

Strange Fire

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Leviticus 9:22-10:2
Preached On: Sunday, February 24, 2019

Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

You know, I know sometimes when we gather together in an environment like this, we begin to sing the words and there is kind of an energy or shall I say, a synergy that rises in the room. Well, what a catchy phrase, "Yes, I will," but one thing I want you to note in that song is that it talked about the valleys as well as the mountaintops. You know, Isaiah said, "Yes, I will," and the Lord had it saw fit that for three years not a single person would pay attention to what he said. Jeremiah said, "Yes, I will," and the Lord said, "Because you said yes, that family that you desire in the flesh, it's not going to become a reality." Daniel said, "Yes, I will," and we know the story, there was a lions' den that was before him. The majority of what we know as the apostles when they said, "Yes, I will," found themselves at least from their own perspective meeting an untimely gruesome death. It's a dangerous thing to say, "Yes, I will. Not doing it my way but doing it your way, God." So I want to challenge us today as we study the word of God to kind of keep that theme going, "Yes, I will. Do it your way according to your manner," and I'm gonna warn you, oftentimes when we make that declaration, it doesn't turn out quite the way that we scripted.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we continue our time of worship, may that be our declaration, "Yes, we will. We will do as you have commanded. We will do as you've instructed." Lord, we just come this morning and we stand guilty, so guilty of desiring our way over yours, so guilty of thinking that somehow we know better how to do this thing called life than you do. So Lord, somehow, some way, supernaturally as only you can do, would you allow it to that the only voice we hear today is yours? May even our own voice be drowned out by the volume of your word as we read it, as we study it. Lord, may your Holy Spirit take it and not only do a spiritual surgery in our lives, but may your voice be so profound that nothing can compete with it. Lord, may this be the day that we say, "Yes, I will." It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning if you're a guest or a visitor with us, I want to go ahead and assure you that what I'm about to say is not in error and it is not a mistake. Please open your Bibles to the book of Leviticus. I know what some of you are thinking, "The book of Leviticus?" Yes, the book of Leviticus, the third book in your Bible, one of the 66. This is the living proof

that 2 Timothy 3 is true when it says that all Scripture is inspired by God, and I know sometimes we read the book of Leviticus and it challenges us to believe that passage but if you're new to us or maybe a guest with us, we as a family of faith, we are walking through the Scripture together, typically a chapter, maybe two chapters a day, for a time period that will be almost three years in length, and kind of the reasoning for the pace that we're undertaking is not just to check off a box and say, "Read it," but to be able to allow it to kind of soak in, to be able to study that 2 Timothy 2:15 says, to allow it just to become a part of our lives.

This last week, you had the distinct privilege of reading probably the most avoided passages in all of the Bible. In fact, these early chapters of what we know as the book of Leviticus are filled with rites and rituals and you discover about different skin conditions and the color thereof and the offerings and how you separate the fat from the meat and the fire that comes down, I can tell you that numerous people have had conversation with me this week about this section of the Bible, but probably the best response that I got was simply this, the individual said, "Jeff, please tell me that we're coming close to the end of Leviticus." And I said, "We'll be out by the middle of next week. Why?" He said, "Because I don't know if I can take it any longer." And I think we kind of echo that and as we read through and hopefully you participated this week trudging through this difficult almost swampy section of the Scripture, but today as we come to Leviticus 10, we're also gonna back it up a little bit into chapter 9 and we're gonna kinda look at the why. Why did the Lord give such detailed explanation? Why all the rituals? Why all the, shall we just say, religious pomp and circumstance? Why do they have to be in a certain place, in a certain stance, doing a certain thing? What is the purpose and the reasoning for all of this? We're going to discover today there's this little window, this little glimmer of light in the midst of all of the details of Leviticus of the differing of two worship services, one that goes really well, and one not so well, and we're gonna be introduced today of what happens when our worship, what happens when our interaction with, what happens when our relationship with the Lord is done according to our preferences, when it's done according to what we would want it to look like or desire it to look like versus what the Lord has instructed or commanded.

Back in Leviticus 9:22, it says,

22 And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them, and came down from offering of the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and peace offerings. 23 And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out, and blessed the people: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the people. 24 And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces.

