

# BIBLE BRIEFING

## LEVITICUS

### Chapter 10

#### Introduction

It was to be a blessed day for Aaron and his family. Not only was the priesthood over Israel being established; his own sons would be serving with him as priests. Any father would be proud. But the day that began so promising ended in tragedy:

Leviticus 10:1 Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them.

Leviticus 10:2 So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.

Two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered "profane fire" and were struck-down dead by God. The NIV calls it "unauthorized fire"; I like the KJV better – "strange fire."

The sudden execution of judgment here is startling. There is no escaping the statement that the fire was from the Lord. Let us recognize that judgment is not foreign to the age of grace. It may not always be this sudden. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Corinthians 11:30). In the case of Ananias and Sapphira it was just as sudden and sure.

This does not mean that the believer in Christ can lose his salvation! Nadab and Abihu, and Ananias and Sapphira did not lose their salvation. Neither did the believers in the Corinthian congregation. This is made very clear. "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Corinthians 11:31–32).

Physical death is oftentimes a judgment for the child of God. There is a sin unto death (1 John 5:16) but it is physical death. The child of God is not condemned with the world. These judgments in both the Old and New Testaments are examples to believers that will-worship

is detestable to God. The believer must come to God in God's way. The believing sinner must worship God's way.

Everything Nadab and Abihu did was wrong. To begin with, they were the **wrong people** to be handling the incense that was presented to the Lord. This was the task of the high priest (Exodus 30:7-10).

They used the **wrong instruments** – their own censers instead of the censer of the high priest which would have been sanctified by a special anointing oil (Exodus 40:9).

They acted at the **wrong time**, for it was only once a year on the Day of Atonement that the high priest was permitted to take the incense into the holy of holies; and even then he had to submit to a particular ritual (Leviticus 16).

They acted under the **wrong authority**. They did not consult with Moses or their father, nor did they seek to follow the Word of God.

They offered the **wrong fire**. The high priest was commanded to burn the incense on coals taken from the brazen altar, but Nadab and Abihu supplied their own fire.

They acted from the **wrong motive** and did not seek to glorify God alone:

Leviticus 10:3 And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke, saying:

'By those who come near Me  
I must be regarded as holy;  
And before all the people  
I must be glorified.'"

So Aaron held his peace.

Their desire was not to glorify the Lord.

Finally, they acted under the **wrong energy**. Look at verse nine:

Leviticus 10:9 “Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. *It shall be* a statute forever throughout your generations,

It’s a good thing God doesn’t strike us dead whenever we are acting in the flesh rather than by the Spirit! Let’s just be happy we are not back in Old Testament times! Still, we must learn from these boys that it is a **serious** thing to serve the Lord.

We’ll see the rest of the story in a moment. First, let’s go back over the mistakes of Nadab and Abihu and update them for our own day and time.

They were the **wrong people** for the task. As Christians, we are all priests – a kingdom of priests. In a very deep, spiritual sense, we are all equal – whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, or any other such distinction. But we each have a unique place in the Church of Jesus. There are roles and responsibilities God has established that should not be ignored. For example: Regardless that the Bible declares that pastors be men, and then reinforces it by stating women should not have authority over men in the Church, a lot of Churches have female pastors. Ones that don’t are softening their stance on ordaining women. I have no problem with women; but I have a real respect for the integrity and authority of God’s Word. A woman pastor is Nadab and Abihu and cannot be blessed by God.

Nadab and Abihu used the **wrong instruments**. They used their own censers instead of the prescribed one. We do this when we adopt worldly methods for ministering to God’s people. This is always a struggle, since we are so heavily influenced by things in the world. Many Churches are following a new model for ministry called Seeker Sensitive. It analyzes what would get people into Church and keep them there. Nothing wrong so far... Except that one of the techniques is to soften any talk about personal sin and the need for salvation. You don’t want to turn people off. The theory is you can get them coming, then give them the Gospel. Trouble is, in most cases they never get the Gospel! The soft approach permeates every level of ministry. For the most part the people who attend seeker Churches were already Christians but have switched

Churches for the greater creature comforts the seeker Church provides.

Nadab and Abihu ministered at the **wrong time**. It wasn't the Day of Atonement, the day incense was to be burned by the high priest. Is there a wrong time in the Church? There can be... We see in the Book of Acts that Paul had a desire to take the Gospel to Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit forbid him and eventually directed him to Macedonia.

Timing is important. Our timing must be God's timing. We act like Nadab and Abihu is we only always respond to perceived "needs" in our fellowship. Someone will visit another Church; or move here from another Church. What we are doing is different; perhaps we lack a certain ministry. It is not necessarily a deficiency. It is probably a matter of God's proper timing.

Nadab and Abihu acted under the **wrong authority**. They acted on their own. This one is a little tricky because we never want to come across as "lording over" anyone. You are always free to do as you are directed by the Lord. Having said that... It is nevertheless true that God has established a proper authority in government, in the home, and in the Church. Those in authority are accountable to one another. Folks who establish ministry on their own, outside of the Church, are not really accountable to anyone. So, if you want to minister, do it in the Church, or through the Church, or with the Church's blessing and not on your own.

Nadab and Abihu offered the **wrong fire**. Man, there is a lot of wrong, strange, profane, fire on the scene! Pentecostal Churches have a tough time with strange fire. The Holy Laughter revival of a few years ago is a good example. On January 20, 1994, what was intended to be the start of several "revival" meetings was held at a small church located in an industrial complex near Pearson International Airport in Toronto. Within one year, it had become what Diana Doucet, writing for *Charisma*, calls, "a mecca of sorts." Because of the huge crowds seeking a sign from God, the church continues to conduct meetings every night except Mondays. Even the

secular media have focused reports on the phenomenon with articles and television documentaries. The focus of all reports is upon the physical manifestations displayed at these meetings. Says Diana Doucet in the 2/95 *Charisma* (pp. 20, 21):

"... Worshipers are overcome by laughing, weeping, groaning, shaking, falling and, to the chagrin of some, noise-making that has been described as 'a cross between a jungle and a farmyard.' But of greater significance are the reports of changed lives: healings, restored relationships and increased fervor for God."

