

### LEVITICUS

#### Lesson 12 - Chapters 9 and 10

As we go through Leviticus chapter 9, it points out a whole variety of God-principles that a simple and quick reading can easily overlook. So, while we won't spend much time on the details of the rituals, we will look more closely at what these rituals are meant to teach us.

In chapter 9 the consecration of the priesthood and the Tabernacle itself will be completed and Moses will fade to the background and the priests will assume their duties as the officiators of all the prescribed rites and rituals. The ordination, or consecration, rituals of the priesthood go on, as instructed back in Chapter 8, has been going on for a period of exactly one week. That means that this same series of ritual procedures are repeated each day for 7 days.....and they are officiated by MOSES, not Aaron. Because until the END of the consecration period, Aaron and his sons are NOT authorized to begin their duties as priests.

It's quite interesting and unique that Yehoveh uses Moses as a Mediator between Him and the people, and even between God and the priesthood. When Joshua took over after Moses' death, he did NOT inherit Moses' role as a go-between. Perhaps this will help us to understand why Jews to this day revere Moses so highly. Yehoveh made it clear that whatever Moses spoke was done in God's authority; that whatever Moses spoke was as if God spoke it. Obviously not **everything** Moses spoke during that 40 years in the Wilderness is told in the Bible. We get precious few of Moses' words in fact; and we also find that not everything Moses orders is prefaced with the words "and God instructed Moses". This means Moses did not necessarily get a direct revelation from Yehoveh before each time a matter of some sort was dealt with. So let's get the correct picture here: while no doubt Moses was acting sometimes on direct and specific orders from Yehoveh, at other times Moses was acting on general instructions and established principles that Yehoveh taught to Him over a period of time; so the majority of the time it was Moses' own judgment on various matters that was happening.....and Yehoveh says the people were to take Moses' judgments on ALL matters as though it was from God Himself.

The only other person in Holy Scripture who was given such incredible authority and whose every utterance was to be taken as.....well..... Gospel.... was Yeshua.....who indeed was not only Mediator but also God in the flesh. So let's give Moses his due and recognize the nearly unparalleled position of power placed upon him by Yehoveh. Certainly there is no one to compare to him in the Old Testament.

But let's also recognize the important God-principle laid down in the life of Moses for we 21st century Believers: it is that sometimes God will show us directly and plainly His specific will on some matter in our lives.....but far more often and usual, after teaching us His ways, laws, and

commands, He will allow us to exercise our own judgment. And if we have hearkened to Him we will choose wisely and correctly.....we will make our judgments in accordance with the Father's will and therefore His will shall be carried out..... "on earth as it is in Heaven".

Let's read Leviticus chapter 9 together.

### READ LEVITICUS CHAPTER 9 all

The first words of Chapter 9 are "on the 8th day", and it refers to that day when the priesthood is at last going to be empowered and authorized to perform the Yehoveh-ordained rituals inside the grounds of the Tabernacle; no longer will Moses officiate.... Aaron, the first High Priest, is now able to. And, what we see is that a whole set of rituals, involving virtually every kind of sacrifice EXCEPT for the 'Asham Offering, the Reparation Offering, is performed. This set of offerings is kind of unique because it is the VERY FIRST sacrificial rituals that are being performed by the newly formed priesthood of Israel; so this is truly a momentous event, and we probably ought to make a special mark in our Bibles to identify this moment in time.

Now, let me comment on something that is both controversial and important. During these 7 days of the consecration ceremony there has been a lot of sacrificing and a lot of burning things up on the Brazen Altar. Yet it is ONLY at the end of this chapter that we see the Lord LIGHT the fire of the Brazen Altar by His own hand. And as we've already been told in Torah, and will be told again later, this fire must NEVER be allowed to go out because it is divine fire and ONLY divine fire can be used to burn up the sacrifices. The general agreement among the Hebrew Sages of old is that what was going on was a kind of "dry run" during those 7 days of consecration. The fire that was being used was NOT divine fire (men had kindled it), but it was deemed as acceptable by God for the purpose it was being used: consecration of the priests and the Tabernacle. Once the consecration was complete, however, then God re-ignited the fire on the Altar with "holy fire" and from that moment forward no fire that was manmade could be used to turn the sacrificed animals and grains into smoke because now the purpose was different.

