation I shall be glorified.”
  2. If those who claim to be near God are acting in a sinful manner, this unfairly casts the Lord in a very bad light, in the eyes of many.
    - a. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus says that we should pray, “Hallowed be your name” (**Matthew 6:9** and **Luke 11:2**). Early Christian writers understood this to be a challenge to those uttering this phrase, that we need to live the kind of lives that glorify God. (See Tertullian in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 682; and Cyprian in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 450.)
      - i. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, *that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*” (**Matthew 5:14–16**, NKJV)
    - b. Addressing Christians, Peter says our lives need to be characterized by: “having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as

evildoers, *they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God* in the day of visitation.” (**1 Peter 2:12**, NKJV)

- c. God calls those who draw closer to Him and those who have a stronger association with Him (particularly church leaders and teachers) to a higher standard. Consider how it says in **James 3:1** that teachers in the church will receive “a stricter judgment”.

iii. Don’t bring “strange fire” before the Lord.

1. Irenaeus, bishop of the church in Lyons, in Gaul (modern-day France) writing c. 180 AD, commented on the applicability of this story for Christians.
  - a. “And 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 Abiud (**Leviticus 10**). But such as rise up in opposition to the truth, and exhort others against the Church of God, [shall] remain among those in hell (*apud inferos*), being swallowed up by an earthquake, even as those who were with Chore, Dathan, and Abiron (**Numbers 16**).”
    - i. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 4, chapter 26; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 497)
2. Irenaeus equated the sins of Nadab and Abihu with *people who bring false teaching into the church*. This reminds me of the warning given afterward to the surviving priests:
  - a. “That you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between clean and unclean, and that you may teach the children of Israel all the ordinances which the Lord spoke to them by the hand of Moses.” (**Leviticus 10:10-11**, LXX, OSB)
  - b. No one has the authority to play fast and loose with the commands of God. This includes ignoring certain teachings, adding requirements that are not in Scripture, or twisting Scriptures to change their original intended meaning.

- i. Paul has warned, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches *any other gospel to you than what you have received*, let him be accursed.” (**Galatians 1:8–9**, NKJV)
- ii. Similarly, from **Jude**: “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which *was once for all delivered to the saints.*” (**Jude 3**, NKJV)
- iii. People are offering a lot of “strange fire” in modern Christian churches these days! The ‘fire of the Lord’ may not come down as quickly and visibly as it did upon Aaron’s two sons. However, let this serve as a warning for all teachers and preachers in the churches. We have no business trying to ‘improve’ or innovate the faith handed down by the apostles. We must restore and hold onto the original instructions *as delivered*. That includes areas that may be unpopular with the culture of the world around us regarding things like:
  1. Sexual purity
  2. Permanence of marriage
  3. Church discipline
  4. Roles of men and women in the church and family
  5. Unity among Christians
  6. Resolving conflict quickly
  7. Confessing sin one to another
  8. Etc.
- iv. Another lesson for us: Not all who have been washed, clothed, anointed will make it to the end. Do not be surprised when you see other Christians, even prominent leaders, fall because of sin. At the time of



Aaron, *half of his sons* (the priests, who foreshadowed us) *did not make it!*

1. Aaron and his two remaining sons were warned that they had been anointed; therefore, if they abandoned their positions, they would be struck dead also. They could not remove their garments to mourn, neither could they leave the tabernacle to bury their fallen son/brother. Let that serve as a reminder that our allegiance to the Lord has to surpass any ties we have to *even our closest* relatives.
  - a. Similarly, Jesus cautioned His disciples: “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.” (**Matthew 10:34–39**, NKJV)
    - i. Aaron’s family ended up being divided, “three against two, and two against three” (**Luke 12:52**). The surviving three were admonished to leave behind the two who sinned, who had been struck down by the Lord.
  - b. Another similar teaching from Jesus is found in **Luke 9**: “Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, ‘Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’ Then He said to another, ‘Follow Me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.’ And another also said, ‘Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’” (**Luke 9:57-62**, NKJV)



to get a balanced, accurate picture of what the Scriptures teach regarding alcohol.

