

LEVITICUS

Lesson 13 - Chapters 10 and 11

We're going to continue this evening with the story of Aaron's children, Moses' nephews, Nadav and Avihu. Nadav and Avihu were priests who immediately following the consecration of the priesthood into operation were engaged in a ritual at the Tabernacle when suddenly fire went forth from the Lord (His glory was in the Tabernacle) and cremated those two men.

The question I asked before we concluded the last lesson is, "what could have provoked Yehoveh to do something so severe?" I have no doubt that from Moses, to Aaron, to the elders of Israel, tribal leaders, and ordinary Israelites, they were startled and bewildered as to what just took place before their very eyes.

Let's re-read Leviticus 10 as we only barely got into the chapter last time we met.

READ LEVITICUS CHAPTER 10 all

Yehoveh knowing ALL men's thoughts, wastes not one second in letting Aaron....and those in attendance....and those who would be told later of this astounding tragedy.... just what precipitated it all. And, Moses pronounces it to Aaron is vs. 3:

NAS Leviticus 10:3 *"Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'" So Aaron, therefore, kept silent."*

While this may appear, on the surface, to have been a procedural violation that provoked Yehoveh to such wrath as to snuff out the life of two of Aaron's sons, in fact it was because they treaded on the one thing that God can never allow to be violated: His holiness. Yehoveh says I WILL be treated as Holy. And especially so by those who have been authorized to COME NEAR me. And, those who have been honored to serve publicly, in a high position (like a priest), must be held to a higher standard so that "before all the people I will be honored." If the priests showed disdain and carelessness in their worship, what would the common folk do?

In verse 4, we find that Moses has the cousins of Nadav and Avihu remove their dead bodies from the Tabernacle area; actually they were taken to an area described as "outside the camp". Priests are prohibited from touching corpses, although when it involves certain relatives, it is permitted. The HIGH PRIEST can NEVER touch a dead body, even that of his wife or parents or children. Should a priest contact a dead body he instantly becomes defiled....impure....and must go through a lengthy purification procedure to once again become

clean and able to resume the duties of his priestly office.

Under normal circumstances, it would have fallen to Aaron's two younger sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, to deal with the bodies of their brothers. However, since they, too, had just been consecrated as priests; it would have been inappropriate at these inaugural sacrifices for them to become defiled by contact with the dead. So, the grizzly duty fell to Mishael and El-zaphan.

Moving the deceased to a place "outside the camp" was normal. Dead bodies could not be anywhere within the camp of Israel, lest they defile the camp and those who might come into contact with the grave. A good rule to remember when reading Scripture is that of all the ways one could become ritually unclean, there was no more serious and severe than to come into contact with death; so it was avoided wherever possible.

Verses 6 and 7 basically tell Aaron and his two surviving sons that they may not participate in the customary mourning-of-the-dead procedures. In fact, they're told if they DO mourn their kin's passage they TOO will be struck dead. And because they are priests, and therefore represent the entire nation of Israel, the whole community will be subject to God's wrath if they join in the bereavement.

Does all this sound a little severe to you? What happened to the God who mercifully rescued these people from the hand of Pharaoh? Where is the forgiveness that enabled Aaron and his sons to become priests, even though not long ago they had built and celebrated the Golden Calf? How does a God who values life so much, take life away in an instant of judgment and divine punishment?

This is the side of God's attributes that we'd rather not talk about. This is the side of God's attributes that have been pushed to the back by well-meaning clergy who want people to see God's mercy and loving-kindness so that they'll be attracted to Him. And this is the side of God that much of the Church says doesn't even exist anymore; that it was an OT dispensation; that in the NT dispensation the God of the NT somehow has left His wrath and judgment behind. The God that we're told over and over never changes.....changed.

Well it goes without saying that what we read in the Bible are but the tiniest snippets of all that went on amongst the Hebrews during the 14 centuries and the hundreds of Bible characters that the Bible spans. So we ought to take with utmost seriousness those things that ARE recorded for us because they are there to teach us something important. So after we've just looked at a jarring account of God's judgment in the OT, let's just see if that same attribute of God is alive and well or it is indeed a thing of the past once we enter New Testament times.

Turn your Bibles to Acts 4. We're going to start reading at verse 32, and continue reading on into Chapter 5; we'll end with 5:11.

READ ACTS 4:32 – 5:11

Here we have an account of 2 people dieing as a direct judgment by Yehoveh. He killed them.

