

Leviticus 21

Holy Priests Prepared to Participate in Holy Worship

Friday, December 22, 2023 • Read Leviticus 21

Questions from the Scripture text: To whom does YHWH speak in v1 (cf. v4, cf. 10:4–6)? For whom is the message? What mustn't they do? For which relatives may they make an exception (v2–3)? What else mustn't they do (v5, cf. 19:27)? What must their mourning reflect instead (v6)? Why, what special task do they have? What three types of women mustn't they marry (v7)? Why not (v7–8)? What might a daughter of a priest do (v9)? What does this do to her father? What must be done to her? Who has his own regulations (v10)? What was done to his head and clothes? What mustn't he do to them in mourning? For whom, even, may he not make an exception (v11)? Where mustn't he go (v12, cf. 10:7)? What type of woman, alone, may he marry, from what people alone (v13–14)? What special consideration must the high priest have (v15)? What new section introduction do we have in v16? To what individual is this specifically addressed (v17)? Who may not perform the holy-place ministry or altar ministry (cf. v21)? What types of defects are excluded (v18–20)? Yet, what may a man with a defect do (v22)? From which types of bread? Why mustn't he approach the veil or the altar (v23)? How does v24 conclude the two sections of the chapter?

Why were there special rules for the consecrated lives of the priests? Leviticus 21 prepares us for the evening sermon on the Lord's Day. In these twenty-four verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **there were special rules for the consecrated lives of the priests in order to safeguard God's holy worship.**

Increasing degrees of consecration. In "the holiness code," the Lord has given His people instruction, so far, on the sanctity of blood (ch17), the sanctity of marriage (ch18), the sanctity of saints (ch19), and the sanctity of the church (ch20). There has been a subtle progression of increasing consecration, as the Scripture narrows nearer and nearer to the Lord. Now, in chapter 21, it narrows to the priesthood (v1–9), the High Priest himself (v10–15), and the holy place and the altar (v16–23).

The priesthood, v1–9. We already saw in 10:4–5 that with Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar already in the tabernacle court, they could not leave or defile themselves for the sake of Nadab and Abihu. Now, we see in v1–4 that even when they are not "on duty," they may only subject themselves to uncleanness in order to attend to the dead if the deceased is the nearest of relatives. They have a husband's/master's duty to the living (v4), and the work of the tabernacle ministry is too important to interrupt to attend to the dead, unless someone else, related as nearly, isn't available to do so.

There were other safeguards for the consecrated ministry of the tabernacle. Priests were to be especially careful to follow the rules concerning grieving that we saw in 19:27 (v5–6). They were not to grieve like unbelievers do (cf. Gen 49:29–33; 1Th 4:13); the marks of hopeless grief profane the Name of the Lord (v6). The list in v7 does not exclude widows (as v14 does); for priests in general, the point here is that they were to marry women of good character (cf. 1Tim 3:4–5, 11). The priest who offers the bread of God (v8) must be a man who presides over godly living in his own tent/home. By specifying the form of execution in v9, the Lord ties this instance to chapter 20, where the Lord specified various methods of execution as an indication that it is He Who thus maintains the consecration of His church. In the case of v9, the daughter of a priest must take into account how her behavior might defile God's worship, for which God had set apart her father.

The High Priest himself, v10–15. In the case of the High Priest, he must have regard for his office. His head had oil poured upon it (v10), so he must not uncover his head in mourning. He has been dressed in the holy garments, so he must not tear his clothes in mourning. So, he mustn't engage in even some appropriate expressions of grief, which do not include the disfiguring in v5. Similarly, even for the death of one of his parents (v11), he is not permitted to contract an uncleanness that would take him away from his high priestly labor (v12). For him, even a widow will not do as a wife (v13–14) not only on account of his current household, but because from him, the future high priests are to come (v15).

