

Reversing Uncleanness in the Sanctuary

Jesus' Gospel and Leviticus 21

^{ESV} Leviticus 21:1 And the LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them, No one shall make himself unclean for the dead among his people,

² except for his closest relatives, his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, his brother,

³ or his virgin sister (who is near to him because she has had no husband; for her he may make himself unclean).

⁴ He shall not make himself unclean as a husband among his people and so profane himself.

⁵ They shall not make bald patches on their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts on their body.

⁶ They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God. For they offer the LORD's food offerings, the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy.

⁷ They shall not marry a prostitute or a woman who has been defiled, neither shall they marry a woman divorced from her husband, for the priest is holy to his God.

⁸ You shall sanctify him, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I, the LORD, who sanctify you, am holy.

⁹ And the daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by whoring, profanes her father; she shall be burned with fire.

¹⁰ "The priest who is chief among his brothers, on whose head the anointing oil is poured and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not let the hair of his head hang loose nor tear his clothes.

¹¹ He shall not go in to any dead bodies nor make himself unclean, even for his father or for his mother.

¹² He shall not go out of the sanctuary, lest he profane the sanctuary of his God, for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is on him: I am the LORD.

¹³ And he shall take a wife in her virginity.

¹⁴ A widow, or a divorced woman, or a woman who has been defiled, or a prostitute, these he shall not marry. But he shall take as his wife a virgin of his own people,

¹⁵ that he may not profane his offspring among his people, for I am the LORD who sanctifies him."

¹⁶ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

¹⁷ "Speak to Aaron, saying, None of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the bread of his God.

¹⁸ For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, a man blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long,

¹⁹ or a man who has an injured foot or an injured hand,

²⁰ or a hunchback or a dwarf or a man with a defect in his sight or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles.

²¹ No man of the offspring of Aaron the priest who has a blemish shall come near to offer the LORD's food offerings; since he has a blemish, he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God.

²² He may eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy and of the holy things,

²³ but he shall not go through the veil or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries, for I am the LORD who sanctifies them."

²⁴ So Moses spoke to Aaron and to his sons and to all the people of Israel.

(Lev 21:1-24)

A Wee Little Man and Other Outsiders

One of the most enduring children's Sunday School songs is about a man who would probably otherwise be unknown.

*Zacchaeus was a wee little man,
And a wee little man was he.
He climbed up in a sycamore tree
For the Lord he wanted to see.*

As most of you know, several years ago I became fascinated with a storyline in the Bible that I never really knew existed--**giants**. Everyone knows about Goliath and that he was “ten feet tall,” but few realize that David's mighty men fought four other giants (in the LXX there is a fifth) and that the Scripture gives their genealogy as coming from a whole lineage of giants and that this is actually a major storyline of the Bible with the seed of Satan battling the seed of the woman.

The opposite of a giant would be someone who is **very short**. Perhaps it is only in the context of something like very abnormal giants that a person's reading about a wee

little man like Zacchaeus might stand out a little bit differently from what people might normally think. And apparently, as was true of me, what people normally think about it is that this is almost a **throw-away line**, like it wasn't really relevant to the story, other than perhaps this is why he needed to climb that tree. Not knowing why else it would be there, some people think maybe he was just **young** (the text gives no indication of this). Others **spiritualize it**, contrasting his short stature with his “**exceedingly large spirit**.” Many, like Calvin and Wesley, simply ignore the statement altogether. They comment absolutely nothing on this.

In fact, there is good reason to believe that Zacchaeus' height is a **central feature of this story**, especially given that it is Dr. Luke (**Col 4:14**) who is the only one of the gospel writers that tells us about this story. As a doctor, Luke was certainly trained in anatomy and in physical disorders that affected the people who would come to see him for a remedy. In this way, the science and discipline has not changed a whole lot from then to now.

