

# NADAB AND ABIHU

**BIBLE TEXT** : Leviticus 10:1-20; Numbers 3:1-4

LESSON 85 Senior Course

**MEMORY VERSE:** "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified" (Leviticus 10:3)

## BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

### Leviticus 10:1-20 (KJV)

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moses had said.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> And the LORD spake unto Aaron, saying,

<sup>9</sup> 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:

<sup>10</sup> And that ye may put difference

## BIBLE REFERENCES:

### I The Untimely Death of Aaron's Eldest Sons

1 Aaron and his posterity were set apart by God to fill the office of priest in Israel, Numbers 3:1-3;

#### **Exodus 28:1 (KJV)**

<sup>1</sup> And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, *even* Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons.

#### **Numbers 18:1-7 (KJV)**

<sup>1</sup> And the LORD said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood.

<sup>2</sup> And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee: but thou and thy sons with thee *shall minister* before the tabernacle of witness.

<sup>3</sup> And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of all the tabernacle: only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, that neither they, nor ye also, die.

<sup>4</sup> And they shall be joined unto thee, and keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, for all the service of the tabernacle: and a stranger shall not come nigh unto you.

<sup>5</sup> And ye shall keep the charge of the sanctuary, and the charge of the altar: that there be no wrath any more upon the children of Israel.

<sup>6</sup> And I, behold, I have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel: to you *they are given* as a gift for the LORD, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.

<sup>7</sup> Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office for every thing of the altar, and within the vail; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest's office *unto you* as a service of gift: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.

2 Nadab and Abihu's imprudent act of disobedience caused fire to come from the Lord, which killed them, Numbers 3:4; Leviticus 10:1.

#### **1 Samuel 6:9 (KJV)**

<sup>9</sup> And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Bethshemesh, *then* he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that *it is* not his hand *that* smote us: it *was* a chance *that* happened to us.

#### **2 Samuel 6:6-7 (KJV)**

<sup>6</sup> And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth *his hand* to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook *it*.

<sup>7</sup> And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for *his error*; and there he died by the ark of God.

#### **2 Chronicles 26:16-23 (KJV)**

<sup>16</sup> But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to *his* destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense.

<sup>17</sup> And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, *that were* valiant men:

<sup>18</sup> And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, *It appertaineth* not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither *shall it be* for thine honour from the LORD God.

<sup>19</sup> Then Uzziah was wroth, and *had* a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar.

between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean;

<sup>11</sup> And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.

<sup>12</sup> And Moses spake unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons that were left, Take the meat offering that remaineth of the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and eat it without leaven beside the altar: for it *is* most holy:

<sup>13</sup> And ye shall eat it in the holy place, because it *is* thy due, and thy sons' due, of the sacrifices of the LORD made by fire: for so I am commanded.

<sup>14</sup> And the wave breast and heave shoulder shall ye eat in a clean place; thou, and thy sons, and thy daughters with thee: for *they be* thy due, and thy sons' due, *which* are given out of the sacrifices of peace offerings of the children of Israel.

<sup>15</sup> The heave shoulder and the wave breast shall they bring with the offerings made by fire of the fat, to wave *it for* a wave offering before the LORD; and it shall be thine, and thy sons' with thee, by a statute for ever; as the LORD hath commanded.

<sup>16</sup> And Moses diligently sought the goat of the sin offering, and, behold, it was burnt: and he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron *which were* left *alive*, saying,

<sup>17</sup> 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?

<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> And 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 to day, should it have been accepted in the sight of the

<sup>20</sup> And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he *was* leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the LORD had smitten him.

<sup>21</sup> And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, *being* a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD: and Jotham his son *was* over the king's house, judging the people of the land.

<sup>22</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, did Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, write.

<sup>23</sup> So Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the burial which *belonged* to the kings; for they said, He *is* a leper: and Jotham his son reigned in his stead.

**Matthew 21:12-13 (KJV)**

<sup>12</sup> And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,

<sup>13</sup> And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

**Deuteronomy 4:24 (KJV)**

<sup>24</sup> For the LORD thy God *is* a consuming fire, *even* a jealous God.

