



## [Leviticus 10:1-7](#)

(1) And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. (2) And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. (3) Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace. (4) And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. (5) So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moses had said. (6) And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the LORD hath kindled. (7) And ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you. And they did according to the word of Moses.

*King James Version*

What did these men do that was so awful? They were priests, sons of Aaron, the high priest, nephews of [Moses](#). If anybody had a close relationship with [God](#) and would receive a measure of leeway in judgment, it was these two. Nevertheless, there was none; with God, there is no respect of persons in judgment (see [Romans 2:11](#)). He reacted swiftly and violently, wiping them out on the spot. This incident involved no Temple prostitutes, no human

sacrifices, just "strange fire." Surely, such a little thing would not matter! God's reaction allowed no time for a trial; there was just a summary execution, a terrifying supernatural judgment by God.

Verse 6 contains an interesting sidelight to this violent event. Undoubtedly, Aaron was shocked into an emotional reaction that may have ranged from pitiful wailing to a consuming anger toward God, but Moses cautioned him to control himself and give no outward demonstration of his emotional state! Why? Moses understood that they had sinned grievously and got what they deserved. Aaron was told that, despite the shocking nature of what had happened, he should express no disagreement with God's judgment.

Consider this in a larger context. Beginning in [Exodus 40:1](#), the Tabernacle, its altar, and the laver were erected and the interior furniture arranged, then all was consecrated in a solemn ceremony. At that point (verse 34), God came to dwell in the Tabernacle.

Leviticus 1 follows the sequence of events, showing God giving the sacrificial rituals to be performed at the Tabernacle. In Leviticus 8, Aaron and the priesthood are officially consecrated. In [Leviticus 9:1](#), the priesthood's ministry formally begins. In verse 24, a startling occurrence takes place during that first offering: ". . . and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar." This signaled God's acceptance, showing that all had been done according to His will.

However, there is more to this story, giving us understanding of the term "strange fire" that follows in chapter 10. Within the instructions regarding the sacrifices, [Leviticus 6:12-13](#) gives the priests an interesting charge:

And the fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not be put out. And the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order on it; and he shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. A perpetual fire shall burn on the altar; it shall never go out.

The term *strange* means "what is alien to." Foreigners are called "strangers" in Scripture because they are aliens to Israel and to the covenant ([Ephesians 2:12](#)). In this case, the fire used by Nadab and Abihu was alien to what God

had commanded regarding fire. Together with [Exodus 30:7-9](#), their infraction becomes clear. The priests were to make the morning and evening incense offerings only with the special incense mixture God commanded, and they were to take the coals for these offerings only from the continually burning fire under the altar of burnt offerings, which He started in [Leviticus 9:24](#).

Aaron was undoubtedly confused and displeased, not understanding what happened, but Moses gave him God's answer. In [Leviticus 10:3](#), the Lord says, "By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified." Nadab and Abihu were among those chosen to come near Him in service. They revealed their disrespect for Him by treating His command regarding the fire as something common. They simply did not follow His instructions.

They added or subtracted to what God said and did, attempting to get by with what they carnally assumed was acceptable to Him. By this incident, [holiness](#) is defined. Among those who are consecrated to serve God, His instructions must be explicitly followed. Thus, this example appears especially pointed toward the ministry.

The instructions are not ambiguous. Each step and instrument in the process is designed to teach certain spiritual concepts. They had been completely instructed, so they blatantly twisted God's teaching. In response to Moses, Aaron remained silent, knowing the judgment was correct. This incident is of special importance to us because of the context and because of who we are. The context is the consecration of the priesthood in service to God, and we are, according to I Peter 2, a royal priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices. By this incident, God shows, perhaps more clearly than in any other place, what holiness is in relation to Him.

Holiness is not merely consecration or dedication to a god, but it is both moral and ethical as well. True holiness is what results from His consecration, but the consecration must be combined with our submission to His commands. In pagan religions, a person could be dedicated but not moral, as is clearly shown by the ritual prostitution practiced at their temples. The prostitute was indeed consecrated to her god, but she most certainly was not moral—nor were they who used her services.

Today, a person may claim that his god is the Creator God, but if he is not obedient to the Creator God's commandments, he is merely deluding himself. Sincerity is only part of the picture. We are to worship in spirit *and truth* ([John 4:24](#)). The closer one is associated with God's work, the more necessary it is to ensure that the relationship with God is not marred by spiritual blemishes. Otherwise, the person cannot function properly as a channel for God to work through. God will not be glorified before the people unless His servants submit to His commands.

A similar careless notion got Cain into trouble. If we add or omit with knowledge, it is presumption, and presumption springs from pride. It is as if we are telling God He does not know what He is doing. We have elevated ourselves to His level. *Nothing more, nothing less, nothing else than His will must be our attitude.*

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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