1 And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. 2 And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.

As we can see, there are two different stories here, one at the end of chapter 9 that goes according to all that the Lord has instructed, and then one at the beginning of chapter 10 that looks good on the outside, in fact, that's one of the things we're gonna study today. When you just read verse 1, it does not appear that anything has gone awry. It does not appear that anything is "strange" but we discover that the Lord did not welcome it and took care of it thereof, and there's this phrase called "strange fire." I want to define that phrase before we look into the details of this passage. When the Bible uses the word "strange" in this context, don't think of odd or weird. In fact, the best way to define it is with other passages in your Bible.

In the book of Jude, which is the second to the last book of the Bible, one chapter in length right before the book of Revelation, there's a lot of commentary on the Old Testament. It talks about the angels that fell from their first estate. It talks about even the death of Moses and the body that was fought over. But in verse 7 of the book of Jude, it talks about Sodom and Gomorrah, that famous story from the book of Genesis where you see that interaction with the angels and the men of the city, and eventually the judgment of God coming down with what we know as "fire and brimstone." What's interesting is that in the book of Jude 7, it says that the men in Sodom and Gomorrah went after strange flesh. In other words, when it says "strange fire" here, when you look at it biblically, when the Lord is using the word "strange" in relationship to their offering or their activity, he is saying that, "This is that which is in noncompliance to what I have laid out." It's not just that it's weird or that it's odd, it's the fact that it's not what the Lord has instructed. It is outside – hear this – it is outside the bounds by which the Lord has established for a right proper relationship with him, and what we're going to see in just a moment is that they had all the trappings, they had all the exterior things that made it look right and they're much like the Pharisees that Jesus condemned in Matthew 23 when he says, "You are whitewashed tombs," everything looks good on the outside, you're in the right place, on the right day, at the right time, you've even got the right "stuff," the problem is on the inside you're full of rottenness. In fact, the book of James 4 says that when you and I embrace the world, when we decide to go the world's way rather than God's way, do you want to hear what the Lord calls us? He calls us adulterers and adulteresses. Well, that brings it home, doesn't it?

So when it says that they offered "strange fire," if you want to put it in today's context, basically it's saying that these guys cheated on the Lord. What you and I can do today is learn from these guys. What did they do that was so wrong? How can we learn from it? Well, the first thing we see from verse 1 is this: that they had what I would call a strange identity. It says, "And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron." Now that may not seem strange to you, you say, "Well, of course, their dad Aaron is the priest. It makes perfect sense." No, it doesn't. Just because you're the son of the priest, just because you're the grandson of the priest doesn't mean that the Lord has called you to perform and do the job of the priest, particularly in the Old Testament.

Let me bring this to contemporary language today. How many of you would be interested next week if one of my sons was the one presenting the message? Some of you say,

"Well, I might show up. That might be exciting." I promise it might be entertaining, that is for sure, but understand that there is only one person who the Lord called to be the priest. There is only one person who had the identity, the right and the privileges to go into the tabernacle. His name was Aaron. How often in our culture today we put on the trappings of Christianity. Allow me to call it this, I think we suffer from a disease in our culture known as cultural Christianity. Here's what cultural Christianity is, that you're in the right buildings, on the right days, you even use the right words, you sing the right songs, but there's no relationship with God. It's all for show. It's all exterior. It's all surface.

In fact, the story here in Leviticus 10 reminds me of what happens in John 4. In John 4, Jesus encounters a woman who we don't know her first name, but we call her today the woman at the well. This is the woman who had had, shall we say, just a revolving door of men in her life. In fact, at the time when Jesus encountered her, there was another man that was a part of her life, and in the context of their discussion, not only did Jesus introspectively ask her about her past and her present and how this would affect her future, but they began to talk about spiritual matters and how one connects to and has a relationship with God, and in the midst of that conversation, this woman kind of takes a step back and she asked what on the surface appears to be a very good question but Jesus says, "You're asking the wrong question." She said, "Where is it that we're supposed to worship? Is it here or is it in Bethel? Is it this building or is it that building?" In our context, is it that group or is it this group? Is it on that day or is it on this day? To which Jesus makes the statement in verse 24, he says, "The day is coming," and by the way, we're a part of that on this side of the empty tomb, "The day is coming where those who worship God must do so in spirit and in truth." And we're reminded in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, it says that when we believe on Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, that our bodies become the temple of the Holy Ghost. In John 4, I mean John 14:6, Jesus says, "I'm the way, I'm the truth and I'm the life." And what's taking place not just in Leviticus 10, what was taking place in John 4 is Jesus made it abundantly clear there is only one way to have a true relationship with your Creator and the God of the universe and that is through the shed blood and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If we try it any other way, we woefully fall short.

