

Whether the Levitical priests were required to offer up the morning and evening sacrifices on the altar, or whether they were to minister to the poor, afflicted, down hearted, and imprisoned of their day—they were to perform their function faithfully unto Him. God’s people today are to still perform the acts of good service that testify of His love and mercy to all! *Such a “priestly” service is even more imperative in this post-resurrection era where permanent atonement has been offered.* Yet as today’s born again Believers accomplish this priestly service, we must have the indwelling power of the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) to guide us, so the actions we perform for Him do not become mundane or lose their importance.

Are you fulfilling God’s call upon your life to be a part of the Body of Messiah, as a living sacrifice?

Shemini שְׁמִינִי Eighth “True Shock and Awe”

Leviticus 9:1-11:47
2 Samuel 6:1-7:17 (A); 6:1-19 (S)

The title of our Torah portion for this week, *Shemini* or “Eighth,” points one to the chronological context of the “eighth day” that begins this section of Leviticus. A glance at the concluding statements from *Tzav* last week, notes how the seven days of consecration which God required of Aaron and his sons has just been completed. Aaron and his sons had been very busy anointing and consecrating the Tabernacle, various implements for sacrifice, different accoutrements for the Tent of Meeting, and even themselves:

“At the doorway of the tent of meeting, moreover, you shall remain day and night for seven days and keep the charge of the LORD, so that you will not die, for so I have been commanded. Thus Aaron and his sons did all the things which the LORD had commanded through Moses” (Leviticus 8:35-36).

Our selection in *Shemini* begins with, “Now it came about on the eighth day that Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel” (Leviticus 9:1). Now that the seven days of consecration are completed, the glory of God is ready to manifest itself before the Ancient Israelites. The Tabernacle’s system of offerings and sacrifices is ready to begin its designated function:

“Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he stepped down after making the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces” (Leviticus 9:22-24).

This is a very dramatic and exciting section of Scripture to contemplate and imagine in one’s mind’s eye. Now that the anointing and consecration of the Tabernacle have been completed, and all of the required sacrifices have been offered, the glory of the Lord, *kavod-ADONAI* (כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה), appears.

Aaron first lifts up his hands, and then Moses blesses the people. Then, God's glory falls upon the Tent of Meeting. In a powerful way, a fire comes down and consumes the burnt offering and portions of fat on the altar. The appearance of the all-consuming fire was so overwhelming that the people shouted for joy that their offerings were acceptable and fell on their faces in awe.⁸

Aaron's Sons Consumed

Following Leviticus ch. 9, there is a distinct break as the scene of the Tabernacle changes from readers seeing the glory of God manifested—to a very tragic incident involving the deaths of Nadab and Abihu. For some unstated reason in the text, the two eldest sons of Aaron decided to offer up some “strange fire” (Heb. *esh zarah*, אֵשׁ זָרָה) that was unauthorized by the Holy One of Israel. They soon discover that unsanctioned activities at this sacred place—based on their own volitional choices—have terminal consequences:

“Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD” (Leviticus 10:1-2).

The death of these two men was a stunning and unexpected tragedy. It was a clear display of God's apparent displeasure with the actions of Nadab and Abihu. Moments before in the text, a holy fire consumes sacrificial offerings. But then, for offering up “unholy fire” (RSV) or “unauthorized fire” (NIV), the heirs-apparent of Aaron are consumed. As the Hebrew verb *akal* (אָכַל) describes it, they were “eat[en], devour[ed], consume[d]” (AMG).⁹ This is the same verb used previously for the consumption of the offering (Leviticus 9:24). The same God who demonstrated His pleasure with the presentation of offerings before Him in Leviticus 9, is now displeased with the presentation of inappropriate fire before Him in Leviticus 10.

Aaron was in *total shock* after seeing his two sons die by the force of God. Because of the severity of the Levitical service, Moses communicates these direct commands to Aaron, which he had received from the Lord:

“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” (Leviticus 10:3).

⁸ As an aside, it is interesting to note two things from this account. First, witnessing supernatural actions *in person* can generate enough fear to buckle the stiffest of knees. Second, the witnesses to God's glory falling and the fire consuming the offerings caused the Ancient Israelites to fall on their faces. This incident, and others throughout the Scriptures (i.e., Genesis 17:3; Numbers 16:4; Joshua 5:14; Daniel 8:17; Matthew 17:6), indicate how people generally respond to the genuine presence of God.