Interestingly when we study the Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) rituals sometime later, a very similar series of sacrifices is offered; except that in the sacrifices of Leviticus 9 there is no Scapegoat as there is for Yom Kippur, and in it's stead we find a Peace Offering.....a Zevah Offering. So while Yom Kippur is a day to be commemorated in utmost soberness and seriousness, this first day of the official operation of the Israelite priesthood is treated as joyous.

In verse 1 we're also told that besides Aaron and his sons, Moses invited the "elders of Israel" to the occasion of these very first priestly sacrifices. I told you last week that often when we get the words in the Torah that "the whole congregation" of Israel was to come to the Tabernacle, "the whole congregation" did NOT **always** mean all the general population of Israel. Rather, it was usually the people's representatives, called the elders, or at other times it was those who were classified as full-citizens of Israel who were being referred to. Here it specifically uses the word "elders" (in Hebrew **zekenim**), and this has caused some scholars to

believe that in this case, it was only the CHIEF elders that came. There would have been hundreds of elders, and without doubt they would have been organized in some kind of hierarchy. So perhaps it was only the top end of the management chart that was called for this specific occasion but that is just scholarly speculation.

Verse 2 says that one of the sacrificial animals is to be a calf. Some Bibles will in place of "calf" say **Bull, or young bull**. They would be correct; for the Hebrew word for "calf" is **egel**, **which** means a male calf. We discussed some weeks ago that two different categories of Bulls were used for sacrifice: young bulls and mature bulls (a mature bull being of greater value). A young bull, here called an **egel** means it's a year old. A mature bull must be 3 years old. It is interesting that the choice of the Hebrew word **egel** is used here, because it is not usual in Leviticus to refer to the younger sacrificial bull as **egel**; rather, it is typically called a **ben par**.....which means "young bull". Perhaps we get a clue why this unusual use of the word **egel** is present in this verse from the fact that the infamous Golden Calf, which Aaron and his sons helped to build only weeks earlier, was ALSO called an **egel**. One gets the sense that the Lord was making a point here....making a connection... and reminding Aaron and his sons about the Golden Calf incident.....and showing them the contrast between God's system of pure worship and the Egyptian's pagan system of false worship. For in God's system an animal was never worshipped as being above man as it often was in pagan worship; rather an animal was sacrificed for the BENEFIT of man because Yehoveh puts the value of animals as less than men.

In verses 3 and 4 we get a list of the animals and grain that are to be used in this special inaugural sacrifice. And we also get the answer as to the PURPOSE of this particular ritual being a little different than what the future, standard, daily sacrificial rituals will be: it is because "Today, the Lord will appear to you"...actually, what it says is "Today, Yehoveh will appear to you". This is an important occasion indeed; and in verse 6 the concept of Yehoveh appearing to them is refined a little more: it is the GLORY (or presence) of Yehoveh that will appear to Israel. It is the **kavod** of the Lord.

Here's the thing: Israel was already beginning to understand that without Yehoveh's presence in the Tabernacle the Tabernacle was nothing but a really expensive tent. And that sometimes Yehoveh's presence would be there, and sometimes it wouldn't; so Israel would always be in great anticipation of God's presence filling up the Tabernacle.

Let's think about that for a second and apply it to our lives; what is a human being without the presence of Yehoveh within us? Without the Holy Spirit dwelling in us what are we? Nothing but an expensive tent.....an empty shell that serves no divine purpose. And, like tents, some are prettier than others but overall they are just places to live. A person can do all the right things, be moral, upstanding, kind, productive, charitable.....what the world would call a truly good person. But just like the Tabernacle that is filled with wonderful furniture, precious metals, and beautiful art it really serves no divine purpose unless God is present there. Oh it was certainly significantly more awesome to look at than the regular, run-of-the-mill goats hair tents that the average Israelites lived in.....but without God's presence there was no more value to that fabulous Tabernacle than there was to all those other common, dusty smelly tents.