You say, "Well, how does that work out in our world today?" There's a lot of folks who are trying to go to heaven one day because they're Baptists. I've got news for you, that's not the way in. There's gonna be a lot of folks trying to get there because of the money they've given, the deeds they've done. You know at the end of Matthew 7, there is a group of people who find themselves not allowed into what you and I would call heaven and they don't understand it. They say, "But Lord, we said great things. We did great things. I mean, we lived spectacular lives." Do you know what Jesus' response is? "Depart from me, I never knew you." You and I never had a relationship together. There was no connection. It was all surface. It was all exterior. It was all smoke and mirrors. Here in Leviticus 10, there is this "strange fire" because there's a strange identity. They did not have a connection to, a relationship properly to the Lord.

The second thing we see is not only was there a strange identity, but there was a strange intent. Now I want to be very clear, you can be a believer in Jesus Christ, you can be as Ephesians says, you can be seated in the heavens and you may have sonship, so to speak, in other words, there's that relationship that's solid, but then the fellowship can get strained. I want you to see what happens here in chapter 10. It says, "the sons of Aaron, took either of them," listen to this phrase, "his censer." Now I know you're thinking, "Well, what's the big deal? What's wrong with 'his censer'?" The problem is that wasn't the right item or device to utilize when it came to making the proper offerings. The censer that was to be utilized was the one that was from the tabernacle and so basically the intent was simply this, that what I have is either equal to or better than what the Lord has so I'm gonna utilize, I'm going to offer it.

The intent is simply this, the Gospel of John 3, there's a man whom we know as John the Baptist. I'm sure you know of this guy, a pretty well-known character in the Bible. I mean, he comes out of the wilderness and he's, you know, he's wearing an all leather outfit and he's chewing locusts, you know, between his teeth. I mean, he's kind of a rough guy, but he gathers a pretty good crowd. In fact, there's hundreds, there's thousands of people that are gathering around and all of the perceived enemies of Jesus show up. The Pharisees are there. The Sadducees are there. The scribes are there. Everybody who eventually one day will come at odds with the message and the person of Jesus Christ, and they began to have conversation with him and ask him about why and what and when and where, but over and over again he says, "Oh no, no, no. This isn't about me." And he points people to Jesus. He says, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world."

You see, the problem with these two characters in Leviticus 10 is simply this, that they wanted the focus, they wanted the attention to be about what they had, not what God possessed. In other words, notice in chapter 9 the glory of God was demonstrated and showed up, the glory of God never appears in this passage.

At the end of that interaction in the Gospel of John, John the Baptist makes this incredible statement, he says that, "He," being Jesus, "must increase and I must decrease." You know, when there's no true relationship with Jesus Christ and it's all about religious outward expression, it becomes cultural Christianity. Can I share with you how this works out today? Some of you may not like what I'm gonna call it but I'm gonna call it what I see it as, it's what I call celebrity Christianity. Celebrity Christianity is where we're more interested in promoting the preacher than the message he preaches. Well, got kinda quiet in the room. Celebrity Christianity is where we're more interested in the singers than the songs they're singing. You see, celebrity Christianity means we're more interested in the newest book that somebody wrote than the one that God's already given us. Oo, hurts, doesn't it? Because we love celebrities in our culture. We love celebrities. Just watch any type of social media, there are people in our culture who make a living doing nothing but being famous. It marvels me. I don't care what they had for breakfast. I don't care where they took a vacation. And yet we're so consumed with celebrityism we just want to see where they went, what they ate, who they're with, what they said, and yet the question I have is how does that often creep into our own faith?

You know, we are plagued with what I might call Christian celebrities, people that can draw massive massive crowds. You know, last week in Leviticus we talked about holiness, living a distinct, separated, sacred life, and I just wonder if a book was written with this title if it would actually reach the top seller list, instead of your best life now, how about your most holy life now? You see, we're interested in happiness, we're interested in success, we're interested in, "What do you have to offer? What can I get?" You do understand that biblical Christianity isn't what you can get, it's what you can give?

