

Leviticus

Lesson 16

XV. The Law for the Life of a Priest

A. To Keep the Priestly Line Holy

1. From Defiling Himself by Touching the Dead

The LORD turns to address the law for the life of a priest. The purpose of this set of laws is to keep the priestly line holy from birth to death. Every man in the priestly line is to carefully keep from defiling himself by touching the dead. Verse 21. *"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: 'No one shall defile himself for a dead person among his people, except for his relatives who are nearest to him, his mother and his father and his son and his daughter and his brother, also for his virgin sister, who is near to him because she has had no husband; for her he may defile himself.'"* (21:1).

From the birth to death of a man in Aaron's priestly line, the man may touch only one category of people who die – his own personal biological blood family unit. If he has married daughters, those daughters are off-limits in the law; he cannot touch them. If they are not married, then he can touch them. Touching the dead defiles the priests and forfeits his right to serve as a priest. In the story of Benaiah, the chief of David's bodyguard, we find that he was the son of the high priest. It meant that Benaiah was in line to serve as a priest beginning at the age of twenty-five and serving for twenty-five years until he turned fifty when he was required to retire. However, the Scripture in 2nd Samuel and 1st Chronicles details the reason Benaiah could not serve as a priest and possibly become the high priest. In his teenage years, Benaiah killed two Moabite men, an Egyptian man, and a lion. His killing of these men and the lion forfeited forever his place to serve as a priest. Touching the dead body of a married daughter would also forfeit the right to be a priest. The only exception for the priest was the dead bodies of his immediate blood family kin.

2. From Defiling Himself by the Blood Relationships

In the same light as defiling himself from touching the dead, the priest must carefully keep himself from defiling himself by the blood relationships. Verse 4. *"He shall not defile himself as a relative by marriage among his people, and so profane himself."* (21:4).

We could have included this verse with verse 3, but we needed to discover the critical thought in this passage. The priest *"...shall not defile himself as a relative by marriage among his people..."* The critical thought is *"marriage."* All priests in Aaron's family line are related by marriage. In verses 1-3, a brother, sister, uncle, and aunt were not mentioned because they are not part of a priest's immediate blood family. The dead bodies of the brothers, sisters, uncles, and aunts are off-limits and cannot be touched. So, when priestly brothers leave the family by taking a wife in marriage, the brothers with their own families and wives are off-limits.

3. From Defiling Himself by Altering the Flesh

The priest must keep from defiling himself by altering the flesh. Verse 5. *"They shall not make any baldness on their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts in their flesh."* (21:5).

All religions worshiped in all the world at that time required the head's shaving to expose either the whole head or portions of the head. One example would be the baldness of a completely shaved head; another example is the shaving of the head's sides to produce a mohawk. The head of the LORD's priest were to be left to grow naturally. If the head became bald, it was to do so on its own. Cutting the body of the priest was forbidden too. In other religions, tattooing the body with cut designs was common. Not so for the LORD's priests.

4. From Defiling Himself by Profaning the LORD

The priest must keep from defiling himself by profaning the LORD. Verse 6. *“They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for they present the offerings by fire to the LORD, the food of their God; so they shall be holy.”* (21:6).

The Hebrew word for *profane* is *halal*. It means to *open, give access, make common*. The important word in this verse is at the beginning of the sentence and at the end – holy. Holy things were not to become common things. The offerings were holy. The LORD does not allow common people to present His holy offering to Him. Priests were to be holy – not common. If priests begin to do common things, he is no longer holy. He has profaned his office.

5. From Defiling Himself by Women Relationships

a) With the Harlot

A priest must keep from defiling himself by women relationships. First, we see the harlot. Verse 7a. *“They shall not take a woman who is profaned by harlotry...”* (21:7a).

Any relationship, of any kind, with a prostitute, was strictly forbidden for a priest.

b) With the Divorced Woman

Second, we see the divorced woman. Verse 7b. *“...nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband; for he is holy to his God.”* (21:7b).

