
LEVITICUS 21:1 The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them, 'A priest shall not defile himself for the dead among his people;

The priests shall not mourn for the dead, except for near relatives, such as mother, father, son, daughter, and sister if a virgin, Lev 21:1-4. They shall not shave their heads nor beards, nor make any cuttings in the flesh, because they are holy unto God, Lev 21:5, Lev 21:6. A priest shall not marry a woman who is a whore, profane, or divorced from her husband, Lev 21:7, Lev 21:8. Of the priest's daughter who profanes herself, Lev 21:9. The high priest shall not uncover his head, or rend his clothes, Lev 21:10; nor go in unto a dead body, Lev 21:11; nor go out of the sanctuary, Lev 21:12. Of his marriage and off-spring, Lev 21:13-15. No person shall be made a priest that has any blemish nor shall any person with any of the blemishes mentioned here be permitted to officiate in the worship of God, Lev 21:16-24.

Verse 1

There shall none be defiled for the dead - No priest shall assist in laying out a dead body, or preparing it for interment. Any contact with the dead was supposed to be of a defiling nature, probably because putrefaction had then taken place; and animal putrefaction was ever held in detestation by all men.

LEVITICUS 21:2 except for his relatives that are near to him: for his mother, for his father, for his son, for his daughter, for his brother,

LEVITICUS 21:3 and for his virgin sister who is near to him, who has had no husband; for her he may defile himself.

LEVITICUS 21:4 He shall not defile himself, being a chief man among his people, to profane himself.

Verse 4

A chief man among his people - The word בעל baal signifies a master, chief, husband, etc., and is as variously translated here.

1. He being a chief among the people, it would be improper to see him in such a state of humiliation as mourning for the dead necessarily implies.
2. Though a husband he shall not defile himself even for the death of a wife, because the anointing of his God is upon him. But the first sense appears to be the best.

LEVITICUS 21:5 "They shall not shave their heads, neither shall they shave off the corners of their beards, nor make any cuttings in their flesh.

Verse 5

They shall not make baldness - See the note on Lev 19:27. It is supposed that these things were particularly prohibited, because used superstitiously by the Egyptian priests, who, according to Herodotus, shaved the whole body every third day, that there might be no uncleanness about them when they ministered in their temples. This appears to have been a general custom among the heathen. In the book of Baruch 6:31, the priests of Babylon are represented sitting in their temples, with their clothes rent, and their heads and beards shaven, and having nothing upon their heads. Every person knows the tonsure of the Catholic priests. Should not this be avoided as an approach to a heathenish custom?

LEVITICUS 21:6 They shall be holy to their God, and not profane the name of their God; for they offer the offerings of the LORD made by fire, the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy.

LEVITICUS 21:7 “They shall not marry a woman who is a prostitute, or profane; neither shall they marry a woman divorced from her husband; for he is holy to his God.

Verse 7

That is a whore - A prostitute, though even reclaimed.

Profane - A heathen, or one who is not a cordial believer in the true God. Put away from her husband - Because this very circumstance might lead to suspicion that the priest and the divorced woman might have been improperly connected before.

LEVITICUS 21:8 You shall sanctify him therefore; for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you; for I the LORD, who sanctify you, am holy.

LEVITICUS 21:9 “The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the prostitute, she profanes her father. She shall be burned with fire.

Verse 9

She shall be burnt with fire - Probably not burnt alive, but strangled first, and then burnt afterward. Though it is barely possible that some kind of branding may be intended.

LEVITICUS 21:10 “He who is the high priest among his brothers, upon whose head the anointing oil is poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not let the hair of his head hang loose, nor tear his clothes;

Verse 10

He that is the high priest - This is the first place where this title is introduced; the title is very emphatic, הגדול הכהן haccohen haggadol, that priest, the great one. For the meaning of כהן cohen, see the note on Gen 14:18. As the chief or high priest was a representative of our blessed Lord,

therefore he was required to be especially holy; and he is represented as God's king among the people.

LEVITICUS 21:11 neither shall he go in to any dead body, nor defile himself for his father, or for his mother;

LEVITICUS 21:12 neither shall he go out of the sanctuary, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the crown of the anointing oil of his God is upon him. I am the LORD.

Verse 12

The crown of the anointing oil - is upon him - By his office the priest represented Christ in his sacrificial character; by his anointing, the prophetic influence; and by the crown, the regal dignity of our Lord.

LEVITICUS 21:13 “He shall take a wife in her virginity.

Verse 13

He shall take a wife in her virginity - בתולה bethuleyha. This is a full proof that בתולה bethulah is the proper Hebrew term for a virgin; from the emphatic root בתל bathal, to separate; because such a person was in her separate state, and had never been in any way united to man.

LEVITICUS 21:14 A widow, or one divorced, or a woman who has been defiled, or a prostitute, these he shall not marry: but a virgin of his own people shall he take as a wife.

LEVITICUS 21:15 He shall not profane his seed among his people, for I am the LORD who sanctifies him.”

LEVITICUS 21:16 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

LEVITICUS 21:17 “Say to Aaron, ‘None of your seed throughout their generations who has a defect may approach to offer the bread of his God.

