

# Purpose of the Priesthood 2 - Leviticus 10

To Read:

1. Exodus 30:1-10, 34-38
2. Numbers 16:1-40
3. Acts 5:1-11
4. I Peter 2:4-12

## 1 I. Introduction

### A. This morning we're continuing in the second section of Leviticus

1. So first, we can recall what Leviticus is about - Leviticus is answering the question, "how can Israel dwell with a holy God?" And, as we apply it to ourselves, "how can we dwell with a holy God?"
- 1 2. And, if we put our outline up on the screen, we're still in the first half of the book, Judicial Holiness, dealing with the question, "how do we become holy?"
- 1 3. Two weeks ago, we started the second section here, which introduces the priesthood
- 1 4. First, we saw an ordination ceremony where Aaron and his sons were ordained as priests
- 1 5. Then, last week, we saw the ordained priests stand before God to offer the people's sacrifice
6. And like last week, we're picking up right where we left off, still on the eighth day

### B. So, Leviticus 10 starts in the middle of the eighth day, right after the glory of the Lord appears to all the people

1. The sacrifices had been offered and accepted by God with fire coming out from His presence, but the sacrifices weren't done yet because the sacrifices had not yet been eaten - which we'll see at the end of chapter 10
2. But Leviticus 10 takes an unexpected turn - everything is going well, the priest have fulfilled their duty and God's glory has appeared, fire from the Lord, but then tragedy strikes as fire comes out from before the Lord again
- 1 2 3. Leviticus 9:24-10:2 - *And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. 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. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.*
- 1 4. On the very day that the Lord's glory appeared to Israel, Nadab and Abihu transgress in the holy things and are consumed in fire by God - but this isn't just a sad story, it is carefully designed to teach, and it is structured to teach the second purpose of the priesthood; this morning we're going to see that a priest has two functions:
  - a. As we saw last week, the priest represents man to God, he is able to stand before God to offer the sacrifice for the people without being consumed
  - b. And this week we're going to see that the priest also represents God to man, he is to display the honor and the glory of God to the people of Israel
5. So the priest is a mediator, he stands between representing both sides: man to God and God to man

### 1 C. We'll start in Leviticus 10 - if you have your Bibles turn with me there and we'll read it together

### 1 D. Proposition: The priests were called to represent God to the people and therefore must hold up God's holiness, which calls us to rejoice in our perfect Priest who represents God to us and to consider how we represent God to the world.

- 1 1. What did it teach the ancient Israelites about God?
- 1 2. How should this point us to Christ?
- 1 3. How should this be applied to the New Testament believer?

## 1 II. What did this teach the ancient Israelites about God?

### A. As we look at Leviticus 10, it's a story we have probably all heard before although it might not be one of the best known stories and maybe we're unfamiliar with its context

1. If you do know the story well, you've probably heard it connected to what is often called the regulative principle
2. And, while that may be a minor application of our passage this morning, I don't think that is the main point
3. Specifically, we see two stories recorded in Leviticus 10 about two pairs of brothers and the stories are contrasted:
  - 1 a. Nadab and Abihu transgress, doing what was not commanded, and God's wrath consumes them
  - 1 b. And Eleazar and Ithamar also transgress, not doing what was commanded, but God is apparently pleased
- 1 4. Understanding these two stories and how they frame the voice of the Lord in the middle of our passage is going to help us understand what this passage is about - so I want to start by asking some questions about our passage:
  - a. What was Nadab and Abihu's transgression?
  - b. Why did God not respond to Eleazar and Ithamar's transgression in the same way?
  - c. What is God telling Aaron in the center of our passage?
  - d. How does God's voice in the center of our passage explain our passage?

