

## 12. 23 Nadab and Abihu's Strange Fire (Leviticus 10:1–20; Numbers 3:1–4)

✓ “Check” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows.

[. . .] indicates a remark to the teacher that should not be read aloud. It also indicates answers to questions.

### Visuals and Tools:

- “The Tabernacle” Flash-a-Cards from A Beka Book and/or pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional materials.
- *Herein Is Love Commentary Series; Leviticus, A Commentary for Children*, by Nancy Ganz, Shepherd Press, 2002. Ideas and quotations from this book will be identified by (Ganz).

### Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: \*

- *censer*: container in which to burn incense

### Scripture (NASB)

Leviticus 10: 1 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. 2 And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. 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.

4 Moses called also to Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Aaron’s uncle Uzziel, and said to them, “Come forward, carry your relatives away from the front of the sanctuary to the outside of the camp.” 5 So they came forward and carried them still in their tunics to the outside of the camp, as Moses had said. 6 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 burning which the LORD has brought about. 7 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.

8 The LORD then spoke to Aaron, saying, 9 “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— 10 and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean, 11 and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them through Moses.”

12 Then Moses spoke to Aaron, and to his surviving sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, “Take the grain offering that is left over from the LORD’s offerings by fire and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy. 13 You shall eat it, moreover, in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons’ due out of the LORD’s offerings by fire; for thus I have been commanded. 14 The breast of the wave offering, however, and the thigh of the offering you may eat in a clean place, you and your sons and your daughters with you; for they have been given as your due and your sons’ due out of the sacrifices of the peace offerings of the sons of Israel. 15 The thigh offered by lifting up and the breast offered by waving they shall bring along with the offerings by fire of the portions of fat, to present as a wave offering before the LORD; so it shall be a thing perpetually due you and your sons with you, just as the LORD has commanded.”

16 But Moses searched carefully for the goat of the sin offering, and behold, it had been burned up! So he was angry with Aaron’s surviving sons Eleazar and Ithamar, saying, 17 “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. 18 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.” 19 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?” 20 When Moses heard *that*, it seemed good in his sight.

Numbers 3:1 Now these are the records of the generations of Aaron and Moses at the time when the Lord spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. 2 These then are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. 3 These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he ordained to serve as priests. 4 But Nadab and Abihu died before the Lord when they offered strange fire before the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of their father Aaron.

### **Introduction/Review:**

Seventy elders of Israel, Moses, Aaron, and Aaron’s two older sons had seen God in a sapphire appearance on the mountain. They had lived to eat and drink and to tell about their experience. God had not slain them.

The tabernacle, the priests’ clothing, and the seven-day consecration of the priests had taken place. The sacrifices God required were on the altar of burnt offering, placed there by Aaron and his sons on the first day of their service as priests. God had sent fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice. All the people had seen this demonstration of God’s majesty and had shouted, falling on their faces to worship God.

### **Story:**

That first day when Aaron and his sons offered sacrifices to the Lord ✓must have been an exciting day for those priests, dressed in distinctive clothing, daring to come before God with the sacrifices.

✓Perhaps Aaron’s two older sons, Nadab and Abihu, were somewhat proud of themselves. ✓Perhaps they thought they could add a bit of personal touch to God’s instruction—just a little enhancement of their worship. Soon after the tabernacle was set up, after the priests had been sanctified, and after the first sacrifices had been offered by the priests—✓perhaps the very same day—Nadab and Abihu brought their own fire and incense in their censers to offer to God. [Teacher, say the next two sentences with sarcastic, insincere sweetness.] Wasn’t that nice? Didn’t that add a special touch to worship? NO! Had God told them to do this? NO! Was God pleased with this addition to worship? NO!

What happened to those disobedient two older sons of Aaron? Fire from the presence of God came down and consumed those two priests.

Moses asked cousins of these brothers to remove the bodies to be buried. He told Aaron and the other two brothers not to mourn for their loved ones. The people of Israel might mourn for them, but Aaron and his two younger sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, were still in active service, even dressed to serve, and could not defile their service before God by showing sadness for such blatant disobedience and its consequence.

God called the fire of Nadab’s and Abihu’s censers “strange fire”—fire that didn’t belong. They were not the ones to decide how they were to worship; God had already given them those regulations. Nothing needed to be added. Indeed, nothing must be added or taken away from God’s commands. He already had a place for the burning of incense; He didn’t need any enhancement of worship.