In the Old Testament, when a man decided to divorce a wife, her letter of divorce was proof that she was totally innocent in the divorce and did nothing wrong. That is the reason when Jesus was asked why Moses allowed the divorce, Jesus answered, *“Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has been this way.”* (Matthew 19:7-8). In other words, the hearts of the man had shrunk up and become hard toward his wife. But, if the woman was guilty of adultery, divorce was not an option, the death penalty was the only option for the woman. For that reason, when Jesus says, *“It was said, ‘Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce’”* (Matthew 5:31). Continuing, Jesus says, *“... but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of adultery, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”* (Matthew 5:32). Jesus’s word “except” is not a reason for divorce; it explains why adultery is not a reason for divorce. When a woman commits adultery, the penalty is death (20:10). When a certificate of divorce is given, the woman is set free from the man. However, when she marries, she commits adultery against her first husband, who divorced her. Her divorced husband set the path for her sin to possibly occur. Moreover, if a priest married a divorced woman, he would be participating in the act of adultery.

6. From Defiling Himself by His Consecration

The priest must keep from defiling himself by His consecration. Verse 8. *“You shall consecrate him, therefore, for he offers the food of your God; he shall be holy to you; for I the LORD, who sanctifies you, am holy.”* (21:8).

The priest must be holy as the LORD is holy. He is consecrated to the LORD to serve in the Tabernacle complex in the presence of the LORD. Once consecrated, a priest is no longer a common person among the nation.

B. To Keep the Priestly Family Holy

The law for the life of a priest is to keep the priestly line holy and to keep the priestly family holy. Verse 9. *“Also the daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by harlotry, she profanes her father; she shall be burned with fire.”* (21:9).

Because of the bloodline to her father serving as a priest, if she becomes a prostitute, she brings the penalty of death by fire upon herself. But she also profanes her priestly father. He is not put to death, but she has brought dishonor to him by breaking one of the Ten Commandments.

C. To Keep the Highest Priest Holy

1. His Garments

The law for the life of a priest is to keep the priestly line holy, to keep the priestly family holy, and to keep the highest priest holy. First, we see his garments. Verse 10. *"The priest who is the highest among his brothers, on whose head the anointing oil has been poured and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes;"* (21:10).

The guidelines for the high priest were more stringent than that of all the others. His head was always to be covered, and he was never to tear his clothes. What does this mean? In the high priest's position, few reasons can be given for a priest to think of uncovering his head or tearing his clothes. What is the reason? The death of a loved one. The common practice among men in almost all cultures of the world at the time of a loved one's death is to shave the head and tear the clothing. The high priest is forbidden from shaving or uncovering his head or tearing his dress or the priestly garments when the time of mourning occurs.

2. His Actions

Second, we see his actions in his time of mourning. *"...nor shall he approach any dead person, nor defile himself even 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 on him; I am the LORD."* (21:11).

During the time of the context that this book was given to Moses, Aaron's sons died for offering strange fire on the Altar of Incense on the final day of their ordination in front of Aaron and Moses. If you will remember, Moses told Aaron, the high priest, not to flinch. Relatives would carry the sons out of the Tabernacle and bury them (10:1-7). The high priest was not to carry out the duties of the ordinary people. He was not an ordinary person. His job was to serve the LORD fully.

3. His Wife

a) Who He Can Take for a Wife

Fourth, we see his wife and who he can take for a wife. Verse 13. *"He shall take a wife in her virginity."* (21:13).

The high priest must be married to a virgin woman.

b) Who He Cannot Take for a Wife

Now we come to the women who he cannot take for a wife. Verse 14. *"A widow, or a divorced woman, or one who is profaned by harlotry, these he may not take; but rather he is to marry a virgin of his own people so that he will not profane his offspring among his people; for I am the LORD who sanctifies him."* (21:14-15).

Widows are obviously not virgins. Divorced women are not virgins. Prostitutes are not virgins. By detailing these instructions, the LORD clarifies that the priest must marry a virgin if he wants to be the high priest someday. If his wife were not a virgin, he would have forfeited the right to take office when the opportunity came to be the high priest.