### 1 B. What was Nadab and Abihu's transgression?

1. The first thing we should notice about our passage this morning is that there is a significant break in the flow here
  - a. In chapters 8 and 9, four times a command is recorded and the immediate obedience to that command
  - b. And a repeated phrase happens throughout this section - some variation of, "as the Lord commanded Moses" - to emphasize that all the acts are acts of obedience, this phrase occurs 10 times
  - c. So it is a stark contrast at the beginning of chapter 10 that action takes place without command
  - 1 1 d. Leviticus 10:1 - *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.*
  - e. But why was this un-commanded fire such a bad thing?
  - 1 f. There is an interesting phrase used to describe Nadab and Abihu's actions here - they brought what your version might call unauthorized or strange or profane fire before the Lord
  - g. That word translated unauthorized actually means alien or foreign - it's a word that means to turn aside for lodging so it described a foreigner in a foreign land who needed to find a place to stay
  - h. Interestingly, it's a word that's often used in conjunction with the burning of incense before God - we read about the prohibition of burning alien incense in Exodus 30 and the prohibition of alien people burning incense in Numbers 16, and here we see Nadab and Abihu offer alien fire on the altar of incense
  - i. It is clear that alien things were excluded from God's sanctuary, and I think that's why the term 'alien' is used - these things were uninvited, they were alien to the sanctuary, they were outside of God's command
  - j. The word carries the connotation of an uninvited guest in these passages - this was God's house and people were bringing unwelcomed, uninvited guests into His house
2. So Nadab and Abihu brought an uninvited guest with them into God's house
  - a. And here's where I think the severity of their transgression lies - they treated God's house as though it were their house, they treated God's house as though they could do whatever they wanted in it
  - b. And in doing so, they desecrated God's honor and glory - they said, with their actions, that God is not a holy God, not a God to be feared, that coming into His presence is a casual thing
  - c. They treated God's house, and by extension God Himself, casually, without honor

### 1 C. So, why did God not respond to Eleazar and Ithamar's transgression in the same way?

- 1 1. As we come to the second story in Leviticus 10, we see another transgression of God's command but with a very different outcome, Leviticus 10:16-17 - *Now Moses diligently inquired about the goat of the sin offering, and behold, it was burned up! And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the surviving sons of Aaron, saying, "Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the place of the sanctuary, since it is a thing most holy and has been given to you that you may bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD?"*
  - 1 a. This was a direct violation of Leviticus 6:25-26 - *This is the law of the sin offering. In the place where the burnt offering is killed shall the sin offering be killed before the LORD; it is most holy. The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. In a holy place it shall be eaten, in the court of the tent of meeting.*

2. So, why doesn't God respond with fire from the Lord?
  - a. Our first thought might be to contrast a sin of commission (Nadab and Abihu) with a sin of omission (Eleazar and Ithamar) - but I'm not sure this is the right way to go
    - i. Sometimes we talk about sins of omission as though they are lesser sins than those of commission, but in my experience this really isn't true, and we can see this if we tell a couple of stories
    - ii. Say one morning, I get up, I'm working around the house and I hear something on the outside of the house and my son is there painting on the side of the house. He says, "hey dad, I decided to paint the house today." You might be a little irritated because your son did something you didn't tell him to do.
    - iii. In contrast, say one morning, you get up and tell your son, "today you need to paint the house." You go about your work, but you notice you don't hear anything outside the house so you go investigate. Your son is not painting the house so you go ask him why. He says, "dad, I decided that I didn't want to paint the house today." You probably are irritated because your son didn't do something you told him to do.
    - iv. Which one of these sons would you be more irritated with? Which one is more guilty?
  - b. And Moses knew that Eleazar and Ithamar had 'merely' not done what the Lord had commanded and he's still angry, he's still terrified that God's going to destroy them - "why did you do this? I can't have all the priests die on their first day in office!" By the end of the day Moses is driven to exasperation by Aaron and his sons.
  - c. So, I don't think this is a simple difference between Nadab and Abihu doing something that wasn't commanded and Eleazar and Ithamar not doing something that was commanded, because the omission was much more clearly against the law of God than the commission - there has to be something more going on
3. I think the big difference between the two stories is the background attitudes that led to the transgressions
  - a. As we just saw, Nadab and Abihu treated God's Tabernacle with contempt, casually, without honor, but Eleazar and Ithamar's transgression is different
    - 1 b. Listen to Aaron's explanation in verse 19 - *And Aaron said to Moses, "Behold, today they have offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD, and yet such things as these have happened to me! If I had eaten the sin offering today, would the LORD have approved?"*
    - c. Aaron said that he and his two remaining sons refrained from eating the sin offering because they were terrified of God - they showed honor and fear to the Holy One, fearing to transgress in His presence
    - d. And Moses, and apparently God because He didn't burn anyone up this time, approved
    - e. The difference between the two stories is the attitude of honor, of reverence, of fear, the acknowledgement that they were approaching a holy and terrible God and they were entering into His sanctuary
    - f. Nadab and Abihu treated God with contempt, Eleazar and Ithamar saw the wrath of God and feared
    - g. Both of them were 'outside the bounds' in various ways, but for vastly different reasons

