

Leviticus Chapter 21

Personal Restrictions For Priestly Service



Priestly restrictions were greater than those for the layman. This chapter covers ten specific commands for common priests, high priests, and the family of priests. Some specifics are repeated or mentioned in different parts of the chapter. [Picture of Levite Priests from www.lgodsplan-today.com.]

Ten Priestly Restrictions

1. *Verses 1-3*—A priest is not to touch a dead person *except for his relatives who are nearest to him*. So he can touch his *mother, father, son, daughter, and virgin sister*.
2. *Verse 4*—This command is unclear. Some translate this as the priest not becoming a *husband* of a close relative, others see the priest as a *chief* who should not defile himself. The problem is that the word *בָּעַל* (*ba'al*) can mean either *husband* or *chief*.
3. *Verse 5*—A priest may not shave off any hair on his head or beard.
4. *Verse 5*—A priest may not make any cuts in his flesh.
5. *Verses 7, 13-15*—A priest must marry a virgin—not a widow, divorced woman, or harlot.
6. *Verse 9*—A daughter of a priest who *profanes herself by harlotry... shall be burned with fire*.
7. *Verse 10*—A high priest may not *uncover his head nor tear his clothes*.
8. *Verse 11*—A high priest may not touch any dead body, even his immediate family.
9. *Verse 12*—A high priest may not *go outside of the sanctuary nor profane the sanctuary*. (This probably means he cannot go outside to a funeral or have a funeral inside the Tabernacle court. It does not mean he must live inside the Tabernacle.)
10. *Verses 16-23*) No member of the priestly family who has a physical defect can *offer the LORD'S offerings by fire*. That includes the blind, lame, disfigured, deformed, broken-boned, hunchback, dwarf, one with crushed testicles, or one with a skin or eye disease.



The Closer To God, the Greater the Need for Holiness

There are several other significant points in Chapter 21, and they all have to do with the extreme need for cleanliness, holiness, and perfection as one gets closer to God. Here are a few observations:

- One reason the priests were to be holy was they present *the food of their God* (21:6, 8). This is, of course, a figure of speech, but it seems to reflect on God's fellowship with His people.
- The reason the priest was to marry a virgin was *so that he will not profane his offspring among his people*. The genealogy of those who came close to God must be pure.
- By prohibiting the deformed or handicapped priest from approaching the altar, we see that God requires perfection as well as cleanness and holiness.

THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS

The dominant thought here is that, the closer you get to God, the more holy you have to be. And the deformity regulations tell us that, the closer we get to God, the more perfect we have to be. The point for us today is that there is no way to live the spiritual life, mature in Christ, or please God while continuing in our worldly ways. We can come to God just as we are in the sense of salvation because of the cleansing of the blood of Christ. But we cannot grow close to God the way we are.

Remember: *Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24).*