The Holy Place and the altar, v16–23. The prohibitions in v16–20 are in no way an indication of the personal worth of the handicapped man. Not only does he continue to be fully in the image of God, but if he is a priest, he continues to have the right to eat not only of the grain offerings, but even of the showbread (v22)!

However, much of the tabernacle service itself required arduous labor that must be done in the proper manner. The defects described here either diminish the man's ability to do so, endanger the ministry of direct defilement (in the case of scab or sore, v20). The last condition in v20 disqualified anyone from the holy assembly (cf. Deut 23:1). But we must therefore conclude that it only applied to those who had ritually mutilated himself as was done in various ancient near-eastern pagan rituals; for, there are indeed eunuchs who keep God's Sabbath's within God's house (cf. Isa 56:3–5).

The main point can be discerned from "offer the bread of his God" (in v16), "to offer the offerings made by fire" (in v21), and "near the veil or approach altar" (v23). The priests' role, in how God has provided for His people to draw near to Him, is too vital to risk compromising in any avoidable way.

The great High Priest and the priesthood of believers. The ongoing application of this is wondrous and widespread. It is wondrous because the Lord Jesus consecrated Himself as High Priest for our sakes (cf. Jn 17:9). He offered Himself (cf. Ps 40:6–8; Heb 10:5–9), in perfect obedience and atoning death. And the application of this chapter is widespread because through Christ's work as Great High Priest, He has consecrated all believers into their new priesthood (cf. Heb 10:10)—so much so that in the New Testament, every single believer enters the Holy of Holies through Him (cf. Heb 10:19–25)! So, let us put off all willful sin, and always live with a view toward being ready in mind, heart, and life to enter again beyond the veil, in His worship assembly, in less than six days from now.

Who is your Great High Priest? What did He have to be and do to be holy? What important offering did He make? Who leads the worship that was consecrated by His blood? How near do you come to God in that worship? When are you next scheduled to do so? How should you live between now and then?

Sample prayer: Lord, we thank You and praise You that You have given Your own Son to be our Great High Priest. We praise You for His perfect righteousness, purity, and ability to carry out the ministry that You assigned to Him. And we thank You that under His new and everlasting priesthood, You have made all who are united to Him to be priests to You. Grant that we would always live in a way that is mindful of the fact that we must soon gather to You as a holy people, in Your holy Son, for Your holy worship. Help us, we pray, by Your Spirit, through Your Son, in Whose Name we ask it, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP15 "Within Your Tent, Who Will Reside" or TPH165 "To Your Temple, I Repair"

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Leviticus 21. These are God's words. And yahweh said to Moses, speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron. And say to them, none shall defile himself for the dead among his people except for his relatives who are nearest to him, His mother, his father, his son, his daughter and his brother Also, his virgin sister who is near to him, who has had no husband.

For her, he may defile himself. Otherwise, these are not to file himself being a chief man among his people to profane himself. They shall not make any bald place on their heads. Nor shall they shave the edges of their beards? Nor make any cuttings in their flesh. They shall be holy to their god and not profane the name of their god.

For they offer, the offerings of yahweh, made by fire. And the bread of their god. Therefore, they shall be holy. They shall not take a wife who is a harlot or a defiled woman nor shall they? Take a woman divorced from her husband. For the priest is holy to his god.

Therefore you shall consecrate him. For, he offers the bread of your god, he shall be holy to you. For all your way, who sanctify you I'm holy. The daughter of any priest if she profains herself by playing the harlot. She profains her father She shall be burned with fire.

He who is the high priest among his brethren on whose head, the anointing oil was bored. And who has consecrated to where the garments? Shall not uncover his head, nor tear his clothes. Nor shall he go near and he dead body nor defile himself for his father or his mother?

Nor shall he go out of the sanctuary nor profane the sanctuary of his god? For the consecration of the anointing oil of his god is upon him. I am your way. And he shall

take a wife in her virginity. A widower a divorced woman or defiled woman or a harlot these he shall not marry but he shall take a virgin of his own people.

