

**HEBREWS – LEVITICUS**  
**“You Should Be Further Along”**  
**Leviticus 10:1-3 | Hebrews 5:11-14**  
**June 11, 2023**

**Leviticus 10:1-3**

**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 before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. <sup>2</sup> And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>1</sup>**

**“This is the Word of God” – “Thanks be to God.”**

In 1986 I was a senior in high school. It seems that every generation has a “Where were you when?” moment. These may be moments of victory and incredible joy – such as the declaration of the end of a long-fought war. However, more often than not, it seems these are moments of joy or at least normality that suddenly turn to tragedy.

On January 28, 1986 I was in my computer math class and suddenly my teacher entered with a shocked look on his face and shared something with our class that changed the day...in fact, more than the day for everyone.

On that day the Space Shuttle Challenger launched from Canaveral as it had numerous times in the past. Yet, this time, the crew had a bit of a different makeup than the others. This launch of the shuttle included a school teacher as part of the crew. And as you likely know, due to a fault in the O-Rings, the shuttle exploded killing the entire crew. All while the world watched.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Le 10:1–3). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

The list of such generation defining moments is long. Depending on your age, things like the Kennedy assassination, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, the Columbine High School massacre, and now, amazingly over twenty years ago, the 9/11 attacks.

There are more and you have those which stand out, but a common thread in these that ended tragically is that prior the moment that seared these in a people's minds there was peace, if not joy and elation. Then BOOM...everything changed.

Looking at this narrative from the Old Testament book of Leviticus, we see a few characters highlighted. Nadab and Abihu are sons of Aaron the high priest. Aaron had four sons and these are the two oldest. They had accompanied Aaron and their uncle Moses on the journey up Mount Sinai as described in Exodus 24. With their two brothers, they were anointed as priests of the people.

Therefore, these two are presumed to be righteous, holy men, serving God and his people. They are priests.

It is clear as this priesthood had been developed, there were responsibilities given to these men as they stood before the Lord in the place of his people. The descriptors in previous chapters bring to mind memories of great and moving occasions when God's holy people and plans for significant advance for the Israelites. Then...suddenly the euphoria is shattered.<sup>2</sup>

What is happening here?

### **Unauthorized Action**

These two words "unauthorized fire" or perhaps your Bible says "strange fire" from the Hebrew ZAR is confusing a bit. What makes this fire strange or unauthorized? The censer was put in the fire, incense laid

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<sup>2</sup> Wenham, Gordon J. *The Book of Leviticus: The New International Commentary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Lexham, 1979), 155.

upon it and it was then used for the sacrifice and yet...it was unauthorized.

It was not unauthorized because of the censer and the use of it to move the hot coals as Leviticus 16 reminds us that is to be done. It was not unauthorized because of the incense as Exodus 30 says to use incense.

There's speculation and has been for centuries. It could be the coal for the fire was taken from the wrong place. It could be the incense was the wrong type. It could be that the wrong people were handling the fire, but that doesn't seem so as these two were anointed and set apart priests. It could be the timing of the fire was wrong – wrong time of day maybe?

From a twenty-first century viewpoint based on self-focus and fairness based on our mostly wrong-centered view of human fairness, this just seems wrong. Right?

At any rate, God did not ask us to approve of his actions. Thus, at first glance with the fulness of canonical context removed, it makes God seem unfair and maybe even mean.

Yet, he is not. And so there is only one possible reason that these two priests who were playing with fire in a way that the crowd likely approved were suddenly and amazingly burned to a crisp in a moment and died doing church work.

But not doing the Lord's work.

Here is what we do know. It is clearly stated in verse one. They had used fire on the holy altar "which the Lord had not commanded them."

It is apparently one thing to say with your mouth "I love you Lord. You are my King. You are my Lord. You are sovereign and God of all. I am yours." and everything else we say and sing and post and declare. It is one thing to say those things and another to believe those things.

Maybe you're not offering unauthorized fire on an altar, but do you ever just do what you want and believe it's godly and right without ever checking to see if it truly is?

Guilty as charged here.

Let's move to the New Testament and see how the book of Hebrews addresses a similar thing.

### **Hebrews 5:11-14**

**<sup>11</sup> About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. <sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, <sup>13</sup> for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. <sup>3</sup>**

### **Unexpected Immaturity**

As we read through the first few chapters of Hebrews and then in chapters four and five, the author clearly is excited about the prospect of discussing the reality that Jesus Christ is the ultimate, final, highest of High Priests. He is our Savior and fully God and fully man and thus the only one who can stand before the Father as our representative and intercessor. The greatness of this reality as Christ being High Priest is not lost on the author, but...there's a problem here.