**1 D. What is God telling Aaron in the center of our passage?**

1. Let's read verses 8-11 - *And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying, "Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses."*
2. This is the center of our passage this morning and what the passage is trying to highlight, and each of God's words to Aaron emphasize ways that the priesthood is to be honorable, to reflect the honor of God
- 1 3. So the priests were not to be drunk when they entered the sanctuary - that would show great dishonor to God and would reflect poorly on who God was - look, God's priest is up there about to fall off the altar he's so drunk!
- 1 4. Moreover, the priests were to be those who distinguished between the holy and the profane, the clean and the unclean - they were to display by their wisdom and their separation the holiness of God - the people could get a glimpse of how holy God was because they could see how holy the priests had to be
- 1 5. But the most important command is the third - the priests were to teach Israel the commands of God
6. That was the second purpose of the priest, the priest represented God to the people - the priest would teach the people what God was like, what God desired, what God demanded, they taught the people how to live with God
7. If the priests were to do that, they needed to reflect God rightly - no priest who reflected God poorly could teach the people what God was like - if the priests desecrated God then the entire congregation would dishonor Him
8. So the priests had to be holy and then teach the people holiness - they were God's representative to the people

**1 E. How does God's voice in the center of our passage explain our passage?**

1. This idea of the priest being God's representative ties our passage together this morning
2. Nadab and Abihu treated God with contempt as they brought uninvited fire into His house; they represented God poorly, they represented God as low and debased, not someone who should be approached with fear and honor
  - 1 a. And this concept is specifically referenced, verse 3 - *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.'"*
  - 1 b. God had said, "those near me (that is, the priests) must sanctify me, because I want all the people to glorify me" - and this is exactly what Nadab and Abihu failed to do, they failed to show the sanctity of God
3. This idea explains the instructions to the Aaron about the death of his sons
  - 1 a. Verses 6-7 - *And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons, "Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation; but let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning that the LORD has kindled. And do not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.*
  - b. Since his ordination as priest, Aaron was no longer primarily the father of Nadab and Abihu, he was God's representative to the people, so he couldn't mourn for his sons or leave the sanctuary
  - c. He couldn't go about disheveled, with loose, unkempt hair and torn clothing, because God wasn't that way, God wasn't distraught or damaged by this situation and neither could Aaron be
  - d. It might seem harsh, but God's great desire is to display His glory and Aaron was His representative
4. And this explains why Eleazar and Ithamar were not destroyed
  - a. Eleazar and Ithamar approached God with fear and trembling, through their actions they displayed a God who was to be honored, who was to be feared
  - b. They did what Nadab and Abihu did not - they showed the sanctity of God to the people of Israel and called all Israel to wonder and to fear

**1 F. Now that we've worked through the passage together, let's try to make some short statements about what this passage should have taught the ancient Israelites - what did it mean?**

