

A comment on Nadav and Avihu (Lev.10:1-2)

And Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before YHWH, which he had not commanded them. And there went out fire from YHWH, and devoured them, and they died before YHWH. (Lev.10:1-2).

These two verses are well known to all of us and we have all engaged at some time or other, in speculating the nature of the error committed by these two sons of Aaron;

- They were drunk
- They entered the Most Holy Place
- They were attempting to exalt themselves as leaders
- They used the wrong fire (not from the alter)
- They were dressed in the wrong attire for entering the Holy Place

There is no solid evidence that they did any of these although it is suggested, that the allegation of drunkenness is supported by YHWH's subsequent command for the priests not to have consumed 'strong drink' when entering the temple,

Do not drink wine nor strong drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the Tent of Meeting, lest you die: a law forever throughout your generations. (Lev.10:9).

The proximity of this command to the event itself is, for me, too tenuous to consider drunkenness to be the error. After all, death seems a very harsh penalty for breaking a rule that didn't exist at the time of the event, even though you would expect the priestly family to have known better. Not until verse 10 did it become a crime to enter the temple having consumed alcohol. What is more, the rule prohibits any alcohol not just an excessive amount. So this conclusion is certainly subject to challenge.

There is the suggestion that Nadav and Avihu were dressed incorrectly but again there are problems with this accusation because the same description of clothing is used in Lev.10:5 as that in Exod.39:27. Neither is there sufficient evidence to conclude they used the wrong fire, that is, coals not from the alter. Although I believe this is pretty close to the truth.

So let's consider what we are told, they offered 'strange fire' the Hebrew is 'zur.' Strong provides the following definitions: strange, profane, to commit adultery: in other words to act outside the rules.

YHWH has given very specific rules describing the methodology of how to approach Him and how to worship Him. In YHWH's view His rules are exact, we do not need to add anything (Deut.4:2, 12:32). We are not at liberty to please ourselves. It is my view that Nadav and Avihu entered the Holy Place to perform worship not ordained by YHWH. Anything not ordained by YHWH He considers unclean and not worthy of Him. The writer of Hebrews may well have had this event in mind when he wrote,

Therefore since we have received an unshakeable Kingdom, Let us have grace, through which we may offer service that will please YHWH, with reverence and fear. For indeed our Elohim is a consuming fire. (Heb.12:28-29).

Consider the 'Golden Calf' incident recorded in Exodus,

And when the people saw that Moshe was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aharon, and said to him, "Arise, make us mighty ones who go before us. For this Moshe, the man who brought us up out of the land of Mitsrayim, we do not know what has become of him." And Aharon said to them, "Take off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." And all the people took off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aharon.

And he took this from their hand, and he formed it with an engraving tool, and made a moulded calf. And they said, "Israel! Here is your Elohim that brought you out of the land of Mitsrayim!" And Aharon saw and built an altar before it. And Aharon called out and said, "Tomorrow is a festival to YHWH." (Exod.32:1-5).

'Tomorrow is a festival to YHWH.' This was not idol worship, the people were still worshipping YHWH but in a pagan manner: creating an image to represent Elohim. YHWH specifically prohibits anyone following pagan principles when worshipping Him,

"Completely destroy all the places where the nations which you are dispossessing served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And you shall break down their altars, and smash their pillars, and burn their Ashērim with fire. And you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and shall destroy their name out of that place. Do not do so to YHWH your Elohim." (Deut.12:2-4).

"When YHWH your Elohim does cut off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, guard yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their mighty ones? And let me do so too.' Do not do so to YHWH your Elohim, for every abomination which YHWH hates they have done to their gods, for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. All the words I am commanding you, guard to do it – do not add to it nor take away from it." (Deut.12:29-32).

"Do not plant for yourself any tree as a sacred pole near the altar of YHWH your Elohim that you make for yourself. "And do not set up a pillar, which YHWH your Elohim hates. (Deut.16:21-22).

YHWH is emphatic we must not follow pagan practices when worshipping Him. We can only offer service pleasing to YHWH by adhering strictly to the rules he has provided. Thus man's addition of Hanukkah and Purim are just as extraneous to YHWH as are Christmas and Easter. Worshiping in a manner not sanctioned by YHWH is tantamount to telling YHWH He got it wrong.

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