**Deuteronomy 9:3 (KJV)**

<sup>3</sup> Understand therefore this day, that the LORD thy God *is* he which goeth over before thee; *as* a consuming fire he shall destroy them, and he shall bring them down before thy face: so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the LORD hath said unto thee.

**Hebrews 12:29 (KJV)**

<sup>29</sup> For our God *is* a consuming fire.

3 Moses reminded the surviving father, Aaron, of the Lord's commandment that He must receive honor and glory, Leviticus 10:3;

**1 Samuel 2:17 (KJV)**

<sup>17</sup> Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.

**Exodus 34:14 (KJV)**

<sup>14</sup> For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name *is* Jealous, *is* a jealous God:

**Psalms 73:28 (KJV)**

<sup>28</sup> But *it is* good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.

**Hebrews 10:22 (KJV)**

<sup>22</sup> Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

**James 4:8 (KJV)**

<sup>8</sup> Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *ye* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *ye* double minded.

4 Two Levites of the family of Kohath, distant relatives of the deceased, were given the responsibility of carrying the bodies out of the Tabernacle court, that the officiating priests might not become defiled or otherwise hindered in their ministrations, Leviticus 10:4, 5;

**Leviticus 21:1-6 (KJV)**

<sup>1</sup> And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron, and say unto them, There shall none be defiled for the dead among his people:

<sup>2</sup> But for his kin, that is near unto him, *that is*, for his mother, and for his father, and for his son, and for his daughter, and for his brother,

<sup>3</sup> And for his sister a virgin, that is nigh unto him, which hath had no husband; for her may he be defiled.

<sup>4</sup> *But* he shall not defile himself, *being* a chief man among his people, to profane himself.

<sup>5</sup> They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh.

<sup>6</sup> They shall be holy unto their God, and not profane the name of their God: for the offerings of the LORD made by fire, *and* the bread of their God, they do offer: therefore they shall be holy.

**Leviticus 21:10-12 (KJV)**

<sup>10</sup> And *he that is* the high priest among his brethren, upon

LORD?

<sup>20</sup> And when Moses heard *that*, he was content.

### Numbers 3:1-4 (KJV)

<sup>1</sup> These also *are* the generations of Aaron and Moses in the day *that* the LORD spake with Moses in mount Sinai.

<sup>2</sup> And these *are* the names of the sons of Aaron; Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

<sup>3</sup> These *are* the names of the sons of Aaron, the priests which were anointed, whom he consecrated to minister in the priest's office.

<sup>4</sup> And Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD, when they offered strange fire before the LORD, in the wilderness of Sinai, and they had no children: and Eleazar and Ithamar ministered in the priest's office in the sight of Aaron their father.

whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes;

<sup>11</sup> Neither shall he go in to any dead body, nor defile himself for his father, or for his mother;

<sup>12</sup> Neither shall he go out of the sanctuary, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the crown of the anointing oil of his God is upon him: I *am* the LORD.

### Numbers 3:19 (KJV)

<sup>19</sup> And the sons of Kohath by their families; Amram, and Izehar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

### Numbers 3:27-32 (KJV)

<sup>27</sup> And of Kohath *was* the family of the Amramites, and the family of the Izeharites, and the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites: these *are* the families of the Kohathites.

<sup>28</sup> In the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, *were* eight thousand and six hundred, keeping the charge of the sanctuary.

<sup>29</sup> The families of the sons of Kohath shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle southward.

<sup>30</sup> And the chief of the house of the father of the families of the Kohathites *shall be* Elizaphan the son of Uzziel.

<sup>31</sup> And their charge *shall be* the ark, and the table, and the candlestick, and the altars, and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister, and the hanging, and all the service thereof.

<sup>32</sup> And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest *shall be* chief over the chief of the Levites, *and have* the oversight of them that keep the charge of the sanctuary.

5 Aaron and his remaining sons were reminded by Moses that allegiance to God and faithfulness to the Lord's service were greater than any duty or obligation to man, Leviticus 10:6, 7;

### Matthew 6:33 (KJV)

<sup>33</sup> But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

### 1 Kings 19:19-21 (KJV)

<sup>19</sup> So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who *was* plowing *with* twelve yoke *of oxen* before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him.

<sup>20</sup> And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and *then* I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?

<sup>21</sup> And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.

### Luke 9:59-62 (KJV)

<sup>59</sup> And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

<sup>60</sup> Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.

