

Parshat Shemini

Moses instructs Aaron and his sons concerning offerings for atonement of sins.

Nadav and Avihu bring unauthorized fire offerings on their own and God punishes them with death.

God tell Moses and Aaron which foods are permitted and not permitted to be eaten.

Aaron and his sons, on the day after their ordination ceremony, perform a sacrifice that is accepted by God. After which two of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu bring their own incense offering to God at the incorrect time, and God kills them instantly. The same flame that was so glorious as "the presence of the Lord" kills them. This is a very troubling part of the Torah as commentators though out time have tried to make sense of this portion. Many say that bringing an "alien" fire was their sin and others point to the laws that come directly after their death, namely the laws of drinking. These commentaries say that Nadav and Avihu were drunk when they brought their offerings making them unfit for duty.

Aaron is strangely quiet through out this episode as he and his remaining sons are told not to mourn but to continue with their duties as priests.

The parsha concludes with a catalogue listing of animals that are permitted to eat and not eat. Generally the animals that are permitted have split hooves, chew their cud and walk on all four legs. Fish that have fins and scales are clean and fit to eat. Most birds are clean animals except for those animals that feed on other animals, such as vultures, eagles and hawks. Insects may not be eaten except for locusts, grasshoppers, and crickets. The laws are neatly arranged and give a great glimpse as to the animals alive in Biblical times.

The laws of kashrut, dietary laws, are set in place to allow the Jewish people to be holy similar to the priests. Mordecai Kaplan said that the purpose of the dietary laws was to make the people of Israel aware of their dedication to God as a priestly and holy people.

Vayikra 10:3 - To those close to Me I will show my holiness, and before all the people I will be praised.