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Leviticus 10

(2019)

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Leviticus 10.

FOCUS: SINS OF AARON'S SONS NADAB, ABIHU, ELEAZAR AND ITHAMAR

Topics.

- Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu, offer unauthorized fire.
- Mishael and Elzaphan carry their brothers out of the camp.
- The priests are not to drink wine or strong drink in the tent of meeting.
- Eleazar and Ithamar did not take the atoning blood into the sanctuary.

FOLLOWING THE TITLE FOOTNOTES

- The recipe for the incense and worship without knowledge.
- The altar of incense, of prayer, of faith and of Legalistic ritual.
- The altar of incense, and of the throne of God and Christ our mediator.

INTRODUCTION: the book of Leviticus is about ceremonial rules and civil laws that God gave to Moses after He had given him the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai.

- These are the statutes and rules and laws that the LORD made between him and the people of Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai. (Lev. 26:46).

1

Either on Mount Sinai or when he met with him in the Tabernacle (also called the tent of meeting) when they were in the wilderness near the Mountain. Moses was to give these ceremonial laws to the Levitical priesthood, they embrace rules concerning sacrifices, offerings and worship; the ordination of Aaron and his sons and their ceremonial cleanness; the Day of Atonement; feasts and holy days and the Year of Jubilee. The civil and social laws and laws of justice he was to give to the government of Israel to implement within their society. The ceremonial and civil laws were not given to the secular world but are laws God gave to the nation of Israel. The central message is that God is holy and requires His people to be holy. The book also shows that God graciously provides atonement for sin through the shedding of blood. Most Jews and Christians recognise Moses as the author, writing sometime after the giving of the Law (about 1445 B.C.).

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

The previous chapter: firstly, focuses on Moses offering a young bull calf for a sin offering for Aaron, his sons and the elders to make atonement and secondly it focuses on Aaron offering a sin and a burnt offering to make atonement for the people. Thirdly, the focus is upon Aaron offering a grain and peace offering and waving the breast and right thigh. The chapter ended with the glory of the LORD appearing and fire consuming the burnt offering.

Aaron's Sons Nadab and Abihu, Offer Unauthorized Fire.

- **Leviticus 10:1-2:** Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire (strange fire in KJV) before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. ²And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.

In chapter eight we are told that the ordination of Aaron and his sons took seven days to be completed. (Lev. 8:33-36), and chapter nine clearly tells us that it was on the eighth day that Aaron, his sons and the people gave a sin and burnt offering to make atonement for themselves and for the people, which ended with the people seeing the glory of the LORD and fire coming down and consuming the offering. The last verses (16-20) show that the events of this chapter happened the same day that Nadab and Abihu were consumed with fire. They tell us that Eleazar and Ithamar, the surviving sons of Aaron should have taken the blood of the goat for a sin offering into the Holy Place of the tabernacle and eaten the sin offering in the outer court so that they would bear the iniquity of the people and make atonement for them. Moses is angry when he discovers that Eleazar and Ithamar had not done what they should have.

To defend Eleazar and Ithamar Aaron basically says: "Today the people offered their sin and burnt offerings before the LORD, and yet fire came out from the LORD and consumed my two sons Nadab and Abihu and they died before the LORD. (Lev. 10:1-2). Aaron, taking the responsibility for his remaining two sons, then asks Moses, if he had eaten the sin offering on the same day fire from the LORD consumed his two sons, would the LORD have approved? Showing that the following events all happened on the day Nadab and Abihu were consumed with fire. However, though all these things happened in one day, we cannot know how much time had passed between the eighth day of the previous chapter and this day.

Aarons sons: Aaron had four sons, the two eldest were Nadab and Abihu.

2

- Aaron took as his wife Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab and the sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. (Exod. 6:23).
- These are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. (Num. 3:2)

Each took his censer: (v1) a censer was a sacred pan specifically made for the work of the sanctuary. Hot coals of fire were taken from the brazen altar and placed in the pans. The priest would carry the pan of hot coals into the Holy Place and place them on the golden altar of incense and then pour a mixture of incense upon them from which a sweet-smelling fragrance would fill the sanctuary.

Nadab and Abihu, each took his censer: (v1) and put fire in their censers (pans) and laid incense on the fire in their censers and offered unauthorized fire (strange fire in KJV) before the LORD. It is difficult to understand how Nadab, and Abihu who had the honour and privilege of being with Moses on Mount Sinai in the wilderness and seeing God could be guilty of such a fatal error.

- Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, ¹⁰and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. (Exod. 24:9-10).

Considering that Nadab and Abihu were the eldest sons of Aaron the anointed high priest and the brother of Moses and that they were among those invited to accompany Moses when he was going up Mount Sinai, who were to worship afar off, and not come near the LORD.

- Then he said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. ²Moses alone shall come near to the LORD, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him." (Exod. 24:1-2).

