



Nadab and Abihu

Sons of Aaron

*Offered Strange Fire
To God*

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Overview

Some brothers, like Cain and Abel or Jacob and Esau, get each other in trouble.

Nadab and Abihu got in trouble together. Although little is known of their early years, the Bible gives us an abundance of information about the environment in which they grew up. Born in Egypt, they were eyewitnesses of God's mighty acts of the exodus.

They saw their father, Aaron, their uncle, Moses, and their aunt, Miriam, in action many times.

They had firsthand knowledge of God's holiness as few men have ever had, and for a while at least, they followed God wholeheartedly (Leviticus 8:36).

But at a crucial moment they chose to treat with indifference the clear instructions from God. The consequence of their sin was fiery, instant, and shocking to all.

Key verses: "Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord" (Leviticus 10:1-2).

Sons of Aaron

Exodus 6:23

Aaron married Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

The Parentage of Moses and Aaron

Moses and Aaron were Israelites; raised up unto them of their brethren, as Christ also should be, who was to be the Prophet and Priest, the Redeemer and Lawgiver of the people of Israel. Moses returns to his narrative, and repeats the charge God had given him to deliver his message to Pharaoh, and his objection against it.

Those who have spoken unadvisedly with their lips ought to reflect upon it with regret, as Moses seems to do here.

It is profitable to place no confidence in ourselves, all our sufficiency must be in the Lord. We never can trust ourselves too little, or our God too much. I can do nothing by myself, said the apostle, but I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

Called to Mount Sinai with Moses and Aaron to worship

Exodus 24:1

Then the Lord instructed Moses: "Come up here to me, and bring along Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of Israel's leaders. All of them must worship at a distance.

A solemn covenant was made between God and Israel. Very solemn it was, typifying the covenant of grace between God and believers, through Christ. As soon as God separated to himself a peculiar people, he governed them by a written word, as he has done ever since.

God's covenants and commands are so just in themselves, and so much for our good, that the more we think of them, and the more plainly and fully they are set before us, the more reason we may see to comply with them.

The blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the altar, on the book, and on the people.

Neither their persons, their moral obedience, nor religious services, would meet with acceptance from a holy God, except through the shedding and sprinkling of blood.

Also the blessings granted unto them were all of mercy; and the Lord would deal with them in kindness. Thus the sinner, by faith in the blood of Christ, renders willing and acceptable obedience.

Exodus 24:9-10

Then Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the leaders of Israel went up the mountain. There they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there seemed to be a pavement of brilliant sapphire, as clear as the heavens.

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Set apart to priesthood

Exodus 28:1-4

"Your brother, Aaron, and his sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar, will be set apart from the common people.

They will be my priests and will minister to me.

Make special clothing for Aaron to show his separation to God—beautiful garments that will lend dignity to his work.

Instruct all those who have special skills as tailors to make the garments that will set Aaron apart from everyone else, so he may serve me as a priest.

They are to make a chest piece, an ephod, a robe, an embroidered tunic, a turban, and a sash. They will also make special garments for Aaron's sons to wear when they serve as priests before me.

Hitherto the heads of families were the priests, and offered sacrifices; but now this office was confined to the family of Aaron only; and so continued till the gospel dispensation.

The holy garments not only distinguished the priests from the people, but were emblems of that holy conduct which should ever be the glory and beauty, the mark of the ministers of religion, without which their persons and ministrations will be had in contempt.

They also typified the glory of the Divine majesty, and the beauty of complete holiness, which rendered Jesus Christ the great High Priest. But our adorning under the gospel, is not to be of gold and costly array, but the garments of salvation, the robe of righteousness.

The clothing for Aaron's sons

Exodus 28:40-43

"Then for Aaron's sons, make tunics, sashes, and headdresses to give them dignity and respect.

Clothe Aaron and his sons with these garments, and then anoint and ordain them. Set them apart as holy so they can serve as my priests.

Also make linen underclothes for them, to be worn next to their bodies, reaching from waist to thigh. These must be worn whenever Aaron and his sons enter the Tabernacle or approach the altar in the Holy Place to perform their duties.

Thus they will not incur guilt and die. This law is permanent for Aaron and his descendants.

