

### III. THE PRIESTHOOD – Leviticus 8-10

#### A. Preparing the Ministers: Aaronic Ordination – 8:1-36

These first seven chapters of Leviticus are crucial for the understanding of the book. Like what the Apostle Paul did in the New Testament, doctrines were taught first before practice. Now that the people of Israel understood the types of acceptable offerings and the significance and the roles of the “offerers” and the priesthood, the consecration and first offerings by the consecrated priesthood could begin.

NOTE that until this time of the consecration and the official replacement of the firstborn sons of Israel, the firstborn sons of every godly home were the biblical mediators between God and man. The change occurred with the consecration of the priesthood and the anointing of the Levities in Numbers 8 and the replacement of the firstborn sons in Numbers 3. Thereafter began a new mediatorial programme. This was replaced in the New Testament by the local churches whereby truly born again believers are called priests. All will be able to approach the LORD individually without any human mediator or human system like that of the Roman Catholics. All believers are boldly called to enter into God’s presence through Jesus Christ only, the perfect Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

This chapter is chiasmus in structure.

**A** 8: 1-5 – Introduction at the Door of the Tabernacle of the Congregation

**B** 8:6-29 – Anointing Oil Used for Anointing

**B** 8:30 – Anointing Oil Used for Anointing

**A** 8:31-36 – Conclusion at the Door of the Tabernacle of the Congregation

The chiastic structure is for emphasis. What is the emphasis? The emphasis is the unity of these events. They are to be seen as one and not individual units unrelated to one another. The sequence of events becomes significant.

The key phrase in this chapter is “as the LORD commanded”. This phrase occurs seven times in this chapter (verses 4, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 36) 16 times in chapters 8, 9 and 10.

How important is worship in God’s eyes? How important should worship be in the eyes of the believer? [see John 4:20-24]

#### 1. The Preparation for the Consecration – 8:1-13

- a. **Vv 1-4** -- Moses was the man that the LORD spoke to. He was the only legitimate mediator between God and Israel including the Aaronic priesthood until they were consecrated. The people and the items for consecration were listed for Moses. They included:

- Aaron and his sons;

- the garments;
- the anointing oil;
- a bullock for the sin offering;
- two rams; and
- a basket of unleavened bread.

This consecration must be done publicly so that all Israel might see and accept Aaron and his sons as the God appointed legitimate priests to mediate on behalf of all Israel. The high priesthood was the most holy office in Israel and on earth. No one was given this most holy office other than Aaron.

Moses did all that the LORD had commanded him. The people were all gathered in front of the completed Tabernacle (see last chapter of Exodus). It was of course impossible for ALL Israel (2,000,000 people) to fit into the space of the outer court of the Tabernacle. Therefore it is most likely the tribal leaders and their representatives were present to witness the public consecration of the priests.

- b. **Vv 5-9** – Aaron and his four sons were to be properly dressed for the occasion. Before they put on their priestly garments, Moses had to wash them with water. According to Exo 30:17ff the priests had to wash themselves each time they went on their priestly duty. (see also Lev 16:4) Outward washing was a symbol of the person’s desire for inward cleansing. This was also true in Exodus 19 before the LORD appeared to Israel and gave them the Ten Commandments. The people of Israel were required to wash themselves first which indicated their willingness to listen and to meet the LORD.

Why couldn’t the priesthood do their duties in ordinary clothes? Today, some institutions of higher learning are doing away with traditional robes for convocations. Why is a uniform important?

After the priestly garments were made, they were put onto Aaron and his sons for the first time. Uniforms are very important. Modern society today, especially in the West, frowns on uniforms. Everybody wants to stand out. But when a uniform is worn, the individual personality recedes to the background. When we see a man in uniform, we are immediately attracted to his profession or rank. If he is wearing a policeman’s uniform or that of a fireman, then his personality would not be the focus. The next focus of interest would be his rank. The more spectacular his uniform, the higher his rank would be. (The PhD gown is more elaborate than the Bachelor gown). Hence, the uniform of the high priest was much more “glorious” than that of the ordinary priest. The reason is that the high priest’s duties are far more important than that of the ordinary priests.

“Essentially a uniform draws attention to the office or function of a person, as opposed to his individual personality. It emphasizes his job rather than his name.” [Wenham, 138] This is an acute observation by

Wenham. Aaron would die and the next high priest would take over and this continued till the coming of Jesus Christ who is the Great High Priest. Regardless of who wore the high priestly garment, the focus was not the person in the garment but the office of the high priesthood.

The whole of Israel saw their priests in their priestly garments for the first time. The awesome significance of the event must have been impactful. For the last four hundred and thirty years, the people of Israel existed as slaves. Now they had their own place of worship and their own priests. The best part of it was that they were all designed and made and approved by the LORD Himself. Moses began by saying that this was done according to the command of the LORD. It was not Moses who did it or the people who voted for it. It was by the will of the sovereign God.

The items of the high priestly garment (described in greater detail in Exodus 28 and 39) were listed accordingly:

- the coat;
- girded him with the girdle;
- clothed him with the robe;
- put the ephod upon him;
- girded him with the curious girdle of the ephod, bound it unto him therewith;
- put the breastplate upon him; also he put in the breastplate the Urim and the Thummim;
- put the mitre upon his head; also upon the mitre, even upon his forefront, did he put the golden plate, the holy crown.

The most important phrase is “as the LORD commanded Moses.” The high priest will die but the uniform worn by the next high priest highlights the continuation of the function of the high priest. He is to be holy unto the LORD as the only legitimate mediator between God and man.