As wife. Nor shall he prove vain his posterity among his people. For all you always sanctify him.

And you always spoke to Moses saying. Speak to Aaron saying, No man of your descendants and succeeding generations. He has any defect may approach to offer the bread of his god. For any man who has a defect shall not approach a man blind or lame, who has a marred face or any limb too long.

Uh, man who has a broken foot or a broken hand or is a hunchback, or a dwarf, Or a man who has a defect in his eye or eczema, or scabber is a eunuch. No man of the descendants of Aaron. The priest who has a defect, shall come near to offer the offerings made by fire to Yahweh.

He has a defect. He shall not come near. To offer the bread of his god. He may eat the bread of his god. Both the most holy and the holy Only, he shall not go near the veil. Or approach the altar because he has a defect Lest he profane?

My sanctuaries. For all you all day, sanctify them. And Moses told it to Aaron and his sons. And to all the children. Of Israel. For men that sends reading of gods inspired and inherent word. Ever since the day of attunement, in chapter 16, we've been in the section in levticus.

Where he deals with that, which is consecrated with that, which is holy, Uh, you remember that in the wake of native and a bayou being struck dead How God had said in chapter 10 and verse 10? That one of the reasons why the priesthood was so necessary and guarding it was so necessary.

That's because they had to teach Israel to differentiate between the the holy and the common. And the clean, and the unclean. And so, all of the different ways that you might be made. Unclean. He covered in chapters 11 through 15. And now, since beginning of chapter 17, he's been covering that which is holy.

And so chapter 17, we had the sanctity of blood Uh, particularly it. Being given for life and attainment. Chapter 18, the sanctity of marriage. Chapter 19. The sanctity of saints of the People of god to be different than. Um, Distinct from The people of land. Uh, marked off by the lord, who is holy and therefore they must be holy.

Then last week in chapter 20, the sanctity of the church. And the necessity of, Applying whatever penalties. Uh, The lord has given as preventative and purification. In order to maintain the sacredness of the assembly as a whole. Now, in chapter 21, we come to the sanctity of the priesthood.

So there's kind of been this progressive increasing Uh, nearer to The.

Uh, nearer to the lord himself. Aspect. Uh, in every subsequent chapter where you start with something that is for all of creation and something that is for all of humanity, individual believers, the corporate assembly and now not just a sanctity of the priesthood. But as we find Uh, throughout the chapter.

It's really the sanctity of the worship itself. Uh, that the priesthood brings And the sanctity of the worship. Of god's people is really the sanctity of god because it's to god whom they drawn here. Uh, this is why you have several times. Um, the offerings of yahweh made by fire the bread of their god.

That the sanctity of worship is the sanctity of god. Now, this is one of the reasons of course why Uh, we care so much to worship only in the manner that god has said but also it's the reason that we care so much to worship with bright hearts and right minds.

And as and to come only through the lord jesus. In whom alone is. The righteousness and the purity. The atonement. Through which god may be approached. To come only independence upon his spirit. And then also, as we learn in this chapter, so, to order our lives and our conduct That we not be defiled.

Outside the assembly or outside the sanctuary as it were. In order that we would be. Fit and ready. For the worship of god. And so, this is really. If chapter 20 was the sanctity of the church chapter 21 now is the sanctity. The consecration. Of worship. And we see him deal with the priesthood generally.

Inverses, one through nine and the high priest and self-specifically In verses 10 through 15. And then Uh, this Uh, ban upon Um, Men with defects, but really Uh, the band upon the men of defects having more to do. With that, which is required of those who are conducting the worship.

Uh, and so Um, it's not so much about the the men themselves as it is about the holy place and the altar. And the physical requirements and the ceremonial cleanliness requirements. Of that worship. So when he deals with the priesthood and verses 139, he actually deals with a couple of things that we saw already immediately.

