**Instructions for the Priests**

The older our republic becomes, the farther away from the people our elected officials seem to become. This is not a political statement as politicians from both parties display a similar attitude. Government created of and for the people has become an entity unto itself. A typical courtroom gives us an image of a government far above the people with a judge (addressed as your honor) elevated above everyone else glaring imperiously at those who appear before him. Over the years we have created grandiose government buildings that have become bastions of those in power who seem to have forgotten that they are accountable to their constituents. Even those who enter public service with the best intentions seem to quickly go native, succumbing to the trappings of power reinforced by lobbyists who stroke their egos. Humility, among the human characteristics most prized by Jesus, is sorely lacking in Washington. It takes a special person to avoid the many temptations and place service above self. In our study of chapters 8-10 of Leviticus, we see priests elevated to a high position accompanied by much pomp and circumstance as Aaron and his sons are consecrated for service in the tabernacle. Two of his sons, probably the eldest, have a very brief tenure of service before they were killed by God as punishment for failing to obey His commands regarding the tabernacle.

In chapter 8, God instructs Moses to bring Aaron and his sons to the Tent of Meeting and to gather the Israelites to observe the preparations for the priestly ministry. As Matthew Henry wrote, having a tabernacle without priests would be like a candlestick without a candle. Before serving, however Aaron and his sons had to be consecrated which involved cleansing and anointing with oil. After that, 3 offerings were sacrificed of the altar. First a sin offering was made transferring the guilt of Aaron and his sons to a bull which was sacrificed. Next the burnt offering was made giving praise to God. The final offering was the ram of ordination (ram of consecration in KJV) which was accompanied by a grain offering. The breast of the ram was used as a wave offering. Before beginning their ministry, Aaron and his sons had to eat a meal from the offering and stay at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting for 7 days and night.

Chapter 9 begins with additional sin and burnt offerings along with a fellowship offering being made to make atonement for the priests as well as the people. At the end of the chapter, the burnt offering and fat portions of the other offerings were completely consumed by fire from God. Understanding that this symbolized God’s acceptance of the offerings, the Israelites shouted for joy and fell to the ground in awe. David Guzik pointed out 7 times God showed acceptance of a sacrifice with fire from heaven: Gen 4:4, Lev. 9:24, Judges 6:21 and 13:19-23, 1st Chron. 21:28, 2nd Chron. 7:1 and 1st Kings 18:38.

Chapter 10 begins with Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu offering unauthorized fire before God resulting in their being consumed by fire sent from God. Remarkably, Moses instantly observed that *“This is what God spoke of when he said ‘Among those who approach me, I will show myself to be holy; in the sight of all people I will be honored’”.* Next Aaron and his sons were warned by Moses to restrain their emotions and remain at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting since that was a requirement of God. Imagine having to continue a ceremony immediately after witnessing the death of 2 of your sons. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the priests were to have a meal from the grain and sin offerings, however Moses discovered that the goat sacrificed as a sin offering was completely burned and not eaten as a meal as he had instructed. Aaron response seemed to be that he did not feel it was appropriate to have the meal after the death of his sons which satisfied Moses.

The reasons for the harsh sentence of judgment passed on Nadab and Abihu are not clear although we have some clues. God was very specific in his requirements for burning incense (see Ex. Chapter 30) and it may be that they failed to follow his instructions. Note that they apparently took coals from the fire sent from God which may not have been allowed. After their deaths, God told Aaron that he and his sons were not to drink wine whenever they went into the Tent of Meeting so it could be that his sons were drunk perhaps as a result of celebrating their priesthood. I believe that pride may have been the cause of their demise. Great honor was lavished on Aaron and his sons complete with extravagant uniforms and a weeklong consecration ceremony. The manner in which they offered the incense may indicate that they saw this as an opportunity to show their importance to the crowd gathered instead of serving with humility which Aaron did. Whatever the reason, the statement made by Moses underscores that we must approach God reverently. While we are called to be priests, we have no elaborate clothing to wear. Instead, we have the full armor of God consisting of truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and the word of God through the Holy Spirit. (Eph. 6:13-17)