<sup>61</sup> And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.

<sup>62</sup> And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

6 Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar obediently remained at their posts of duty, Leviticus 10:3-7;

### Mark 10:28-30 (KJV)

<sup>28</sup> Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.

<sup>29</sup> And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's,

<sup>30</sup> But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

7 God Himself commanded Aaron and his sons to separate themselves unto the Lord that they might effectually serve Him, Leviticus 10:8-11

## II The Completion of the Worship of the Day

- 1 The priests were instructed to proceed with the sacrificial worship and eat the portion of the meat offering reserved for them, in the Holy Place, Leviticus 10:12, 13;  
**Leviticus 9:4 (KJV)**  
<sup>4</sup> 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.
- 2 The breast and shoulder of the peace offering were then to be eaten by the priests and their families in a clean place, Leviticus 10:14, 15;  
**Leviticus 9:4 (KJV)**  
<sup>4</sup> 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.  
**Leviticus 9:18-21 (KJV)**  
<sup>18</sup> He slew also the bullock and the ram *for* a sacrifice of peace offerings, which *was* for the people: and Aaron's sons presented unto him the blood, which he sprinkled upon the altar round about,  
<sup>19</sup> And the fat of the bullock and of the ram, the rump, and that which covereth *the inwards*, and the kidneys, and the caul *above* the liver:  
<sup>20</sup> And they put the fat upon the breasts, and he burnt the fat upon the altar:  
<sup>21</sup> And the breasts and the right shoulder Aaron waved *for* a wave offering before the LORD; as Moses commanded.  
**Numbers 18:8-20 (KJV)**  
<sup>8</sup> And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Behold, I also have given thee the charge of mine heave offerings of all the hallowed things of the children of Israel; unto thee have I given them by reason of the anointing, and to thy sons, by an ordinance for ever.  
<sup>9</sup> This shall be thine of the most holy things, *reserved* from the fire: every oblation of theirs, every meat offering of theirs, and every sin offering of theirs, and every trespass offering of theirs, which they shall render unto me, *shall be* most holy for thee and for thy sons.  
<sup>10</sup> In the most holy *place* shalt thou eat it; every male shall eat it: it shall be holy unto thee.  
<sup>11</sup> And this *is* thine; the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel: I have given them unto thee, and to thy sons and to thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: every one that is clean in thy house shall eat of it.  
<sup>12</sup> All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the LORD, them have I given thee.  
<sup>13</sup> And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the LORD, shall be thine; every one that is clean in thine house shall eat of it.  
<sup>14</sup> Every thing devoted in Israel shall be thine.  
<sup>15</sup> Every thing that openeth the matrix in all flesh, which they bring unto the LORD, *whether it be* of men or beasts, shall be thine: nevertheless the firstborn of man shalt thou surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shalt thou redeem.  
<sup>16</sup> And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thine estimation, for the money of five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which *is* twenty gerahs.  
<sup>17</sup> But the firstling of a cow, or the firstling of a sheep, or the firstling of a goat, thou shalt not redeem; they *are* holy: thou shalt sprinkle their blood upon the altar, and shalt burn their fat *for* an offering made by fire, for a sweet savour unto the LORD.  
<sup>18</sup> And the flesh of them shall be thine, as the wave breast and as the right shoulder are thine.  
<sup>19</sup> All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the LORD, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it *is* a covenant of salt for ever before the LORD unto thee and to thy seed with thee.  
<sup>20</sup> And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I *am* thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel.



3 Moses, finding that the people's sin offering had not been eaten by the priests, reproved the sons of Aaron for their failure, Leviticus 10:16-18;

**Leviticus 9:3 (KJV)**

<sup>3</sup> 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;

**Leviticus 9:15 (KJV)**

<sup>15</sup> And he brought the people's offering, and took the goat, which *was* the sin offering for the people, and slew it, and offered it for sin, as the first.

**Leviticus 9:22 (KJV)**

<sup>22</sup> And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them, and came down from offering of the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and peace offerings.

**Leviticus 6:30 (KJV)**

<sup>30</sup> 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.