Today you are God's choice to be his Tabernacle....His earthly tent. Pray for all the empty tents of flesh in this world....the pretty and the plain; those in your community, maybe even in your family.....and certainly for all those millions of empty tents in Israel.

In verse 7, with the words, "approach the Altar" Moses officially turns over the administration of the priestly rituals to Aaron, and we enter a new era in Israel's history; they have a priesthood. The first offerings Aaron makes are on behalf of himself and his sons; it is a public admission that even the priests carry sin within them.....it must have been a humbling experience. And we see the typical 'Olah, the burnt offering, performed. After this, in verse 15, Aaron now offers up sacrifices ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL. Notice that it was a goat that was sacrificed on behalf of the people. Why a young bull for the priests and a goat for the people? Because the sin of the priests is of greater consequence than the sin of the people. We've talked a number of times about how God classifies sins.....some being more serious.....meaning more DANGEROUS....than others. And how the sacrificial system even set up a hierarchy of animals to account for the various classifications of sins.....the mature Bull being the most valuable to atone for the most serious sin, and birds being the least. While we should pay close attention to this, the purpose of this foundational teaching of God that we find in the Torah is NOT so we can run around and compare sins of others against our own sins, and decide which were worse. It is so we can see the multi-faceted nature of sin, how it can affect and infect those who come into contact with sin, how serious and devastating sin is, and that it is not such a simple and straightforward matter as we have often been taught.

I don't know about you but I was always a little bothered when a preacher would say that all sins are the same before God...that there aren't little ones and big ones. That stealing a candy bar is no different than murder in God's eyes, because both are sins, and God makes no distinction. Well that's just the opposite of what the Torah says. Let us not confuse what we're told by Paul in the NT, that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God".....versus what we see over and over in Leviticus concerning sin. Paul is speaking concerning our corrupted nature and the inevitable result.... the impossibility that that nature can ever be acceptable to God. And, therefore, there has never been a human (except for Yeshua) who has not committed at least a tiny sin caused by a corrupt nature. So all men are in the same boat in that context. The Levitical sacrificial system demonstrates the principle that Paul is talking about, by means of the 'Olah and Minchah sacrifices which must be performed on a daily basis for ALL Israel....no one, including the priesthood, is exempted.

Yet the **nature** of men is a separate issue from the **behavior** of men.....which the sacrificial system ALSO demonstrates. The various classifications of sins (and the sacrificial ritual required to atone for each class) concern the behavior itself, the intent, and the position a man holds in society. Put another way: Paul, in his pronouncement that all men have sinned and come short of God's glory, is talking more about who we ARE and less about what we DO. And who we ARE is the same among all men, in God's eyes. That is, we are ALL equally guilty of being born of a sin nature....no exceptions. What we DO is quite another matter. God does NOT equate stealing a candy bar with murder. God does NOT equate being telling a lie with committing adultery. What we DO is indeed categorized with some of our acts being less serious offenses and others being what the Word calls an "abomination". And we don't need to wonder about which is which, the Torah tells us all that in great detail.

What we must grasp is that even though the classifications of sins remains in effect to this day..... that is there are indeed more serious and less serious disobediences.... the sacrifice required to atone for of each of these various disobedient behaviors has been reduced to but one: the blood of Jesus. And it is that SAME sacrifice that is also required to atone for our natures. The blood of Yeshua has replaced every sacrificial procedure....He is the one and only authorized atonement; but, the fact that sinful behavior can be more or less serious, more or less offensive to God, and more or less dangerous to the community of Believers, remains.

One of the most poignant moments of this special inaugural ceremony must have been what is recorded in verse 22. Aaron raises his hands over the people, and blesses them. Although we're not told at this point what words were spoken, the Sifra, followed by Rashi and some other great Hebrew sages, says that the blessing Aaron pronounced is what is recorded in Numbers 6:22-27.

