

“STRANGE FIRE”

Presented by

Blake Brown

In the Old Testament, there is a very unusual story about two young men who were priests, and who died while offering worship to God. One of those young men was Nadab, who was the firstborn son of Aaron, the Israelites’ High Priest. The other young man was Abihu, who was Nadab’s younger brother. Leviticus 10 explains how these two young men followed their own desires instead of doing what God had commanded—and what happened to them as a result.

In Leviticus 10:1-2 we read the following: “Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died.”

This is a pretty scary story, wouldn’t you say? Nadab and Abihu must have done something **really** bad, because God caused fire to leap up from the altar and **burn them to death!** Why did this happen? The key to understanding the story is found in the fact that these two young priests offered “strange fire,” which the Bible says “God had not commanded.” What does the Bible mean when it speaks of “strange” fire? Perhaps we can understand this point better by looking at other passages in the Old Testament that discuss worship to God. There is a good example in Exodus 30:9 where God gave the Israelites specific instructions regarding the altar where incense was to be burned. He warned them: “You shall not offer **strange incense** on the altar, or for a burnt offering, or during a grain offering.”

In Exodus 30:7-8, God told the Israelites exactly what **kind** of incense they were to burn during their worship of Him. Anything else was “strange” incense that God had not authorized. If the people used “strange fire” or “strange incense,” they violated God’s law. The Bible tells us in Leviticus 16:12 where Nadab and Abihu **should** have gotten the fire that they used in their worship. Moses wrote: “Then the priest shall take a censer full of burning coals of **fire from the altar before the Lord.**” Aaron’s two sons ignored God’s law. They took matters into their own hands and took the fire for the altar from somewhere else. This was a terrible sin on their part because they disobeyed the command of God. And their sin cost them their lives!

In referring to the Old Testament, the apostle Paul said, “Whatever things were written before were written for our learning” (Romans 15:4). From the account of Nadab and Abihu, we can learn a **very** important lesson about how God wants people to worship Him. That lesson is this: God expects us to obey Him—not just in how we **worship**, but in **every** aspect of our lives. We must do **exactly** what God has commanded, in **exactly** the way He has commanded that we do it. **Nothing** can take the place of simple obedience to God. Nadab and Abihu learned that lesson the hard way. I don’t want to be like them, do you?