So what do these guys do? They went and got their own censer. Now I'm gonna be honest with you, I would be willing to say that if you took the censer from the tabernacle and you took the censer from their house, I would be willing to say I bet their censer looked more attractive. I bet it was more valuable from a monetary perspective. I bet it had the appearance of being the one you would want. But it reminds me of the great somewhat not really remotely far from biblical trilogy known as "Raiders of the Lost Ark." Y'all remember the story? Oh, Indiana Jones and you know the context of one of the accounts where he goes and he's to get the cup and there he is, he's crossed all these thresholds, you know, by the way, is it just me or can that whip do weird things? I mean, it's just one of the, I mean, he can do anything with that. But nonetheless, he gets to this place and there's all these cups to choose from. Do you remember that famous line from that figure in the story? He says, "Choose wisely." Why? Because those who had the wrong intent chose the beautiful, ornate, gold cup. What did Indiana do? He begins to think what would Jesus the Nazarene, what would Jesus the carpenter? And it was a simple plain cup.

That's why Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane made this statement, he said, "Father, I've come not to do my will but yours." And so the struggle that we have is oftentimes we fall into the celebrity Christianity and you say, "Well, I don't do that. I don't follow." You know, sometimes the celebrity is you. You're the celebrity. It's about what you want, what you desire, your preference, your this, and so many times we get in this trap of saying, "God, I know how you've orchestrated things but that's not how I want it. That's not how I like it. This is what I prefer." And the problem with that is we easily can creep into this strange fire of saying, "God, my censer is actually better than yours. The way I would do it is actually superior to yours, and so if you'll just hold back, I got this." What happens here? Oh, the Lord shows up and the fire comes down but rather than the offering being consumed, it was the one making the offering.

So this strange fire often has a strange identity, sometimes it has what we might call a strange intent, but last but not least, there are what I want to call the strange instructions because you can be here this morning and you can say, "I have a right relationship with the Lord. There's come a time and a place in my life I understood that I was a sinner. I believed that Jesus Christ was the only answer to my sin problem, I asked him to save me, I've asked him to forgive me, and if you ask me, I really do want him to increase. I want to decrease. I want him to have the preeminence in my life and I want to take a back seat." But there's still this one other area that we can struggle with, what I call strange

instructions. It says, "either of them took his censer, they put fire therein, and put incense thereon, they offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. There went out fire from the LORD, devoured them, and they died before the LORD."

Now you read that verse and you say, "I don't see the problem here. Why is this such a big deal? Okay, so he had the wrong censer but the fire and the incense, I mean, that's all throughout Leviticus, how did that go awry?" The problem with the fire is it didn't come from the right source. In fact, you go back and read Exodus 40, there's all these instructions about how they were to do things. The fire was supposed to come from the brazen altar which was in the tabernacle, and here he takes his own censer and his own fire. What he simply did was this, he took away from what God had instructed. He said, "God, I know this is how you commanded us to do it, but I don't like that part and so I'm gonna do it this way." You say, "Well, what's wrong with the incense? Isn't there incense utilized all throughout the Old Testament?" Of course there is, here's the problem: the incense was not commanded by God until you get to chapter 16. In other words, when the fire is illustrated there, they said, "God, I don't like that part of it, I'm just gonna act as if it doesn't exist. I'm gonna do my own thing." When it comes to incense, you say, "God, I'm gonna get ahead of you, I'm gonna do it my way whether you've said it or not."

Let me tell you what this produces. You see, a strange identity produces a cultural Christianity where it's just all about names on the doors and titles and places and locations and days. A strange intent, that basically is just a celebrity Christianity where either yourself or somebody else becomes the authority rather than God. Let me tell you what this one does, the strange instructions gives you a convenient Christianity. It's very reminiscent of the first story in the book of Genesis 4 where Cain and Abel, you remember the two brothers of Adam and Eve. Abel comes and he brings his offering and everything is good, but when Cain shows up, the Lord does not accept his offering. Why? Because rather than doing it the way the Lord had commanded, he decided, "I want to do it the most convenient way to me."