It is truly amazing that they would fall so far, for next to Moses and Aaron, we would expect that there would be none were more likely to be honourable in Israel than the two eldest sons of the high priest. This shows that no matter how high the position a person holds in a church or religious organisation, being born into a family is no guarantee of faithfulness. The fact we are told that they “offered unauthorized fire before the LORD,” means that they must have entered the Holy Place where the golden altar of incense was.

The sin of Nadab and Abihu: (v1) the sin of Nadab and Abihu involved the following transgressions:

- In Leviticus chapter sixteen we are told that the LORD spoke to Moses after the death of Aarons two sons Nadab and Abihu, when they drew near before the LORD and died, and told Moses to tell Aaron that he would die if he went into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark. (Lev. 16:1-2). This implies that Nadab and Abihu went into the Most Holy Place, which is supported by the fact that here in chapter ten we are told that Nadab and Abihu, offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them to do and they died. (v2). Only the high priest was permitted to enter the Most Holy Place and even then, only after he had clothed himself in the holy garments skillfully made for the high priest as Leviticus chapter sixteen goes on to show.
- They entered the Most Holy Place when they were not ordained or anointed to do so, perhaps out of curiosity to see what was behind the curtain, this is very likely since they both went in together, when it only required one to burn the incense on the golden altar.
- They were usurping the authority and role of the High Priest and coming before the LORD in the wrong way and not as He instructed or commanded.

3

Offered unauthorized fire (strange fire in KJV): (v1) there are various understandings of what this expression means, following are the most common:

1. The fire that the incense was burned upon was done at an unauthorized time.
 2. The unauthorized fire was not taken from the brazen altar of burnt offering, but from some common domestic fire, or fire that was created by themselves. This is unlikely since there would be no other fires burning in the outer court of the tabernacle.
 3. There was a very specific recipe for the incense, which means the expression, “unauthorized fire,” may mean that the incense, Nadab and Abihu offered was not prepared according to the recipe required under the law and therefore the fire is spoken of as being unauthorized in the same manner that the expression, “unauthorized incense” refers to incense not being prepared according to the rules of the Law.
- You shall not offer unauthorized incense (strange incense in KJV) on it, (the golden altar of incense in the Holy Place) (Exod. 30:9).

For the full recipe of the incense see the notes titled:

- The Recipe for Incense, at the end of this document.

Which he had not commanded: (v1) meaning that Nadab and Abihu not only did it of their own volition and without any command or authority from God, but also did it against His command.

- They took upon themselves a sacred office which did not belong to them and entered-into the Most Holy Place, to which they had no authority to do so, for entry was denied to all but the high priest.

- They showed ceremonial misconduct, fragrant disrespect for Gods law and His will and a careless and irreverent display of faith.
- Based upon the LORD's command to Aaron in verse eight and nine saying, "Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die, it is possible Nadab and Abihu may have been under the influence of strong drink when they offered the LORD's offering and therefore in a state of intoxication and uncleanness (v8).

It is interesting to notice: that there is a very striking parallel between verse two of this chapter:

- Fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. (Lev 10:2).

And the last verse of the previous chapter:

- Fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. (Leviticus 9:24).

In both verses, the same expression is used, which means the same divine fire that had graciously signified God's acceptance of the appointed sacrifice in the previous chapter, now flashed out with lightning-like power of destruction and killed the two rebel priests. This fact highlights the truth that God is both a God of love and life and a God of wrath and destruction. The God who reveals Himself as gracious and gentle, is also the God who reveals Himself as the God of wrath and death.

Unauthorised fire may symbolise: performing religious duties from tradition without any inward affection and love toward God. Serving God from selfish ambition, pretended, hypocritical and feigned love, or from a zeal not according to knowledge, but from superstition and false doctrines. It embraces everything a person does according to their own will and effort devoid of faith in-order to obtain eternal life and salvation. It could be likened to Christian worship glowing with self-will and outward zeal but lacks inward commitment and reality. When we worship God for what we can get and rush into His presence with hot, eager desires that we have not submitted to His will, it can be rightly said that, "we are burning unauthorised fire that the LORD has not commanded." The fire that should kindle the prayers (incense) in our hearts (censers), and send a sweet smelling fragrance from the altar (our inner most being) up to heaven is the fire of true passion, devotion and zeal for our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, it is his love and grace that must kindle the flame in our hearts toward God if we are to offer true worship to our heavenly Father. When our prayers and worship are offered in this way, they will be truly sweet to the ears of the LORD.

Ponder for a moment: how Aaron the father of Nadab and Abihu would have felt when he comprehended the severity of the words his brother Moses expressed without any sense of comfort or sympathy. Aaron paternal heart. would have bled with sorrow for his sons but being a faithful priest himself and fully aware that Nadab and Abihu had recently been consecrated for, the purpose of enforcing the truth of God's holiness, but instead had done the very opposite, by ignoring the distinction between the holy and the common accepted God's judgment. Aaron's attitude could be likened to those who confess to believe in Christ and the Gospel accepting that the eternal destination for their family members who blatantly deny Christ is eternal death (i.e., total-destruction, annihilation and extinction), in contrast to those who, because of their love for them believe they have gone to heaven even though they have never shown any interest in Christ, which is contrary to the word of God. Nadab and Abihu were near to God, which means the lesson we can learn from this story is that being closer to God can bring great blessing, but with it also brings corresponding judgment, if God is not honoured by His sanctified servants.