The Urim (Hebrew means “Lights” from root word “ur” – light) and Thummim (Hebrew means “Perfections” from root word “thom” – completeness or perfect) were used to discern God’s will. After the exile, they were not used at all or at least no record was given of it being used. These are some of the references of their being used: Num 27:21; Deut 33:8; 1Sam 23:9-10 (implied); 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Neh 7:65.

The four sons of Aaron are not dressed yet. They will put theirs on after the anointing of the oil.

- c. **Vv 10-13** – The Tabernacle and the items inside were anointed with anointing oil. These items included the Ark of the Covenant, the Mercy Seat; the Table of Shewbread, the Altar of Incense and the Candlestick or Lampstand. **Leviticus 8:10-11**, “*And Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the tabernacle and all that was therein, and sanctified them.*”

*And he sprinkled thereof upon the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all his vessels, both the laver and his foot, to sanctify them.”*

The altar for the burnt offering was also anointed for the purpose of sanctifying these items. The formula for the anointing oil is found in Exodus 30:23ff.

Then it was Aaron’s turn to be anointed with the same anointing oil. The purpose was the same, for sanctification. “To sanctify” something means to make something “clean”. Note that only the high priest was anointed with oil, not the sons of Aaron. They were not even dressed in their priestly garments yet when all these took place. The significance was that Aaron the high priest represented the entire priesthood. When he was anointed, it meant that all other priests present and those in the future of Aaronic lineage were also anointed. After this anointing the four sons of Aaron put on their priestly garments, which were much simpler in design, in preparation for the consecration.

Again, the phrase “as the LORD commanded Moses” is mentioned here. Every step of the way and every sequence carried out were in accordance with the LORD’s command. No human hand or power was involved.

What was the significance of the anointing before consecration? The anointing with the anointing oil meant that Aaron accepted the role and duty of the priesthood willingly. There was no coercion. This means that the responsibilities had to be carried out seriously and with the fear of God in their hearts. They were the only legitimate and acceptable mediators for sinful man before the one living and true God. There was no one else. All other priesthoods on this earth were false. Should they fail the LORD and abuse their duties, then the world would be left with no mediator. The LORD would surely deal with them grievously if they were to abuse their power and position.

Now that everything and everyone was ready, the consecration began.

## 2. **The Consecration Sequence – 8:14-30**

- a. **Vv 14-17** – The sin offering<sup>1</sup> was offered first. It was for the purification of the altar before it could be used for the rest of the offerings including the burnt offering which was next.

Why was purification necessary? The reason is that sin always leaves behind its deadly stain. The altar had to be cleansed or purified first

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<sup>1</sup>The sin offering of the priests is burnt whole. The fat and two kidneys and caul above the liver shall be burnt on the altar of burnt offering (see 4:8-10). The rest of the animal was burnt outside the camp in a clean place (not dumping ground for refuse or toilet area) [see 4:11-12]. But the sin offering of the ordinary people (elders and commoners) could be eaten by the priest who does the offering (see 6:24-26), except for the fat which has to be taken out and burned on the altar of burnt offering (see 4:22-35).

before it could be used for the burnt offering which was for the atonement of sins.

The sequence of the sin offering:

\* Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bullock for the sin offering;

\* he [Moses] slew it; (see Exo 29:10-11; Lev 1:5; 3:2, 8.) – In other instances the worshipper who brought the offering killed it himself. But in this instance Aaron and his sons had not been consecrated so Moses killed the offerings for them;

\* Moses took the blood, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about with his finger, and purified the altar, and poured the blood at the bottom of the altar, and sanctified it, to make reconciliation upon it;

\* he took all the fat that was upon the inwards, and the caul above the liver, and the two kidneys, and their fat, and Moses burned it upon the altar; But

\* the bullock, and his hide, his flesh, and his dung, he burnt with fire without the camp;

Again the phrase “as the LORD commanded Moses” is used to highlight the fact that it was done precisely according to the LORD’s command.

The above was done exactly according to Exo 29:10-14 and Lev 4. It is also mentioned in Eze 43:19-21. NOTE: in Leviticus 4 the sin offerings of the priests were sprinkled on the veil and altar of incense INSIDE the Holy Place whereas here it was smeared upon the horns of the altar. The reason perhaps was that they had not been consecrated yet and could not go in, thus the altar of burnt offering had to be purified beforehand it could be used.

Why was it that Moses did not have to offer any offering for his own sins before he accepted the offerings of Aaron and the priests?

b. **Vv 18-21** – The burnt offering of the ram was offered next since the significance was for the atonement of sins. The sequence of the burnt offering:

- Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the ram;
- he [Moses] killed it-same explanation as above for the sin offering;
- Moses sprinkled the blood upon the altar round about;
- he cut the ram into pieces; and Moses burnt the head, and the pieces, and the fat;
- he washed the inwards and the legs in water; and
- Moses burnt the whole ram upon the altar.

This burnt offering “was a burnt sacrifice for a sweet savour, and an offering made by fire unto the LORD. Again the phrase, “as the LORD commanded Moses” is used.

This offering was for the atonement of sins. Aaron and his sons had to atone for their sins before they could be accepted by the LORD as mediators for Israel. This indicated a desire for the mercies of the LORD to be upon the priesthood. They were undeserving individuals who needed the LORD's forgiveness. They might have been made priests but they were never to forget that they were also sinful men needing the cleansing blood of Christ as these offerings typify.

- c. **Vv 22-24** – The other ram was offered next as a consecration. The Hebrew word for “consecration” literally means “to dedicate.” Instead of being called the peace offering, this was called the consecration offering. The method of offering is the same as the peace offering (see Lev 3) but the only difference is what Moses did with the blood. In the case of the peace offering, the blood of the animal was sprinkled against the altar of burnt offering (see Lev 3: 2, 8, 13). But in this case of the ordination of the priesthood, the blood was applied on the priests first and then sprinkled onto the altar.