Luke's Gospel and his companion volume Acts are filled with stories about **physically deformed people** being helped

by the Jesus and his gospel. There is Jesus healing the lame man in Luke 5:17-26 and a companion story in Acts 3:1-10. There is the bent woman whom Jesus heals in Luke 13:11-17. There is the woman healed of her twelve-year bloody discharge (Luke 8:43-48). There is the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). There are stories of the dead being raised (the widow's son in Luke 7:11-17; Jairus' daughter in 8:40-42, 49-55; Tabitha in Acts 9:40; Eutychus in Acts 20:9-10). I believe it is into these kinds of stories that we must understand Zacchaeus' shortness.¹

Recently, some have argued that these stories need to be read in light of Leviticus 21.² Specifically, as it regards our “wee little man,” a very good case can be made that Zacchaeus was a midget or dwarf. When read this way, suddenly his and these other stories make a lot more sense and start to reveal that Jesus is doing something more than just forgiving “tax-collectors and sinners.” What that is can

¹ A book length treatment of Luke accounting of this is Mikeal C. Parsons, *Body and Character in Luke and Acts: The Subversion of Physiognomy in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

² Besides Parsons (above), see also Amos Yong, “Zacchaeus: Short and Un-Seen,” in *Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics—Disability*, ed. Robert B. Kruschwitz (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2012), 11-17. <https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/188189.pdf>. We discussed this briefly back in Leviticus 13-14.

only be seen in its greatest light and joy with Leviticus 21 as the backdrop.

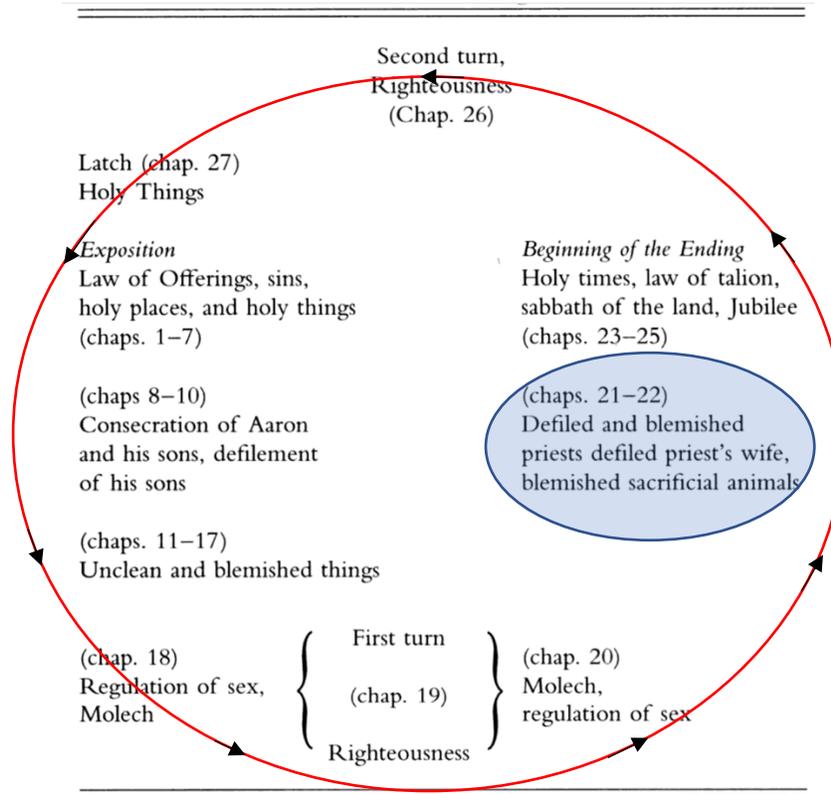
Structure/Context

In her brilliant analysis of Leviticus as patterned after the tabernacle, with three decreasing sizes of chapters emulating the three tiers of the tabernacle, Mary Douglas also describes [the book as a ring](#).³ To build a book around a ring, you have to start somewhere. As you begin moving forward, you are looking for a place to “turn” your composition so that it will begin to return to the beginning (kind of like a chiasm only it will eventually close). The clear turning point is chapter 19, also the center of the book.