They weren't put to death by any earthly authority. And it all seems to have come as a surprise to the Apostles and disciples that were present. Let us remember that by all accounts Ananias and Sapphira were Believers; they were Jews who had come to belief that Jesus was Savior and Lord. There is nothing here that says they were pretenders, or that they had only fooled themselves into THINKING they believed. So Ananias and Sapphira, husband and wife, were Christians.....the Holy Spirit lived within them just like with all their Christian brothers and sisters.

What happened here? Simply put, they wanted to join in the spirit of what everybody else was doing by selling property they owned and giving the proceeds to those Believers who were needy. And they were certainly sincere about it because they DID sell their property and they DID bring the proceeds to the Church leadership.....although they told a little white lie and held back some of it. Now let's stop there for a second and ponder this: they sold property that was rightfully theirs, kept a little for themselves and gave the rest (apparently the lion's share) to the Church. True enough, it wasn't 100% of the proceeds, but it was without doubt a VERY generous thing to do, right? Tell me something: how many here would sell their house and give every penny to the Church? How many here would sell a valuable piece of property and give 90% to the Church?

It would appear on the surface that the issue was not about generosity; it was that Ananias and Sapphira lied about it and that was what precipitated God's death sentence upon them. Or.....was that really the deal? How often in the Bible do we see people killed by God for the sin of lying? Had not Peter lied and denied Yeshua HIMSELF.....THREE times? Yet he wasn't killed. In fact, the Torah doesn't call for physical death for the sin of lying....not even lying to God. So, why here, in Acts, in the NT where the God of Wrath has supposedly been replaced by the God of Love?

Here's where we get to put to work something we just recently learned. When an Israelite brought his sacrificial animal, his offering, to the Tabernacle, and presented it to God, that property (that animal) became God's property. In the sacrificial system it FORMALLY became God's upon semikhah.....the laying on of hands on the animal's head.....to signify that this animal was indeed the offering, and that it was being turned over to Yehoveh. From a spiritual standpoint when did that transfer of ownership ACTUALLY occur? Later Rabbi's would say that it was the moment when the worshipper entered the Temple grounds with the animal that it became God's property. Be that as it may, the term the Bible uses for offerings to Yehoveh is "HOLY PROPERTY". We've discussed Holy Property a little bit; and we've also been shown that to violate God's Holy Property is a VERY serious sin.

The key to this is that Yehoveh deemed Holy Property as itself being holy. When Ananias and Sapphira determined to sell the property and give all the money to the Lord, it became Holy Property. Just as an Israelite did NOT have to bring a certain animal for a sacrifice....that is, in some cases the species of animal was, within certain limits, the worshippers choice, and in other cases exactly WHICH animal from his flock was his own choice.....Ananias and Sapphira were under no obligation to sell their property and donate the money; it was purely their idea and their choice. But....once they did make that choice, the situation changed. Once they began the process, and they sold the property, and had the money in hand, there was an important

element of holiness added to it because at some point in the process this became Holy Property. We would say that they “held back some of their money” from God. Wrong. Once it became Holy Property, it was ALL His. They had no right to any of it....because it wasn't theirs anymore. What God chose to do with His property was His prerogative. What they did was to rob God. They partook of God's Holy Property, which is a blatant violation of God's Holiness. They paid for it with their lives.

It certainly seems that Ananias and Sapphira were held to very high and strict standard, doesn't it? Well, of course they were.....because as Believers of Messiah Yeshua they were near-to-God. Peter said in 1Peter 4:17, “.....**Judgment begins with the household of God**”. James said in James 3:1, “.....**We who teach shall be judged with greater strictness.**” And Jesus said in Luke 12:48, “.....**everyone to whom much is given, of him will much be required.**” Then there is this in 1Peter 2:9, NIV **1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”**

In essence Ananias and Sapphira held the same status before God that Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu did: they were all priests. Ananias and Sapphira were as common priests for the High Priest Yeshua, just as Nadav and Avihu were common priests for the High Priest Aaron. And as priests they were “near” to God, put into a special position of proximity and association with Yehoveh. Nadav and Avihu were allowed to enter into Yehoveh's presence, the Wilderness Tabernacle Sanctuary, as only priests could. Ananias and Sapphira had God's presence living WITHIN them, as only those made priests through trust in Yeshua could. And when any of these violated God's holiness it was without excuse; and because they were all so privileged to be “near” God they also bore far more responsibility than those who weren't.