D. To Keep the Priesthood Holy

1. The Man with a Physical Defect Cannot Offer the LORD's Food

The law for the life of a priest is to keep the priestly line holy, to keep the priestly family holy, to keep the highest priest holy, and to keep the priesthood holy. First, we come to the man with a physical defect who cannot offer the LORD's food. Verse 16. *"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to Aaron, saying, 'No man of your offspring throughout their generations who has a defect shall approach to*

offer the food of his God. For no one who has a defect shall approach: a blind man, or a lame man, or he who has a disfigured face, or any deformed limb, or a man who has a broken foot or broken hand, or a hunchback or a dwarf, or one who has a defect in his eye or eczema or scabs or crushed testicles. 'No man among the descendants of Aaron the priest who has a defect is to come near to offer the LORD'S offerings by fire; since he has a defect, he shall not come near to offer the food of his God.' (21:16-21).

The priest begins training for the work of the priesthood at the age of twenty-five. At the age of thirty, he can start work as a priest. Sadly, between birth and age twenty-five, many things can happen. Birth defects occur that cause deformities. Accidents happen that cause deformities. Diseases happen that cause deformities. The list in this passage disqualifies a man in Aaron's priestly line from serving as a priest. Factually, this list disqualifies a man from entering the training as a priest, and if any of the accidents or diseases occur during the training, the person will be removed from the school.

2. The Man with a Physical Defect Can Eat the LORD's Food

Second, we come to the man with a physical defect who can eat the LORD's food. Verse 24. *"He may eat the food of his God, both of the most holy and of the holy, only he shall not go in to the veil or come near the altar because he has a defect, so that he will not profane My sanctuaries. For I am the LORD who sanctifies them."* So Moses spoke to Aaron and to his sons and to all the sons of Israel." (21:24).

A man of the priestly line, forbidden from serving as a priest because of a birth defect, accident, or disease, still remains a part of the priestly family, and the provisions for meals still come in the holy areas of the Tabernacle complex as with the rest of his extended priestly family. Yet, he is never to enter the Tabernacle or approach the Altar of Incense next to the Veil. That is off-limits. However, for his offerings, he would still be required to bring them to the priests serving the LORD at the Tent of Meeting doorway as with all the people of the Nation of Israel.

E. To Keep the Gifts of Israel Holy

1. The Purpose of the Holy Gifts

The law for the life of a priest is to keep the priestly line holy, to keep the priestly family holy, to keep the highest priest holy, to keep the priesthood holy, and to keep the gifts of Israel holy. First, we look at the purpose of the holy gifts. Chapter 22, verse 1. *"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, Tell Aaron and his sons to be careful with the holy gifts of the sons of Israel, which they dedicate to Me, so as not to profane My holy name; I am the LORD."* (22:1-2).

Inside the outer curtain of the Tabernacle complex, everything must be kept holy for the LORD. Every gift that passes through the curtain must be holy. The gifts are the offerings that we studied in chapters 1 through 7 of this book. In those chapters, the LORD made clear that the offerings had to be without blemish.

2. The Prohibited of the Holy Gifts

a) The Unclean Among the Sons of Israel

Second, we look at the prohibited of the holy gifts. Specifically, this is a reference to the unclean among the sons of Israel who bring the gifts. Verse 3. *"Say to them, 'If any man among all your descendants throughout your generations approaches the holy gifts which the sons of Israel dedicate to the LORD, while he has an uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from before Me; I am the LORD.'"* (22:3).

The gifts for the offering may have been without blemish, but the giver could not come through the curtain if he were blemished in any way. The unclean person could not bring a clean gift to the LORD. Uncleanness was not allowed inside the Tabernacle complex.

b) The Unclean Among the Priests of Israel

Third, we look at the unclean among the priests of Israel. Verse 9. *“No man of the descendants of Aaron, who is a leper or who has a discharge, may eat of the holy gifts until he is clean. And if one touches anything made unclean by a corpse or if a man has a seminal emission, or if a man touches any teeming things by which he is made unclean, or any man by whom he is made unclean, whatever his uncleanness; a person who touches any such shall be unclean until evening, and shall not eat of the holy gifts unless he has bathed his body in water. But when the sun sets, he will be clean, and afterward he shall eat of the holy gifts, for it is his food. He shall not eat an animal which dies or is torn by beasts, becoming unclean by it; I am the LORD. They shall therefore keep My charge, so that they will not bear sin because of it and die thereby because they profane it; I am the LORD who sanctifies them.”* (22:9).

