

Leviticus 21:1 ¶ And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron, and say unto them, There shall none be defiled for the dead among his people:

Leviticus 21:2 But for his kin, that is near unto him, *that is*, for his mother, and for his father, and for his son, and for his daughter, and for his brother,

Leviticus 21:3 And for his sister a virgin, that is nigh unto him, which hath had no husband; for her may he be defiled.

Leviticus 21:4 *But* he shall not defile himself, *being* a chief man among his people, to profane himself.

Verses 1-9 are addressed to the sons of Aaron, the priests. They were not to defile themselves by association with dead bodies. Guzik informs: “The prohibition regarding dead bodies wasn't just about touching a dead body, but even being in the same room as a dead body or walking over a grave or touching a tomb.” However, exception was made in the death of near kin—mother, father, son, daughter, brother and virgin sister. Though no mention is made of his wife, I would assume she is included in this category.

The position of priest was very public and visible, and they were to be especially careful to maintain an example of holiness before the people.

Leviticus 21:5 They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh.

Leviticus 21:6 They shall be holy unto their God, and not profane the name of their God: for the offerings of the LORD made by fire, *and* the bread of their God, they do offer: therefore they shall be holy.

The priests were also to avoid showing any signs of mourning that were common among the pagan nations. They were not to shave their heads, shave the corners of their beards or make cuttings in their flesh.

Again the instruction is coupled with the reminder that God had given them a special position of leadership before the people. Their lives were to give testimony to complete submission and obedience to the LORD. It was a great responsibility to superintend the offerings made to the LORD by the people.

Leviticus 21:7 They shall not take a wife *that is* a whore, or profane; neither shall they take a woman put away from her husband: for he *is* holy unto his God.

Leviticus 21:8 Thou shalt sanctify him therefore; for he offereth the bread of thy God: he shall be holy unto thee: for I the LORD, which sanctify you, *am* holy.

Priests were also forbidden to take as a wife a woman who had prostituted herself or had a testimony of wicked behavior. Neither were they to marry a woman who had been divorced.

The instruction is again coupled with a statement essentially stating that greater responsibility before God comes with greater accountability to God.

Leviticus 21:9 And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire.

Any daughter of a priest found to have prostituted herself was to be “burnt with fire.” I can’t help but think that Adam Clarke may have a point in connecting this judgment with some type of branding.

Leviticus 21:10 ¶ And *he that is* the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes;

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.

This section of verses begins an address to the high priest. He was to be held to an even higher standard and was not to defile himself for the death of anyone—even father or mother. (Again—that troubling omission of mention of the wife.) He was to remain active in the sanctuary.

Leviticus 21:13 And he shall take a wife in her virginity.

Leviticus 21:14 A widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, *or* an harlot, these shall he not take: but he shall take a virgin of his own people to wife.

Leviticus 21:15 Neither shall he profane his seed among his people: for I the LORD do sanctify him.

The high priest could only marry a virgin, a woman who had no previous sexual partner.

Leviticus 21:16 ¶ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

Leviticus 21:17 Speak unto Aaron, saying, Whosoever *he be* of thy seed in their generations that hath *any* blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God.

Leviticus 21:18 For whatsoever man *he be* that hath a blemish, he shall not approach: a blind man, or a lame, or he that hath a flat nose, or any thing superfluous,

Leviticus 21:19 Or a man that is brokenfooted, or brokenhanded,

Leviticus 21:20 Or crookbackt, or a dwarf, or that hath a blemish in his eye, or be scurvy, or scabbed, or hath his stones broken;

Leviticus 21:21 No man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the LORD made by fire: he hath a blemish; he shall not come nigh 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 Only he shall not go in unto the vail, nor come nigh unto the altar, because he hath a blemish; that he profane not my sanctuaries: for I the LORD do sanctify them.

Leviticus 21:24 And Moses told *it* unto Aaron, and to his sons, and unto all the children of Israel.

The chapter ends with a section forbidding any descendant of Aaron that was blemished or had any physical imperfection from serving as a priest. However, he was to be allowed to partake of the food portions allotted to the priests.

I would like to close this chapter with two more quotes from Bob Deffinbaugh.

“The priests were those who offered the sacrifices of the people, and thus a higher standard of conduct was essential to assure that the offerings which they sacrificed were acceptable to God (Lev. 21:6). In addition, the priests were also leaders in Israel. It is my observation that leaders, in the Old Testament and the New (cf. 1 Tim. 3), are required to live according to a higher standard, and for good reason. Leaders are to exemplify God’s ideals for character and conduct, not the minimum standard. To allow leaders to live according to the lowest standard, rather than according to the ideal, would be to encourage the people to live the same way, rather than to challenge them to the highest level of conduct.”

“...the higher standards God requires for leaders should cause one to be even more sensitive to impurity and contamination in his or her life, and thus to be humbled by a position of leadership. Humility, not pride, is the mark of God’s leaders. Leviticus was written to assure a greater sensitivity toward corruption on the part of the priests, not to create a sense of pride, as though they were better because God required more of them.”