
LEVITICUS 10:1 Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer, and put fire in it, and laid incense on it, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them.

Nadab and Abihu offer strange fire before the Lord, and are destroyed, Lev 10:1-5. Aaron and his family forbidden to mourn for them, Lev 10:6, Lev 10:7. He and his family are forbidden the use of wine, Lev 10:8-11. Directions to Aaron and his sons concerning the eating of the meat-offerings, etc., Lev 10:12-15. Moses chides Aaron for not having eaten the sin-offering, Lev 10:16-18. Aaron excuses himself, and Moses is satisfied, Lev 10:19, Lev 10:20.

Verse 1

And Nadab and Abihu - took either of them his censer - The manner of burning incense in the temple service was, according to the Jews, as follows: - "One went and gathered the ashes from off the altar into a golden vessel, a second brought a vessel full of incense, and a third brought a censer with fire, and put coals on the altar, and he whose office it was to burn the incense strewed it on the fire at the command of the governor. At the same time all the people went out of the temple from between the porch and the altar. Each day they burned the weight of a hundred denaries of incense, fifty in the morning, and fifty in the evening. The hundred denaries weighed fifty shekels of the sanctuary, each shekel weighing three hundred and twenty barleycorns; and when the priest had burned the incense, he bowed himself down and went his way out. See Maimonides' Treatise of the Daily Service, chap. iii. So when Zacharias, as his lot fell, burned incense in the temple, the whole multitude of the people were without at prayer while the incense was burning, Luk 1:9, Luk 1:10. By this service God taught them that the prayers of his faithful people are pleasing to him, whilst our High Priest, Christ Jesus, by his mediation puts incense to their prayers; (see Psa 141:2; Rom 8:34; Heb 8:1, Heb 8:2; Heb 9:24; Rev 8:3, Rev 8:4); for the priests under the law served unto the example and shadow of heavenly things; Heb 8:5." See Ainsworth in loco.

In the preceding chapter we have seen how God intended that every part of his service should be conducted; and that every sacrifice might be acceptable to him, he sent his own fire as the emblem of his presence, and the means of consuming the sacrifice - Here we find Aaron's sons neglecting the Divine ordinance, and offering incense with strange, that is, common fire, - fire not of a celestial origin; and therefore the fire of God consumed them. So that very fire which, if properly applied, would have sanctified and consumed their gift, became now the very instrument of their destruction! How true is the saying, The Lord is a consuming fire! He will either hallow or destroy us: he will purify our souls by the influence of his Spirit, or consume them with the breath of his mouth! The tree which is properly planted in a good soil is nourished by the genial influences of the sun: pluck it up from its roots, and the sun which was the cause of its vegetative life and perfection now dries up its juices, decomposes its parts, and causes it to moulder into dust. Thus must it be done to those who grieve and do despite to the Spirit of God. Reader, hast thou this heavenly fire? Hear then the voice of God, Quench not the Spirit. Some critics are of opinion that the fire used by the sons of Aaron was the sacred fire, and that it is only called strange from the manner of placing the incense on it. I cannot see the force of this opinion.

Which he commanded them not - Every part of the religion of God is Divine. He alone knew what he designed by its rites and ceremonies, for that which they prefigured - the whole economy of redemption by Christ - was conceived in his own mind, and was out of the reach of human wisdom and conjecture. He therefore who altered any part of this representative system, who omitted or

added any thing, assumed a prerogative which belonged to God alone, and was certainly guilty of a very high offense against the wisdom, justice, and righteousness of his Maker. This appears to have been the sin of Nadab and Abihu, and this at once shows the reason why they were so severely punished. The most awful judgments are threatened against those who either add to, or take away from, the declarations of God. See Deu 4:2; Pro 30:6; and Rev 22:18, Rev 22:19.

LEVITICUS 10:2 Fire came out from before the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.

LEVITICUS 10:3 Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke of, saying, 'I will show myself holy to those who come near me, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" Aaron held his peace.

