

## **Second Baptist Church of Doylestown**

### **Bible Study Notes**

**6-9-21**

#### **Leviticus 21**

##### **Priests Are Forbidden From Touching Dead Bodies - Verses 1-4**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: 'A priest must not make himself ceremonially unclean for any of his people who die, <sup>2</sup> except for a close relative, such as his mother or father, his son or daughter, his brother, <sup>3</sup> or an unmarried sister who is dependent on him since she has no husband—for her he may make himself unclean. <sup>4</sup> He must not make himself unclean for people related to him by marriage, and so defile himself.

**21:1 Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron:** The priests came from a particular family of the tribe of Levi - the family of Aaron. The priests, because of their special responsibility to represent God before the people and the people before God, had a special call to holiness and ritualistic purity. The purpose behind these laws was to illustrate the purity and separation from sin that was to characterize the priest; a dead body is a picture of sin's result in this world, especially in the way it rapidly decays.

**21:2-4 None shall defile himself for the dead among his people:** 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. Except for his relatives who are nearest to him: A priest could participate in the burial rites for an immediate family member, but for none other.

##### **Priests Must Not Imitate The Mourning Practices Of The Pagans Verses 5-6**

<sup>5</sup> "Priests must not shave their heads or shave off the edges of their beards or cut their bodies. <sup>6</sup> They must be holy to their God and must not profane the name of their God. Because they present the food offerings to the LORD, the food of their God, they are to be holy.

**21:5** They shall not make baldness — 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.

##### **The Marriage Practices Of Priests - Verses 7-9**

<sup>7</sup> "They must not marry women defiled by prostitution or divorced from their husbands, because priests are holy to their God. <sup>8</sup> Regard them as holy, because they offer up the food of your God. Consider them holy, because I the LORD am holy—I who make you holy. <sup>9</sup> "If a priest's daughter defiles herself by becoming a prostitute, she disgraces her father; she must be burned in the fire.

**21:7-9 They shall not take a wife who is a harlot or a defiled woman:** Priests were only to take virgins for wives, again as an illustration of the commitment and purity that was required of priests. A priest - under the Old or New Covenant - was only to set their affections on that which is pure.

**The daughter of any priest:** The daughter of a priest had a special responsibility to be pure as well; though this would be covered under the general laws of Israel, special mention is made of it here to emphasize the point.

### **The Responsibility Of The High Priest - Verses 10-15**

<sup>10</sup> "The high priest, the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and who has been ordained to wear the priestly garments, must not let his hair become unkempt or tear his clothes. <sup>11</sup> He must not enter a place where there is a dead body. He must not make himself unclean, even for his father or mother, <sup>12</sup> nor leave the sanctuary of his God or desecrate it, because he has been dedicated by the anointing oil of his God. I am the LORD. <sup>13</sup> "The woman he marries must be a virgin. <sup>14</sup> He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman, or a woman defiled by prostitution, but only a virgin from his own people, <sup>15</sup> so that he will not defile his offspring among his people. I am the LORD, who makes him holy."

**21:10-15 Shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes:** These were extreme signs of mourning for the dead. The high priest was not allowed to mourn in this extreme way for any dead person - even his father or mother.

The high priest who tried Jesus sinned against this command at the trial of Jesus (Matthew 26:52), in a dramatic display of horror that Jesus claimed to be God.

**21:10-15 And he shall take a wife in her virginity:** The high priest also had to take special care in selecting his wife; not just any woman would do. A woman would have to have a unique purity and a unique calling to be the wife of a high priest.

"The mention of a harlot is intended to remind the Israelites that cultic prostitution of the Canaanite variety had no place whatever in the life of the covenant community, since such behaviour would profane God's holy name."

### **Ministering Priests Must Be Free From Physical Defects - Verses 16-24**

<sup>16</sup> The LORD said to Moses, <sup>17</sup> "Say to Aaron: 'For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. <sup>18</sup> No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; <sup>19</sup> no man with a crippled foot or hand, <sup>20</sup> or who is a hunchback or a dwarf, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles. <sup>21</sup> No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the food offerings to the LORD. He has a defect; he must not come near to offer the food of his God. <sup>22</sup> He may eat the most holy food of his God, as well as the holy food; <sup>23</sup> yet because of his defect, he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar, and so desecrate my sanctuary. I am

the LORD, who makes them holy.'" <sup>24</sup> So Moses told this to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites.

**21:16-23** Was God unfairly discriminating against handicapped people when he said they were unqualified to offer sacrifices? Just as God demanded that no imperfect animals be used for sacrifice, he required that no handicapped priests offer sacrifices. This was not meant as an insult; rather, it had to do with the fact that the priest must match as closely as possible the perfect God he served. Of course, such perfection was not fully realized until Jesus Christ came. Because they were Levites, the handicapped priests were protected and supported with food from the sacrifices. They were not abandoned; they still had opportunity to perform many essential services within the tabernacle.