4 Aaron's defense of his reprimanded sons seems to indicate fear that they were-not ceremonially clean themselves (therefore unworthy of eating the sin offering), no doubt prompted by God's quick judgment on presumptive sin that day, Leviticus 10:19, 20;

**Leviticus 9:15-17 (KJV)**

<sup>15</sup> And he brought the people's offering, and took the goat, which *was* the sin offering for the people, and slew it, and offered it for sin, as the first.

<sup>16</sup> And he brought the burnt offering, and offered it according to the manner.

<sup>17</sup> And he brought the meat offering, and took an handful thereof, and burnt *it* upon the altar, beside the burnt sacrifice of the morning.

**NOTES:**

**Sudden Judgment in the Midst of Blessing**

At our last view of the Tabernacle we saw it glorious with the manifestations of a reconciled God and a delighted, adoring people. We saw the institution of the Aaronic priesthood and the comparisons between it and the Priesthood of Christ, who is now performing His mediation for us (**1 John 2:1 (KJV)** <sup>1</sup> My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous). But someone has said that "light rejected bringeth night"; and we can see that fact demonstrated in this lesson, for even while the sublime heights of heavenly glory were manifested in and around the newly dedicated Tabernacle the dark clouds of sudden and thorough judgment descended, leaving death and sorrow in their wake. This instance of vengeance is a standing example of that divine wrath which shall consume all who pretend to serve God but who do not come in the way God has designated, which is through and by the Atonement of Christ. God's anger burns wherever there is sin; but it burns fiercest of all about His holy altar if there are present those who pollute His service and ordained worship with their unholy, disobedient hands. The fire God wanted to be used for the burning of incense had been miraculously kindled upon the brazen altar and was kept constantly burning by the officiating *priests* **Leviticus 6:12-13 (KJV)** <sup>12</sup> And the fire upon the altar shall be burning in it; it shall not be put out: and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order upon it; and he shall burn thereon the fat of the peace offerings. <sup>13</sup> The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out). After it had been *extinguished* prior to or during the wars of Saul and David it was restored at the dedication of Solomon's Temple, in exactly the same manner as it was originally given. The incense, to be acceptable to God, was that which was compounded according to His directions and used exclusively for His worship. It was acceptable only if its prayer-typifying smoke arose from coals of holy fire. These men knew that God would honor no devotion but that which He inspired, but they stubbornly paid no attention to His requirements.

Nadab and Abihu were no inconsiderable personages. They were the sons of Israel's high priest, the nephews of Israel's leader, and heads of Israel's princely elders. They had been, with Moses and Aaron on the Mount of God; they had looked upon the glorious vision of God

as He appeared on Sinai; they had been chosen and consecrated to the priesthood; and they had stood by and assisted Aaron in the first operation of the sacrificial law. But in spite of all this they committed a rash act of sacrilege, and one vengeful flash from the Lord struck them dead. They fell from the mount of vision to the pit of destruction.

Nadab and Abihu were accepted priests at the beginning of the day and disgraced victims of God's holy indignation at its close. The world had not made one of its 24-hour revolutions from the morning when the people drew near Nadab and Abihu as the sanctified of the Lord? until they shrank from them in horror as the accursed of God. In the morning they had the prospects of a bright destiny before them, but in the evening they were in the hands of death and all their hopes were quenched. The head and fount of the sin of these men was the presumptuous substitution of a will-worship of their own, in defiance of what God had appointed. They had disregarded the "Thus saith the LORD."

A certain saint, when asked the question: "What is the most dangerous thing in which a person can indulge?" replied, "To hold God's truth carnally, and to exalt self." God has here given us full proof that He will not suffer human institutions to take the place of His own prescribed worship. He who makes such substitutions is exalting himself above God. and he certainly will not stand guiltless before God. God's light can blind such a one; God's ark can destroy him; God's sanctuary can smite him; and the Lord's table be damnation to him. A willfully perverted truth can be, to the apostate, a chain that will hold, bind, and blind him forever.

God can carry on His work with a pure ministry, few in number, but not with a multitude of unholy men in priestly robes serving their own lusts. It has been said: "Infidelity at the altar will inevitably beget irreligion in the tents. An impious priesthood cannot train up a pious people for the heritage of God." This outflashing of divine wrath upon the sons of Aaron gives a perpetual emphasis to the admonition, "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD" (Isaiah 52:11).