They died before the LORD: (v2) some have suggested this means that they died:

- Before the brazen altar of burnt offering in the outer court of the tabernacle.
- Before the entrance of the tabernacle.
- Before the golden altar of incense since it was upon this altar, they burnt the unauthorised fire and incense.

Though it is true that if they did die in anyone of these places it could be rightly stated they died before the LORD, but in the context of Nadab and Abihu it is more likely that they died before the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place.

The two lessons: in this story for the Israelites is firstly, that just because one is an anointed priest and mediator between the people and God it does not mean they are free from the same infirmities and inward sinful dysfunctions and aberrations as those who they minister over and make atonement for. Secondly, those who are exalted to such an honoured and privileged position, should never presume that they will escape judgment, because of their exalted status.

LEVITICUS 10:3-5

Mishael and Elzaphan Carry their Brothers Out of the Camp.

- **Leviticus 10:3-5:** Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has said, 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.' " And Aaron held his peace. ⁴And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near; carry your brothers away from the front of the sanctuary and out of the camp." ⁵So they came near and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said.

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Sanctified: comes from the Hebrew word (*qadash*) and means to consecrate and pronounce a person clean (ceremonial or moral), it carries the idea of being set aside for the work of God.

This is what the LORD has said, (v3) though Aaron's heart must have been filled with anguish and dismay, when he heard of the LORD's judgment upon his two eldest and unfaithful sons, yet with silent submission he accepted the LORD's judgment.

The lesson: in this for us to learn today is that when God corrects us or those near to us it is our duty to accept the punishment, and say, "It is the LORD, let him do what seems to Him to be right." Whenever we worship God, we come as spiritual priests near to Him, which means we should embrace every act of worship and praise and all acts of devotion with great seriousness and endeavour to do everything as though the most Holy God is standing before us, with the knowledge that He will take vengeance on those that dishonour His name and treat Him with disrespect and who are frivolous with His sacred things.

The sons of Uzziel: (v4) Uzziel was the son of Kohath, the younger brother of Amram. Kohath had the following four sons, Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, (Exod. 6:18). Amram was the father of Aaron, which means Uzziel was Aarons uncle. Uzziel had the following three sons Mishael, Elzaphan and Sithri. (Exod. 6:22).

Come near; carry your brothers (brethren in KJV): (v4) referring to their relatives. The expression brother is frequently used in the Bible in the sense of near relation as the following verses show: -

- Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen (brethren in KJV). (Gen. 13:8).

- Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen (brethren in KJV). (Gen. 24:27).
- I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman (brother's in KJV). for his son. (Gen. 24:48).
- Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman (brother's in KJV), and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father. (Gen. 29:12).
- Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman (my brother's in KJV), should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" (Gen. 29:15).

NOTE: during the early ancient generations and the period of the Roman Empire and the age of the New Testament women (especially those who had authority) were referred to as brothers. The Jewish nation viewed a Jewish man or woman as a brother. This is because it was an ancient expression that signified a person belonged to the same nation, the same family, the same faith, or the same group of people etc. During these eras (especially the Roman and New Testament era) the word, brothers was not used to differentiate between male and females unless the context specifically states it. Brothers was a perfect expression for those in Christ since, brotherly love is love that protects, defends, guards and shelters, and is free from any romantic or sexual thought. The brothers (brethren) in this context refers to the first cousins of Aaron the following two sons of Uzziel:

1. Mishael.
2. Elzaphan (Exod. 6:22).

These two are selected by Moses to carry the bodies of Nadab and Abihu out of the camp and bury them, it is very probable they were in the court of the tabernacle, being Kohathites, of the tribe of Levi, however, since they were not priests, (only Levites directly descended from the bloodline of Aaron were priests), they had no right to go into the Most Holy Place, where the two sons of Aaron lay dead, so Moses tells them to come to the front of the sanctuary (v4). It is most likely that Moses or some priests he appointed to the task brought the bodies of Nadab and Abihu out of the tabernacle and then called Mishael and Elzaphan to carry them from the entrance of the tabernacle outside the camp. It is very likely Moses understanding that Nadab and Abihu closest family members would have been greatly affected by this appalling scene, charged their cousins Mishael and Elzaphan with the task of carrying away the dead bodies of Nadab and Abihu to spare the feelings of the immediate family members. Such a serious judgment and the removal of the two corpses being carried outside the camp for burial would have spread a painful consciousness throughout all the congregation of Israel into the hearts of the priests and the people and a fearful awareness that should anyone disrespect God's laws, they will bring serious judgement upon themselves.