When native and about who died. Because, The rest of the high priestly family was in the tabernacle. And they had just been consecrated. It was on the last day. Following their ordination the first full day of their consecrated priestly work. And they, they could not leave They also could not defile themselves to Touch the dead bodies.

They couldn't remove their Uncover their heads or tear their clothes because on their heads where the priestly hats and they're closed that they were wearing where the priestly garments. And so there were a bunch of logistical things. That Moses had to do, you get the uncles to come and And get the bodies and warn.

Um, Aaron and LAAS are and ithamar. Against even what is ordinarily, appropriate mourning. And so verses one through nine. Specify for whom. A priest was permitted. Uh, to mourn. Uh, to participate in. Uh, taking care of the dead attending, the dead, not just a mourn. Um, They could mourn.

Uh, anyone In the appropriate way. Yeah, uncovering their head. Or tearing their clothes. But they were not allowed to disfigure themselves. Remember that from verse 19? And, Saving the The parts of their heads or shaving their beard in a weird way or making cutting or tattooing in themselves that would disfigure or mar their identity.

Make being a grieving person part of their identity, which was how the pagans grieved they could never do that. Verse five tells us, Um, but as they Uh, mourned for people. The only ones to whom they could attend directly to the deceased were those of their nearest family. And you see that in, Um, In verse 2.

And verse 3. And so, it's very important. That they're respond to. Death in a way that shows. That god has given his people, a hope. That is stronger and greater than death. And then there were other safeguards. Uh, due to the fact that Uh, they had this uh, consecrated Um ministry.

In the tabernacle. One of the safeguards was in their marriages. There were certain categories of women. That they were not to marry. Because they, Uh, those women were immoral. Notice that? Uh, For the priests generally, they could marry a widow. Which, as we heard later in the chapter, the high priest could not.

It's because it's not immoral to be a widow. Uh, but a priest was to have a moral family. Uh, indeed. Uh, this was part of not just consecrating the man himself. But because the man himself had such a significant role in the worship of god in the worship that god had commanded his people.

The consecration of his home, the holy conduct of his wife and his children. Uh, was also important for his being properly set apart. Um, and holy for leading the

worship of god. Um, So much. So that in verse 9, the daughter of a priest if she profaned herself by playing playing the harlot, she doesn't just profane herself.

She profanes the household in particularly the head of the household. She profanes her father Verse 9 says she shall be burned with fire. And what that does is, it reminds us of the different penalties that were in chapter 20 Uh, where you saw that the lord didn't just Um inflict sometimes or require sometimes the penalty of excommunication.

And in that case, where you had the church that was also a state, the penalty of Of execution. But the lord would even give specific specific methods of execution stoning in some cases. Um, Probably when cutting off was an execution. Uh, you know, it would be with the sort.

And, Uh, we also saw in Um, in one case, execution by burning And all of that. Uh, to demonstrate that, it is god who has maintaining the holiness of his church. And that when the church responds to god's own maintaining of the holiness of his church, Uh, from glory that the church is to do.

So not according to her, own ideas, but very specifically according to gods instruction, Uh and so this burning with fire and verse 9 refers back to that it reminds us that this is a form of Uh, church discipline as it were not. Now just discipline upon the daughter or discipline upon Her father, who has a priest, but because one of the great Um, Matters in church discipline.

One of the main points in church discipline is the consecration of the worshiping people. Uh, for their consecrated worship. And so the, the priests generally, Uh, were to have their conduct and their home and And in their, Uh, marriages and and how they grieved and whether or not they could attend to the dead.

All of that went uh was to be considered, was to be seen and approached through the lens of Uh, they're needing to fulfill their role in the holy worship of god's people. Now if that's true the priest's generally how much more than the holy priest? Sorry the the high priest or Um, the Great Depriest actually to translate.

That word more literally in verse 10. The one upon whom the anointing oil was poured. And who is consecrated to where this special garments? And the special garments. You remember the ones that had the names of israel on the shoulders and the names of israel. Um, In the breast pouch and so, This was the one who not only.