Aaron and his sons laid hands on the ram which symbolized their absolute and total identification. Then Moses took of the blood of it, and . . .

- put it upon the tip of Aaron's **right ear**; and
- upon the **thumb of his right hand**; and
- upon the **great toe of his right foot**; and
- he brought Aaron's sons, and Moses put of the blood upon the tip of their **right ear**; and
- upon the **thumbs of their right hands**; and
- upon the **great toes of their right feet**; and
- Moses sprinkled the blood upon the altar round about.

The application of the blood is significant. Since the majority of people on earth are right handed, the right ear, hand and toes are used for the consecration.

The anointing of the right ear signified that whatever the priests heard they were to be discerning and just. They would also function as judges in disputes. They must listen to the truth without fear or favour of any man, king or relatives or otherwise. At the same time they were to listen to the LORD who chose them and consecrated them as His priests. They were holy persons, the mediators between God and man.

The anointing of the right hand with blood denoted that any deed done must be godly and fair. Theirs were holy hands. Justice and righteousness must come forth from the lives of the priests. They were not allowed to sin and practise corrupt and idolatrous deeds for whatever reasons.

The anointing of the great toe of the right foot meant that the priests could not go anywhere they liked. The places they visited must be holy. They must walk holily before the LORD and man. Psalm 1:1-3.

After these were done, the blood was sprinkled upon the altar of burnt offering round about. Peace between the LORD and the priesthood has now been attained and the priests were ready for service.

- d. **Vv 25-27** – The wave offering was last. The significance was one of thanksgiving. They had been consecrated unto the LORD as the mediators between God and man. After peace had been made between the LORD and His priests, there must be genuine thanksgiving. This was symbolized by the wave offering.

Moses took . . .

- the fat; and
- the rump; and
- all the fat that was upon the inwards; and
- the caul above the liver; and
- the two kidneys, and their fat; and
- the right shoulder; and
- out of the basket of unleavened bread, that was before the LORD, he took one unleavened cake, and a cake of oiled bread, and one wafer; and
- put them on the fat; and
- upon the right shoulder.

All these items were placed in the hands of Aaron and his four sons and they waved them above their heads as a wave offering unto the LORD. This symbolized the completion of the consecration as well as a thanksgiving gesture on their part that the service was over.

The sequence: –

purification > atonement > peace/consecration > thanksgiving !!

- e. **Vv 28-30** – The final anointing was done by Moses using both the anointing oil and the blood. These were the best parts of the offered animal. Normally the right shoulder (7:31-33) and the three types of bread as stated above (7:11-14) were to be eaten by the priests when offered by an ordinary Israelite. But since the offerings came from the priests themselves, they were not given back to the priests for their consumption.

These were all given to Moses who burned them on the altar of burnt offering. They were considered as a sweet savour unto the LORD since it was a consecration service.

The breast of the consecration offering was given to Moses. This was in line with the instruction in 7:31; the breast was given to the priests when offered by an Israelite worshipper. The significant difference here is that

in the case of the peace offering offered by the people, the mediator-priest would also take the right thigh. In this case it was burned up as a sweet savour offering unto the LORD. Wenham explains, “Perhaps this distribution of the priestly perquisites represents the idea that the ordination of Aaron is carried out jointly by God and Moses.” [Page 142]

Do you agree?

Then Moses took the anointing oil and the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled them on all the priests. This was for the purpose of sanctification and the final step which they needed to do before God in order for the consecration to be considered officially completed.

It is interesting to note that both the bodies and the garments of the priests were sprinkled with the oil and blood for the sanctification to be complete. I believe this symbolizes the sanctification of both the external and the internal. The life and the motives of the priests must always be holy and sincere and true and righteous before the LORD. Their duties were indispensable and could not be regarded lightly. Their spiritual disqualification would immediately result in a world void of any mediator till the LORD’s coming as Emmanuel.

### 3. **The Consecration Completed** – 8:31-36

- a. **Vv 31-32** – Eating the meal before the LORD was the final and concluding part of the consecration. In OT times, every covenant was sealed and finalized with the eating or, in some cases, burning of the offering. In this instance, the rest of the consecrated offering, other than the breast which was given to Moses, and the portions burned on the altar were given to the priests to eat.

They were to boil the flesh and eat it together with the unleavened bread that was in the baskets of consecrations. They were to eat them at the door of the Tabernacle. This would have to be the outside of the door of the Tabernacle rather than the inside since the consecration was not completed yet. Aaron and his sons were to eat all of it. Whatever they could not finish they were not to keep to the next day but to burn with fire.

- b. **Vv 33-36** – The consecration lasted seven days. Aaron and his sons were to remain at the door of the Tabernacle for the entire duration. Any break from this would result in death. The location where they could walk around was the outer courtyard of the Tabernacle. They were not allowed inside the holy place because the consecration was not completed yet and therefore they were still unclean. They could not go out into the world because of the impurities and sin for fear of “undoing” the consecration process which was in its last stage.

Exodus 29:36-37 declare that during this seven day period Aaron and his sons were to offer a bullock a day as a sin offering. This was for the cleansing of the altar. This way the altar would be most holy.

Aaron and his sons did exactly as the LORD had commanded them. It was a blessed and most happy occasion for Israel to see and experience for the first time the consecration of her own national priesthood. It was momentous and awe-inspiring indeed.

## B. Inaugurating the Ministry: The First Offerings – 9:1-24

### 1. First Offerings of the Priests and the People Prepared – 9:1-7

Aaron and his sons would now begin their first official offering on behalf of the people of Israel. On the eighth day, after the consecration of Aaron and his sons, Moses called them and the elders of Israel.