One job of the priest is to determine those who are clean and unclean. Therefore, he is among those who are unclean every day, and that includes the diagnosis of the leper. In order to eat his meals in the Tabernacle complex, if he has been in contact with any unclean and become unclean, he must bathe and wait until evening to be clean and then eat. The Tabernacle complex operated twenty-four hours a day. Priests were always on duty. The meat was constantly being cooked. The process to keep the gifts of the offerings that became the priests' food was in place and had to be followed.

c) The Unclean Among the Layman of Israel

(1) The Sojourner or Employed Cannot Eat the Holy Gifts

Fourth, we look at the unclean among the layman of Israel. Specifically, we look at the sojourner or employed who cannot eat the holy gifts. Verse 10. *“No layman, however, is to eat the holy gift; a sojourner with the priest or a hired man shall not eat of the holy gift.”* (22:10).

Simply, the gifts of the offerings to the LORD were the food for the priests. People passing through or people hired to work were not to eat the holy gifts' meat because they are considered unclean.

(2) The Purchased Slave Can Eat the Holy Gifts

However, if the priest purchased a slave, the purchased slave can eat the holy gifts. Verse 11. *“But if a priest buys a slave as his property with his money, that one may eat of it, and those who are born in his house may eat of his food.”* (22:11).

Here is the reason why. The priest has purchased the slave out of slavery and brought him or her to his family. Within the process, the priest will free this purchased slave one day. Once an Israelite bought a slave, the slave could not be sold; he had to be freed. We covered this topic in the commentary of 19:20-22 of this book. Therefore, the purchased slave was part of the priest's family and could eat the Tabernacle food.

d) The Married Daughter to a Layman Cannot Eat the Holy Gifts

Being part of a priestly family did not mean that a person could always eat the Tabernacle food. The married daughter to a layman cannot eat the holy gifts. Verse 12. *“If a priest's daughter is married to a layman, she shall not eat of the offering of the gifts.”* (22:12).

Why? The priestly family's daughter became part of another tribe when she married someone not of the priestly line. She changed families. Only the priestly line could eat the Tabernacle meat.

e) The Daughter who Returns to the Family Can Eat the Holy Gifts

A daughter is always a daughter. If the daughter who married a layman becomes divorced or widowed, she can return to her biological family in the priestly line. Verse 13. *“But if a priest's daughter becomes a widow or divorced, and has no child and returns to her father's house as in her youth, she shall eat of her father's food; but no layman shall eat of it.”* (22:13).

The key in this instruction is the words “*no child*.” If there is a child, then the daughter with the child will stay in the tribe with whom she married to be cared for by some kinsman-redeemer. But if no child was born, the daughter may choose to return to her father’s priestly family and eat meals in the Tabernacle complex.

3. The Punishment of the Holy Gifts

From the purpose of the holy gifts to the prohibited of the holy gifts, we come to the punishment of the holy gifts. Verse 14. *“But if a man eats a holy gift unintentionally, then he shall add to it a fifth of it and shall give the holy gift to the priest. They shall not profane the holy gifts of the sons of Israel which they offer to the LORD, and so cause them to bear punishment for guilt by eating their holy gifts; for I am the LORD who sanctifies them.”* (22:14).

How could a layman unintentionally eat a holy gift to the LORD? In the offering explained in chapter 3, we learned that certain portions of the meat from the offering could be eaten by any priest or priestly family members in the Tabernacle complex. Still, certain cuts of the meat were given to the priest making the offering to the LORD. That meat could be taken to that priest’s home outside the Tabernacle complex to be explicitly eaten by his family. If that meat was eaten by a layman, not knowing that it was part of the holy gifts that had been presented to the LORD, it was eaten unintentionally and fell under this law. All meals of the priestly families prepared in the home were from the animals and grains brought to the complex as tithes. Out of the tithes, a tenth was selected from the best of the best to be part of the required daily offerings, and the remaining ninety percent of the tithes were distributed to the priestly families to supply their needs. Those food supplies could be shared with anyone needing a meal. But as for the offerings required in the first seven chapters of this book, they were holy gifts that were only to be eaten by the priests and their families. At home, a restricted meal could accidentally be eaten by a layman. In that case, the layman was to present an offering at the Tabernacle complex equal to what he had eaten with an additional one-fifth. For example, if he had eaten a pound of holy meat, he would need to offer a pound and a fifth of meat to the LORD.