On either side of this chapter you have the two guardian chapters (18 and 20). These repeat each other, showing that we have indeed begun our turn back to the start. Their focus is on moral law, showing that at the center of a book dealing almost entirely with ceremonial law, we have three chapters that are deeply concerned with objective morality, even if

³ [Mary Douglas](#), "Poetic Structure in Leviticus," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells*, ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 239-56.

that is also sometimes carried out in a ceremonial context. These chapters are also concerned with the average ordinary Israelite.



Ring Composition of Leviticus
Douglas, "Pomegranates," 253.

Leviticus 21-22 continues the repetition from earlier chapters. This time the focus turns away from the people, in their civil or ceremonial activities, towards the priests. In this, we return especially to things discussed in **Leviticus 8-10**. But our chapter also discusses things already seen in Lev 11-17 as well, especially defilements and uncleanness caused by such

things as death or **physical deformities**. You might recall the discussions about nasty skin diseases (Ch. 13) or dead carcasses (Ch. 11). In this way, we are slowly making our way back to the beginning of the book.

Chapter 21 can be divided into two halves. The first deals with **priests**, that is those who officiate ceremonies near the tabernacle. The second concerns **the high priest** of Israel. In turn, each section is subdivided into two parts. The first concerns restrictions on **mourning for the dead**. The idea here is of desecration, and it corresponds to Chs. 8-10. The second deals with restrictions on **marriage**. This has some connection to the impurity laws of women (Ch. 12) in that both revolve around children. After this is added one more set of laws. These are the **physical impediments** to the full exercise of the priestly office, be they a regular priest or the high priest.⁴ They correspond to all of the discussions of blemishes in animals and bodily secretions, especially leprosy in Chs. 11-15).⁵ Technically, we **could consider Ch. 22 an extension of Ch. 21**, but there is enough in the former

⁴ This is the basic outline in **Gordon J. Wenham**, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 290.

⁵ See **Douglas**, "Pomegranates," 254.

for one sermon that we will look at the latter next time. A good reason to continue thinking about the structure of this book is that so many get lost in it because they read it linearly, but when you read it as it was meant to be read, it starts to make a lot more sense.

What's **the chief concern of our chapter**? Heiser puts it nicely. The **“Priest had the responsibility to sanctify people who were ritually and morally unclean. But what if he is unclean himself? How can he perform his job?”**⁶ As we will see, this question does not go away in the NT. However, the beauty of the gospel is the answer it provides in light of the coming of Jesus Christ. This is truly where our end goal of our reading of this chapter must take us.

Normal Priests

Lev 21:1-4: Dead Bodies for Normal Priests (not High Priest)

We begin in **vs. 1** with our common **prologue**. **“And the LORD said to Moses.”** Recall that at least one of the Targums reads, **“The Memra [Word] of the LORD said to**

⁶ **Michael Heiser**, *Notes on Leviticus from the Naked Bible Podcast* (Blindspot Press, 2018).

Moses.” This has been consistent, and we have always interpreted it as John and others did, as referring to Jesus in his preincarnate state. He is the Law-Giver in both Testaments.

It continues, “**Speak to the priests**” (vs. 1). Who are they? “**The sons of Aaron.**” So, this section does not seem to have in mind the cousins of Aaron, such as Moses or Korah—that is Levities more generally speaking. It is talking about those men whose job it was to offer the sacrifices in the tabernacle precinct.

We learn next about the laws concerning their **contact with the dead**. “**No one shall make himself unclean for the dead among his people**” (vs. 1). Recall that touching a dead corpse of any kind would make a person ritually unclean. This “sin” is not moral, but ceremonial in nature. It is a **forbidden blending** of the realm of life with the realm of death. But the sanctuary is the ultimate picture of life, not death. God is life. He is holy. He is pure in every sense. Thus, those who participate in mediating his presence to the people must take great care not to bring any contamination or spiritual toxin into the holy spaces, lest they become defiled and wrath break out against them.

