

What Does God's Word Say About...

God Striking Men Dead – Part 1

Together, Aaron and his sons were to minister as priests to God. God instructed Moses, "For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics; you shall also make sashes for them, and you shall make caps for them, for glory and for beauty. You shall put them on Aaron your brother and on his sons with him; and you shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve Me as priests. Thus you shall do to Aaron and his sons, according to all that I have commanded you; you shall ordain them through seven days. You shall put an altar in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is over the ark of the testimony, where I will meet with you. Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it...you shall not offer any strange incense on this altar..." (Ex. 28:40-41, 29:35, 30:6-9).

"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. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord" (Lev.10:1-2). Because they offered fire which was not commanded, fire came from the Lord and consumed them. Notice the reason why this happened, as Moses gives the explanation in Lev. 10:3: "By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored." What was the point Moses was making? When we try to worship God our way, we are glorifying ourselves and not God. God must be glorified in all we do. The apostle Peter wrote, "you also [Christians], as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house as a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Peter also said, "but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written 'you shall be holy for I am Holy'" (1 Pet. 1:15-16). In order to be "holy" we have to be obedient children to God's commands!

In Numbers 16:1-35, we find Korah and some of the Israelite leaders were upset that Moses and Aaron were in charge. They rebuked Moses saying that he had gone too far by exalting himself above the whole assembly (16:3). We see the charge again in 16:13, "Do you also have to appoint yourself as ruler over us?" Now, who had appointed Moses as their leader? God had done so. Korah and the leaders were complaining that they were not in charge. They wanted the glory they felt Moses and Aaron were receiving as the leaders of the assembly. In verses 31-35, God validates that Moses and Aaron were his chosen people to lead them through the wilderness to the land of Canaan. The desire for glory got in the way. Moses said to Korah and the leaders who were complaining, "By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these deeds; for this [being the leader] is not my doing." "Then it came about as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground that was under them [Korah] split open; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions." The Hebrew writer told Christians today to "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).

A rectangular wooden box known as the ark of the covenant, which contained Aaron's rod that miraculously budded, a pot of manna, and the ten commandments, was to be moved only

by the Levites (Numbers 3:31, 4:1-5; Deut. 10:8, 31:9). It was to be carried by the Levites with poles, which were inserted through rings by the sides of the ark (ex. 25:14-15). The poles were not to be taken from the rings of the ark. If the ark of the covenant were to be touched by anyone other than the Levites, the one touching it would die (Num. 4:15). When David recovered the ark of the covenant from the Philistines [who moved the ark on a cart], he decided with great fanfare and the consent of the people, that the ark should be carried on a "new cart," not borne by poles in rings on the side of the ark. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab [who were Israelites] were leading the new cart (2 Sam. 6:3). "But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God stuck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God" (2 Sam. 6:6-7). Even when we have good intentions, when we do not do as God has commanded, it would be considered a presumptuous sin. David said in the Psalms, "Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not rule over me; then I shall be blameless, and I shall be acquitted of great transgression" (Psm. 19:13). Such a sin would be to speak on behalf of God and to act or proceed with disobedience to God's will. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12). God stuck Uzzah dead for touching the ark of God against the command of God. God takes His commands seriously. God expects us to keep His commands, and when we do not, we are claiming glory for ourselves.

These are several Old Testament examples of God striking men dead for their disobedience to His commands. Paul wrote, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11). Next week we will find in the New Testament that God struck dead a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, for lying to the Holy Spirit.