Verse 3

And Aaron held his peace - וַיִּיֶדְם אַהֲרֹן vaiyiddom Aharon, and Aaron was dumb. How elegantly expressive is this of his parental affection, his deep sense of the presumption of his sons, and his own submission to the justice of God! The flower and hope of his family was nipped in the bud and blasted; and while he exquisitely feels as a father, he submits without murmuring to this awful dispensation of Divine justice. It is an awful thing to introduce innovations either into the rites and ceremonies, or into the truths, of the religion of Christ: he who acts thus cannot stand guiltless before his God. It has often been remarked that excessive grief stupefies the mind, so that amazement and deep anguish prevent at once both tears and complaints; hence that saying of Seneca, *Curae leves loquantur; gravior silent.* "Slight sorrows are loquacious; deep anguish has no voice. See Clarke on Lev 10:19 (note).

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

Verse 4

Uzziel the uncle of Aaron - He was brother to Amram the father of Aaron; see Exo 6:18-22.

LEVITICUS 10:5 So they drew near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said.

Verse 5

Carried them in their coats out of the camp - The modern impropriety of burying the dead within towns, cities, or places inhabited, had not yet been introduced; much less that abomination, at which both piety and common sense shudder, burying the dead about and even within places dedicated to the worship of God!

LEVITICUS 10:6 Moses said to Aaron, and to Eleazar and to Ithamar, his sons, “Don’t let the hair of your heads go loose, neither tear your clothes; that you don’t die, and that he not be angry with all the congregation; but let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the LORD has kindled.

Verse 6

Uncover not your heads, etc. - They were to use no sign of grief or mourning,

1. Because those who were employed in the service of the sanctuary should avoid every thing that might incapacitate them for that service; and,

2. Because the crime of their brethren was so highly provoking to God, and so fully merited the punishment which he had inflicted, that their mourning might be considered as accusing the Divine justice of undue severity.

LEVITICUS 10:7 You shall not go out from the door of the Tent of Meeting, lest you die; for the anointing oil of the LORD is on you.” They did according to the word of Moses.

Verse 7

The anointing oil of the Lord is upon you - They were consecrated to the Divine service, and this required their constant attendance, and most willing and cheerful service.

LEVITICUS 10:8 Then The LORD said to Aaron,

LEVITICUS 10:9 “You and your sons are not to drink wine or strong drink whenever you go into the Tent of Meeting, or you will die. This shall be a statute forever throughout your generations.

Verse 9

Do not drink wine nor strong drink - The cabalistical commentator, Baal Hatturim, and others, have supposed, from the introduction of this command here, that Aaron's sons had sinned through excess of wine, and that they had attempted to celebrate the Divine service in a state of inebriation. Strong drink - The word שכר shechar, from shachar, to inebriate, signifies any kind of fermented liquors. This is exactly the same prohibition that was given in the case of John Baptist, Luk 1:15 : Οινον και σικερα ου μ η πιη· Wine and sikera he shall not drink. Any inebriating liquor, says St. Jerome, (Epist. ad nepot)., is called sicera, whether made of corn, apples, honey, dates, or other fruit. One of the four prohibited drinks among the Mohammedans in India is called sakar, (see the Hedaya, vol. iv., p. 158), which signifies inebriating drink in general, but especially date wine or arrack. From the original word probably we have borrowed our term cider or sider, which among us exclusively signifies the fermented juice of apples. See on Luk 1:15 (note).

LEVITICUS 10:10 You are to make a distinction between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean.

Verse 10

That we may put difference between holy and unholy - This is a strong reason why they should drink no inebriating liquor, that their understanding being clear, and their judgment correct, they might be always able to discern between the clean and the unclean, and ever pronounce righteous judgment. Injunctions similar to this were found among the Egyptians, Carthaginians, and Greeks. Indeed, common sense itself shows that neither a drunkard nor a sot should ever be suffered to minister in holy things.

LEVITICUS 10:11 You are to teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by Moses.”

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

LEVITICUS 10:13 and you shall eat it in a holy place, because it is your portion, and your sons’ portion, of the offerings of the LORD made by fire: for so I am commanded.

LEVITICUS 10:14 The waved breast and the heaved thigh you shall eat in a clean place, you, and your sons, and your daughters with you: for they are given as your portion, and your sons’ portion, out of the sacrifices of the peace offerings of the children of Israel.