Back in the early to mid-1990s, a phenomenon was moving through various charismatic circles known by a variety of names such as the “Toronto blessing” or “holy laughter.” As people claimed to have been blessed by various speakers, etc., many were falling down under the supposed power of the Holy Spirit. In many cases, as they were being prayed for, the typical response was to see people fall on their backs as they were being touched—rather than fall forward on the face, as is typical from the Scriptural examples.

Things like this should make one pause and ask just what kind of a “spirit” was being served. If more of the participants had been conscious of the Biblical examples where people *fall on their faces* before God, there could have been a recognition that these actions needed to be viewed with a more critical eye. Thankfully today, as more and more Believers become better acquainted with the basic principles of God's Torah, He will equip us to more properly question the origins of the various spiritual phenomenon we encounter.

⁹ Baker and Carpenter, 49.

Certainly, these words from God spoken by Moses, struck a chord with Aaron. Could it have been possible that Aaron thought back to the admonition uttered just before the Decalogue was received at Mount Sinai? Here the instruction was, “Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, or else the LORD will break out against them” (Exodus 19:22).

At this juncture, Moses was warning not just the Levites, but by extension all of the Ancient Israelites, to not be presumptuous about approaching their Creator. The priests needed to be reminded about the necessity of personal consecration, lest they be punished for presenting something unholy or inappropriate before the Lord.

Leviticus 10:3 is clear how “Aaron remained silent” (NIV) as Moses delivered instruction following the deaths of Nadab and Abihu. Can you imagine what was going through his mind? He was responsible for the golden calf incident in Exodus 32, and yet here he was still standing, in spite of three thousand Israelites slaughtered. For what could seem to be a far lesser offense than committing idolatry against the Holy One, he had to look at the charred remains of his sons. Aaron understood in a very visible way that in order to be in the presence of the Lord, one must be sanctified unto Him.

What can we learn from this today, in the era of New Covenant when Yeshua’s sacrifice has offered permanent forgiveness from sins? *The Lord still requires His people to be holy in order for them to access to His presence.* He demands that He be glorified and properly honored by His creatures. It is quite possible that Aaron was terrified into thinking that he could be the next victim of the consuming fire of God. While Believers today might have the sacrifice of Yeshua covering their transgressions, even the Apostolic Scriptures admonish us, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

Pleasing the Holy One

There is speculation by the Jewish Rabbis that Nadab and Abihu were perhaps under the influence of alcohol when they made the bad decision to offer up strange fire on the altar.¹⁰ This is a possibility, as they could have been intoxicated so as to not properly follow the procedures that the Lord required of them as consecrated priests. The mention of this prohibition, several verses later in Leviticus 10, is a good textual clue that they could have indeed been drunk:

“Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die—it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations—and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean, and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them through Moses” (Leviticus 10:9-11).

The problem with alcohol may provide some explanation, but we need not overlook some of the verses which appear between the description of Nadab and Abihu’s death (Leviticus 10:1-3) and then the description of how priests were not to drink while on duty (Leviticus 10:9-11). Some intriguing statements are made in Leviticus 10:6-7, succinctly describing how holy God considers the priestly office to be:

“Then Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, ‘Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, so that you will not die and that He will not become wrathful against all the congregation. But your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, shall bewail the

¹⁰ J.H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: Soncino Press, 1960), 445.

burning which the LORD has brought about. You shall not even go out from the doorway of the tent of meeting, or you will die; for the LORD's anointing oil is upon you.' So they did according to the word of Moses" (Leviticus 10:6-7).

Aaron's other two sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, will take the place of Nadab and Abihu as priests. They are all instructed not to mourn for the untimely deaths of their brothers. Then they are told to not even leave the Tent of Meeting, because "the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you" (RSV).