The priest's garments typify the righteousness of Christ. If we appear not before God in that, we shall bear our iniquity, and die. Blessed is he, therefore, that watches, and keeps his garments, [Rev 16:15](#).

And blessed be God that we have a High Priest, appointed of God, and set apart for his work; furnished for his high office by the glory of his Divine majesty, and the beauty of perfect holiness.

Happy are we, if by the law spiritually understood, we see that such a High Priest became us; that we cannot draw near to a holy God, or be accepted, but by him. There is no light, no wisdom, no perfection, but from him; no glory, no beauty, but in being like unto him.

Let us take encouragement from the power, love, and compassion of our High Priest, to draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

**Nadab and Abihu Offer "strange" (unauthorized) fire to God,
and are destroyed.**

Leviticus 10:1-2

The Sin and Death of Nadab and Abihu Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu put coals of fire in their incense burners and sprinkled incense over it. In this way, they disobeyed the Lord by burning before him a different kind of fire than he had commanded.

So fire blazed forth from the Lord's presence and burned them up, and they died there before the Lord.

Next to Moses and Aaron, none were more likely to be honourable in Israel than Nadab and Abihu.

There is reason to think that they were puffed up with pride, and that they were heated with wine.

While the people were prostrate before the Lord, adoring his presence and glory, they rushed into the tabernacle to burn incense, though not at the appointed time; both together, instead of one alone, and with fire not taken from the altar.

If it had been done through ignorance, they had been allowed to bring a sin-offering.

But the soul that doeth presumptuously, and in contempt of God's majesty and justice, that soul shall be cut off. The wages of sin is death.

They died in the very act of their sin. The sin and punishment of these priests showed the imperfection of that priesthood from the very beginning, and that it could not shelter any from the fire of God's wrath, otherwise than as it was typical of Christ's priesthood.

Eleazar and Ithamar serve as priest.

Numbers 3:1-4

This is the family line of Aaron and Moses as it was recorded when the Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai: Aaron's sons were Nadab (the firstborn), Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

They were anointed and set apart to minister as priests. But Nadab and Abihu died in the Lord's presence in the wilderness of Sinai when they burned before the Lord a different kind of fire than he had commanded.

Since they had no sons, this left only Eleazar and Ithamar to serve as priests with their father, Aaron.

There was much work belonging to the priests' office, and there were now only Aaron and his two sons to do it;

God appoints the Levites to attend them. Those whom God finds work for, he will find help for.

The Levites were taken instead of the first-born. When He that made us, saves us, as the first-born of Israel were saved, we are laid under further obligations to serve him faithfully. God's right to us by redemption, confirms the right he has to us by creation.

Nadab and Abihu are buried

Leviticus 10:4-5

Then Moses called for Mishael and Elzaphan, Aaron's cousins, the sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel. He said to them, "Come and carry the bodies of your relatives away from the sanctuary to a place outside the camp."

So they came forward and carried them out of the camp by their tunics as Moses had commanded.

Their father and brothers were forbidden to mourn

Leviticus 10:6-7

Then Moses said to Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, "Do not mourn by letting your hair hang loose or by tearing your clothes. If you do, you will die, and the Lord will be angry with the whole community of Israel.

However, the rest of the Israelites, your relatives, may mourn for Nadab and Abihu, whom the Lord has destroyed by fire.

But you are not to leave the entrance of the Tabernacle, under penalty of death, for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you." So they did as Moses commanded.

Though Aaron's heart must have been filled with anguish and dismay, yet with silent submission he revered the justice of the stroke.

When God corrects us or ours for sin, it is our duty to accept the punishment, and say, it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.

Whenever we worship God, we come nigh unto him, as spiritual priests. This ought to make us very serious in all acts of devotion.

It concerns us all, when we come nigh to God, to do every religious exercise, as those who believe that the God with whom we have to do, is a holy God. He will take vengeance on those that profane his sacred name by trifling with him.

Life Application

We are in danger of making the same mistake as these brothers when we treat lightly the justice and holiness of God. We must draw near to God while realizing that there is a proper fear of God.

Don't forget that the opportunity to know God personally is based on his gracious invitation to an always unworthy people, not a gift to be taken for granted.

Allow your thoughts about God include a humble recognition of his great holiness?

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Verse Concept: Matthew Henry's Concept Bible Commentary.