Administered, the sacrifices and performed the sacrifices, but embodied the people before god as they gathered for worship, and then once a year would even go through the veil, Uh, to apply the blood on. Uh, on the day of atonement. And who would confess on behalf of the people? Upon the scapegoat.

And so the great priest if you have Those rules for the priests generally. Then one of the ways that god communicates that this really is about the sanctity of his worship. Is that all of the rules that are heightened for the high priest? He may not attend to even his father or his mother.

If they are the deceased. Uh, he may Uh, he may grieve for them. Um,

Um, but he may not even uncover his head or tear his clothes. Okay, so Uh, not only is he forbidden the pagan. Uh, grieving But being one, who is a public person and a representative for the people, he may not even do the morally, okay? Grieving, He must let others do the grieving for him and attend.

Uh, continue attending to the work for which he has been consecrated. When it comes to his marrying. It's not just immoral women that he may not marry whether divorced or of harlotry. It's defiled etc. Uh, but he must also not even marry a widow. Uh, this is in part because Uh, he needs to marry a virgin.

It is from his Descendants that the next high priest. That the remaining high priests are to come And so, So, he must Uh, marry, a wife in her virginity verse 13, not even a widow verse 14. In part because verse 15. It is important that he not profane has posterity, he needs to consider the line.

That is going to come from him. Uh, just as he is has. Uh, rules guide. Guarding his own ministry in a way that the Uh, rest of the priesthood isn't isn't guarded to the same extent. Well, he also has Uh, within his loins as it were, the descending, high priests from him.

And so, he must have a regard for their ministries. As well. So there's a safeguards here for the consecration of the priesthood and for the consecration of the high priest himself, And then for the ministry, the physical ministry of Of taking care of. Uh, the showbread Um, Particularly. In attending to Uh, the lamps in the holy place.

Has probably darker in there. You have a couple of Uh, a couple of prohibitions. Uh, defects of sight. Um, Uh, even Uh, defect of Um, Of the face. Uh, in part because they have to pronounce benedictions upon the people. There's a Uh, there is a Uh, physical. Uh, blessing there.

Uh, physical aspect and representing gods to them, as they pronounce the blessing of god's lifting up his face upon the people. And then, even That says here. Eczema or a scab, it's probably scabs or sores as the best way to translate. That phrase. We've come a long way in our understanding of Hebrew.

Uh, at the time, the king james was written. Uh, the word that's translated eczema, they just guessed scurvy. Um, so that's there in the king james but We've gone through, haven't we? In the clean and unclean section the danger. If you have a scab or a sore that you might bring a ceremonial uncleanness, If you had.

Uh, if you, if you had that. So, all of these things about the man with the defect Um,

So all of these things about the man with the defect are actually about the carrying out, Of the ministry. That has been appointed. That that was necessary and this is something that The lord jesus was obviously thinking about the night before he was going to the cross. And he was, Uh, getting ready to do something, that was going to.

Uh, Be extremely taxing on him, in soul and body. And he was praying for this reason, i, he prayed John 17 verse 19 for this reason, i consecrate myself so that they Maybe sanctified through the truth. And hebrews 10 then picks up that language. Of god, not actually wanting the sacrifices and offerings.

Uh, that he had appointed to israel as pictures that look forward to, what christ was going to do. But what god actually wanted, when it caught is actually, requiring is his own son to have a body and to have ears and to offer himself. Uh, and so In God's providence, that's our psalm of the month, psalm 40, from which hebrews 10 quotes.

And as And hebrews 10. Then says. Uh, In verses 5 through 9, it deals with the, with the portion of the psalm that we have just referred to and that we've been singing this month. And then it says that in hebrews 10 10 that through the sacrifice, for which he was consecrated, he himself has consecrated all.