He said to Aaron -- **Leviticus 9:2** – “*And he said unto Aaron, Take thee a young calf for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer them before the LORD.*”

Aaron needed to bring :-

- a young calf for sin offering;
- a ram for burnt offering;

Both of them must be without blemished and these would be offered before the LORD.

Then he turned his attention to the elders who represented the children of Israel -- **Leviticus 9:3-4** – “*And unto the children of Israel thou shalt speak, saying, Take ye a kid of the goats for a sin offering; and a calf and a lamb, both of the first year, without blemish, for a burnt offering; Also a bullock and a ram for peace offerings, to sacrifice before the LORD; and a meat offering mingled with oil: for to day the LORD will appear unto you.*”

The children of Israel shall bring:-

- a kid of the goats for a sin offering;
- a calf and a lamb both of first year and without blemish for a burnt offering;
- a bullock and a ram for peace offerings;

These would be offered before the LORD

- a meat offering mingled with oil – as a concluding offering.

The reason Israel had to offer all these offerings through Aaron was that today the LORD would appear to Israel.

Israel obeyed the word of God through Moses and brought all the above offerings. They now awaited further instruction from the LORD as a gathering of God's people. This was Israel's first inaugural service. They never experienced their own worship of the LORD before, having been slaves for and wanderers in the wilderness, and with the completion and dedication of the Tabernacle and consecration of the priesthood they would experience their first ever offering! They probably waited with bated breath and great anticipation (v 5).

Before the glory of the LORD appeared to Israel, this was what she needed to do (9:6).

The one to take the lead in this process of preparing the appearance of the LORD was Aaron. **Leviticus 9:7** – *“And Moses said unto Aaron, Go unto the altar, and offer thy sin offering, and thy burnt offering, and make an atonement for thyself, and for the people: and offer the offering of the people, and make an atonement for them; as the LORD commanded.”*

The sequence was clearly stated and must be observed to the jot and tittle. Aaron and his sons had to offer the sin offering and burnt offering for the atonement for their own sins first before they were allowed to offer the offering of the people and make atonement for them as the LORD commanded. This was a non-negotiable directive that was to be strictly obeyed.

The priests, including the high priest, were still sinners no matter how priestly they looked in their God-designed priestly garments. They had to offer sin and burnt offerings for the atonement of their own sins first before they were allowed to perform the offerings on behalf of the people of Israel.

## 2. **First Offerings Conducted** – 9:8-22

**Vv 8-10** – The sin offering was offered first. **Leviticus 9:8-10** – *“Aaron therefore went unto the altar, and slew the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself. And the sons of Aaron brought the blood unto him: and he dipped his finger in the blood, and put it upon the horns of the altar, and poured out the blood at the bottom of the altar: But the fat, and the kidneys, and the caul above the liver of the sin offering, he burnt upon the altar; as the LORD commanded Moses.”*

The sons of Aaron brought the blood unto Aaron. He dipped his finger in the blood and put it upon the horns of the altar – symbolizing the purification of the altar for the receiving of the burnt offering which would follow next.

The blood was poured out at the bottom of the altar. Unlike the sin offering explained in Lev 4:1-12, Aaron did not have to enter into the Holy Place and sprinkle the blood onto the veil. The possible reason is that Lev 4 specifically mentioned the priest having committed the sin of ignorance. But here there was not any specific sin that the priests and high priests had committed that resulted in this sin offering but one of purification of the altar so that it would be ready for the burnt offering. Hence there was no need to enter the Holy Place.

This was done by Aaron with his two older sons assisting him. This sin offering was not for the high priest only but all the priests as well (Aaron's sons) as he represented them.

The fats and the kidneys and the caul above the liver were burned upon the altar of the LORD.

The flesh and the hide were burned outside the camp as a sign that the impurities and the stain of sin had been removed and the altar was now cleansed and ready.

With the altar purified, it was ready for the burnt offering. The burnt offering was killed and the blood sprinkled round about the altar. The animal was cut into pieces and the inwards and the legs were washed and all parts of the animal were burnt on the altar. This was done according to Lev 1 (9:12-14).

After these have been offered, Aaron began to mediate the offerings of the people of Israel.

The sin offering (a goat) of the people was offered first (v 15). Again this was for purification. This conclusion is arrived at based upon the phrase "as the first", referring to the first time the offerings were done for the priests. The similarity of the sequence is highlighted here. The altar has just been cleansed for the priests' sacrifices. Why was there a need to purify it again? The reason perhaps was to demonstrate the similarity in dealing with sins of the priests and the ordinary sinners. Their functions were different. The priests were given certain religious duties and the people had theirs but as far as their spiritual state or standing before the LORD was concerned, they were all in the same state of total depravity.

**Romans 10:12** – *“For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.”*

**Galatians 3:28** – *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

**Colossians 3:11** – *“Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.”*

The Christian must not be confused about biblical teachings on salvation and service.

The burnt offering was next (a calf and a lamb) and was done according to the biblical guidelines (v 16). This was for the atonement of sins (see Lev 1). Now that sins have been atoned for, instead of the peace offering being offered, the next offering was the meat offering. Why?

The meat offering would ascend to the LORD as a sweet savour sacrifice (see Lev 6:20-23). The word “besides” does not mean “next to”, but rather “apart from” (from the Hebrew word *mi-le-bad*). In other words, apart from the burnt offering, Aaron also offered the meat offering. Not all the meat offering but only a portion of it was offered. The meat offering was a tribute offering of gratitude (see Lev 2). Now that their sins can be and have been atoned for, the children of Israel must be grateful. This is not a usual reaction from depraved sinners. More often than not, 9 out of 10 would take things for granted; they would think that they deserved to be healed and forgiven and thus fail to express gratitude and give thanks (see Luke 17:12-19).