Take a moment, and imagine yourself in a sea of people, out there in the pristine desert wilderness; the dry breeze is kicking up little whirlpools of dust, and the valley at the foot of Mt. Sinai acts like a natural megaphone that amplifies Aaron's voice. Thick smoke with the smell of burning animal flesh is rising upward from the Brazen Altar, and Aaron, in his splendid High Priest's garments pauses the ritual, steps toward you, raises his hands, and on behalf of the God of the Universe pronounces this blessing upon you:

**NJB Numbers 6:24 “ May Yehoveh bless you and keep you. 25 May Yehoveh let his face shine on you and be gracious to you. 26 May Yehoveh show you his face and bring you peace.”**

With that Moses and Aaron entered the Tabernacle and the presence of Yehoveh appeared to ALL the people. God confirmed His pleasure and acceptance of all that had been done in strict accordance to His instructions and commands, by sending forth divine fire and consuming all that was at that moment already smoldering on the Brazen Altar, and thereby changing the character of the Brazen Altar from merely glorious to divine.

The crowd gasped in awe. The people's knees grew weak from trying to take in all that they had witnessed. In spontaneous reaction they fell on their faces, out of fear, respect, and gratitude to the Father of All Things. What a day that was. Not too far into the future, with the rebuilding of the 3rd Temple in Jerusalem, a very similar event will occur and I suspect it will produce a very similar reaction.

Let's move on to Leviticus 10.

READ LEVITICUS CHAPTER 10 all

Chapter 10 takes an interesting detour for a short time. It begins by telling the rather startling and grizzly story of Aaron's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, who are killed by Yehoveh for an offense against Him. We're going to look at their death and its cause very carefully because 1300 years later a similar incident will occur and it, too, is recorded in the Scriptures.

First, though, we need to step back and look at this chapter from a wider view; and understand that in many ways it pulls together so much of what we have been learning. Thus far Leviticus has challenged us primarily by laying out long lists of minutely detailed rituals each for carefully defined purposes; all associated with the matters of sin, and at the other end of the scale, holiness. I'm sure that for many of you our study of Leviticus has been anything from difficult to fathom, to somewhat tedious. But just like when we were in grade school and first learning basic arithmetic, it is necessary to wade through a whole series of rules, memorization, and new concepts and principles BEFORE one can make any sense of it, or to begin to make any kind of useful, practical application. I applaud you for staying the course.....it's about to start paying off.

Several years ago in an adult Sunday School class I was teaching, it became necessary to examine a certain aspect of Yehoveh's character; and that aspect was His willingness to judge, punish, and even destroy when necessary. Not long into the teaching concerning these attributes of our Lord, a man who (along with his wife) regularly attended this class raised his hand and made a terse comment that went something like this: ".....I don't come to Church to hear about God's judgment, I come to hear about His love. My God is love, and that is all I am interested in." That was his last Sunday with us; he never came back.

His reaction took me aback and I thought about it for several weeks. It caused me to accept the reality that indeed our God is a god of many contrasts; and so when reading the Scriptures, OT or NT, we can read of His incredible love and mercy that would permit His own son to die a torturous death for our sake yet on other pages we read of His destruction of the entire world, of His slaying of hundreds of thousands of Egyptians because of the stubbornness of a Pharaoh, and of His ordering the deaths of thousands of Israelites for building a Golden Calf.

This man who was so upset at me for teaching on God's attribute of judgment represents a goodly portion of the modern Church who prefers to set aside the Biblical view of divine retribution in favor of something more warm and fuzzy. As I have heard said in one form or another from pulpits more times than I can remember: "God will always forgive us. That's His job."

It's important to understand that this perception that the supposed strict and judgmental God of the OT has given way to a tolerant and all-merciful God of the NT is but modern and progressive theology. Examine the teachings of the learned biblical scholars of barely more than a century ago and you'll see great concern over **proper** worship; and for **constant** self examination to assure that we are striving for purity and obedience to our Lord.....and this to avoid the disciplinary action, or worse, loss of Yehoveh's blessing upon us. Today we describe sermons on the subject of God's judgment as being about "Hellfire and Damnation".....and most pastors won't touch that with a 10-foot pole anymore. Why? Because 21st century Christians don't want to hear it.