#### **The Faithfulness of Aaron**

The third verse of the tenth chapter of Leviticus contains a sentence of only a few words but an eloquent depth of meaning: "And Aaron held his peace." This man stood and gazed upon the bodies of his eldest sons, lying dead before the sanctuary, where they had been smitten by an angry God. He had not one lingering ray of hope to comfort him in the hour of bereavement, except the knowledge that it was the Lord's doings, done in the just vindication of divine holiness and glory. He knew it was a deserved punishment, but still he must have keenly felt the sting of bereavement that any loving father would feel. However, in spite of his grief and sorrow he "held his peace."

#### **The Law Regarding the Dead**

It was fitting that leading members of the Levite family of Kohath, *soon* to be charged with the transportation of the sacred vessels and furniture of the Tabernacle, be chosen to remove the bodies of these judged and condemned men. Elzaphan was a chief of the Kohathites and Mishael was his brother and no doubt also held a prominent place in the service of the Levites.

We read that later when it was near the time for Aaron to die, the Lord gave instructions that the priestly garments were to be taken from him while he was still alive and were to be given to his successor. For him to die in those consecrated robes would mean that they would be rendered unfit for further use in the sanctuary (**Numbers 20:26 (KJV)** <sup>26</sup> *And strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there*). But God's judgment upon these unfaithful priests was so sudden and so complete that there was no time for divesting them of their priestly apparel. They died in their robes, and because of the defilement thus brought upon those garments Nadab and Abihu were buried in them. Jude seemed to allude to this incident in his Epistle when he wrote: "And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 23).

Moses also reminded the remaining priests of the further prohibitions of the Law. They were to exhibit no outward evidence of mourning, because they were engaged in the service of the sanctuary. Those who are thus engaged must be sure to avoid anything that might incapacitate

them for that service (**John 4:31-36 (KJV)**)<sup>31</sup> In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat.<sup>32</sup> But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of.<sup>33</sup> Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him *ought* to eat? <sup>34</sup> Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.<sup>35</sup> Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.<sup>36</sup> And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together). Also, because of the fact that the crime was so highly provocative to God, mourning or grief could be interpreted by God or man as an insinuation that God was deemed guilty of undue severity.

### God's Service Resumed

It probably takes a longer time to relate the happenings of this tragic hour than was taken by the whole proceedings. The transgressors came into the holy precincts of God and were smitten. The remaining priests stood in awe before the manifestation of judgment while the leader, Moses, gave the detailed instructions for the disposal of the bodies and his warning to those who were left. Following this, the order to resume the worship of God was given and the priests took up where they had left off in the sacrificial. ceremony..

When certain offerings were brought to the Lord, portions of them were to be eaten by the priests. It has been pointed out that when the portions allotted to them were eaten, more was included in that act than merely the nourishment of their bodies. As the offering was consumed by the priests they prefigured the time when the priest and sacrifice would be one person: Jesus Christ, the Messiah. This eating, then, was a part of the sacrificial worship and was not to be casually, or carelessly, or irreverently done. (**1 Corinthians 11:23-30 (KJV)**)<sup>23</sup> For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread:<sup>24</sup> And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.<sup>25</sup> After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me.<sup>26</sup> For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.<sup>27</sup> Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.<sup>28</sup> But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup.<sup>29</sup> For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.<sup>30</sup> For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep).

Some offerings were to be eaten in the Holy Place by the priests only, while others were for the families of the priests and could be eaten outside the sanctuary in a clean place. However, no sin offering if the blood was taken into the Holy Place and sprinkled upon the golden altar and before the vail, could be eaten. Those bodies must be burned without the camp in a clean place.

### The Sin Offering Uneaten

Moses was alert to the possibility of error again being committed; and with the zeal of a true leader he observed every detail of the priests' conduct, to see that they did all things according to the Word of the Lord (**Hebrews 13:17 (KJV)**)<sup>17</sup> Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you). He detailed the procedure for each sacrifice.