Why was only part of the meat offering offered instead of all of it as taught in Lev 6:20-23?

Then the peace offering was offered (**vv 18-20**). Why was the peace offering not offered after the burnt offering as was the case in Lev 8? (See Lev 3 for peace offering.)

The peace offerings were for the people. The bullock and ram were offered for the peace offerings of the people. The switch in peace and meat offerings here was perhaps to highlight the general well being of the nation of Israel. This was an inaugural offering and not for any particular sin that Israel had committed. In the case of the offerings done by Moses on behalf of Aaron and his sons for their consecration, the sequence was for the atonement of their personal sins in general.

For the people of Israel, the sequence was Sin-offering > Burnt-offering > Meat offering > Peace offerings. The reason for their gratitude was the peace they had with God as God’s people made available through the only sacrificial system designed by God and given to only the people of Israel and no other nation on earth! They were blessed with an enormous blessing and responsibility. To maintain and defend this system of sacrifice for perpetuity was their privilege. Above all else they were to obey it as their God given duty and honour on behalf of the rest of the world that is in darkness and sin. Obedience is the best way to keep God’s Law and His statutes.

The breasts and right shoulder were held above Aaron’s shoulders and waved for all Israel to see. **Leviticus 9:21** – “*And the breasts and the right shoulder Aaron waved for a wave offering before the LORD; as Moses commanded.*” The wave was an acknowledgement that all had been completed according to Scriptures and had been offered to the LORD.

Then Aaron lifted up his hand (singular) to bless the people of Israel. After which Aaron came down from offering the sin offering, burnt offering and peace offering.

### 3. First Offerings Accepted – 9:23-24

Then Moses and Aaron went into the Tabernacle of the congregation as the representatives of the people and came out and then blessed the people. Then the glory of the LORD appeared unto the people “*And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces.*” (Lev 9:24) The consummation of the offerings by fire was an acceptance of the first offerings done by Aaron and his sons.

## C. Disciplining The Ministers: Nadab and Abihu – 10:1-24

### 1. Instantaneous Death – 10:1-2

- a. The Sin (v 1) -- For whatever reasons, Nadab (meaning is “to offer freely”) and Abihu (meaning is “father of him”, i.e. God is father), the two older sons of Aaron, sinned against the LORD. The inaugural offering was not completed yet when they sinned. The sin committed was to offer strange fire on their respective censers.<sup>2</sup> Nadab and Abihu each had his own censer (see Numbers 16 on the challenge whereby each Levite was asked to use his own censer to see which legitimate priesthood was appointed by the LORD, Aaron or Korah and gang).

Apparently the priests and Levites had their own censers. They were called snuffdishes in Exo 25:38 and firepans in Exo 27:3. Nadab and Abihu took fire and put it on their respective censers and then incense was placed in them and they offered them unto the LORD. It was called “strange fire.” What exactly was this strange fire?

**Barnes’ Commentary** – “Strange fire - The point of their offence is evidently expressed in this term. This may very probably mean that the incense was lighted at an unauthorized time. And we may reasonably unite with this the supposition that they were intoxicated (compare Lev 10:9), as

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<sup>2</sup>sen'-ser: In the King James Version censer is used as a translation of two Hebrew words, namely, *machtah*, and *miqTereth*. The former word is generally rendered "censer," sometimes "firepan," and in three cases (Ex 25:38; 37:23; Nu 4:9) "snuffdish" It denoted a bowl-shaped vessel used for different purposes, namely, (1) a censer, in which incense was burnt (Lev 10:1); (2) a firepan, made of bronze, used in connection with the altar of burnt offering (Ex 27:3); (3) a snuffdish, i.e. a receptacle to hold pieces of burnt lamp-wick removed by the tongs or snuffers (Ex 25:38). Probably in all these cases the same kind of vessel was meant, namely, a bowl-shaped utensil with a handle, not unlike a saucepan. The other Hebrew word (derived from the same root as the word for "incense") denoted a vessel for conveying incense (Eze 8:11; 2Ch 26:19). The Greek word *thumiaterion*, by which the Septuagint rendered *miqTereth*, is used also in Heb 9:4, where the King James Version gives "censer". [ISBE, Swordsearcher]

well as another conjecture, that they made their offering of incense an accompaniment to the exultation of the people on the manifestation of the glory of the Lord - Lev 9:24. As they perished not within the tabernacle, but in front of it, it seems likely that they may have been making an ostentatious and irreverent display of their ministrations to accompany the shouts of the people on their way toward the tabernacle. The offence for which they were immediately visited with outward punishment was thus a flagrant outrage on the solemn order of the divine service, while the cause of their offence may have been their guilty excess.”

**Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary** – “If this incident occurred at the solemn period of the consecrating and dedicating the altar, these young men assumed an office which had been committed to Moses; or if it were some time after, it was an encroachment on duties which devolved on their father alone as the high priest. But the offense was of a far more aggravated nature than such a mere informality would imply. It consisted not only in their venturing unauthorized to perform the incense service--the highest and most solemn of the priestly offices--not only in their engaging together in a work which was the duty only of one, but in their presuming to intrude into the holy of holies, to which access was denied to all but the high priest alone. In this respect, "they offered strange fire before the Lord"; they were guilty of a presumptuous and unwarranted intrusion into a sacred office which did not belong to them. But their offense was more aggravated still; for instead of taking the fire which was put into their censers from the brazen altar, they seem to have been content with common fire and thus perpetrated an act which, considering the descent of the miraculous fire they had so recently witnessed and the solemn obligation under which they were laid to make use of that which was specially appropriated to the service of the altars, they betrayed a carelessness, an irreverence, a want of faith, most surprising and lamentable. A precedent of such evil tendency was dangerous, and it was imperatively necessary, therefore, as well for the priests themselves as for the sacred things, that a marked expression of the divine displeasure should be given for doing that which "God commanded them not."