1. First, God is holy
  - a. I may have said this before, but this is the emphatic, repeated teaching of Leviticus - God is a holy God
  - b. He is not a God whom you can approach casually, He is not your buddy, or your cheerleader, or your big Santa Claus; He's not a magic omen, or a weak regional deity to be controlled - He is the God of the universe, it's creator and sustainer, and He upholds all by the Word of His power
  - c. The activity here on the second half of the eighth day would have strongly reminded the watching Israelites of that truth and as time went on, new generations of Israelites could read and remember
  - d. Our God is a holy God, an awesome and powerful and jealous and terrible God, a God whose wrath will consume the trespasser
- 1.2. And so, second, God's people must recognize His holiness
  - a. If God is a holy God, then God's people need to live in reverent fear of Him - they must honor Him as God and respect His holiness and they must approach in a way that reflects that truth
  - b. To approach God casually is to treat God with contempt, to deny His holiness and such approach would be terribly dangerous, such an approach would cause God's wrath to burn against the trespasser
- 1.3. And so, third, God's priests must display His holiness
  - a. This is the main point of the passage - God's priests need to represent Him well, they need to display God's holiness to the people so that they will glorify Him
  - b. So the priests needed to be honorable, they needed to approach God with honor and fear, and they needed to teach the people what God was like and what God desired and demanded of them
  - c. The priest was God's representative among the people and therefore He would be held to the highest standard - if he failed to honor God, he would surely be destroyed

**1 G. Kid's question:**

1. What does a priest do?
- 1.2. He represents man to God and God to man

### 1 III. How should this point us to Christ?

#### A. As we turn to our second point this morning, we want to see how Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of this passage, how this passage was longing for Him, how it was incomplete until He came

1. Our passage this morning upholds the priest as God's representative, but, unfortunately, the priests were not good at this, some did better than others, but none of the priests could truly reflect God to the people, they all fell short
2. So the Old Testament records a line of priests, but a line of priests that kept failing to represent God and declare His holiness
  - 1 a. Several generations later, Eli's sons would fail to represent God well and hold Him in contempt, 1 Samuel 2:12-17 - *Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD... Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you but only raw." And if the man said to him, "Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish," he would say, "No, you must give it now, and if not, I will take it by force." Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt.*
  - 1 b. And, as the exile drew near, Ezekiel faulted the priests who could not distinguish between the holy and the common and failed to teach the people, Ezekiel 22:26 - *Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.*
3. But Ezekiel also held out hope that there would one day be temple and a priesthood that would display the holiness of God to God's people
  - 1 a. Ezekiel 42:20 - *He measured [the temple] on the four sides. It had a wall around it, 500 cubits long and 500 cubits broad, to make a separation between the holy and the common.*
  - 1 b. And Ezekiel 44:23-24- *They [the priests] shall teach my people the difference between the holy and the common, and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean. In a dispute, they shall act as judges, and they shall judge it according to my judgments. They shall keep my laws and my statutes in all my appointed feasts, and they shall keep my Sabbaths holy.*
4. Our passage this morning and the long account of Old Testament history longs for a better representative, for God's perfect representative who can perfectly display who God is to the people

#### 1 B. So our passage calls us to see that Jesus is God's perfect representative

1. He is the perfect priest, not only because He can perfectly represent us to God, but also because He can perfectly represent God to us
- 1 2. So Hebrews, the great defense of the priesthood of Christ, starts by emphasizing that Jesus is able to represent God rightly, Hebrews 1:3 - *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.*
  - a. Jesus bore the exact imprint of God's nature and exercised God's power, therefore He could be the perfect representative of God, He could be the perfect priest
- 1 3. Paul expands on this concept in Colossians 1:15-17- *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities---all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*
  - a. Paul emphasizes that Jesus was the exact image of God and participated in all of God's actions in this world, so we can look at Jesus to see what God is like
- 1 4. Or Jesus Himself says, in John 14:8-10 - *Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.*
  - a. Jesus says that if we have seen Him, we have seen the Father - His representation is perfect
- 1 5. And, unlike the Old Testament priests who so often failed, Jesus has perfectly upheld the honor and glory of God through His representation, John 12:27-28 - *"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."*
  - a. Jesus goal was to display the Father's glory and He accomplished that goal
6. Jesus came to be God's representative, to display what God is like to us, and He can do that perfectly in a way that no priest could because He was one with God Himself