Have you ever wanted to dig deeper into a subject, or talk about something with some friends but soon discovered that those you were speaking were unable to have such conversations? It's not about stupidity, but it is about ignorance.

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<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 5:11–14). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

I remember as a student having the summer off. Then, the fall semester would begin and we would be in the next section of math – it was always math it seems. In my case, it was Algebra 2 I believe. So, here we are in class and the teacher begins. Suddenly, it is clear that whatever has just been put on the board may as well be Chinese characters because the class – well me particularly – has no idea what she is talking about and thus, no concept of what I am supposed to be doing and what is coming next.

Apparently, I was not the only one with this moment. As the teacher turned around to face us, she apparently was met with a sea of faces declaring “huh?” and then she said, “Well, you did have Algebra 1, but apparently you forgot everything over the summer and so we are going to have to take a few days to review.”

It was frustrating to her, I’m certain, but for us...it was a relief.

Review was needed but it was not the teacher’s fault. It was ours. We didn’t forget as much as we chose to not remember.

Thus, our ignorance was on display and our immaturity was revealed. Immaturity in the sense that we abandoned that which we knew and basically took a couple of steps backward in what we knew and where we should have been.

Frustrating.

And not unlike the readers here. The author is basically saying “I want to talk so much more about the exclusivity of Christ and the amazing reality of his role as our High Priest...but I cannot. Why? Because “you have become dull of hearing.”

Wow! That hurts.

The writer declares that these Christians are like babies who have now gone through the teething phase and should be eating solid food, but apparently are too addicted to the milk that they have refused to move forward. There are no punches pulled here. It's severe.

You should be further along. Shame on you for not being.

It gets really personal when this is stated:

**<sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,<sup>4</sup>**

Well, that's convicting. For all the Christians in churches throughout the world today who have settled, who have treated the fellowship of the redeemed as a club for those who like spiritual stuff and have kept their faith personal (You know the phrase all too often used by some that "faith is personal, I don't feel right talking to others about it.") and become comfortable being sometimes attenders, pew warmers, and retired believers...the scripture speaks loudly "By this time you ought to be teachers."

Apparently, this is not contingent on "feeling called to teach" but is expected of every single person who has been redeemed, rescued, saved from the abyss. Teaching formally? Not always, but teaching nonetheless. This is the call of every disciple regardless of what a spiritual gift survey may reveal.

Certainly, some are gifted to teach, but all are called to do so, if informally and "as we go therefore" to make disciples.

Perhaps there is someone here today feeling the unction of the Holy Spirit at this point. This is not manipulation. No guilt-driven call here.

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<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 5:11–12). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Just a reality check – God calls us to action. Works don't save, but works reveal the saved.

May we never be the examples of the UNEXPECTEDLY IMMATURE.

We will look more at these warnings and the good turn toward maturity next week. Yet, today, let this sink in.

### **Unbelievable Grace**

Certainly, we should all be further along. No one has arrived. The comfortable disciple is often not a disciple at all...at least not a faithful one. Yet, in our immaturity there is hope.

I think about my Algebra 2 teacher who was certainly frustrated, but didn't throw her book in the air and storm out saying "You guys are hopeless."

She stopped. Clarified the lesson. Reviewed what we should know...and did know. And met us where we were. What a good teacher. And once we were reminded of what we knew, but had forgotten and once we were up-to-speed, we moved onto the meat of the lesson.

Milk is good. Meat is nourishing and God is not keeping these hard teachings hidden. He is also not force-feeding us, but graciously providing that which is glorifying to him and good for us.

Our loving Father is not content to leave us in the nursery of the faith, but is maturing us, growing us, teaching us, disciplining us, and graciously providing all that we need. And...he is challenging us to not be content with baby food.

So, in closing I go back to Leviticus 10:3

**<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup>**

God’s actions are declared by Moses to his brother. God will be sanctified (set apart) and glorified (for only God is worthy of such.)

God’s holiness is his hidden, concealed glory...but his glory is his holiness revealed.<sup>6</sup>

And as we mature in the faith, are led by our loving and holy God, we draw near to him...not with unauthorized actions, but reverence, submission, and a thankfulness for our great High Priest that even makes such possible. In this our holy God makes us holy worshippers. For his glory and our good.

To God be the glory.

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<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Le 10:3). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>6</sup> Wenham, 156.