Let me tell you how this works out in our lives both in pulling away and adding to. Let's talk about offering the fire where you don't do it according to his way, you want to pull back and do it yours. How many passages have you read in the Bible and you may mean well but it's strange using the biblical definition when you say, "I just don't think that's cultural relevant anymore. I think that part's out of date. I mean, after all, we've progressed as a culture and a society. That's antiquitous. That's old school. That doesn't apply anymore." In other words, "I want to offer my fire, not the fire off the brazen altar." As you begin to read through the Scriptures, there's a lot of things in the Bible that completely clash with the philosophies and the belief systems of our world today. Let me remind you all Scripture is inspired by God, not just the parts that you like, not just the parts that our society addresses, not just the part that our world says, "Oh, we'll accept that part." You see, it's a convenient Christianity when you build our faith around the parts you like and not the parts you don't and you say, "We're just gonna pretend that part doesn't relate anymore. It's not relevant."

You say, "Well, what about the addition part?" Have you ever gotten frustrated, I know have, where you're going through something in life, you say, "I sure wish that somewhere in the Bible this would've been explicitly spoken about." And so you get caught up in saying, "Well, if the Bible were written today, I'm sure this is what God would've said about it." You do realize that's incense, right? You're saying, "God, I don't like what you said about it, I don't like what I've discovered, so I'm just gonna make up what I think you would have said." You see, that's what happened here. When they offered the incense, they said, "God, this is what I think you want us to do so we're gonna do it anyway even though you haven't told us to do so." It's a Christianity that is so convenient because we don't have to address the difficult issues, we don't have to address the things that make us uncomfortable, and we can ultimately do that which we want because, "If I were God," guess what, you're not, "that's how I'd do it," and it produces a strange fire.

What happens to these guys in verse 2, the fire comes out of heaven. Now allow me just to kind of read between the lines for just a moment. You know the fire came out of heaven in chapter 9, right? Devoured the sacrifice? Can you imagine the expression on their face when they realized it wasn't the altar that was gonna get it, it was them? Today I want to close with Hebrews 12:29, it says, "Our God is a consuming fire." Either that which we offer will be consumed because it's as he ordained, or it will be us who is consumed because we did it our way. False intentions. False instructions. Quite possibly even a false identity.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're that individual today that as we stretch back into this old section of the Bible that oftentimes seems so irrelevant, maybe today it seemed more relevant than any other passage, particularly if you're one of those individuals either here on our campus or on the other side of the cameras or the microphone and you realize that your "relationship" with the Lord has been based on what you do, what you don't do, where you are, where you're not, and not based on what Jesus Christ has done on your behalf. Maybe today's the day where the Lord made it real clear that you've fallen into this trap of cultural Christianity. I've got great news for you, Romans 10:13 says whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved and maybe you're that person today who needs to call on the Lord. Biblically speaking, that's just have a time of prayer just talking to the Lord. You say, "Well, what do I say? How do I say it?" Can I encourage you just to have a conversation with the Lord and not a conversation out loud, not necessarily even the same conversation that I would have, maybe not even the same phrase or words that I would use, but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this. "God, today I realize I've been headed down the wrong path. I've been doing things for the wrong reason, with the wrong motive, and it's just all wrong, and so today I understand that Jesus Christ is the only answer that I've spent my whole life searching for and today, Lord, I'm ready. In fact, today, Lord, I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to pay the price for my sin on his cross, and I believe that three days later when he rose from the grave, he made it possible for my sins to be forgiven, for my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to all the

problems of life, but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem so the best way I know how, I'm asking you to save me, I'm asking you to forgive me, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, if you had that conversation with the Lord today, we'd love to have a conversation with you. We'd love just to celebrate what the Lord has and is doing in your life by just having a conversation with you. Or maybe you had that conversation with the Lord years ago and you know you're saved, you know you're born again but it's been a struggle since and as of late, we'd love the privilege of praying with you or talking with you, whatever how the Lord might use us to minister unto you.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time in our service, Lord, we have the privilege of responding, the privilege of hearing with our ears and hearing with our heart but now allowing it to transfer to our mouth and our hands and our feet. Lord, I pray whatever it is that you've shown us through your word, that we would just simply respond as your Holy Spirit has moved us. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm gonna ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Whatever decision, I'm gonna be right down here at the front.