Who believe in it. Which is really important in hebrews 10 verse 10. Because nine verses later it's going to talk about all of us. Coming through the veil. In the new and living way, that is the flesh of jesus christ. And so, for more than a thousand years before the lord jesus did that there was this requirement of the of the priests who are actually going to do the physical work.

That was necessary for the consecration of the worship of god's people. Um to uh to to consecrate themselves, even for the physical labor that they were going to do. And our lord, jesus consecrated himself. Even for the offering up of himself, even as he offered himself in the offering of acts of obedience, As his active obedience to be our righteousness, throughout his life.

But coming at last also, to offer himself in his passive, obedience offering himself as a sacrifice for our sins. But if that's the case and hebrews 10 does draw upon language or does describe what the lord jesus did and that language from psalm 40 in that language. That borrows or takes rather.

It's it's word pictures. Uh, from The requirements here in Leviticus 21 and the consecration of the priests and the consecration. Of the great high priest. But if what the lord jesus has done is then consecrate us so that we all come Into the holy of holies in the public worship.

Then how much more? Should we seek to live? Righteous and holy lives. That we would always be ready because a christian is never more than six days away. From when he is next scheduled to enter the holy of holies. And so our holy living is very important the way we operate in our households, it that our household be kept pure and holy and reserved unto god.

So that every one of us has this duty to not just live well in relation to one another but to live well before the face of god, And not just our house, but every household in the church, I am not the great, high priest. I am appointed for preaching and for separating.

Um, but jesus is our great, high priest, every one of us. Have been consecrated every one of us. Go through the veil, every one of us. Come into the holy of holies lord's day. By lord's day. And there is to some extent, some preparation of the body as well.

No, we don't have to lift bulls and and slaughter them and drain blood, and catch it, and splatter it. And Um, go into dark places and mess with fire and You know, all the rest of it that the Uh, the sons of Aaron had to do. But, There are things that we can do in ways that we can order our lives.

That will enable us to have. Um, Uh, better rest more energy and clearer thoughts. So that we can join in prayer. Well, and There are things that we might or might not do with our voices, for instance, Yeah, what a fool would scream himself raw at a sporting event or a music concert.

On a saturday evening. If his voice is supposed to be consecrated for the congregational singing, in the worship of god, and the lord's day morning, And so there's a lot for us to think about here. Uh, As. The whole of the priest's life. Was ordered around the fact that he was going to be.

Uh, doing these things that he was. Required to do in the worship of god. Uh, for god's people. Well, the whole of a believer's life should be lived. Also, then In light of the fact that we are coming soon again. Less than six days time. Um, Into the holy of holies and the public worship.

And we may do so rejoicing that the lord jesus. Not only consecrated himself for his work. He finished his work. And he has consecrated us once for all by his blood. And he always lives to intercede for us. By the power of his indestructible life. And therefore he is able To save us to the uttermost.

And so we have the great high priest. Who has followed this perfectly? And by the spirit applying his grace to us. May we follow him. And living life as consecrated worshipers as those who come nearer than any high priest ever did. Under the order of leviticus. And then, let's pray.

Our father in heaven. Forgive us for, we have thought. So, little of your worship at times. And we have not given it the Priority of place and the care and regard. That this portion of your word teaches us to do, And so we pray that you would forgive us, that you'd help us by your spirit.

We thank you and praise you for your son. Our lord jesus. And his perfect high priestly work. By which he has made all of us who believe in him. Into priests unto you, who come week by week. All the way through the veil. And so we pray. Lord that you would give us to live.

Uh, Mindful of the fact that we are going to be doing that, And give us to live godly and holy lives. And then to come and rejoice. In the privilege that you have given us. And the worship that we offer through him. As we don't forsake the assembling of ourselves together, But do gather under him.

And with him. And that sabbath, keeping that remains. And so we pray. Lord that you would Help us and bless us to live as those who have been redeemed and consecrated. For your public worship. Before we ask it in christ's name. Amen.