This is not allegory. This is a critically important God-principle that is established in the Torah and is naturally continued right on into the NT.

Why have I spent so much time dealing with this? Because it affects you and I. It applies PRECISELY to us. We are in the same position as Ananias and Sapphira. No one in all the world is in a better or higher or nearer position before God, than a Believer. And no one is in a position of more responsibility before God, nor held to a higher standard before God, than a Believer. But....and this is the difficult part....we, all of us who confess trust in Yeshua, are also in a position to violate God's holiness like no others can. And the penalty for doing that can be of the severest nature.

Yet we modern Christians typically think nothing of it. We choose to think about just how much we can gain or prosper from our being near God. Grace in our day now means there's no further need for obedience; worship now means sitting and observing other people performing; Salvation now means we can't REALLY offend Yehoveh and if we should, there will be no consequences. Righteousness now means that we will be shown, as individuals, what is right and wrong; that God's laws and commands are now different for different people. Freedom in Christ now means we have the choice of whether to live out a God-ordained lifestyle, or simply to live as the world does.....with Yeshua added to the mix.

Nothing in the Word, from Genesis to Revelation, validates that line of thinking; yet, even if those premises are not outright stated, it is the de facto mode of operation for much of modern Christianity. Apparently Ananias and Sapphira had exactly the same mindset.

As I studied and prayed over this lesson, right at the end, some words of Wisdom fell on me like a hammer on an anvil: "Come out of her, my people". That phrase is from Jeremiah 51:45, and is later quoted in Revelation 18. But, listen to the WHOLE verse:

NIV Jeremiah 51:45 "Come out of her, my people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of Yehoveh!"

God's anger is going to rain down upon this earth, and any nation or congregation that has decided to place their faith in doctrines instead of the Word of God is going to be subject to that anger. Jeremiah warns us to run from it.

In verse 8 we encounter a rarity for Leviticus: Yehoveh speaks directly to Aaron. Normally anything God wants Aaron to be told goes through Moses. So what should we take from this? That what God has to say to Aaron, He wants to have special emphasis. Anyone who has worked for even a relatively small company understands this methodology; that is, the Big Boss usually speaks to the employees through the 2nd in command of the company. And, part of the reason for this is so on those rare occasions when the Big Boss DOES speak directly to an employee the employee is going to pay special attention.....and the event is usually accompanied with some amount of fearful trepidation. Considering that what Yehoveh is about to speak to Aaron is coming very soon after the horrifying death of Aaron's first and second-born sons, you can bet Aaron was all ears.

What Aaron is told is that prior to performing his or her priestly function, no priest should drink any intoxicating beverage (in Hebrew this is the word **yayin**, which is typically used in conjunction with the word **shekar**. Yayin means "wine", and shekar means "strong intoxicating drink". Yayin, wine, is exactly as we think of wine.....fermented grape with a relatively small alcohol content. **Shekar** refers to wine that has been allowed to ferment longer and so has a much higher alcohol content; and it also refers to beers and ales made from grain). This instruction not to drink alcohol is specifically linked to functions whereby the priests must enter the Tabernacle's Sanctuary, the Mishkan, the Tent of Meeting. Now was this a new law that countermanded previous directives? After all: much of the ceremony and ritual that God had recently ordered INVOLVED the use of wine to a small degree. No this is not a new and different order; it is simply an instruction to the priesthood that they are to be fully sober in the undertaking of all their priestly duties before the Lord.

Now does this mean that there may be a connection between what happened to Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's sons, and drunkenness? Perhaps. One would have to assume something that is not plainly stated anywhere in Scripture.....that Nadav and Avihu were drunk, and so weren't thinking straight when they approached the Lord in an unauthorized manner (a strange incense offering by fire), and in an unauthorized place (the Holy of Holies, a place they were NEVER permitted to go). But it is known that priests of many of the world's pagan religions got liquored up pretty good before they assumed their duties. Many of the world's religions use drugs and intoxicants as part of their religious ceremony. So perhaps Nadav and Avihu were guilty of this

infraction and so this regulation prohibiting drinking wine just before going on duty is to make clear that none of that is to happen with followers of Yehoveh.