Do you agree with the above commentaries?

My understanding is that the sons took the fire from another place instead of from the altar of burnt offering which was the only legitimate place since it was fire from heaven sent by the LORD never to be put out. They did it when they were in a state of drunken stupor. The drunken state assumed to be the cause of their sin led to the new rule that followed in verses 8-11 of no drinking before priestly duty.

The LORD certainly did not ask them to do what they did. They did it deliberately as seen from the polysyndeton that appears in this verse. It was a deliberate sin on their part. There was no excuse at all.

Consecration is no excuse for sin and arrogance. The consecrated priesthood was expected to have a higher standard of holiness because of

their higher spiritual duties; not a lower one which is the thinking of unbelievers and the unregenerate man.

- b. The Punishment (v 2) – The punishment was instantaneous. The fire from heaven, which a moment ago was sent by the LORD to consume the inaugural offerings, became the fire to punish sinners, even priests.

The punishment was immediate. Why were the sons of Eli in 1 Samuel not dealt with instantaneously like the sons of Aaron, the first high priest? Why is the punishment not immediate today? See Acts 5.

The manner in which they died is significant. The fire from the LORD devoured them. They were not burned into ashes like the offerings. Matthew Poole said that their bodies and their priestly clothes were not consumed. But there is no mention that the bodies were not burned; just that they were not incinerated into ashes. The priestly garments were definitely not burned at all (see verse 5).

The Bible makes it very clear that it was not an accident. They died before, i.e. in front of, the LORD.

The priestly duties were not to be trifled with. Whether it is consecrated priests or inaugural services, there is no acceptable excuse for abuse in priestly service and duties.

Could God be charged for being unmerciful in this case because He did not give them a chance to explain?

## 2. **Biblical Response** – 10:3-7

- a. The Warning (v 3) – Before Aaron could open his mouth to complain or react, Moses said to him in no uncertain terms that his sons deserved to be punished with death. The punishment came from the LORD.

The reason from the LORD was twofold – *“I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified.”* Those who approach the LORD must come with clean hands and pure hearts. They are not to fool around and come any way they like or think best. Attitude such as, “what is good enough for ME must be good enough for the LORD” must be repudiated from our psyche. Arrogance and presumption are sins that will not only hinder anyone from approaching the LORD but will warrant just judgement from the LORD as in the case of Nadab and Abihu. Beware and be warned of the sin of presumption in our walk with the LORD, especially in the areas of service and prayer.

The secondfold reason was that God must be glorified before Israel as they observed the proceedings.

How does the instantaneous death of Nadab and Abihu glorify the LORD before Israel?

The LORD is glorified when Truth is upheld even when people are hurt or misunderstand the situation. The highest standard for the priesthood was demonstrated here at the start of the Levitical priesthood ministry. God is no respecter of persons, not even for those in the priestly ministry, not even for Moses who had done so much for the LORD for nearly 40 years of his life.

“As long as God is glorified it does not matter that some people misunderstand or are hurt by what God does or asks His children to do.”

Can you accept this statement? Do you agree or disagree?

Aaron’s reaction was that “he held his peace.” He was about to open his mouth but the moment he heard the twofold reason of the LORD he had nothing to say. The reason was from God’s perspective, not man’s. If it was from man’s perspective, perhaps Aaron would have tried to present some kind of argument, but he could not because the reasons involved sanctification and glorification of the LORD.

- b. The Removal (v 4-5) – The cousins of Moses and Aaron, Mishael and Elzaphan, were called to carry the bodies of Nadab and Abihu out of the sanctuary and out of the camp. This means that Michael and Elzaphan were Levities, not ordinary Israelites. They did exactly as they were told. They took the bodies which had the priestly garments intact and brought them outside the camp, just as Moses said. The priestly garments with their pomp and dignity during their consecration were now their grave and burial clothes. It was a very sad day when the priests sinned and at the start of their ministry!

The parallel application would be the fulltime workers after graduation from seminary or Bible College who go into the ministry and sin against the LORD by their laziness, arrogance and man pleasing, just to name a few.

- c. No Mourning (v 6-7) – Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar were expressly told by Moses that they were not allowed to mourn or exhibit any sign of mourning for Nadab and Abihu.

They were not allowed:-

- To uncover their heads;
- To rend their clothes;

Both the above actions were signs of grief and mourning. In other words Aaron was not allowed to cry for his sons and over their sudden demise. Eleazar and Ithamar were forbidden to mourn for their brothers as well. If

they disobeyed they could very well die with the offenders. Not only that, the wrath of God might even come upon all the people of Israel.

Let all of Israel bewail the burning of Nadab and Abihu which the LORD Himself had kindled.

Was the LORD unkind or even heartless to not allow Aaron and his remaining sons to weep for their deaths?

Why did the LORD threaten Aaron and his sons with death and great anger toward Israel if they were to show any sign of grief?

Aaron and sons were not allowed to go out from the door of the Tabernacle of the Congregation or else they would die. They were therefore not allowed to attend their burial, if there was one, or even to find out where they were to be buried.

The reason for this very, very strict demand from the LORD at this juncture of their lives was that the anointing oil of the LORD was still upon them. This means that their inaugural offering was not completed yet. It was not to be interrupted. They were offering offerings for themselves and the people of Israel and until the offering was completed the people were not yet sanctified!