LEVITICUS 10:6-7

Moses tells Aaron Eleazar and Ithamar, Not to Morn, Lest they Die.

- **Leviticus 10:6-7:** And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons, "Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose (uncover not your heads in KJV), and do not tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation; but let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning that the LORD has kindled. ⁷And do not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.

Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose: (v6) (uncover not your heads in KJV) or tear your clothes. It was the custom for mourners to cover their heads, and let their hair grow long, and fall in a disorderly and wild manner over the head and face as an expression and outward sign

of deep sorrow and mourning. Tearing the clothes in the front to lay open the chest was another common manifestation of grief, sorrow and mourning as the following verses show.

- When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes. (Gen. 37:29).
- Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. (Gen. 37:34).
- David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. (2 Sam. 1:11).
- Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. (Job 1:20).
- Rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. (Joel 2:13).

Moses command to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons not to let their hair of their heads hang loose (not uncover their heads in KJV) or tear their clothes means that they were not to take off their mitres, turbans and bonnets or shave their heads, nor were they to rend their clothes or give any outward signs of sorrow or morning for the following two reasons:

1. So that they would not appear to be reflecting to the people that God's punishment was too severe.
2. So that their attention would not be diverted from their present sacred service before the LORD.

On this occasion Aaron and his two surviving sons Eleazar and Ithamar are forbidden to give way to these manifestations of grief, since it might be taken by the people to be a silent murmuring against God's justice of such a severe punishment. The core of Moses command to Aaron, Eleazar and Ithamar was that they should not let the hair remain untidy, disorderly unkempt and bedraggled, because showing any sign of sorrow would appear to justify Nadab and Abihu's sin, and without words imply that God's severe punishment was unjust. The act of showing no outward sign of sorrow manifested to the people that they submitted their emotions of sorrow to God's just judgment and accepted His will. The prohibition to Aaron and his remaining sons not to mourn Nadab and Abihu highlights God's point of view, for to lament their punishment and mourn their deaths would indicate that they are murmuring against God's judgments and possibly led others to sympathize with them and participate in their sin.

Nadab's and Abihu's lifeless corpses lying in the forecourt of the tabernacle, and Aaron's dry eyes and undisturbed attitude would have proclaimed the same truth to the people which was that the sin of the two dead men was extremely grave and accordingly the righteous and severe judgment of God was right and just. Even today many Jews observe this custom of mourning for the death of their near relations; they tear their garments, let their hair and nails grow, and do not wash.

Let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail: (v6) though Aaron and his two surviving sons Eleazar and Ithamar were forbidden to show any signs of mourning and sorrow, close relatives and the people were not forbidden to show the customary expressions of mourning and express the depth of their sympathy over the death of Nadab and Abihu. Some, such as close friends and relatives would mourn in compassion for Nadab and Abihu, but most of the nation's mourning would be that such a horrific and blatant sin had been committed in Israel.

Do not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting: (v7) Aaron and his two surviving sons were forbidden to leave the court of the tabernacle to attend the funeral, because they were acting as consecrated

priests and as such they were to outwardly maintain the honour of the LORD and bear visible testimony to the righteousness of Nadab and Abihu punishment.

Lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation: (v7) Aaron and his two surviving sons Eleazar and Ithamar were forbidden to leave the court of the tabernacle because the anointing oil of the LORD was upon them. The anointed priests stood before God on behalf of people as representatives of the entire nation. Under the law it was a principle that a sin committed by an anointed priest, especially while ministering before God in their official sacred position on behalf of the people involved the whole nation and as such the people had a share in the consequences of the offence.

- If the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull from the herd without blemish to the LORD for a sin offering. (Lev. 4:3).

Aaron and his two surviving sons Eleazar and Ithamar were forbidden to go out amongst the people while the anointing oil was upon them, for if they did they would bring guilt upon the people and expose them to God's diving judgment. Aaron, Eleazar and Ithamar obeyed to the word of Moses and remained within the boundaries of the tabernacle.

LEVITICUS 10:8-11

Priests are Not to Drink Wine or Strong Drink in Tent of Meeting.

- **Leviticus 10:8-11:** And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying, ⁹"Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. ¹⁰You are to distinguish between the holy and the common (unholy in KJV), and between the unclean and the clean, ¹¹and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses."

8

During the time they ministered, the priests were forbidden to drink alcohol, this same principal is required of Gospel ministers. In the book of Timothy, it is written:

- If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task, by they must be sober and not a drunkard. (1 Tim. 3:1-3).

This ban has led some to conclude that the two disobedient priests, Nadab and Abihu were under the influence of intoxication when they committed the offense, though this idea may be true, it must be kept in mind that it is only a speculation.

Distinguish between the holy and the common (unholy in KJV): (10) this is clearly an allusion to Nadab and Abihu who did not distinguish between the holy and the unholy, but instead performed duties that they had not be consecrated and sanctified for (i.e., had not been made ceremonially holy).