The blood of the people's sin offering had not been taken into the Holy Place, therefore the flesh was to be eaten by the priests. (**Leviticus 6:24-30 (KJV)**)<sup>4</sup> And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,<sup>25</sup> Speak unto Aaron and to his sons, saying, This *is* the law of the sin offering: In the place where the burnt offering is killed shall the sin offering be killed before the LORD: it *is* most holy.<sup>26</sup> The priest that offereth it for sin shall eat it: in the holy place shall it be eaten, in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation.<sup>27</sup> Whatsoever shall touch the flesh thereof shall be holy: and when there is sprinkled of the blood thereof upon any garment, thou shalt wash that whereon it was sprinkled in the holy place.<sup>28</sup> But the earthen vessel wherein it is sodden shall be broken: and if it be sodden in a brasen pot, it shall be both scoured, and rinsed in water.<sup>29</sup> All the males among the priests shall eat thereof: it *is* most holy.<sup>30</sup> And no sin offering, whereof *any* of the blood is brought into the tabernacle of the congregation to reconcile *withal* in the

### QUESTIONS

- 1 Name the four sons of Aaron according to their ages.
- 2 What great distinction was placed upon the eldest son of Aaron?
- 3 What relationship did these sons have to Moses?
  - 4 Tell about the self-willed act of the two that brought about their death.
- 5 Why was God so particular about His service?
- 6 Why could not Aaron mourn for them as a father would normally mourn the death of his sons?
  - 7 What great lesson does Aaron's conduct teach us?
- 8 Why is God so particular that His ministry be clean and holy?
- 9 Why were they buried in their coats?
- 10 What particular sin offerings were to be eaten by the priests in the Holy Place and not burned without the camp?

holy place, shall be eaten: it shall be burnt in the fire). When Moses found that this had not been done, he sternly reprimanded the two remaining sons of Aaron because the flesh had been burned instead of eaten. Aaron interceded for his sons with an apology that was accepted by Moses because of the trouble of the day. The import of the apology seems to be that all the duty pertaining to the presentation of this sacrifice had been duly and sacredly performed, except that which might have been called the festive portion of it. He said, "Such things have befallen me: and if I had eaten the sin offering to day, should it have been accepted in the sight of the LORD?" This indicates that the tragic events of judgment which had bereaved Aaron had made him eager to examine his own heart to make sure there would be no further disobedience of the law of God.

Perhaps the other priests also had not eaten of the offering because of a sense of unworthiness, as well as a fear of committing an impropriety which might call down still more judgments. The anointing oil of the Lord was upon them but they might have felt that they were, in a certain sense, unclean and undone, having seen the terrible manifestation of God's power in a way that left no doubt about His omnipotence (**Isaiah 6:1-5 (KJV)** <sup>1</sup> In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. <sup>3</sup> And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. <sup>4</sup> And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.) They probably felt that they could eat the meat offerings of praise, which was their due, in perfect confidence; but when it came to partaking of that offering which was brought to take away the inward depravity and inbred sin of the people it was a more serious matter, and they were not desirous of being careless about the handling of that matter.

### What This Incident Teaches Us

We find in this tragic chapter of Israel's history a staggering lesson to us all. To a good man, sudden death is only a sudden deliverance from the infirmities of life. It is merely a sudden entrance into Glory for him. It saves him many an anxiety and pain. It transforms his mortal body into that which is immortal and eternal. It removes him from this valley of tears and sorrow, and plants his feet in the land of eternal bliss and happiness. It settles forever the state of the individual, because there is 'no possibility of sin in Heaven and no tempter to entice him.

But when a thoughtless and impenitent sinner is cut off and hurried to judgment without a moment's notice or warning it is exceedingly terrible. There is no opportunity then to retrace his steps or to repent of his sins. As the tree falls, so shall it lie. (**Ecclesiastes 11:3 (KJV)** <sup>3</sup> If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be). No matter how devout a person's life may have been, the spiritual condition at the moment of death will determine its eternal existence. There is no chance after death to repent of one's sins or to be purged from their stain. As we live; so shall we die — and in that manner stand before God.

Nadab and Abihu had been zealous servants of God and had enjoyed great privileges not given to many in Israel. But they transgressed, and while in the very act of their transgression a bolt of flame darted out and laid them instantaneously with the dead. They will not stand before God at the judgment as devout men who saw God's glory on Mt. Sinai, but as rebellious, self-willed, proud sinners who substituted their own ways for the plan of God and who in their disobedience were called to stand before God, judged and condemned for their willful sin (**Proverbs 14:12 (KJV)** <sup>12</sup> There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death).