Does this incident teach us that we cannot attend the funeral of loved ones or not weep for them? Should we cancel a speaking engagement if there is a death in the family?

### 3. Strict Guidelines Instituted – 10:8-11

- a. Forbidden to Drink (v 8-9) – The New rule given to the priests on duty was total abstinence. “Wine and strong drink”<sup>3</sup> were placed in front of this verse for emphasis.

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<sup>3</sup>“(shekhar; sikera; from shakhar, "to be or become drunk"; probably from the same root as sugar, saccharine): With the exception of **Nu** 28:7, "strong drink" is always coupled with "wine." The two terms are commonly used as mutually exclusive, and as together exhaustive of all kinds of intoxicants.

“Originally shekhar seems to have been a general term for intoxicating drinks of all kinds, without reference to the material out of which they were made; and in that sense, it would include wine. Reminiscences of this older usage may be found in **Nu** 28:7 (where shekhar is clearly equivalent to wine, as may be seen by comparing it with **Nu** 28:14, and with **Ex** 29:40, where the material of the drink offering is expressly designated "wine").

“When the Hebrews were living a nomadic life, before their settlement in Canaan, the grape-wine was practically unknown to them, and there would be no need of a special term to describe it. But when they settled down to an agricultural life, and came to cultivate the vine, it would become necessary to distinguish it from the older kinds of intoxicants; hence, the borrowed word yayin ("wine") was applied to the former, while the latter would be classed together under the old term shekhar, which would then come to mean all intoxicating beverages other than wine (**Le** 10:9; **Nu** 6:3; **De** 14:26; **Pr** 20:1; **Isa**

The strong drink would include all intoxicating drinks which exclude wine, the fruit of the vine.

This new rule which came immediately after the Nadab and Abihu incident seems to point to the cause of their sins which resulted in their immediate demise. From henceforth, all priests about to go on duty must refrain from drinking.

“This means that they were allowed to drink wine and strong drink when they were not on duty.” Could this be the correct interpretation?

The punishment was also death, if they persist to disobey. This was to be the new statute for all priests who follow the priestly footsteps. There were no exceptions. Their ministry of sacrifice was too important for any form of indulgence. Total abstinence was the best solution.

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24:9). The exact nature of these drinks is not clearly indicated in the Bible itself. The only fermented beverage other than grape-wine specifically named is pomegranate-wine (**Song** 8:2: "the juice of my pomegranate," the Revised Version, margin "sweet wine of my pomegranate"); but we may infer that other kinds of shekhar besides that obtained from pomegranates were in use, such as drinks made from dates, honey, raisins, barley, apples, etc. Probably Jerome (circa 400 AD) was near the mark when he wrote, "Sikera in the Hebrew tongue means every kind of drink which can intoxicate, whether made from grain or from the juice of apples, or when honeycombs are boiled down into a sweet and strange drink, or the fruit of palm oppressed into liquor, and when water is colored and thickened from boiled herbs" (Ep. ad Nepotianum). Thus shekhar is a comprehensive term for all kinds of fermented drinks, excluding wine.

“Probably the most common sort of shekhar used in Biblical times was palm or date-wine. This is not actually mentioned in the Bible, and we do not meet with its Hebrew name *yen temarim* ("wine of dates") until the Talmudic period. But it is frequently referred to in the Assyrian-Babylonian contract tablets (cuneiform), and from this and other evidence we infer that it was very well known among the ancient Semitic peoples. Moreover, it is known that the palm tree flourished abundantly in Biblical lands, and the presumption is therefore very strong that wine made of the juice of dates was a common beverage. It must not be supposed, however, that the term shekhar refers exclusively to date-wine. It rather designates all intoxicating liquors other than grape-wine, while in few cases it probably includes even wine.

“There can be no doubt that shekhar was intoxicating. This is proved (1) from the etymology of the word, it being derived from *shakhar*, "to be or become drunk" (**Ge** 9:21; **Isa** 29:9; **Jer** 25:27, etc.); compare the word for drunkard (*shikkar*), and for drunkenness (*shikkaron*) from the same root; (2) from descriptions of its effects: e.g. Isaiah graphically describes the stupefying effect of shekhar on those who drink it excessively (28:7,8). Hannah defended herself against the charge of being drunk by saying, "I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink," i.e. neither wine nor any other intoxicating liquor (1Sa 1:15). The attempt made to prove that it was simply the unfermented juice of certain fruits is quite without foundation. Its immoderate use is strongly condemned (**Isa** 5:11-12; **Pr** 20:1; see **DRUNKENNESS** ). It was forbidden to ministering priests (**Le** 10:9): and to Nazirites (**Nu** 6:3; **Jg** 13:4,7,14; compare **Lu** 1:15), but was used in the sacrificial meal as drink offering (**Nu** 28:7), and could be bought with the tithe-money and consumed by the worshipper in the temple (**De** 14:26). It is commended to the weak and perishing as a means of deadening their pain; but not to princes, lest it might lead them to pervert justice (**Pr** 31:4-7).” [ISBE, Swordsearcher]

**Leviticus 10:8-11** *And the LORD spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations: And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.*

- b. The Reasons Stated (v 10-11) – The first reason given was that the priests, who were to be teachers and the most spiritual in Israel, must demonstrate the difference between holy and unholy and between clean and unclean. The priests were holy and the rest of Israel was not in that the former were the only ones allowed to do the spiritual work. The standard must be set by them. The clean and unclean refer to the holy and unholy. Israel was to live by this division of clean and unclean in their dressing, diet, farming, clothing, etc, every day in every facet of their lives. This was in fact, to be a constant reminder of their distinction from the rest of the world.