## ① IV. How should this be applied to us?

### ① A. We need to fear the holiness of God

1. The Israelites watching this ceremony would have seen and understood that God was holy and must be approached as a holy God with fear and reverence, and nothing has changed - our God is still a consuming fire
2. So the first thing that our passage should call us to see is that our God is a holy and a terrible God, a God who is rightly to be feared
- ① 3. So Hebrews calls us to reverence, Hebrews 12:28-29 - *Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.*
  - a. Our God is still the same God whose wrath burned against Nadab and Abihu and consumed them
  - b. So, just as much as the Israelites should not approach God casually, treating Him as though He was less than He was, we should have that same reverence as we approach God
  - c. Assuredly, the way has been opened in Christ and we are welcomed to come, but we are still approaching a holy and awesome God and should do so honoring who He is
4. And so we are often called to fear God - to recognize God as holy and as judge
  - ① a. Jesus Himself says in Matthew 10:28 - *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*
  - ① b. And Paul calls us to make this the attitude of our salvation, Philippians 2:12 - *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,*
5. Our God is a terrible God, a consuming fire and we can't forget that truth - we must approach with reverence and awe, honoring Him as God Almighty

### ① B. We need to look at Jesus to see God

1. Through our passage this morning, the priests were appointed as God's representatives and Israel was called to come to the priests to understand who God is and what it means to dwell in His presence
2. And this is our second application this morning - we need to come to our priest to see what God is like - if we have been given a better representative then we should come to Him to learn how to dwell with God
- ① 3. Paul puts it this way in II Corinthians 3:12-18 - *Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*
4. Since we have a better revelation than the people of Moses' day did, Paul calls us to gaze upon that revelation - to look at Christ to see the glory of God
5. But particularly notice that Paul says that as we gaze at the glory of Christ we will be transformed into the same image - we will be taught by Christ what it means to honor God's holiness, to dwell in God's presence; we will see our priest and understand God and we will see our priest and be taught to dwell in God's presence
6. So we all, with unveiled faces, should be beholding the glory of the Lord, to be intently looking at Jesus to see God
7. So we should be in Scripture and we should be in prayer with an attitude of desiring to see the glory of Christ, to mine the Word of God to see Christ and to wrestle in prayer to see the glory of Christ
8. We need to come learn from our perfect priest

### 1 C. We need to represent God to this world

1. Jesus has become our perfect priest, the One who perfectly represents God - but we also are called to be priests under Christ, a continuing representation of God in this world
2. And, if that is true, we need to be careful with how we represent Him - we need to make sure that our lives are displaying a holy and awesome God, not a cheap, little God that does only what we want Him to, that serves our needs
13. So Peter calls us to examine our conduct as priests because we are to declare the glory of God, I Peter 2:9-12 - *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*
4. We need to be careful that we organize our lives to display how great God is - we must set aside sinful things that dishonor God and lesser things that devalue God so that the world can see how great our God is
  - a. And God is just as serious about how we represent Him as He was in the Old Testament, which is why the story of Ananias and Saphira is recorded
  - b. Just like at the beginning of Old Testament worship, at the beginning of New Testament worship two believers approached God as though He was less than He really was, as though they could deceive God
  - c. And like the two priests long ago, they were struck down and carried out
  - d. God is still passionate about how we, His people, represent Him
5. It is under this application that we might derive something like the regulative principle
  - a. I'm a little hesitant to uphold the regulative principle because arguments about it can quickly break down into worthless animosity and I'm not sure that our passage even supports a strict regulative principle
  - b. But our passage this morning does call us to make sure that whatever we do in representing God, especially as we gather as a people, is designed to rightly honor God and display who He is
  - c. Which means we need to do what He has called us to and to do it in an attitude of reverence - not pursuing things in worship that please us, or glorify us, or tantalize the world, but pursuing things that declare who God is, declare that God is holy and that God is judge
6. But this doesn't only apply to our time of worship together, but to all of our lives - we should be directing all of our lives in this same manner - am I pursuing the world, am I pleasing myself, or am I displaying the glory of God?