



## Clanking Chains: Failures to Glory & Honor God: The Case of Nadab & Abihu: Typology from Burning of Incense: the Cross, Glorification, & Intercession

We will study two examples of impetuous disobedience, the first by Moses and the second by two Aaronic priests, Nadab and Abihu. These events demonstrate that a human viewpoint effort to serve God is a wrong thing done in a wrong way and is considered by God to be disobedience. Human good turned to evil is wood, hay, and stubble and will be burned at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

**Freedman, David Noel.** *The Nine Commandments: Uncovering a Hidden Pattern of Crime and Punishment in the Hebrew Bible.* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 70-72:

**Moses' Mistake.** One of Deuteronomy's transitions is Moses' death, one of the most heartrending moments in all the Bible.

**Deuteronomy 34:1 -** Now Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan ...

**v. 4 -** Then the Lord said to him, "This is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there."

**v. 5 -** So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord.

**Aaron's Errant Sons.** In order to place Moses' sin into its proper context, we must go back to an enigmatic story recounting the death of two of Aaron's sons. In Exodus 30:9, God specifically commands the Israelite priests not to offer him "foreign [strange] incense." This prohibition seems to be aimed at forbidding the incorporation of foreign cultic practices into the worship of Yahweh. Thus, "foreign [strange]" incense would mean an offering not specifically commanded by Yahweh, and which is probably borrowed from the nations surrounding Israel.

**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.

**v. 2 -** And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.

What happens next is ... meant to communicate the severity of not honoring Yahweh by obeying his commands.

Moses, instead of expressing sympathy and sorrow over the deaths of Aaron's sons, communicates to Aaron why God has dealt so harshly with them:

**Leviticus 10:3 -** 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.

Aaron has nothing to say. Moses' words and the silence of Aaron are meant to communicate the seriousness of this cultic violation.

Then, as if the deaths of his two sons were not enough, God, via Moses, tells Aaron and his two remaining sons that they may not participate in the mourning for their deaths:



**Leviticus 10:6** - Then Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, “Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, so that you may not die, and that God may not become wrathful against all the congregation.

Aaron’s sons did not honor God before the people and therefore they will not be honored.

Moses, Aaron, and Aaron’s four sons were delegated leadership roles over the people of Israel. The Levitical code for priests stipulates with extreme detail the process and procedure for administering the offerings, sacrifices, and feast days, and the management of the Tabernacle, its furniture and its materials. Every function of the priesthood is designed to teach doctrine to the people. The typology of the Alter of Incense, the ingredients of the incense, and the mandates surrounding them are important to our understanding of the Fifth Commandment. We find the divine recipe for the incense in:

**Exodus 30:34** - Then the Lord said to Moses, “Take for yourself spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, spices with pure frankincense; there shall be an equal part of each.

**v. 35** - “And with it you shall make incense, a perfume, the work of a perfumer, salted, pure, and holy.

**v. 36** - “And you shall beat some of it very fine, and put part of it before the testimony [ **the Arc of the Covenant** ] in the tent of meeting [ **the Holy Place of the Tabernacle** ], where I shall meet with you; it shall be most holy to you.”

The ingredients include (1) stacte: Hebrew, **נָטַף** *nataf*; Greek, **στακτή**, *staktē*, a species of gum storax resembling myrrh; (2) onycha: Hebrew, **שֶׁחֶלֶת** *shecheleth*; Greek, **ὄνυχα**, *onucha*, the shell of a mollusk, e.g., a clam or oyster, that gives off a musky odor when burned; and (3) galbanum: Hebrew, **חֶלְבֵנִי** *chelbenah*; Greek, **χαλβάνη**, *chalbanē*, a gum resin obtained from the shrub *Ferula galbaniflua*.

These three ingredients are to be added to (4) pure frankincense: Hebrew, **לְבִנָּה** *lebonah*; Greek, **λίβανος**, *libanos*, meaning literally “white”; a vegetable resin, bitter and glittering, obtained by incisions in the bark of the *arbor thuris*, and fragrant when burned.

These four items, prepared in equal parts were to be mixed with (5) salt: Hebrew, **מֶלַח** *malach*; Greek, **ἅλας**, *halas*, a compound used for its preservative qualities. The result of this recipe was incense: Hebrew, **קֶטֶרֶת** *qetoreth*; Greek, **θυμίαμα**, *thumiama*, an aromatic compound which gives forth a sweet savor in burning.

Why have I told you all this in such detail? Because we have just witnessed from Scripture the instant execution of two of Aaron’s sons because they didn’t follow this recipe and they offered it at the wrong time. We need to find out why this was a capital offense:

### Typology from the Burning of Incense:

1. The Altar of Incense portrays Christ as our Intercessor through whom our prayers ascend to God.

**Hebrews 7:23** - The former priests [ **Aaronic** ], on the one hand, existed in greater numbers, because they were prevented by death from continuing,



**v. 24** - but Christ, on the other hand, because He abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently.

**Hebrews 7:25** - Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

2. The Golden Altar communicates several types: shadow theology found in the Old Testament and revealed in the New Testament. Its first type is its basic structure of acacia, a hardwood indestructible by insects, and it refers to the impeccability of the Lord's true humanity. It was covered with an overlay of pure gold which is a type of our Lord's undiminished deity.
3. Since the function of a priest is to represent man to God, Jesus Christ serves as our High Priest. But His priestly ministry could not begin until He was crucified, judged, buried, resurrected, and glorified. The gold completely covered the acacia wood of the altar and is a type for the glory of the resurrected Christ.
4. As our Intercessor, Christ processes our prayers to the Father. The incense is a type for these prayers. These prayers are uttered by our Lord and the manner in which they are presented must be concentrated, precise, and specific.
5. Since this incense represents the intercessory prayer of Jesus Christ, it was to be made in accordance with specific standards provided to Moses in Exodus 30. The ingredients of this incense represent certain aspects of both prayer and the One who utters them.
6. The association between prayer and incense is found in many passages. David identifies his prayers with those of the incense of the Golden Altar in:

**Psalms 141:1** - A Psalm of David. O Lord, I call upon You; hasten to me. Give ear to my voice when I call to you!

**v. 2** - May my prayer be counted as incense before You; the lifting up of my hands as the evening offering.

7. David is asking the Father to consider His prayer as one offered by the Intercessor as typified by the Golden Altar and the incense that burned upon it. He then asks that his lifted hands serve as the evening sacrifice which was a daily reminder of the substitutionary sacrifice of the Messiah.
8. Because of the cross, symbolized by the sacrifice on the Brass Altar in the Tabernacle's courtyard, the Lord is qualified to offer Intercessory prayer inside the Tabernacle before the throne of God.
9. Now that the Lord is resurrected and seated at the right hand of the throne of God, He continuously offers intercessory prayers for all the saints:

**Revelation 5:8** - And when Christ had taken the book, the four angelic heralds and the 24 angelic staff officers fell down before the Lamb, and each one had a lyre, and libation cups made of gold full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

10. It is clear that the incense burning on the Golden Altar is typical of the Intercessory prayer of the glorified Christ. We have already noted the recipe for the incense in Exodus 30:34-36. Now let's analyze how it was to be used in the ritual plan of God for Israel.