Yet there is no evidence that drunkenness was ever a problem with the Israelite priesthood; bad judgment at times yes; drunkenness, no. I think this incident has more to do with God making it abundantly clear that these priests, including the High Priest, had no latitude in their rituals; the smallest deviation from God's explicit commands COULD be met with the severest discipline.....as demonstrated by the Nadav and Avihu incident. Either way, the idea being expressed to Aaron is that clear headedness and attention to detail was necessary.....not just to keep the potential violator from a gruesome death at the hands of the Creator, but because the Priesthood had some very important duties to perform for the benefit of the people of Israel.

Without going back over the deaths of Aaron's two sons, let's remember what Yehoveh said was the real problem with what Nadav and Avihu had committed: in verse 3, He said "...and before all the people I WILL be glorified." Priests were teachers as well as officiators of the rituals; and even more, they were NEAR-God; and the Word makes it clear that FAR more than words it was the **actions** of the teacher that affected their followers. What the student **observed** his teacher doing was likely to be what the student emulated.

Further it was the priest's job....let me go so far as to say it was their most important DUTY..... to (as it says in verse 10) distinguish between the sacred and the common, and between the clean and the unclean. And while often the distinction was a simple matter at other times it was not so easy. The priests carried a great responsibility and soberness of thought in the service of the King of the Universe was necessary to avoid God's wrath due to some type of careless error, especially when it endangered His holiness.

I suspect most people in this room have, at some time in their life, gotten a little tipsy. And even though that may have been long ago for some of you, you undoubtedly remember that you don't have to be blind drunk to start making compromises and unwise judgments that you wouldn't normally make if you hadn't been drinking.....or doing drugs. What is key to grasp, so as not to lose context, is that those who are actively doing something in the direct service of the Lord.....pastoring, teaching, leading, ministering, whatever.....shouldn't drink intoxicating beverages prior to beginning that activity, because you are representing Yehoveh and your carelessness could not only cause YOU to do something offensive to God (which is dangerous to His Holiness and your well-being), it could cause others to believe such carelessness is OK.

I must also make clear, however, that in no wise is this an instruction that one may not drink wine or some other alcoholic beverage. In fact, the whole Bible, from beginning to end, makes it clear that **yayin**, wine, is a gift from God. It is symbolic of joy, not drunkenness. It is most certainly appropriate in moderate quantities during certain ceremonies and occasions to lighten the mood. Yet downright drunkenness is never approved PRIMARILY because it affects decision-making. And especially for those near-to-God....priests in the OT days and Believers in NT times.....we are to be more careful than those who are NOT near-to-God. Because the standard we bear is much higher.

Beginning in verse 12, Moses is more or less going over a checklist of what the priests **should**

have been doing; considering what just transpired with Aaron's sons, it was probably a pretty good idea. Moses makes sure that the Minchah offering, the grain offering, ritual is completed as it was supposed to be; that in this case, the dough was to be unleavened, and it was to be eaten by the priests in the courtyard of the Tabernacle....or, more literally, "beside the Altar", meaning the Brazen Altar. A couple of things are being communicated here: first, is that the incident involving Nadav and Avihu has not changed anything. The rituals and their purposes remain the same. Second is that Aaron and his remaining sons still bear the office of priests, this has not been taken from them.

Next, more of the burnt offerings are discussed and reminders are made of just how they are to be performed. We won't go there, because we've already dissected these particular rituals in some detail in prior lessons.

Now, interestingly (beginning in verse 16), when Moses inquired about the status of the purification offering, the Hatta'at, he gets quite angry. Because, as he feared, the carelessness that Nadav and Avihu had displayed and paid the ultimate price for, led to Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's remaining two sons, doing something similar but apparently not quite as serious. They ate the meat of the Hatta'at offering in an improper manner; they were supposed to eat it ONLY inside the sacred precinct.....that is, within the courtyard of the Tabernacle.....but instead, they ignored God's specific command and ate it somewhere else. Why weren't they destroyed for this violation? I don't know. Paul, in Romans 9:15, quotes directly from Exodus 33 when he attempts to answer a similar question: NIV **Romans 9:15** "**For he (Yehoveh) says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."**" We are simply in no place to question God's decisions on such matters; He decided, it's His prerogative to decide, and that is that.