“Why was it necessary for these instructions and regulations to be perfectly obeyed? . . .

1. “These were not man-made rules for worship. These were not human traditions or religious customs, which could be changed. These were institutions, which God Himself revealed and required. . . .
2. “This earthly worship was patterned after heavenly worship. The priests could not do as they pleased; they were following a heavenly pattern of worship in a tabernacle which was a copy of heaven itself! These priests served at ‘a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven’ (Hebrews 8:5). [Cf. Revelation 8:3, 4.] . . . In heaven there is a golden altar of incense before the throne of God. It is the hands of angels that carry the golden censers.

3. “This carefully regulated worship in the Old Covenant had the most glorious purpose of pointing beyond itself to the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Old Covenant worship prefigured and foreshadowed the mission of the Messiah. . . . All that went on in the Tabernacle worship, even the most minute details, must be performed perfectly by the priests because it was all an illustration of something and Someone much greater than themselves. By their form of worship ‘the Holy Spirit was showing . . . that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing.’ . . . (Hebrews 9:8, 9)” (Ganz, pp. 18, 19).

When the people saw the fire come down, they responded properly—they bowed down in humble worship, and they mourned the deaths of these two men.

After the bodies had been removed from before the tent, Moses told Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar, “Take the grain offering, the sin offering, and the wave offering and eat them.” But when Moses searched carefully for the meat from these offerings, it had been burned up! Eleazar and Ithamar had burned it instead of eating it.

Angry, Moses scolded, “Eleazar and Ithamar! Why didn’t you eat the sin offering at the holy place? For it is most holy, and you certainly should have eaten it in the sanctuary, just as I commanded.”

But Aaron interrupted to speak 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?” In other words, “Since my sons died today, God would not have wanted me to eat of the sacrifice even though I was not to mourn, would He?”

Moses when he heard that explanation, realized that Aaron and his younger sons had done the right thing.

#### **Lessons from this lesson:**

- We see Jesus:  
Nadab and Abihu thought they could come to God in their own way. Many people today think they can come to God through their own way—good works, religious ritual, *etc.* Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). Jesus is the only Way to God.
- We must be careful in our worship to do what God has instructed us to do. What are some of those things? [Teach the Word, pray, sing.]

#### **Activities:**

- Play dough: censers
- Burn incense, being very careful to avoid a fire hazard.
- Sword drill: Hebrews 12:28, 29; Leviticus 16:12, 13; Hebrews 4:14, 16; Isaiah 8:13
- Review questions: (Game: Place an incense stick into a jar for each correct answer.)
  1. What were the names of Aaron’s two oldest sons? [Nadab and Abihu.]
  2. What did they do to add to God’s prescribed worship? [Brought fire and incense in their censers.]
  3. Why was God not pleased with their worship? [They brought their own ideas, not God’s, into worship.]
  4. How did God show his anger and extreme displeasure? [Burned up the two.]
  5. Tell one reason why it was important that God’s instructions be obeyed. [They were given by God and were not man-made; they follow a heavenly pattern; they point to Jesus Christ.]
  6. What was Aaron not allowed to do after the death of his two sons? [Mourn; bury them.]
  7. What were the names of Aaron’s younger two sons? [Eleazar and Ithamar.]
  8. Why was Moses angry with Eleazar and Ithamar? [Because they had not eaten the sacrifice.]
  9. What was Aaron’s reason for not eating the sacrifice? [The family had endured great grief in having

Nadab and Abihu die.]