- i. While some are able to maintain strict personal limits on alcohol consumption, others are easily enslaved to it and clearly need to abstain from drinking alcohol.
  - ii. Also, we do not want to cause other Christians (who may struggle with enslavement to alcohol) to stumble.
  - iii. I am aware that some from very conservative church backgrounds who listen to these messages are from church fellowships where drinking alcohol is *strictly prohibited* as a condition for church membership.
3. Warnings against drunkenness for Christians:
  - a. “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,” (**Ephesians 5:18**, NKJV)
  - b. “But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore ‘put away from yourselves the evil person.’” (**1 Corinthians 5:11–13**, NKJV)
4. On the other hand, while drunkenness is a sin, moderate drinking of alcohol is not prohibited in the New Testament.
  - a. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding feast in Cana. “And he said to him, ‘Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the *good wine* until now!’” (**John 2:10**, NKJV)
  - b. “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine *nor do anything by which your brother*

*stumbles* or is offended or is made weak.” (**Romans 14:19–21**, NKJV)

- c. In **1 Corinthians 11**, Paul admonishes the Corinthians for selfishness at the Lord’s Supper: “One is hungry and *another is drunk*”.
  - i. This would indicate that they were drinking wine (with some percentage of alcohol) when they gathered, as opposed to (non-alcoholic) grape juice.
  - d. “No longer drink only water, but *use a little wine* for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities.” (**1 Timothy 5:23**, NKJV)
- 5. **Challenge / Encouragement:** Take a personal inventory of your drinking habits. For many who have problems, if unable to maintain strict self-control, then make a decision not to drink any alcohol. For the rest, be open and accountable to one another.
- 6. In addition to regular fasts (abstaining from all food and drink, except perhaps water), early Christians sometimes would engage in “partial fasts”. For example, they might abstain just from wine either permanently or for a period of time, as a sort of fast. They pointed to examples in Scripture to support partial fasting.
  - a. Consider Daniel and his three friends in **Daniel 1:6-20**; Daniel himself in **Daniel 10:1-3**; the Nazirite vow in **Numbers 6**; and the vow of Hanna before the birth of Samuel, in **1 Samuel 1:11** in the LXX; and what the angel Gabriel said regarding John the Baptist in **Luke 1:15**. Perhaps this applied also to Timothy, based on what Paul said in **1 Timothy 5:23**.
  - b. Early Christian writer Tertullian pointed out that the Old Testament has several examples of types of partial fasting. (See the appendix at the end of these notes, which has a lengthy quote from *On Fasting*, by Tertullian.)
- f. **Questions:** Isn’t the Lord much *kinder* now than He was back in the days of Nadab and Abihu? But what about the ‘good news’ of the gospel in the New Testament? Now that we are no longer under the Law, but are under grace,

doesn't God show Himself as *kinder, more merciful and more tolerant of sin* now, than He was back then?

i. **Question:** After the resurrection of Jesus, were any Christians struck dead suddenly as a result of sin?

1. Read **Acts 5:1-11**. Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead because of greed and lying.

a. Fear seized the whole church.

2. Read **Revelation 2:18-23**. Jesus warns that Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and those who commit adultery with her will be struck dead.

a. Note that she was given time to repent, but did not.

ii. Read **Hebrews 10:19-31**.

1. We have a High Priest.

2. We have had our bodies washed; and have had our hearts sprinkled with the blood of Christ.

3. We are the ones who are "*drawing near*" to God.

a. Recall what the Lord said at the time Nadab and Abihu were struck dead, regarding those who "*come near*" to Him (**Leviticus 10:3**).

4. We must stay away from deliberate sin.

5. Vengeance belongs to the Lord. It is a *fearful thing* to fall into the hands of the living God!

a. If we trample the Son of God and profane the blood that sanctified us, we are guilty of a *worse crime* than the one that brought death to Nadab and Abihu.

iii. Read **Hebrews 12:25-29**.

1. God is to be feared now just as much as He was to be feared in the days of Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu.

2. *Our God* is a consuming fire!