True enough, as Believers we're not to focus day and night on sin. Nor are we to live a life of anxiety and worry for some imagined offense against Yehoveh that we're not really able to completely identify.....or perhaps about a grievous sin we've committed that we view as possibly too horrible for even Jesus' blood to atone. The desire to avoid God's wrath, His

condemnation to an eternity in Hell, and to be obedient to a fault led to morbid introspection that became all the rage in the Middle Ages; self-mutilation accompanied with long prayers that might last for hours, and the confession of every perceived sin (real or imagined) that might exist within that person, gained popularity with the especially pious-minded.

As unbalanced as all that was it is no more out of kilter than where the bulk of modern Christians have arrived; that is that we have nothing to fear from our God. That because we have confessed loyalty to His Son, Yeshua, all of our disobedience and careless worship and frivolous lifestyles will be met with a grandfatherly wink and nod from the Almighty. The idea being that now that we've purchased our fire insurance in the form of Salvation we can play with matches in our fireproof suits without a care in the world.

Well I hope to put a dent in that kind of dangerous thinking and false theology by showing you examples from both the OT and NT of how Yehoveh reacted severely to disobedience by His Believers. I'll use some examples we've all heard about before, but because we might not have had the proper background and context the principles and lessons intended were obscured.

First let's examine the story of Nadav and Avihu which is told in the first few verses of Leviticus chapter 10; then we'll compare that with the NT account of Ananias and Sapphira as told in Acts 5. In both cases the common element is that Yehoveh took the lives of these folks for offending Him. In both cases it involves Believers; in fact Nadav and Avihu were priests.....Ananias and Sapphira were early disciples of Jesus. And in both cases the offenses seem, on the surface, to be little more than breaches of protocol; hardly the thing one might expect a God who places such a high value on life, love, and mercy to pronounce the death sentence over.

Verse 1 of chapter 10 begins by introducing us to Aaron's eldest sons, Nadav and Avihu. Aaron was now the fully consecrated High Priest of Israel, and Nadav and Avihu were fully consecrated common priests. In fact due to the normal line of family succession, Nadav likely would have been the NEXT High Priest upon Aaron's death.

We're told that Nadav and Avihu each took his fire pan (your Bible may say "censer", which is simply a vessel designed to transport a small pile of hot coals), put incense on it (to create smoke) and then they offered it to Yehoveh as part of the Tabernacle rituals. But there was a problem; what they offered to Yehoveh the Scriptures called "alien" or "strange" fire; further, whatever it was they were doing they were making it up as they went along.....it was NOT something God had ordained.

Suddenly in a starkly matter-of-fact tone we see that the Lord spewed forth fire and burned Nadav and Avihu to a crisp.....killing them instantly.....for offending Him. Immediately Moses turns to Aaron and gives him a somewhat cryptic explanation of what just happened.....basically saying that what Aaron's smoldering children had done was a great affront to Yehoveh's holiness and as such would not be tolerated....especially by the leaders of the priesthood who ought to know better.

Let's dissect this for a few minutes because it is vitally important to understand as it has everything to do with who Yehoveh is.

First, what is normally translated as "fire", referring to this fire that Nadav and Avihu put into their censors, is in Hebrew **esh**.....and it means "hot coals". So they put hot coals into their censors, their fire pans, and not a little flaming fire. Next we're told it was an "alien fire" or a "strange fire" that they used. In Hebrew, this is **esh zarah**, and it is actually referring to the incense rather than the fire itself. So a little more precise meaning of this phrase that is usually translated as "strange" or "alien" fire, might be:.....**an alien incense offering by fire**. The significance being that there was something wrong or defective with the overall offering they brought to Yehoveh.

Now truth be known, there is no universal agreement among the great and ancient Hebrew sages nor among modern scholars as to the precise nature of the defect of this "alien incense offering by fire" that caused the deaths of these two sons of Aaron. In the Sifra, which is basically a commentary on Leviticus, a number of suggestions are made that lend some light to the subject.....and probably, taken as a whole, these suggestions give us the best picture possible of what happened here.