Doucet attributes the origins of the Toronto Blessing to Vineyard pastor Randy Clark of St. Louis, Missouri, who had been influenced by Rodney Howard-Browne in late 1993:

"... What was intended to be a four-day series of meetings with Clark expanded into months of nightly services that sometimes lasted until 3 a.m."

News of the movement spread, and by April, 1994, curious international visitors were arriving in Toronto. By December, 75,000 people from almost every country of the world had crossed the Airport Vineyard's threshold. Cumulative attendance has been more than 200,000, some 10,000 of them clergy [as of mid-1995].

Many wish to worship God in the Spirit, and this is fine; but they neglect the second requirement: that we worship Him in truth. His Word is truth (John 17:17). The two cannot be separated, for God's work is by His Word.

His Word says that all things in the Church must be done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). People flopping on the floor and hooting or making animal sounds is not decent. Holy laughter is not orderly.

Nadab and Abihu had the **wrong motive**. We can't say exactly what their motive was; but we know it was not to glorify God. The only motive we should ever have is to bring glory to God. We should always want to decrease so Jesus can increase.

This is really tough to determine, since our hearts are deceitful and it's difficult to judge someone else's motives. God will sometimes reveal your motives when you are overlooked... Or not acknowledged... Or bumped in favor of someone else.

Finally, there is the matter of the **wrong energy**. Nadab and Abihu were drunk! Obviously – Don't minister while under the influence. May sound obvious; but there are many religions that encourage the use of stimulants.

As far as wrong energy, we would say that anytime you are walking in the flesh you are using the wrong energy. There is a lot of wrong energy in Churches. If you seek to motivate people through guilt or by manipulation, you are using the wrong energy.

Returning to our story... We've seen ministry is **serious**. Next we see it can **supercede**:

Leviticus 10:4 Then Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp."

Leviticus 10:5 So they went near and carried them by their tunics out of the camp, as Moses had said.

Leviticus 10:6 And Moses said to Aaron, and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons, "Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people. But let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the LORD has kindled.

Leviticus 10:7 You shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.

The first thing you notice is that Aaron and his other sons, because they were priests, could not themselves handle the bodies of their deceased loved ones. Their priesthood superceded their family ties.

OK, that's not too bad... *But they were also prohibited from even mourning their loss!* And they were stuck in the Tabernacle; they could not leave.

Mourning would have left Israel without priest to mediate...

Mourning – at least outwardly – would contradict the action of God in judging their loved ones. They must have been saddened; but they went about obediently serving God to show their agreement with His will.

We need balance here. It is far too common to ignore family and its responsibilities in favor of “ministry.” Having said that, there are times ministry supercedes normal life.

Ministry requires personal **sacrifice**:

Leviticus 10:8 Then the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying:

Leviticus 10:9 “Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. *It shall be* a statute forever throughout your generations,

Leviticus 10:10 that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean,

Leviticus 10:11 and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by the hand of Moses.”

The prohibition was not against drinking, but against drinking when they went “into the tabernacle.” It’s not unlike us saying no alcohol or smoking on Church property.

It’s not enough to teach the people; the priests must be examples and live-out in their lives the things they teach.

Ministry reveals **sincerity**:

Leviticus 10:12 And Moses spoke to Aaron, and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons who were left: “Take the grain offering that remains of the offerings made by fire to the LORD, and eat it without leaven beside the altar; for it *is* most holy.

Leviticus 10:13 You shall eat it in a holy place, because it *is* your due and your sons’ due, of the sacrifices made by fire to the LORD; for so I have been commanded.

Leviticus 10:14 The breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the heave offering you shall eat in a clean place, you, your sons, and your daughters with you; for *they are* your due and your sons’ due, *which* are given from the sacrifices of peace offerings of the children of Israel.

Leviticus 10:15 The thigh of the heave offering and the breast of the wave offering they shall bring with the offerings of fat made by fire, to offer as a wave offering before the LORD. And it shall be yours and your sons’ with you, by a statute forever, as the LORD has commanded.”

Leviticus 10:16 Then Moses made careful inquiry about the goat of the sin offering, and there it was—burned up. And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron *who were left*, saying,

Leviticus 10:17 “Why have you not eaten the sin offering in a holy place, since it *is* most holy, and *God* has given it to you to bear the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD?”

Leviticus 10:18 See! Its blood was not brought inside the holy *place*; indeed you should have eaten it in a holy *place*, as I commanded.”

Leviticus 10:19 And Aaron said to Moses, “Look, this day they have offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD, and such things have befallen me! *If* I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have been accepted in the sight of the LORD?”

Leviticus 10:20 So when Moses heard *that*, he was content.

Let me explain what happened. Moses discovered that the sin offering hadn't been presented according to the law and that Aaron and his sons hadn't eaten it. He was angry in a concerned way – not wanting anyone else to die!

Aaron explained that he couldn't eat the offering with a good conscience because of his sorrow. He just wasn't hungry after seeing the burned bodies of his two boys!

God looked on Aaron's heart; it was sincere. The law didn't allow Aaron to mourn in the usual manner, but it did not forbid him to fast; and fasting was his way of grieving within the boundaries of his ministry.

Conclusion