#### IV. Appendix: Tertullian on Partial Fasting (Which Often Included Abstaining from Wine and Alcohol)

- a. **Note:** in the quote that follows, the word “*xerography*” refers to eating something ‘dry’, meaning without drinking liquid (for example, eating solid food without drinking wine along with it).
- b. Tertullian was an early Christian writer who lived in Carthage, North Africa. The text that follows is from chapter 9 of a work entitled *On Fasting*, written c. 213 AD. This can be found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, pp. 107-108.
  - i. “This principal species in the category of dietary restriction may already afford a prejudgment concerning the inferior operations of abstinence also, as being themselves too, in proportion to their measure, useful or necessary. For the exception of certain kinds from use of food is a partial fast. Let us therefore look into the question of the novelty or vanity of xerophagies, to see whether in them too we do not find an operation alike of most ancient as of most efficacious religion.
  - ii. “I return to Daniel and his brethren, preferring as they did a diet of vegetables and the beverage of water to the royal dishes and decanters, and being found as they were therefore ‘more handsome’ (lest any be apprehensive on the score of his paltry body, to boot!), besides being spiritually cultured into the bargain. For God gave to the young men knowledge and understanding in every kind of literature, and to Daniel in every word, and in dreams, and in every kind of wisdom; which (wisdom) was to make him wise in this very thing also,—namely, by what means the recognition of mysteries was to be obtained from God.
  - iii. “Finally, in the third year of Cyrus king of the Persians, when he had fallen into careful and repeated meditation on a vision, he provided another form of humiliation. ‘In those days,’ he says, ‘I Daniel was mourning during three weeks: pleasant bread I ate not; flesh and wine entered not into my mouth; with oil I was not anointed; until three weeks were consummated:’ which being elapsed, an angel was sent out (from God), addressing him on this wise: ‘Daniel, you are a man pitiable; fear not: since, from the first day on which you gave your soul to recogitation and to humiliation before God, your word has been heard, and I am entered at thy word.’ (**Daniel 10:1-3, 5, 12**) Thus the ‘pitiable’ spectacle and the humiliation of xerophagies expel fear, and attract the ears of God, and make men masters of secrets.
  - iv. “I return likewise to Elijah. When the ravens had been wont to satisfy him with ‘bread and meat,’ (**1 Kings 17:1-6**) why was it that afterwards, at Beersheba of Judea, that certain angel, after rousing him from sleep, offered him, beyond doubt, bread alone, and water? Had ravens been wanting, to feed him more liberally? Or had it been difficult to the ‘angel’

to carry away from some part of the banquet-room of the king some attendant with his amply-furnished waiter, and transfer him to Elijah, just as the breakfast of the reapers was carried into the den of lions and presented to Daniel in his hunger? But it behooved that an example should be set, teaching us that, at a time of pressure and persecution and whatsoever difficulty, we must live on xerophagies (partial fasts) ...

- v. “For of Samuel his mother said: ‘And wine and that which is intoxicating shall he not drink.’ (**1 Samuel 1:11**) for such was her condition withal when praying to God. And the Lord said to Aaron: ‘Wine and spirituous liquor shall you not drink, you and your son after you, whenever you shall enter the tabernacle, or ascend to the sacrificial altar; and you shall not die.’ (**Leviticus 10:9**)
- vi. “So true is it, that such as shall have ministered in the Church, being not sober, shall ‘die.’ Thus, too, in recent times He upbraids Israel: ‘And you used to give my sanctified ones wine to drink.’ (**Amos 2:12**) And, moreover, this limitation upon drink is the portion of xerophagy. Anyhow, wherever abstinence from wine is either exacted by God or vowed by man, there let there be understood likewise a restriction of food fore-furnishing a formal type to drink. For the quality of the drink is correspondent to that of the eating. It is not probable that a man should sacrifice to God half his appetite; temperate in waters, and intemperate in meats.
- vii. “Whether, moreover, the apostle had any acquaintance with xerophagies—(the apostle) who had repeatedly practiced greater rigors, ‘hunger, and thirst, and fasts many,’ who had forbidden ‘drunkennesses and revelings’ (**Romans 13:13**) - we have a sufficient evidence even from the case of his disciple Timothy; whom when he admonishes, ‘for the sake of his stomach and constant weaknesses,’ to use ‘a little wine,’ (**1 Timothy 5:23**) from which he was abstaining not from rule, but from devotion—else the custom would rather have been beneficial to his stomach—by this very fact he has advised abstinence from wine as ‘worthy of God,’ which, on a ground of necessity, he has dissuaded.”