The holy and unholy: the holy refers to people and things that are consecrated and sanctified (i.e., set apart for God's purposes) and vessels and sacred things that are made clean in a ceremonial sense and all animals, birds and fish that are declared clean by the law, while the unholy embraces all things that would cause a person to be defiled should they touch or eat them.

All priests and ministers of God's word and work must remain sober, so that they are clearly able to distinguish between the holy and the unholy, the clean and the unclean, for the mind and senses are dulled from making such discernments when they are influenced by wine and acholic drinks. The entire focus of the following chapter is upon what is clean and unclean.

NOTE: The Bible does not teach total abstinence, nor does it teach that drinking alcohol is a sin, but many verses do strongly warn against drinking an excess of alcohol for the following reasons:

- It weakens the will and can lead to a lack of moral fortitude.
- It can be dangerous since it often leads to self-indulgence, immorality, shamelessness, violence and drunken driving.
- It has the potential to lead to alcoholic addiction and destroy marriages and lives.
- It results in behavior that is often regretted when the drunken state of the mind sobers up and returns to normality.

Clearly excessive amounts of alcohol can lead to many sins and drunkenness can result in behavior that is often regretted the next day, even the secular world understands these truths. Many (men and women) when inebriated do things when they are drunk that when sober they would not think of doing and would certainly never act on certain thoughts that flow through the mind but do so after drinking and excess of alcohol. For these reasons, it is obviously better to abstain altogether, nevertheless those who do drink in moderation cannot be accused of committing any sin.

LEVITICUS 10:12-13

Eleazar and Ithamar, Eat the Most Holy Grain Offering by the Altar.

- **Leviticus 10:12-13:** Moses spoke to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his surviving sons: "Take the grain offering that is left of the LORD's food offerings, and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy. ¹³You shall eat it in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons' due, from the LORD'S food offerings, for so I am commanded.

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Moses spoke to Aaron, Eleazar and Ithamar: (v12) this was a timely rehearsal of the laws that regulated the conduct of the priests.

You shall eat it in a holy place: (v13) meaning in any part of the outer court where the brazen altar of burnt offerings was.

- The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. In a holy place it shall be eaten, in the court of the tent of meeting. (Lev. 6:26).

Not the Most Holy Place or the Holy Place, but in the outer court of the tabernacle, for it was not to be taken out of the tabernacle and eaten in their own houses or tents, because these food offerings were given in honour of the LORD, and therefore it was only right that they should be eaten with due reverence in a holy place.

It is your due and your sons' due, from the LORD'S food offerings: (v13) it was Aaron and his sons' and not any others; neither his wife nor his daughters, nor any other related to him as in other food offering that their families and daughters could eat.

Portions Aaron, his sons and his daughters could eat: every portion of the grain, sin and trespass offering that was not burnt by fire on the altar was most holy to Aarons and his sons and could be eaten by them. (Only the males were permitted to eat the most holy things). But, the heave offering of the peoples' gift, with all the wave offerings could be eaten by Aaron, his sons, his daughters and everyone who was clean in his house. (Num. 18:9-11). The high priest and his children ate of the tithe the Levitical priests gave to them from the tithe the children of Israel gave to them, which means that all the family of Israel were sharing the food and eating of the same herd and flock.

The Thigh and Breast Waved is Aaron, His Sons and Daughters.

- **Leviticus 10:14-15:** But the breast that is waved and the thigh (heave shoulder in KJV) that is contributed you shall eat in a clean place, you and your sons and your daughters with you, for they are given as your due and your sons' due from the sacrifices of the peace offerings of the people of Israel. ¹⁵The thigh (heave shoulder in KJV) that is contributed and the breast that is waved they shall bring with the food offerings of the fat pieces to wave for a wave offering before the LORD, and it shall be yours and your sons' with you as a due forever, as the LORD has commanded."

The breasts of a bull, bullock, cow or ox: is today called brisket. It refers to the cut of meat that comes from the chest area of the animal. Each of these animals have one beef brisket. It is one of the nine beef primal cuts, though the precise definition of the cut differs internationally. It is best cooked in a small amount of liquid slowly over a fire, on top of an oven or in a slow cooker.

The breast and thigh (heave shoulder in KJV) that is waved (v14) the person offering these portions of the peace offering to the LORD where to bring them to the officiating priests.

- Speak to the people of Israel, saying, whoever offers the sacrifice of his peace offerings to the LORD shall bring his offering to the LORD from the sacrifice of his peace offerings. ³⁰His own hands shall bring the LORD's food offerings. He shall bring the fat with the breast, that the breast may be waved as a wave offering before the LORD. (Leviticus 7:29-30).

The officiating priest waved the breasts (today called brisket) and right shoulder of the sacrifice before the LORD. The wave offering was not a separate offering but a portion of the main offering that was offered to God and then set aside as a reward for the priests. They were most likely waved horizontally, backward and forward as a sign of thanksgiving, much like worshippers in a church service wave their hands to and fro before the Lord as an act of worship, gratitude and thanksgiving.