The amazing thing is that God gives an exception! “... except for his closest relatives, his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, his brother, or his virgin sister (who is near to him because she has had no husband, for her he may make himself unclean)” (2-3). There are a couple of features worthy of comment about these interesting verses. **First**, here we have the basic family unit consisting of three pairs of opposites which were presumed in Chs. 18 and 20. In this way, there is a nice continuation of thought from what we have just read about sexual sins in those chapters.

Second, the **virgin sister** is mentioned specifically because she still belongs to this immediate family. This would not be true if she had married. Her virginity is mentioned to distinguish her as possibly being betrothed (a state of marriage like Mary and Joseph) but prior to the consummation of her vows when she would fully belong to another man and presumably his family would take care of her when she dies. In other words, don't read more here than that.⁷ This isn't the place in the law to talk about why she has lost her virginity and what would happen under the

⁷ **Baruch A. Levine**, *Leviticus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 142.

different circumstances that occurred. That's what things like Ch. 20 were dealing with. This is simply clarifying that she still belonged to the priest's family.

The point of this is that normally the priest shouldn't go into a home where someone had recently died. He must not pollute himself with death and bring that back into the precinct. This includes when he is tempted to go to a good friend's house who is mourning the loss of someone they all deeply loved. There are other ways he may express his condolences and help them through the process. But he must beware of the temptation to break the law on this point and risk the wrath of God.

At the same time, to me, the greatest thing about this little exception is **God's grace** in allowing for the priest to attend to the death of his closest family. Imagine life as a priest without this exception. That's the kind of God who came down and covenanted with our fathers. As God is often gracious with the law, it seems to me a good rule of thumb is for us to **not be harsher** about it with people like our children than he is, especially if the laws we are thinking about are not even found in the Bible.

Vs. 4 is difficult and has been for the Rabbis for a very long time. “He shall not make himself unclean *as a husband* among his people and so profane himself.” The word “husband” (*ba'al*) is not the normal word for that. But it is a possible translation. This idea would be that the priest is not allowed to attend his wife’s funeral. This seems very harsh, especially in light of the exceptions of close family just given. Is not his wife “one flesh” with him? Did not Abraham and Jacob bury their wives?

The rabbis were not unaware of this difficulty. There is another ambiguity in vs. 2 where the ESV’s “closest relatives” was translated as wife. So, some rabbis argued that this verse actually permitted him to bury his wife.⁸ So if you translate vs. 4 as “husband,” it would seem to be talking about some kind of an unlawful marriage (a slave wife, polygamy?). The Targum gives you the flavor of this interpretation, “The husband shall not defile himself on account of his wife, except so far as it is right for him; but for a relative of those who do the work of his people he may defile himself.” (Lev 21:4 PJE).

⁸ This whole discussion is in Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1800.

The other main idea reads “husband” more naturally as a “master” or “chief.” The idea is that the priest a chief among his people and should not defile himself because of this. In other words, it is a reiteration of vs. 2 which may or may not include his wife. Many translations have gone with something like this (YLT, LXX, VUL, ASV, TNK, KJV, etc.). It seems to me that the explanation that he can bury his wife and that he is the chief among the people makes the most sense of the verse.

Lev 21:5-6: bald patches, shave edges, cuts on body (see Lev 19:27-28)

Vs. 5-6 continue the theme of **mourning the dead**. Vs. 5 is very closely related to **Lev 19:27-28**, “You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the LORD.” It says, “They shall not make bald patches on their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts on their body” (**Lev 21:5**). We saw in Ch. 19 that those practices were closely related to **mourning rituals** of Egyptians and Canaanites and Babylonians and

Greeks. Jeremiah demonstrates this when he says, “Both great and small shall die in this land. They shall not be buried, and no one shall lament for them or cut himself or make himself bald for them” (Jer 16:6). God was forbidding his people to mourn like pagans. Is this not in keeping with the fact that the LORD is the God of life! We do not grieve like those who have no hope (1Th 4:13). This NT principle spoken by Paul has its roots right here in Leviticus.