The nature of the offense begins in the fact that these two men were ordained priests. They, by their positions of privilege, were especially close to God (or, in the Hebrew way of saying it, they were "NEAR" to God); and by implication, whatever they did wrong they should have known better and were, therefore, without excuse. On a few occasions I've read to you from a translation called the Schocken Bible; it is a very literal word-for-word translation, and as a result can be hard to follow. In it there was a very specific term or phrase that was repeated often when referring to the Temple sacrifices and the associated rituals brought before Yehoveh, and to those who were authorized to bring them; in Hebrew it is the word **kirvah**; in English it is the word "near". Because it specifically refers to certain sacrifices the literal meaning is "near-offering".

So what is this getting at? What does "near" in its simplest sense mean? Close-by. Next to. Adjacent to. Near is the opposite of far. A near relative is one that is **genealogically** close to you.....a close blood relative. So **near** can speak of a close association or it can speak of a close proximity. Priests were "near" to God in association with Him.....both in the sense that they were his set-apart servants given duties to perform that ONLY they were permitted to do; and they were given the privilege of being "near" in proximity to Him by being allowed to enter into His earthly dwelling place....the Tabernacle Sanctuary.

So as a principle we find all throughout the Scriptures that anyone who is "near to God" is held to a higher standard than those who are not. The reason is simple: you can only be near to the Lord if He gives you such a great privilege. Therefore, in a general sense, Nadav and Avihu had no room for error because they were God's privileged "near-servants". They were closest to Him. And the closer to God's holiness one is, the greater the responsibility one assumes because of the danger of polluting His holiness that proximity to Him automatically brings with it. Over and over Yeshua warned that teachers of the Law that taught false doctrines to people, instead of Scriptural truth, faced far greater consequences than those who didn't even know



God.

What was the exact nature of Nadav and Avihu's offense? Again, we're not entirely sure. Two violations seem most likely, however. One is that possibly they entered the Tabernacle Sanctuary and went beyond where they were allowed to go. Priests could enter into the front room, which was called the Holy Place. But.....ONLY the High Priest was permitted to go into the back room, which was called the Holy of Holies (during Moses' lifetime, due to his unique position, Moses was allowed to go into the Holy of Holies way more often than Aaron, the High Priest. But, after Moses' death, the rules of the entry into the Holy of Holies were more strictly enforced, and the High Priest could only go into that room once a year, on Yom Kippur).

This conjecture that the two sons of Aaron trespassed into the Holy of Holies and were given the death sentence for doing so is backed-up by a warning given by God to Moses concerning his brother Aaron. We find that warning in Leviticus 16; let me quote it for you:

**NIV Leviticus 16:1** *"The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the LORD. 2 The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover."*

The next most likely reason for God's judgment upon Nadav and Avihu is that they violated the order stated in Exodus 30, verse 9:

**NAS Exodus 30:8** *"And when Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. There shall be perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. 9 "You shall not offer any strange incense on this altar, or burnt offering or meal offering; and you shall not pour out a libation on it."*

So at the midway point of examining this event we see that the great privilege of being near to God, brings great responsibility as well as danger.....and greater than normal consequence when that responsibility is abrogated.

Now, imagine if you can: Here is Aaron and his two sons performing the very first sacrificial rituals since becoming consecrated as priests. In front of the elders who surrounded the Tabernacle, and in view of hundreds of thousands of Israelites who climbed the surrounding hills for a glimpse of this seminal event, God in His displeasure bellows forth fire, which instantaneously cremates Aarons firstborn and second born sons. As stunned as the crowd must have been, what about poor Aaron who had just witnessed the most horrible kind of death of his eldest two sons? Can you imagine being in Synagogue or Church and you go forward with two of your children to pray, and suddenly for no apparent reason they burst into flame and die right before your eyes? What was going through Aaron's mind? His sadness and shock must have been overwhelming. His fear and horror must have run a close second. What happened here? WHY would Yehoveh DO such a thing?

We'll delve into that the next time we meet.