How much more when it comes to the priests and the rest of Israel?

Does this mean that there is some kind of work or ministry which is holy while others are unholy or clean and unclean today?

The second reason given was that the children of Israel were to be taught all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken to them. This means that as teachers they were to be clear headed at all times. Alcohol dulls the mind and senses.

Teachers of God's Holy Word are to be sober all the time. Total abstinence is a must for believers today. Pastors and teachers of God's Word must practise total abstinence.

Is there another group of people in Israel who were barred from drinking wine and alcohol?

Who are the priests today?

Any Bible verses to support your answer?

#### **4. Immediate Replacement – 10:12-20**

- a. Eating of the offering (v 12-15) – Moses instructed Aaron and his sons, Eleazar and Ithamar to complete the offering by eating the offerings which Nadab and Sbihu were supposed to do before they offered strange fire and died by the hand of the LORD.

They were not to eat them with leaven and were to consume them beside the altar. This offering was most holy and only for holy people to eat.

It was also to be eaten in the holy place. This was Aaron's due and that of his son's due as well. This was a command from Moses. It was part of the sin-offering that the people offered to the LORD which the priests were allowed to consume (see Lev 6:24-30).

The wave and heave offerings (for thanksgiving) were to be eaten in a clean place. This refers to a place that has not been contaminated by any form of uncleanness like a leper or a man with open sores, or a dead person or a refuse dump or a place for ablution. But in this instance, the sons and daughters of Aaron were allowed to eat. Not all daughters but only daughters who were with Aaron, i.e. lived in his house.

**Leviticus 22:10-16** *“There shall no stranger eat of the holy thing: a sojourner of the priest, or an hired servant, shall not eat of the holy thing. But if the priest buy any soul with his money, he shall eat of it, and he that is born in his house: they shall eat of his meat. If the priest's daughter also be married unto a stranger, she may not eat of an offering of the holy things. **But if the priest's daughter be a widow, or divorced, and have no child, and is returned unto her father's house, as in her youth, she shall eat of her father's meat: but there shall no stranger eat thereof.** And if a man eat of the holy thing unwittingly, then he shall put the fifth part thereof unto it, and shall give it unto the priest with the holy thing. And they shall not profane the holy things of the children of Israel, which they offer unto the LORD; Or suffer them to bear the iniquity of trespass, when they eat their holy things: for I the LORD do sanctify them.”* [Emphasis added]

- b. Offering Returned Back unto the LORD (v 16-20) – The sons of Aaron did not consume the offerings as commanded by Moses in the holy place. Apparently the wave and heave offering were eaten but not the sin offering. When Moses made a search to make sure that the sacrifices were completed accordingly, he was shocked to find that the offerings were burnt by Eleazar and Ithamar.

Moses sought an explanation from them. He asked, *“Wherefore have ye not eaten the sin offering in the holy place, seeing it is most holy, and God hath given it you to bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD? Behold, the blood of it was not brought in within the holy place: ye should indeed have eaten it in the holy place, as I commanded.”*

If the blood had been brought into the holy place, then the sin offering should be burnt. But the blood was not brought into the holy place therefore the sin offering ought to be consumed by the priests. Moses knew his theology well. **Leviticus 6:30** *“And no sin offering, whereof any of the blood is brought into the tabernacle of the congregation to reconcile withal in the holy place, shall be eaten: it shall be burnt in the fire.”*

Aaron's explanation placated Moses and it was for a very godly and reasonable reason. Aaron said unto Moses, *“Behold, this day have they offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD; and*

*such things have befallen me: and if I had eaten the sin offering today, should it have been accepted in the sight of the LORD?"* After what happened to Nadab and Abihu there was sorrow in their hearts. The sin offering was to be eaten by priests who were rejoicing but there was no rejoicing at this time. The best way was to offer the sin offering back to the LORD which was exactly what they did by burning it up.

And when Moses heard *that*, he was content.

**A SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS 8-10** – From blessings to cursings. The inauguration of the Levitical priesthood was one of the high points of Israel's nationhood. The Tabernacle had been built and completed after the struggle for holiness due to the sin of the golden calf a few short days or weeks earlier. With that behind them, Israel had so much to look forward to after receiving the forgiveness of the LORD.

But tragedy struck Israel again. This time it occurred among the most spiritual people in all of Israel, the sons of the high priest, Aaron, inside the premises of the Tabernacle itself. So soon after the consecration of the first generation of priests, death had violently intruded and stained the most holy place in Israel.

Is there no sacred place on this earth that Satan would not intrude?

The sin was committed by the two firstborn sons of Aaron. They had no children. Their deaths instantaneously terminated their lineage and the priestly line was cut into half with one terrible act of sin. The line of Nadab and Abihu was gone forever. There remained only the lines of Eleazar and Ithamar (sons number 3 and 4).

Tears and sorrow and shock and horror displaced joy and glory when they died in the hands of the thrice holy God. There was no reprieve. There was no time for mercy. The deaths were instantaneous. The irony was that the fire that came from heaven to consume the offerings of the priests as a heavenly acceptance by the LORD came down from heaven to consume them as an absolute rejection of their persons!

The offerings were made acceptable as Eleazar and Ithamar were asked by Moses to replace them and to finish the offerings. Nadab and Abihu died their deaths and sin did not neutralize or diminish the offerings at all. God accepted the offerings when they were completed according to Scriptures. But the sinners who offered them were rejected.

Could this be an example for our understanding the Lord's Supper - when a pastor who conducts it is hiding a secret sin, would the Lord's Supper sacraments (taken by the members) remain holy and acceptable to God as long as it is taken worthily?