Verse 14

Wave-breast and heave-shoulder - See Leviticus 7 (note), and Exo 29:27 (note).

LEVITICUS 10:15 The heaved thigh and the waved breast they shall bring with the offerings made by fire of the fat, to wave it for a wave offering before the LORD: and it shall be yours, and your sons’ with you, as a portion forever; as the LORD has commanded.”

LEVITICUS 10:16 Moses diligently inquired about the goat of the sin offering, and, behold, it was burned: and he was angry with Eleazar and with Ithamar, the sons of Aaron who were left, saying,

Verse 16

Moses diligently sought the goat - The goat which was offered the same day for the sins of the priests and the people, (see Lev 9:15, Lev 9:16), and which, through the confusion that happened on account of the death of Nadab and Abihu, was burnt instead of being eaten. See Lev 10:16-18.

LEVITICUS 10:17 “Why haven’t you eaten the sin offering in the place of the sanctuary, since it is most holy, and he has given it you to bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD?”

Verse 17

To bear the iniquity of the congregation - See on Lev 6:26 (note), etc.

LEVITICUS 10:18 Behold, its blood was not brought into the inner part of the sanctuary: you certainly should have eaten it in the sanctuary, as I commanded.”

LEVITICUS 10:19 Aaron spoke to Moses, “Behold, this day they have offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD; and such things as these have happened to me. If I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have been pleasing in the sight of the LORD?”

Verse 19

And such things have befallen me, etc. - The excuse which Aaron makes for not feasting on the sin-offering according to the law is at once appropriate and dignified; as if he had said: "God certainly has commanded me to eat of the sin-offering; but when such things as these have happened unto me, could it be good in the sight of the Lord? Does he not expect that I should feel as a father under such afflicting circumstances?" With this spirited answer Moses was satisfied; and God, who knew his situation, took no notice of the irregularity which had taken place in the solemn service. To human nature God has given the privilege to weep in times of affliction and distress. In his infinite kindness he has ordained that tears, which are only external evidences of our grief, shall be the outlets to our sorrows, and tend to exhaust the cause from which they flow. See on Lev 10:3 (note).

LEVITICUS 10:20 When Moses heard that, it was pleasing in his sight.

Verse 20

When Moses heard that, he was content - The argument used by Aaron had in it both good sense and strong reason, and Moses, as a reasonable man, felt its force; and as God evidenced no kind of displeasure at this irregularity, which was, in a measure at least, justified by the present necessity, he thought proper to urge the matter no farther. Though the punishment of Nadab and Abihu may appear severe, because the sacred text does not specify clearly the nature and extent of their crime, we may rest assured that it was of such a nature as not only to justify but to demand such a punishment. God has here given us a full proof that he will not suffer human institutions to take the place of his own prescribed worship. It is true this is frequently done, for by many what is called natural religion is put in the place of Divine revelation; and God seems not to regard it: but though vengeance is not speedily executed on an evil work, and therefore the hearts of the children of men are set to do wickedness, yet God ceases not to be just; and those who have taken from or added to his words, or put their own inventions in their place, shall be reprov'd and found liars in the great day. His long-suffering leads to repentance; but if men will harden their hearts, and put their own

ceremonies, rites, and creeds, in the place of Divine ordinances and eternal truths, they must expect to give an awful account to him who is shortly to judge the quick and the dead. Were the religion of Christ stripped of all that state policy, fleshly interest, and gross superstition have added to it, how plain and simple, and may we not add, how amiable and glorious, would it appear! Well may we say of human inventions in Divine worship what one said of the paintings on old cathedral windows, Their principal tendency is to prevent the light from coming in. Nadab and Abihu would perform the worship of God not according to his command, but in their own way; and God not only would not receive the sacrifice from their hands, but, while encompassing themselves with their own sparks, and warming themselves with their own fire, this had they from the hand of the Lord - they lay down in sorrow, for there went out a fire from the Lord, and devoured them. What is written above is to be understood of persons who make a religion for themselves, leaving Divine revelation; for, being wilfully ignorant of God's righteousness, they go about to establish their own. This is a high offense in the sight of God. Reader, God is a Spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth. Such worshippers the Father seeketh.