Verse 17

Whosoever - hath any blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God - Never was a wiser, a more rational, and a more expedient law enacted relative to sacred matters. The man who ministers in holy things, who professes to be the interpreter of the will of God, should have nothing in his person nor in his manner which cannot contribute to render him respectable in the eyes of those to whom he ministers. If, on the contrary, he has any personal defect, any thing that may render him contemptible or despicable, his usefulness will be greatly injured, if not entirely prevented. If however a man have received any damage in the work of God, by persecution or otherwise, his scars are honorable, and will add to his respectability. But if he be received into the

ministry with any of the blemishes specified here, he never will and never can have that respect which is essentially necessary to secure his usefulness. Let no man say this is a part of the Mosaic law, and we are not bound by it. It is an eternal law, founded on reason, propriety, common sense, and absolute necessity. The priest, the prophet, the Christian minister, is the representative of Jesus Christ; let nothing in his person, carriage, or doctrine, be unworthy of the personage he represents. A deformed person, though consummate in diplomatic wisdom, would never be employed as an ambassador by any enlightened court, if any fit person, unblemished, could possibly be procured.

LEVITICUS 21:18 For whatever man he is that has a defect, he shall not draw near: a blind man, or a lame, or he who has a flat nose, or any deformity,

Verse 18

A blind man - That is, in one eye; for he that was utterly blind could not possibly be employed in such a service. A flat nose, like that of an ape; so the best versions. Any thing superfluous, such as six fingers, six toes, etc.

LEVITICUS 21:19 or a man who has an injured foot, or an injured hand,

Verse 19

Broken-footed, or broken-handed - Club-footed, bandy-legged, etc.; or having the ankle, wrist, or fingers dislocated.

LEVITICUS 21:20 or hunchbacked, or a dwarf, or one who has a defect in his eye, or an itching disease, or scabs, or who has damaged testicles.

Verse 20

Crooked-backed - Hunch-backed or gibbous. A dwarf, דַּק דַּק, a person too short or too thin, so as to be either particularly observable, or ridiculous in his appearance.

A blemish in his eye - A protuberance on the eye, observable spots or suffusions.

Scurvy, or scabbed - A bad habit of body, evidenced by scorbutic or scrofulous affections.

Stones broken - Is ruptured; an infirmity which would render him incapable of fulfilling the duties of his office, which might be often very fatiguing. In the above list of blemishes we meet with some that might render the priest contemptible in the eyes of men, and be the means of leading them, not only to despise the man, but to despise the ministry itself; and we meet with others that would be a very great impediment in the discharge of his ministerial duties, and therefore any person thus blemished is by this law precluded from the ministry. The blemishes here enumerated have been considered by some in an allegorical point of view, as if only referring to the necessity of moral purity; but although holiness of heart and righteousness of life be essentially necessary in a minister

of God, yet an absence of the defects mentioned above is, I fully believe, what God intends here, and for the reasons too which have been already advanced. It must however be granted, that there have been some eminent divines who have been deformed; and some with certain blemishes have been employed in the Christian ministry, and have been useful. The Mosaic rule, however, will admit of but few exceptions, when even examined according to the more extended interpretation of the Christian system. "The Hebrews say there are in all 120 blemishes which disable the priest - eight in the head, two in the neck, nine in the ears, five in the brows, seven in the eyelids, nineteen in the eyes, nine in the nose, nine in the mouth, three in the belly, three in the back, seven in the hands, sixteen in the secrets, eight in any part of the body, eight in the skin, and seven in the strength and in the breath." - Ainsworth. In ancient times, even among heathens, persons of the most respectable appearance were appointed to the priesthood; and the emperor, both among the ancient Greeks and Romans, was both king and priest. It is reported of Metellus, that, having lost an eye in endeavoring to save the Palladium from the flames, when the temple of Vesta was on fire, he was denied the priesthood, though he had rendered such an excellent piece of service to the public; yet the public opinion was that a priest who was defective in any member was to be avoided as ominous - See Dodd. "At Elis, in Greece, the judges chose the finest looking man to carry the sacred vessels of the deity; he that was next to him in beauty and elegance led the ox; and the third in personal beauty, etc., carried the garlands, ribbons, wine, and the other matters used for the sacrifice." - Athen. Deipnisoph., l. xiii., c. 2.

Formerly the Church of England was very cautious in admitting to her ministry those who had gross personal defects; but now we find the hump-backed, the jolt-headed, bandy-legged, club-footed, one-eyed, etc., priests even of her high places. Why do our prelates ordain such?

LEVITICUS 21:21 No man of the seed of Aaron the priest who has a defect shall come near to offer the offerings of the LORD made by fire. Since he has a defect, he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God.

LEVITICUS 21:22 He shall eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy, and of the holy.

LEVITICUS 21:23 He shall not come near to the veil, nor come near to the altar, because he has a defect; that he may not profane my sanctuaries, for I am the LORD who sanctifies them."

Verse 23

He shall not go in unto the veil - The priest with a blemish was not permitted to enter into the holy of holies, nor to burn incense, nor to offer the shew-bread, nor to light the golden candlestick, etc. In short, he was not permitted to perform any essential function of the priesthood.

1. The great perfection required in the Jewish high priest was intended principally to point out the perfection of that priesthood of which the Jewish was only the type. And yet, as the apostle assures us, that law made nothing perfect, but pointed out that most perfect priesthood and sacrifice by which we draw near to God.

2. As none who had a blemish could enter into the holy of holies, and this holy of holies was a type of the kingdom of God, so nothing that is defiled can enter into heaven; for he gave himself for his Church that he might purify it to himself, and present it at last before the presence of the Divine glory having neither spot nor wrinkle, nor any such thing, Eph 5:27; a passage which evidently refers

to the directions in the preceding verse. Reader, art thou become a king and priest unto God and the Lamb? and hast thou obtained, or art thou earnestly seeking, that holiness without which thou canst not see the kingdom of heaven?

LEVITICUS 21:24 So Moses spoke to Aaron, and to his sons, and to all the children of Israel.