One final issue and we'll move on to Chapter 11. At the end of chapter 10, in verses 19 and 20, we get this somewhat difficult-to-decipher conversation between Aaron and Moses in which Aaron talks about what has befallen him, and if he and his sons HAD eaten the Hatta'at in the manner that was commanded, would Yehoveh have approved? Seems like a rather odd question, doesn't it? After all the question SEEMS to be, "well, if I had performed the Hatta'at and eaten the meat in the manner required, would that have been acceptable to God"? But that's not actually what is meant here. So what was this all about? It was common for Hebrew families in mourning not to eat food for a time. In this case the matter was particularly problematic because what was involved was not just ordinary food.....it was HOLY food....for it was the portion specifically set aside for the priests from God's Holy Property. Apparently the priests felt they were caught between a rock and a hard place; do they eat the Hatta'at portion of the meat assigned to them, or do they NOT eat it all due to the death of their family members and the required mourning rituals? They mostly certainly chose wrongly because they were told not to mourn for their charbroiled kin. But, for his own reasons, Moses seemed to be understanding of the dilemma and God accepted Moses' determination that the priests would not bear any disciplinary action for this misadventure.

I need to point out that Aaron asked, "would the LORD approve", and then we're told that **MOSES** approved. Remember Moses was unique in all Biblical history; Moses spoke for God. If Moses spoke it, it was as if God spoke it. And that is NOT tradition; that is a direct

scriptural instruction from Yehoveh.

LEVITICUS CHAPTER 11

Chapter 11 is the beginning of a new section of Leviticus that the Lord has been setting the stage for since the 20th chapter of Exodus. Because beginning with Leviticus 11, and continuing through chapter 16, we get the laws of ritual purity laid out for us. Fittingly it starts with the laws of diet.....what in Hebrew is called Kashrut. We know it more generically as Kosher eating.

In the previous chapter, chapter 10 verse 10, we were told that perhaps the primary duty of priests ***“is to distinguish between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean.”*** You’ll recall that that statement was made in the context of not drinking wine immediately before performing priestly duties, as clear mindedness was necessary for proper discernment and good judgment, lest Yehoveh’s holiness be violated and His divine retribution be the result.

Before we read chapter 11 together, I’d like to make a few points. There is nothing of more paramount importance in the lifestyle that Yehoveh has ordained for Israel than purity and holiness. And He sums up WHY this is, in verse 45 of chapter 11: ***“I am Yehoveh who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God. Therefore YOU are to be holy, for I am holy.”*** The Torah calls for a holy and pure lifestyle, as defined by God, for the people of Israel. There is absolutely no doubt that the Torah was given to Israel and to no one else. All these laws and commands and rituals and sacrifices were NOT for just anyone.....they were reserved for Israel. Now before some of you get too concerned about that last comment please understand that there is more to that simplistic statement than meets the eye. For example, foreigners were certainly allowed to join Israel. And a foreigner who officially joined Israel was considered an Israelite. Yehoveh did not create two classes of Israelites: the natural born and the adopted. All were considered equal in His eyes, and were to operate under the same covenants and justice system; and this principle applies directly to our condition, as gentiles, and our relationship with Israel in New Testament times. So as I have addressed a Believer’s relationship with Israel on more than one occasion, and will undoubtedly do so again, for now just take at face value the truth that the Torah was given to Israel as a specially chosen people. And that Romans 11 states clearly and emphatically that gentile Believers have been grafted into Israel; so, on a spiritual level, Believers (gentile foreigners) have become one with Israel.

Now one of the things that we will delve into is whether or not Kosher eating was abolished by Yeshua or is still in effect; and if it is still in effect, who is obligated to follow it? This is a dicey subject. Eminent scholars, Jewish and gentile, Believer and secular, have suggested a wide ranging set of views on this often emotion-charged topic.

However before we dive into those turbulent waters let me discuss an aspect of Kashrut that is not so controversial: and it is that the Hebrew diet was center stage on the matter of purity and holiness. As important as the Torah makes diet some would argue that Judaism has taken the matter FAR beyond the rather succinct Scriptural regulations concerning eating and has made

it a food cult unto itself. Yet these laws that we'll study in Leviticus 11 are important enough that they are repeated in Deuteronomy 14, though with somewhat different emphasis. We're going to talk a lot about purity, cleanness, and holiness, so it is worthwhile to have a review of what those concepts, taken together, seem to mean in a Biblical sense. I say Biblical sense, because what I'll explain does NOT necessarily reflect modern Judaism or doctrine based Christianity.....that is it does not necessarily reflect Tradition and customs. It is the Scriptural view.

We'll tackle that subject to begin our study next week.