

Lev. 9:1 On the eighth day Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel. ² He said to Aaron: “Take a calf of the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, without blemish, and bring them before the LORD. ³ And speak to the Israelites, saying: Take a he-goat for a sin offering; a calf and a lamb, yearlings without blemish, for a burnt offering; ⁴ and an ox and a ram for an offering of well-being to sacrifice before the LORD; and a meal offering with oil mixed in. For today the LORD will appear to you.”

...

Lev. 9:22 Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them; and he stepped down after offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the offering of well-being. ²³ Moses and Aaron then went inside the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the Presence of the LORD appeared to all the people. ²⁴ Fire came forth from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat parts on the altar. And all the people saw, and shouted, and fell on their faces.

RASHBAM: Fire came forth from before the LORD. From inside the Holy of Holies, via the golden altar inside the Tabernacle—in order to turn the incense into smoke (which, according to B. Yoma 33b, must precede the regular daily offering). But there, next to the golden altar, the fire encountered the sons of Aaron and burned them. Then it came forth to the outside altar and consumed the burnt offering and the fat parts.

Lev. 10:1 Now Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered before the LORD alien fire, which He had not enjoined upon them. ² And fire came forth from the LORD and consumed them; thus they died ^aat the instance of^a the LORD. ^a Others “before.”

RASHBAM: Fire came forth from the LORD and consumed them. This is the event previously described in 9:24. The burning of the offering and of Aaron’s sons took place as a part of a single event in which “fire came forth from before the LORD.” Just when Aaron’s sons took this unwanted fire to the inner altar, fire came forth from before the Lord to burn the incense there. It struck Aaron’s sons and they died. Then the fire came forth from the Tent to the outer altar, where it consumed the offering. See my comment to Exod. 19:8 for other examples of a single event being narrated in two different verses.

NAHMANIDES: Fire came forth from before the LORD. More literally, “from with the face of the Lord.” The enlightened person will comprehend this, as I have already explained it.

Baruch Levine, *Leviticus* (JPS Torah Commentary)

24. Fire came forth from before the LORD The Sifra interprets this as a fire from heaven. Rashbam more accurately identifies it as the fire of God that was inside the Tent, the same fire that would subsequently scald Nadab and Abihu, Aaron’s two sons, when they entered the Tent improperly, according to 10:2. In both verses we have the same formulation: *va-tetse’ esh mi-lifnei YHVH*, “Fire came forth from before the Lord.” God’s fire issued from the *kavod*, which itself was a fire that was enveloped in a thick cloud and pervaded the Tent. It was a blessing to those who pleased God but destructive to those who angered Him. On this occasion the ignition of the altar fire was cause for rejoicing.

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at the instance of the LORD Rather, “before the Lord.” This formula identifies the place of death. Verses 4–5 state that Aaron’s relatives removed the bodies of Nadab and Abihu “away from the front of the sanctuary,” namely, from the spot where they died. It is logical, therefore, to conclude that verse 2 is also identifying the place of death, rather than informing us who caused their death.

Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus* (Anchor Bible)

24. Fire came forth from before the LORD (*wattēšē’ ’ēš millipnē YHWH*). The sacrifices on the altar were slowly burning (vv 13, 14, 17, 24), a process normally taking many hours (6:2b), but the divine fire consumed them in a flash (Hoffmann 1953).

Whence the fire? The silence of the text allows for ample speculation: (1) it came of itself (Jos., *Ant.* 3.207); (2) it descended from heaven (2 Chr 7:1; *Sipre Zuṭa* on Num 11:1; *Sipra*, Millu’im Shemini 20; *Pirḡe R. El.* 53); (3) it originated in the adytum (*Sipra*, Millu’im Shemini 34; Philo, *Vit. Mos.* 2.154); (4) from the adytum it passed through the shrine, where it kindled the incense on the inner altar (the incense being burned before the *Tāmīd*, *b. Yoma* 33b), incinerated Nadab and Abihu, and then exited into the court and consumed the sacrifices on the altar (Rashbam; cf. *Sipre Zuṭa* on Num 11:1). But on the other occasions on which the divine fire consumes the sacrifice (cited above), it is explicitly stated or assumed that it descends from heaven: “the fire of the Lord fell (*wattippōl*)” (1 Kgs 18:38); “He (the Lord) answered him in fire from heaven” (1 Chr 21:26); “as the fire descended (*bēredet*)” (2 Chr 7:3). Here, however, the verb employed is *yāšā’* ‘come out, emerge’. Thus there can be no doubt that the fire emerged from the adytum, in conformance with the Priestly theology that the Lord’s *kābôd*, encased in cloud, would descend upon the Tabernacle and rest between the outspread wings of the cherubim flanking the Ark.

Anthropologists see the altar fire as a gateway to the other world through which offerings are transmitted to God and through which the power of God is directly manifested to man (e.g., Leach 1976: 88). The correctness of this observation is accentuated by a Priestly rule concerning the altar fire: it may never be allowed to die out. This admonition is given twice in two consecutive verses (6:5–6). The reason is now apparent. Because the altar fire is of divine origin it must be perpetuated (*Sipra*, Nedaba 5:10). Furthermore, a more pragmatic purpose underlies this injunction. Just as the initial appearance of the divine fire signified God’s approval, so every sacrifice offered on the same altar will, with God’s grace, also merit his acceptance.

HIZKUNI: Fire came forth from before the LORD. The fire that came forth in Moses’ day was not extinguished from the copper altar until they got to the time of the Temple, and that which came down in Solomon’s day was not extinguished until the time of King Manasseh.

2Chr. 7:1 When Solomon finished praying, **fire descended from heaven** and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the House.

וְכַכְלֹת שְׁלֹמֹה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל וְהָאֵשׁ יֵרְדָה מִמַּשְׁמַיִם

2 Chr. 7:1

וַיְהִי | כְּכַלֹּת שְׁלֹמֹה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל אֶל-יְהוָה

1 Kings 8:54

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