XVI. The Law of the Animal Offerings

A. The Offering Must Be without Defect

1. The Burnt Offering

From the law of the life of a priest, we come to the law of the animal offerings that the priest must oversee. The offerings must be without defect in every case. The priest must make sure they are without blemish. First, we see the burnt offering. Verse 17. *“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to Aaron and to his sons and to all the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘Any man of the house of Israel or of the aliens in Israel who presents his offering, whether it is any of their votive or any of their freewill offerings, which they present to the LORD for a burnt offering—for you to be accepted—it must be a male without defect from the cattle, the sheep, or the goats. Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it will not be accepted for you.’”* (22:17-20).

Burnt offerings were required, as presented in chapter 1. However, vow and freewill offerings were also burnt offerings as part of a *sacrifice of peace offering*, as explained in chapter 7. The two offerings were not required. The people gave them because of a promise they wanted to make to the LORD or in appreciation to the LORD.

2. The Sacrifice of Peace Offering

Second, we come to the sacrifice of peace offering. Verse 21. *“When a man offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD to fulfill a special vow or for a freewill offering, of the herd or of the flock, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it. Those that are blind or fractured or maimed or having a running sore or eczema or scabs, you shall not offer to the LORD, nor make of them an offering by fire on the altar to the LORD. In respect to an ox or a lamb which has an overgrown or stunted member, you may present it for a freewill offering, but*

for a vow it will not be accepted. Also anything with its testicles bruised or crushed or torn or cut, you shall not offer to the LORD, or sacrifice in your land, nor shall you accept any such from the hand of a foreigner for offering as the food of your God; for their corruption is in them, they have a defect, they shall not be accepted for you."(22:21-25).

And again, as before, the LORD is making sure the priests and the people understand that the offerings must be without blemishes of any kind.

B. The Offering Must Meet Requirements

1. The Age of the Animal

The offerings must meet requirements to be accepted by the LORD. First, we come to the age of the animal. Verse 27. *"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall remain seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be accepted as a sacrifice of an offering by fire to the LORD."* (22:27).

No animal offering is to be presented before the age of eight days. On the eighth day, the animal can be brought to the Tabernacle as an offering.

2. The Restriction of the Animal

Second, the restriction of the animal being offered. Verse 28. *"But, whether it is an ox or a sheep, you shall not kill both it and its young in one day."* (22:28).

A mother ox or sheep cannot be sacrificed on the same day as its offspring.

3. The Presentation of the Animal

Third, the presentation of the animal had a purpose. Verse 29. *"When you sacrifice a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the LORD, you shall sacrifice it so that you may be accepted."* (22:29).

Hidden in this verse is the purpose of the sacrifice. It says *"that you may be accepted."* When a *sacrifice of thanksgiving* is presented, it is a free will or vow offering presented totally upon the giver's willingness. It is the same as the *sacrifice of peace offering*. It is not a required offering. However, the LORD did lay the requirements for this offering's presentation in chapters 3 and 7. What is not said here but is within the intent of the passage is the heart of the one bringing the offering. The gift must be given for the right reason, in the right way, and with the right heart. Only with those three requirements met would the LORD, Who sees the heart and mind of man, accept the man and his offering.

4. The Eating of the Animal

In the requirements for the animal offerings, we see the age of the animal, the restriction of the animal, the presentation of the animal, and lastly, we come to the eating of the animal. Verse 30. *"It shall be eaten on the same day, you shall leave none of it until morning; I am the LORD. So you shall keep My commandments, and do them; I am the LORD. You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be sanctified among the sons of Israel; I am the LORD who sanctifies you, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, to be your God; I am the LORD."* (22:33).

Overseeing the offerings presented to the LORD was a detailed job for the priests. From the animals' arrival to the eating of the animals, everything done in the process had to be precise and perfect. That included the consumption of the meat from the offering gifted to the priestly families by the LORD. It could be eaten that day or through that night, but it could not be eaten when morning broke. The meat had to be consumed before the break of the next day.

Now we come to the law of the appointed times.