10. How did Moses react to Aaron's reasoning? [He accepted it as good.]

**Memory Verse[s]:**

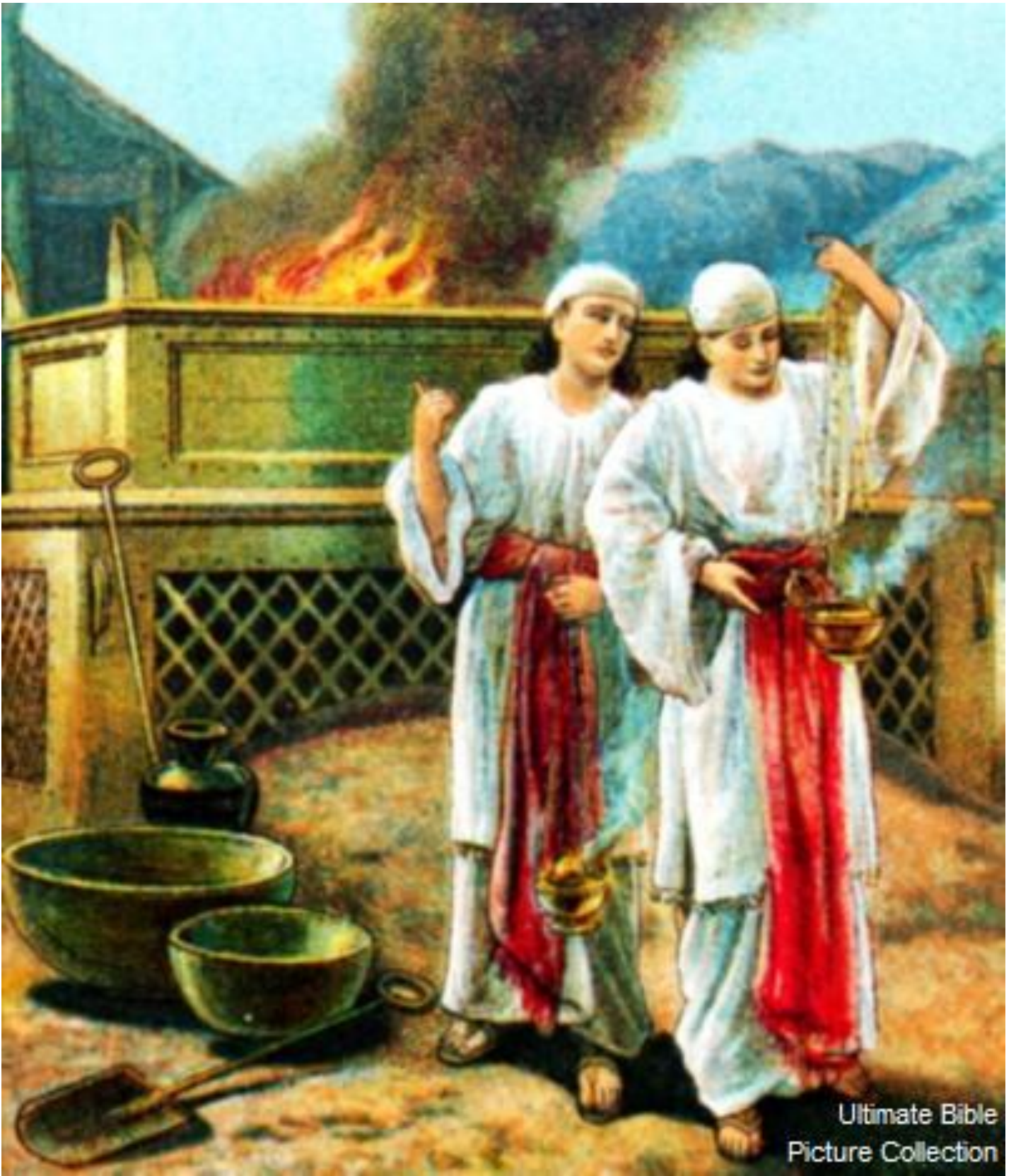
- Continue to memorize Exodus 20:1–17. An enlarged copy of the words, the “Exodus 20:1–17” song sheet, and motions are in Lesson 12.15 or on the “Lessons” and “Songs” pages at [teachingthebibleto kids.org](http://teachingthebibleto kids.org).

**Handwork:**

- Have students draw Nadab and Abihu on 5 ½” x 4 ¼” pieces of paper (one-fourth of an 8½x11” sheet of paper). Attach the drawings to an upside-down plastic cup. (See <https://missionbibleclass.org/teaching-ideas/visual-aids/stand-up-figures-to-make/> for video instruction of this craft.)
- A printable poster to which paper, cellophane, or glitter may be attached is found at <https://missionbibleclass.org/old-testament/part1/exodus-through-12-spies/nadab-and-abihu/>.

*censer*





[http://bibleencyclopedia.com/pictures/Leviticus\\_10\\_Nadab\\_and\\_Abihu.htm](http://bibleencyclopedia.com/pictures/Leviticus_10_Nadab_and_Abihu.htm)