After these had been waved before the LORD they were given to the high priest and his sons to eat for their reward for their service to the people and to the LORD. The act of waving them acknowledged that God was Lord of all and supplied all they had.

Generally speaking: the high priest and the common priests could eat from all of the peoples sacrifices, but not of sacrifices the priests offered for themselves or of sacrifices in which the blood of the animal was taken into the Holy Place of the temple.

It shall be yours and your sons with you as a due forever: (v15) to be observed for as long as the ceremonial law and Levitical priesthood lasted and the end of the Jewish age and beginning of the Gospel age.

Eleazar and Ithamar did Not Take the Blood into the Sanctuary.

- **Leviticus 10:16-20:** Now Moses diligently inquired about the goat of the sin offering, and behold, it was burned up! And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the surviving sons of Aaron, saying, ¹⁷"Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the place of the sanctuary (the holy place in KJV), since it is a thing most holy and has been given to you that you may bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD? ¹⁸Behold, its blood was not brought into the inner part of the sanctuary (the holy place in KJV). You certainly ought to have eaten it in the sanctuary (in a Holy Place in KJV) as I commanded." ¹⁹And Aaron said to Moses, "Behold, today they have offered

their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD, and yet such things as these have happened to me! If I had eaten the sin offering today, would the LORD have approved?" ²⁰And when Moses heard that, he approved.

Aarons words, "If I had eaten the sin offering today," (v19) show that all the events spoken of in this chapter occurred the same day Nadab and Abihu were consumed with fire (v20).

You ought to have eaten it in the sanctuary (in the Holy Place in KJV): (18) the English Standard Bible says the offering should have been eaten in the sanctuary, whereas the King James Bible says, in the holy place, it is better read, in a holy place, meaning in the outer court as the following verse shows: -

- The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. In a holy place it shall be eaten, in the court of the tent of meeting. (Lev. 6:26).

The sanctuary generally refers to the Holy Place in which no food was eaten, whereas the holy place in this context refers to the outer court the place where food offerings were eaten.

The goat offering was burned up: (v16) it was the duty of the priests representing the people and bearing their sins to offer the goat for the sin offering and to take the blood into the Holy Place and sprinkled it upon the golden altar of incense and then afterward eat the flesh (meat) of the goat in the outer court for a sacred feast, so that they would bear the iniquity of the people and make atonement for them, but Eleazar and Ithamar instead burnt it outside the camp.

Moses was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar: (v16), Moses is angry when he discovers that Eleazar and Ithamar had not done what they should have. It is possible his anger stemmed from a dread that the LORD would strike them dead as He had done with Nadab and Abihu (v1-2).

You that you may bear the iniquity of the congregation: (v17) which the priests did by making atonement for them before the LORD, as is explained in the next verse. The flesh (meat) of the sin offering was given to the priests, that by the act of eating it they may visibly show the person offering the animal that God has graciously accepted the atoning sacrifice for whatever they did wrong and forgiven them which was a most holy thing. The word, "bear" comes from the Hebrew word (*nasa'*), and means to lift, accept, suffer, exalt, pardon and raise up and often carries the idea of bearing iniquity, and forgiving wrongdoing which raises the question, "in what way did the priests bear the iniquity of the people since we know that though they performed the act of atonement on the peoples behalf, they did not take away or remove their sin." Based upon the following verse, the answer to this question is that though no priest can remove our sin, they can bear our guilt before the LORD.

- It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall bear any guilt (bear any guilt in KJV) from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall regularly be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD. (Exodus 28:38).

The book of Leviticus constantly talks about trespasses, iniquity and guilt, naturally, all trespasses and iniquities led to guilt, no one can remove our trespasses, iniquities and sins, but as anointed priests they could bear our guilt before the LORD. Amongst commenters there are different thoughts concerning what the expression, "bear the iniquity of the people," means, following are the two most common:

1. The priest by eating the sacrificial animal that the person had laid their guilt upon, spiritually took away or neutralised the sinners' guilt in a mysterious way, because of the sacred anointing that belonged to the office of the priesthood.
2. That the priest literally took the sin upon himself, but those that hold this view rather than explaining how, simply say, that by eating the sin-laden sacrificial animal the sins of the person offering it were, in

some way, laid upon the priest to be taken away by him, and in this way prefigured Christ, who is both the High Priest and the sacrifice.

To spend time in attempting to micro dissect the wonder of God's forgiveness that came to the Old Testament believers through the anointed priests, and to us today through the Lord Jesus Christ is an unnecessary exercise since it is enough to know that if we are faithful and confess our sin before God we will be forgiven. King David declared:

- Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. (Psalm 32:1).
- I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah* (Psalm 32:5).

