

So that you can distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, Leviticus 10:10

This is an important verse in Leviticus – it explains one of the core tasks of a priest and had applications as diverse as declaring people free from skin disease or certifying an animal fit for sacrifice right through to teaching and making judgements on moral issues.

What might it mean for us?

### Finally

The Bible tells us that we are priests. Revelation 1v6, 1 Peter 2v5,9

What can we learn from this passage?

*Don't mess with God*

*Don't treat God with contempt*

*Do things God's way*

*Don't be complacent in serving God*

*Stay humble*

*Fear God.*

It seems that Christians have two basic responses to a passage like this;

To adopt a fear of the Lord stance, and attempt to live by a strict holiness regime always expecting that judgement to fall at any time.

To say this is Old Testament and we can behave however we want because we are under grace, God loves us and will forgive anything we do.

What are the weaknesses in each of these?

What are the strengths?

What is going to be the outcome of each?

Is there a third way or a middle ground?

Did anything like this ever happen in the New Testament?

Acts 5v1-10, 1 Corinthians 11v30, Hebrews 12v7.

Do you expect God to strike you down at any moment?

Why not?

Where this did happen in both the First and the New Testament – it is always intended to make an example, it is never God's basic response if it was we would all be dead! God is a loving God and his responses are always marked by love, grace and patience. His response tends to be graded. It is always His goal to work in our lives to change us – it is not His goal to destroy us.

Does this let us off the hook?

What is your basic response to this passage?

## BIBLE STUDY



### Strange fire

Read Leviticus 10v1-5

What happened?

How does this passage make you feel?

### The Background

Leviticus is a great book – IT IS NOT BORING \_ It has some amazing concepts in it. This story serves to highlight some of them. It is one of only two stories in the book. (the other is in Lev 24). In Exodus a remarkable thing has happened. Moses meets God on Mt Sinai. This is what we expect in the cultures of the day this is where the gods lived. But this God does not stay on the mountain, He comes down and lives among the people, right in the centre of the camp. This is unheard of. Exodus 33v16, Deut 4v33. The people are living in a tent so God lives in a tent. This tent is called the Tabernacle. In fact the whole Israelite camp is arranged around the presence of God. This sets a precedent for the New Testament. God is the God who lives among us, so when John describes Jesus coming to live among us, he uses the same (Greek) word as is used of the tabernacle – the word became flesh and tabernacled among us. John 1v14

Having God living so close had incredible blessings attached to it. Deut 9v3, 29v5, but it also had incredible risks associated with it. When the people were disobedient we have several accounts of plague and fire coming out from the presence of the Lord. Numbers 11v1, 11v33, 14v12, 16v35, 16v46, 25v8. It is dangerous to live close to a holy God.

One of the major themes of Leviticus is how to live safely when you are so close to God.

This Story is an example of when it goes wrong.

### Strange fire.

The King James version of the bible says in its 400 year old language that the Nadav and Avihu offered strange fire before the LORD. The Word in Hebrew is Zur – it is the word used for something foreign. When incense was offered on the incense altar in the holy place, they took fire – ie burning coals from the brazen altar in the outer court where the sacrifices were made and transfer it in a census to the incense altar. The fire on the altar was never allowed to go out. Leviticus 6v13

In this part of Leviticus everything is new. The priest have only recently been ordained and the first sacrifices have only just been made.

Where did the fire come from for the first sacrifice? Leviticus 9v23-24

Where does the fire in your life come from?

### Nadav and Avihu

According to Leviticus 10v1 who were Nadav and Avihu?



What else do we know about them?

Exodus 24v1-2 Is it significant that their names come before those of the elders?

Exodus 24v9-11 Who did they see?

Exodus 28v1 How many priests were there?

What is the over all picture that we get?

These were very important and very privileged people. It has been suggested that they were effectively the third and fourth most senior leaders after Moses and Aaron. They were called to minister as priests, set apart, educated and ordained at length.

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. Luke 12v48

Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 1 Corinthians 4:2



What do these verses mean?

How do they apply to Nadav and Avihu?

How do they apply to us?

What has been given to us?

What do you think is demanded of us?

What did they do wrong?



They went where they were not supposed to go.

Where did Nadav and Avihu go? Leviticus 10v1

We assume the presence of the Lord means the Most Holy Place. The tabernacle was divided into three areas, the outer court where the priests worked all the time. The holy place where they went at least twice a day and the Most Holy Place.



Read Leviticus 16v1-2.

How often were priests allowed to enter the Most Holy Place? Why?

This command was given after the event and seems to confirm that Nadav and Avihu did enter the Most Holy Place. Only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement.

What picture do we get of Nadav and Avihu? How would you describe them?

They rejected God's will about

Who could enter

How to enter

When to enter

What purpose to enter.



Are we free to enter God's presence? Hebrews 10v19-22

Does this mean we can come however we want?

How should we come?

Why do you come into God presence? When? How? Why?



Their attitude

Read Leviticus 10v 3

This verse is God's complain against them. It suggest that they had a problem in the area of Holiness and Honour.



Did they honour God in their behaviour?

Is it ever OK to show disrespect for God.

How do we bring honour to God?

How do we show him disrespect?

For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. Deuteronomy 4:24, Hebrew 12v29

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Ecclesiastes 5:1

Do you think they knew what they were doing wrong?



Is there a danger that familiarity breeds contempt?

Is there a danger that privilege breeds presumption?

How did these work for Nadav and Avihu? How might it work for us?

What picture do we get of Nadav and Avihu? How would you describe them?

They should have known better.

To obey is better than sacrifice, 1 Samuel 15v22



Thirdly - They offered the wrong fire.

Where were they supposed to take the fire from? Why?

Instead they used ordinary fire taken from an ordinary, people kindled source. Why did they do this?

Milgrom one of the leading commentators on Leviticus suggest that they also used the wrong census – the Hebrew word used is more often used to the pans designed to clear the ashes- and they used the wrong incense.

What picture do we get of Nadav and Avihu? How would you describe them?

It would be possible to get allegorical here. They used human fire rather than divine fire. Could it be said they relied on human effort instead of divine provision, could it be said they did it the human way instead of God's way. They substitute the artificial for the genuine. How might we be guilty of this?

This was fire that had associations; it came from the place where sacrifice was made for sin, where peace offerings were brought. It had to do with repentance, atonement and fellowship. It came from where God and humans connected. It was holy fire!



Lastly

After Nadav and Avihu were struck down, other priests had to remove them from the Holy place. They were placed outside the camp. This is because of a strong concept in Leviticus called sacred contagion. Effectively things that come close to God become too holy to be safe so they have to be removed from the camp. This is a very New Testament idea, Paul explains that our righteousness – holiness comes the same way – God has touched us. In Verse 6-7 they are told not to mourn – (allow their beards to grow – tear their clothes etc) because they have to be in a fit state to minister before the Lord. Having dealt with this housekeeping God speaks to Aaron and makes His point



Read Leviticus 10v8-11

What does God tell Aaron?

It is widely believed that this command was given in direct response to what has just happened. Ie that they were drunk. This would explain why people who we assume were sensible and responsible did something so rash.



What are the dangers of being drunk?

What is the Bible's teaching on the subject? Ephesians 5v18

What picture do we get of Nadav and Avihu? How would you describe them?

Did they deserve what happened to them?