The God of Israel was very serious about His chosen priests honoring the office in which they were to serve. In some respects, you can ascertain that from the shock of the consuming deaths of Nadab and Abihu, a genuine awe and reverence of the Lord has settled in the hearts of Aaron and his other sons. Obedience to these directives was adhered to without question. As this section of Leviticus closes, Moses asks Aaron and his sons why they have not followed the instructions to partake of the "holy" offerings that were clear instructions from the Most High:

"Why did you not eat the sin offering at the holy place? For it is most holy, and He gave it to you to bear away the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD. Behold, since its blood had not been brought inside, into the sanctuary, you should certainly have eaten it in the sanctuary, just as I commanded.' But Aaron spoke to Moses, 'Behold, this very day they presented their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD. When things like these happened to me, if I had eaten a sin offering today, would it have been good in the sight of the LORD?' When Moses heard *that*, it seemed good in his sight" (Leviticus 10:17-20).

Aaron responds to this rebuke with a very heartfelt reply, which indicates that the circumstances of his sons' deaths, in his mind, prohibited them from eating the sin offering. Having seen his two sons die in a very tragic way, and having heard the admonitions about mourning and leaving the presence of the Lord while under the anointing, Aaron's heart seems to finally be in the right place.

Even with the potential for immediate Divine retribution, Aaron's contrite response was, "would the LORD have approved?" (NJPS). Apparently, this was what the Lord was looking for from His high priest and his sons, and Moses was satisfied with the response (Leviticus 10:20). Since Aaron was not consumed for disregarding the requirements for the sin offering, the Lord was pleased with his service as high priest of Israel.

In *Shemini*, God makes it clear through a very dramatic episode, what He required of the Levitical priesthood. As exemplified in Aaron and his sons, He desires a set-apart people who understand the call upon their lives, and who put His interests as Creator ahead of their own as mortals. Aaron learns from the shocking deaths of Nadab and Abihu that being presumptuous with how someone approaches God can bring significant consequences. *Aaron was a changed man*. Is it possible that he went through some kind of a mental checklist, asking the question of whether or not God would approve, before every priestly action he took? These initial scenes had to be preparatory for the great responsibility that being the high priest of Israel would entail.

Conforming to His Image

Today, as representatives of the God of Israel in the Earth, we need to approach our service unto Him with the same kind of sobriety that Aaron developed. We need to understand His ways, a very important part of which involves personal Torah study. So

much knowledge and understanding about God’s holiness can be imparted to us by a review of the weekly *parashah*, as we contemplate not only the continuing trajectory of God’s Word, but also His mission and calling for our individual lives.

In Leviticus 11, a part of our Torah portion for this week, we encounter the first major instruction detailing the kosher dietary laws. Many Believers today will casually dismiss these directions given by God, because they think they were only for a previous time or age. But at the same time, several prominent evangelical Christians today—because of the poor health of many in our society—have spoken in favor of the *health benefits* that are derived from not eating certain meats. Are God’s people to be regulated by Him in simple matters like their diet? Can you learn anything about God’s holiness by what you eat?¹¹

As we search our own hearts in these days of “shock and awe,”¹² perhaps we should ask the Lord to give us hearts that are reminiscent of Aaron’s heart—hopefully without having to witness the same kind of dramatic encounters that he saw! Learning from *Shemini*, before we take actions, we should learn to ask the simple question **of whether or not God would approve**. By training our hearts and minds to such a pattern of behavior, those called into His service can demonstrate how they are being conformed to the image of Yeshua:

“For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified” (Romans 8:29-30).

Let us be reminded that Yeshua only did what the Father instructed Him to do:

“So Yeshua said, ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me’” (John 8:28).

By His grace, may we also be reminded that we, as obedient servants, should be doing only that which the Lord has instructed us. By being sensitive to His will, not only will He be glorified—but we might find ourselves truly in awe of His work *through us*. If we choose otherwise, we may be in for an unexpected shock!

***Tazria* תְּזַרִּיעַ** **She Conceives** **“What Did Yeshua Do?”**

Leviticus 12:1-13:59

2 Kings 4:42-5:19

One of the many blessings that today’s Messianic Believers receive in committing themselves to a consistent, weekly examination of the Torah portion, is the much fuller perspective that they naturally receive of the Scriptures. Too frequently, people who read the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament, when reading references about the Mosaic

¹¹ For a further discussion, consult the *Messianic Kosher Helper*.

¹² The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (2002-2003).