The apostle Paul wrote:

- The word of God is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (Romans 10:8-10)

If I had eaten the sin offering today, would the LORD have approved: (v19) though Moses admonishes only Eleazar and Ithamar, Aarons words, "If I had eaten the sin offering today," shows that he takes the rebuke to himself, and in doing so makes an apology for himself and on his sons' behalf in the following manner. He tells Moses that he and his sons had performed their duty in offering the people's sin and burnt-offering according to God's divine law prior to the death of his two eldest sons Nadab and Abihu. Upon seeing such a dreaded and fearful thing, they were so overwhelmed with grief, that they judged themselves unfit for offering the peoples sacrifices and feasting at God's table. Aaron then presents to Moses the argument that since such terrible things had happened to him even if he had performed his duties and eaten the offering would the LORD have accepted it? It is very possible that after Aaron saw his two sons consumed by fire from the LORD that he doubted that he and his remaining sons were worthy before the LORD to perform the sacred duties of a priest, and that if they had performed their duties and eaten the sacrifice while in such heaviness, doubt and grief would they and their offerings still be counted worthy especially since the voice of Scripture calls us to celebrate feasts upon joyous occasions, and with a cheerful heart. Prior to Israel entering the Promised Land the LORD told the people of Israel that He would choose a place to put His name and make His habitation and that they were to bring their burnt offerings, sacrifices, tithes, contribution, vow offerings, freewill offerings and the firstborn of all their herd and flock, and then we read:

- There you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the LORD your God has blessed you. (Deut. 12:5-7).

The following verse shows that if the tithe was offered with mourning it would be counted as an offense:

- I have not eaten of the tithe while I was mourning, or removed any of it while I was unclean, or offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the voice of the LORD my God. I have done according to all that you have commanded me. (Deut. 26:14).

Eleazar and Ithamar were in the wrong for the sin offering was by the direct command of God to be eaten in a holy place and no self-view, affliction or sorrow should have led them (and by extension all of us) away from following God's law. However, after seeing how Aaron, took on the responsibility of his two sons Eleazar and Ithamar, to defend them, saying: "if they had eaten the offering on the same day that fire came out from the LORD and consumed their two older brothers Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2) would the LORD be pleased? Moses considered his deeply afflicted brothers' circumstances and sympathized with him and said no more. It is said that because of the events of this chapter, Jewish scribes established the following two rules during the era of the second temple:

1. When an ordinary priest heard of the death of a relative while on duty in the temple, he had to cease from his sacred service, but could not leave the boundaries of the Temple otherwise he defiled the sacrifice.
2. When the high priest heard of the death of a relative while on duty, he could continue his sacred ministrations but was not allowed to partake of the sacrificial meal.

FOOTNOTES

The recipe for the incense: the recipe for making the sacred incense was very specific, the LORD said to Moses to take the following four sweet spices:

1. **Stacte:** refers to a thick gooey aromatic gum or resin including myrrh. Though the plant or tree that it comes from is not specified, some suppose that it refers to the sap that drips from the tapping of the wood of the balsam tree, whatever it come from it is certain that it was some type of extract of the highest quality.
2. **Onycha:** refers to a scale or shell, such as a sea snail or the membrane of a snail like creature, slug or aromatic mussels found in the Red Sea. In its raw state it needs to be beaten into a very fine powder after which it can be added to other ingredients. Today it is used as an antiseptic cleanser for cuts and wounds; as an antioxidant; as an astringent lotion applied to the skin to reduce bleeding from minor abrasions; as a cosmetic to make the skin less oily and as a cough medicine and sedative.
3. **Galbanum:** refers to a fragrant gum resin that forms on certain plants. It tastes bitter and has a musky aroma. Today Galbanum is used in food and drinks for flavouring and for fragrance in cosmetics and is sometimes applied directly to the skin for wounds.
4. **Frankincense and myrrh:** both frankincense and myrrh are derived from the tree sap or gummy resin that oozes out of the Boswellia and Commiphora trees when their bark is cut. The leaking milky white resin is left to harden and then scraped off the trunk in tear-shaped droplets. It can be used in its dried form or steamed to yield essential oils, and both are prized for their alluring fragrance. A perfumer would blend these four sweet spices together, season them with salt and mix them in equal parts. A portion was to be beaten very small and taken before the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place of the tent of meeting where the LORD would meet with Moses.

No other incense was to be burned on the altar and the people were not to make any perfumes for themselves using this recipe, for it was to be holy to the LORD. Whoever did use the recipe to make a perfume for themselves was to be cut off from the LORD's people. The priests would refill this special mixture of incense on the golden altar in the morning and evening, so a sweet-smelling smoke rose from it day and night. (Exodus 30:34-38).

Summing it all up: stacte, onycha, galbanum, frankincense and myrrh mixed in equal amounts along with salt was used for the sacred incense burned on the golden altar of incense that sat in the Holy Place. The priests would refill this special mixture of incense on the golden altar in the morning and evening, so a sweet-smelling smoke issued from it day and night. If anyone made this holy incense for their own use, they were to be cut off from the people. (Exodus 30:34-38).

