

# The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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How Will You Worship the Next Time? (Part 8)

Exodus 24:1-2, 9-11

Last month we began considering the Man-made Worship of Nadab and Abihu. As I mentioned at the close of last month's article, Nadab and Abihu should have known better. They had been on the mountain and saw God. They should have desired to worship God again, but in the right way. Why they tried to make up some other way is beyond my comprehension. It would make more sense if they had never gone up Mount Sinai and had never seen God. For someone who does not know God and has never heard God's commandments against other gods and idols, I can understand why they have false gods. But these two men heard God Himself forbid other gods in the first commandment and idols made to worship Him in the second commandment. Then they saw the feet of God and ate in His presence. Why would they try something that they were not supposed to be doing? I will never understand it.

Now that we have considered The Contributors to this Man-made Worship, we move on to The Circumstances. The Bible does not give much detail about what happened, but we will discuss what is found in Leviticus 10:1. The verse says, "*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.*" Right now we are going to focus on the words took, put fire, and put incense—the actions of Nadab and Abihu. At this point the tabernacle is being used for the first time. Let me see if we can grasp just how soon Leviticus 10 takes place after Exodus 24. This should help us realize how fresh their vision of God should have been. The time span will be a bit longer than Aaron's, but that is still no excuse for their actions. In Exodus 19:1, we find that it is the third month after they leave Egypt. In Exodus

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24, we read that God reveals at least his feet to the elders of Israel. From Exodus 25-31, God gives the details of the Tabernacle to Moses. After the interlude with the golden calf in Exodus 32-33, Moses went back up Sinai in chapter 34. At the end of chapter 34, Moses comes down from the mount and in chapter 35 the people bring the materials for the Tabernacle. Bezaleel leads in the making of the material for the Tabernacle and priests throughout Exodus 36-39. In Exodus 40, the Tabernacle is set up and verse 17 gives the time as being the first day of the first month of the second year after leaving Egypt. In totality, the time from Exodus 19 to Exodus 40 is nine months. Sometime after the third month, maybe as early as the end of the third or start of the fourth, Nadab, Abihu, and the others saw God.

Numbers begins on the first day of the second month of the second year, so all of Leviticus takes place within a month. Leviticus 1-7 records the details of the offerings that God was expecting the nation to offer unto Him. Chapter 8 records the process of the dedication of Aaron and his sons as priest, and in chapter 9 Aaron and his sons begin their priestly work. That puts us on the doorstep of chapter 10 where Nadab and Abihu commit their sin against God. The last several months since the golden calf incident have been spent in getting the Tabernacle ready and in preparing to worship God. After all that time of preparation, almost as soon as the Tabernacle is finished, Nadab and Abihu sin against God. How could they sin that fast after doing so much to get ready to worship God? You would think that they would be concerned with doing everything right, but they are not. One lesson we can learn from all of this is that we must constantly make sure that everything we are doing is right according to God's Word. As far as we know, Nadab and Abihu were not living a life of gross sin. If so, God would have killed them the moment they walked close to the Tabernacle. As far as we know, they were helping to get all the material for the Tabernacle and helping Bezaleel and Moses in making the Tabernacle itself and also the vessels for worship in the Tabernacle. They were doing what they were supposed to do and almost in an instant did something wrong. It was

at most nine months since seeing God on the mountain. Then they spent several months serving God in preparing the Tabernacle. Once the Tabernacle was up, they sinned. It does not take long or much to displease God. This should not be a cause for worry or disgust. Rather it should make us intent and persistent in staying right. Nadab and Abihu were busy serving God, but quickly departed from that and experienced God's wrath.

Now we get back to The Circumstances that made up their Man-made Worship. Again, verse 1 says that they took their censer, put in the fire, and put in incense. Obviously what they did was wrong because God killed them, but what made it wrong? The only way we can determine what they did wrong was by considering what God said to do about the incense. From Exodus 25-40, the word incense is used in 16 verses. In 6 verses, it is talking about the altar of incense. In most of the other verses, the word incense is just mentioned in a list of things that are made for or used in the tabernacle. Exodus 30 is the only place where some restrictions are made about incense. Exodus 30:7 says that Aaron shall burn incense every morning, and Exodus 30:9 says that no strange incense is to be offered on the altar of incense. Nothing else was to be offered on the altar of incense—no sacrifice of any kind. It was only for incense and only the incense that God told Moses to make in Exodus 30:34-38.

God had not said much about the incense, but he had made it clear that only Aaron could offer it, and it could only be the kind that God told Moses to make in Exodus 30:34-38. If anyone else tried to offer it, they would be disobeying God. If someone made another kind of incense, it would be "strange" incense. Later, in Leviticus 16:11-14, we find the fire for the altar of incense is to be taken from the burnt altar. Any other fire would be "strange" fire.

With these things added together, we can discern what Nadab and Abihu were doing wrong. First, they were burning incense when they were not allowed to do it. Again, only Aaron could burn incense. They were doing something that God had not told them to do. The

other thing that they were doing wrong was offering "strange" fire. Apparently, they had started the fire from some other source other than the fire from the burnt offering. They were trying to worship God, but they were doing it in ways that were contrary to God's commandments.

That brings us to the third part of Man-made Worship. The last two sections of Leviticus 10:1 give us The Comment about Man-made Worship. Those two sections say, "[A]nd offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not." Nothing is said about strange incense, so apparently they had used the right kind of incense. But the fire is described as "strange." Strange means non-acquaintance or no-relatedness. As I mentioned earlier, God would not give the source of the fire until Leviticus 16. Nadab and Abihu were trying to do something that they did not know anything about. God had not revealed how the fire on the altar of incense was to be kindled. Nadab and Abihu may have been sincere, but they were sincerely wrong. It is wrong to jump ahead of God and make your own form of worship or anything else. We cannot assume that God will accept something from us just because we offer it. God has revealed everything about worship in His Word. We must make sure that what we are offering is acceptable in His sight. If we are not sure, then we should not offer it, just in case it might be wrong. We should find out what God's Word says and worship Him according to His commands.

What I have just said is the same thing that God said in the last part of Leviticus 10:1. What made Nadab and Abihu's offer of incense wrong? The last clause of verse 1 says, "Which he commanded them not." God had not told them to offer this incense. In fact, as we saw earlier, God had said who should offer it. Only Aaron was to do it (Exodus 30:7). Nadab and Abihu sinned against God because they did what God said not to do and started the fire in the wrong manner.

Some will say that God will accept anything that is offered out of

a sincere heart. That is not true. It is obvious from this account, but it is also very clear in I Samuel 15:22 that God desires obedience over sacrifice. That verse has come to mind many times as I have been commenting on Nadab and Abihu. It says, “*And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.*” Notice that last sentence—*to obey is better than sacrifice*. Just because you give it to God does not mean that He will accept it. Nadab and Abihu offered incense to God, but He did not accept it. Saul was going to offer animals in sacrifice to God, but God did not want them. For something to be acceptable to God, it must be according to His commands. You must be obedient to God to make a sacrifice that is acceptable unto Him.

In our day, many are offering “sacrifices of praise” unto God. They do so in music. But their music is not acceptable unto God. How do I know? Because the words in the song do not line up with Scripture. I have heard people sing songs which they think are wonderful. But the words are contrary to Scripture. The people either are not listening to what they are singing, or they are ignorant of Scripture. I do not know which is worse, but to be honest, they are both wrong. We should know enough of Scripture to know if a song is accurate. Some will say, “But it sounds good.” Sounding good is not the qualification for a good song. It must be Scripturally accurate. We will continue next month.