

The Sin of Nadab and Abihu

Lev. 10:1-3

Introduction:

1. Moses, figures prominently in the history of ancient Israel.
2. He serves as God's prophet to communicate God's message to the people.
3. The Book of Leviticus opens with the Lord calling Moses to the tent of meeting and telling him to speak to the sons of Israel.
4. The first ten chapters fall naturally into two divisions.
 - a. Chapters 1:1-6:7 carry instruction about God's law on sacrifice.
 - b. Chapters 6:8-10:20 give instruction about the institution of the priesthood.
5. This study will focus on Lev. 10:1-3 and make observations about the sin described there and its implications for us.
6. But first it is important to give consideration to the background of what is described in that text.

Discussion:

- I. The background setting of the events of Lev. 10:1-3.
 - A. God spoke to Moses to give special instructions to Israel regarding the sacrifices that they would bring to the Lord.
 - B. Aaron and his sons would serve as priests facilitating the sacrificial offerings.
 - C. An Israelite would bring his offering and slay it and Aaron and his sons would offer up the blood on his behalf to make atonement for his sin.
 1. The sons of Aaron were to put fire on the altar and burn the offering as a soothing aroma to the Lord.
 2. When they made such offerings the text says (chap. 4-5): "It will be forgiven him."
 - D. Such offerings called attention to both the justice and the kindness of God.
 1. His justice, in that life was required to atone for sin.
 2. His kindness, in that the sinner was able to substitute the life-blood of the animal for his own blood and God would forgive him.
 - E. The role of the priests, Aaron and his sons, was special.
 1. They were specially consecrated by command of the Lord through Moses. After Aaron had made the golden calf and called on all Israel to worship it, one might wonder if Aaron would be suitable to serve as a priest. But herein again we see God's willingness to use those who have sinned in the past.
 2. An ordination ceremony was conducted.
 - a. A bull was slain as a sin offering.
 - b. A ram was slain as a burnt offering.
 - c. A second ram was slain and some of its blood was put on the lobe of the right ear of Aaron and his sons, some on the thumb of their right hand and the big toe of their right foot.
 - d. Before this they had been washed with water and anointed with the oil of consecration and clothed with special garments, all this was prior to the

sacrifices associated with the ordination.

- e. Aaron and his sons spent seven days in the tent of meeting as part of the ordination process.
 - 1) When they came out on the eighth day more sacrifices were offered and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people.
 - 2) Fire came out from the Lord and consumed the offering on the altar.
 - 3) This fire validated their actions.
- F. It seems that things are going well for Israel and especially well for Aaron and his sons, but chapter 10 describes a radical turn of events.
 - 1. Read 10:1-3.
 - 2. This is the fire of condemnation.

II. Immediately we question, "What is the precise nature of their sin?" "What is it that they have done that has issued in this severe response by God?"

- A. Nadab and Abihu are the two eldest sons of Aaron (Ex. 6:23).
 - 1. They had accompanied their father and Moses up Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:1).
 - 2. Along with Eleazar and Ithamar, they had just been ordained as priests (Lev. 8:30).
 - 3. Certainly, they had the right to burn incense before the Lord.
 - 4. Some have suggested they burned their incense at the wrong time. It has been suggested that they were to take fire from the altar and did not and this constituted their sin. After all, God had set that fire (Lev. 9:24).
- B. The text says, "They offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them."
 - 1. What was strange about the fire they used? Isn't fire fire?
 - 2. The strangeness of the fire is defined by the phrase, "which He had not commanded them."
 - 3. There was some sense in which they had not treated God as holy (v. 3).
 - 4. They had dishonored him (v. 3).
 - 5. It is probable that they had more specific information about what they were to do than we have been given.
- C. There was a message that was clear.
 - 1. God was to be treated as holy and that meant you were not privileged to do that which He had not commanded.
 - 2. The lesson was clear to Moses, and to Aaron.
 - 3. It was made clear to Mishael and Elzaphan, Aaron's cousins who were allowed to collect the bodies of Aaron's sons.
 - 4. It was made clear to Aaron and Eleazar and Ithamar, who were not allowed to mourn in the customary fashion, and to the whole house of Israel, who witnessed these events and mourned the deaths of Nadab and Abihu. Can you hear the talk at the funeral home? "What happened to Nadab and Abihu?" "Where is their father and their brothers?"

III. We need to treat God as holy. In our relationship with Him we are not privileged to be self-willed, to do what He has not authorized, what He has not commanded.

- A. We need to be cautious.
 - 1. "Well, if that's the way it is I am afraid to do anything."
 - 2. But that's not appropriate either. We are to do what God has authorized.
 - 3. The whole sacrificial system indicates that He is gracious and kind and willing to forgive. But we cannot make that forgiveness cheap by disrespecting the life given for our forgiveness.
- B. God is kind, but He is also just.
 - 1. The whole sacrificial system reminds us that death is the consequence of sin.
 - 2. The blood of Christ is the sacrifice that takes away sin (Heb. 10:11ff).
 - a. And we can draw near to God by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19-25).
 - b. But let us not be guilty of regarding the blood of the covenant as unclean (Heb. 10:26-31).
- C. It is of interest to me that Lev. 4 and 5 has spoken of forgiveness for sins committed in error, unintentionally, unaware. An offering was made and the sinner was forgiven. But in the case of Nadab and Abihu there was no occasion for an offering to be made.
 - 1. When there is penitence and confession there is forgiveness.
 - 2. When God is not treated as holy and when He is not honored. Death was the consequence. Cf. Heb. 10:28-31.
- D. There are other instances where God's judgment is immediate and severe.
 - 1. Uzzah put out his hand to steady the ark when it was being transported on an ox cart and was struck dead (2 Sam. 6:7; 1 Chron. 13:10).
 - 2. Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead when they lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5).
- E. Let's be careful about condemning God for His actions with Nadab and Abihu, as if somehow He is unfair. That is not consistent with the sacrificial system and certainly not consistent with Him sacrificing His son for our forgiveness.

Conclusion:

- 1. The God of the Bible is merciful and forgiving, but He will be treated as holy.
- 2. Let us not pass over the idea of God's judgment so as to forget that He is indeed a God of justice.
- 3. Are you acting in a way that is appropriate to His forgiveness and His holiness?