The altar of incense and worship: when worshippers come before the LORD with zeal without knowledge, the incense of worship, praise and prayer is kindled not by a flame within the heart that the Spirit of God sent or the flame of the Holy Spirit that descends from heaven, but with earthly emotional affections and worldly light.

The altar of incense and Legalistic ritual: more important than burning the proper incense at the proper time with the proper fire and the proper implements was having a proper heart before God. It was not enough for the Israelites to legalistically go through the rituals required by the Law to be right with God, the LORD wanted their hearts and lives to be right, not just their outward ceremonial formalities. During Isaiah's era Israel maintained the temple rites, even though they were disobedient to God. This, is why God said through the prophet:

- Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. (Isaiah 1:13).

This same principal applies today, a believer may go to church every Sunday and perform all the ceremonial rites of that church, but if their heart is not right before God, all their religious actions count for nothing.

The altar of incense and prayer: in Scripture, incense is often associated with prayer. David prayed:

- Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice! (Psalm 141:2).

Zechariah the priest was offering incense in the temple while:

- The whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. (Luke 1:10).

In John's vision of heaven, he saw that the elders around the throne "were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people:

- When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. (Rev. 5:8).
- Another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, (Revelation 8:3).

The altar of incense can be taken to be a symbol of the prayers of God's people. ascending to God as the smoke of the incense ascended into the Most Holy Place of God's presence in the temple of God. The fact that the incense was always burning means that we should always pray and not lose heart. (Luke 18:1), confirming this the apostle Paul said to the Thessalonians, pray without ceasing giving thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thess. 5:17-18). The altar of incense was holy to the LORD and sin was atoned for by the blood of the sacrifice sprinkled on its horns, likewise, it is the blood of Christ applied by faith to our lives that makes our prayers acceptable to God and counted holy and pleasing to Him, because of Jesus' sacrifice.

It should be of great comfort to every faithful believer to know that we can now enter by faith into God's holy presence with full assurance, and that God considers our prayers to be like the sweet smell of incense because of our devotion faith and love for His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Mark tells us that the veil of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. (Mark 15:38), signifying that God has opened the way for those in Christ to enter-into His presence in the Most Holy Place. The author of Hebrews encourages the faithful to enter with confidence the holy places through the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the veil of the temple. (Heb. 10:19-20).

The altar of incense and faith: for the incense to produce its sweet-smelling fragrance, it had to be placed on the altar and burned with fire, likewise faith that is tested by the troubles, sorrows and hardships of this life and endures is a pleasing aroma before God. The apostle Peter said:

- The tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:7).

The altar of incense and the throne of God: burning incense on the altar was a continuous act which means that a pleasing aroma would be continually flowing into the Most Holy Place of the temple where the presence of God dwelt, signifying that the prayers of the faithful continually ascend as a pleasant fragrance before the throne of God in heaven because of the righteous of our Saviour.

- Another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne,⁴ and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. (Rev. 8:3-4).

One of the great lessons we learn from the altar of incense is that the priests could not burn incense according to their own ideas, likewise, we cannot bring prayers to God based on our own false claims of righteousness but must faithfully offer them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, our sinless high priest and mediator.

The altar of incense and Christ our mediator: the altar of incense was situated before the mercy-seat of the ark of the covenant, which beautifully symbolises Christ our Advocate standing in the presence of the Father. The altar of burnt sacrifices in the outer court signified Christ's death on our behalf, while the altar of incense in the Holy Place symbolise Christ's mediation and intercession for his people. In the book of Hebrews, it is written:

- He holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb. 7:24-25).
- Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. (Hebrews 9:24).

The incense was to be continually burning on the altar of incense, signifying the perpetual nature of Christ's mediation and his intercession on our behalf and in the same way that the aroma of the incense ascended to God, likewise Christ's intercession for us is a sweet-smelling fragrance to his heavenly Father. We all love to smell things that have a sweet fragrance, since the people of Israel were strongly warned not to make a perfume from the recipe of the incense for themselves, it is certain that this incense made to burn before the LORD produced a fragrance that would be pleasing to our senses. David cried out to the LORD, saying:

- Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice! (Psalm 141:2).

David was not only fully aware that the priests stood before the inner veil of the temple to burn incense twice a day so that the smoke would carry a sweet-smelling aroma into the Most Holy Place where the presence of God dwelt, but also understood that the prayers he was offering up were a sweet fragrance to the LORD and with this understanding desired that his prayers would be as consistent as the burning of incense that took place in the temple every evening and morning. In the book of Revelation we read of an angel standing at the altar with a golden censer, who was given vast amounts of incense to offer with the prayers of all the faithful on the golden altar that stood before the throne and are told that the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the faithful, rose before God from the hand of the angel. (Rev. 8:3-4).

Whoever is devoted to Jesus is amongst all the faithful spoken of here. Their prayers are the incense and the fragrance they bring is a blessing and sweet-smelling aroma to God who loves to hear from His children.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

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