Why restate this for the priests? The next verse explains that. “They shall be holy to their God and not profane the Name of their God. For they offer the LORD’s food offerings, the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy” (6). In other words, if the people were under the same restrictions and they did not attend the sanctuary, they did not sacrifice offerings, they did not have direct access to the Lord through sacrificial food and bread, how much more the priest who does?

Lev 21:7-9: Marriage to Prostitutes (not High Priest)

The priestly laws conclude by considering them in relationship to marriage. Before reading them, it has always

been fascinating to me to think about the Roman Catholics with regard to all other branches of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Jews allowed priests to marry. In Christianity, though the “priesthood” differs in all traditions in certain respects from the Jews, some still call them “priests.” The Eastern Orthodox allow priests to marry, though with restrictions. Anglicans allow for married priests. Basically, every other Protestant denomination allows for pastors and presbyters and bishops to be married. **Only Rome** has said that a priest cannot be married, and that was something that evolved over time even for them, under the guise of an ascetic life and spiritual discipline (we’ve seen in recent years just how well that has worked out).

In the OT, **the priest could marry**. Of course he could! For it was only through the line of Aaron that there could be any priests, and if none of them married, there would be no more priests in just a couple of generations. The rule is as follows, “**They shall not marry a prostitute or a woman who has been defiled, neither shall they marry a woman divorced from her husband**” (Lev 21:7). The reason? “**The priest his holy to his God**” (7). **Prostitutes** sleep with other men for a living and thus defile their bodies. Another example of a

woman who has **been defiled** might be someone like the woman who bled for 12 years that Jesus healed. Skin diseases, previous loss of virginity through rape or fornication, and other things would also be included. A **divorced** woman has already been married and thus her virginity was last. Though it was permitted other men to marry a divorced woman under certain circumstances, the priest was forbidden from doing this (**Deut 24:2, 4** presume this as I believe does this very law).

Vs. 8 is strange and commenters are not quite sure what to think about it. “**You shall sanctify them, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I, the LORD, who sanctify you, and holy.**” Suddenly, **the priest is no longer addressed**. Rather, **the people are addressed**. Perhaps the idea is that it is the responsibility of any father who has a daughter a priest might marry to ensure that the priest’s new bride is not defiled in any way. A totally different interpretation is that the people must not look down upon the priest but must “sanctify” him, that is treat him as holy.

The next verse could support either interpretation. The law is that “**the daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself**

by whoring, profanes her father; she shall be burned with fire” (Lev 21:9). Notice, we have the father-daughter relationship. But whom would she whore with? **Some man of Israel**. Hence, the men of the nation are told in vs. 8 to respect the priest by not defiling his daughter.

Whatever the case, the consequences are absolutely dire. She must be **burned with fire**. It is interesting to me that “fire” as capital punishment is singled out here, for this is what we saw in the previous chapter as well, in what becomes the central form of punishment in Ch. 20. The fire alone is what purifies and restores holiness, for it **burns away the impurities**. How unspeakable it is to do this to the priest, and how truly holy was the status that God had conferred upon him? Israel is being taught to regard as holy the things that God regards as holy. Again, not more morally pure, but ritually holy, able to walk into the very presence of the holy God to mediate for the people.

High Priest

Lev 21:10-15: Dead Bodies and Marriage

Heiser makes the observation that “The laws were meant to convey an ideal. The closer to the presence of God we, get the more we ought to reflect the holiness and the perfection of God. The original marital couple were innocent and pure. Things become more restrictive for the people who are closer to the presence of God in terms of the sacred space they’re allowed to occupy.” We see this unfolding now as we turn to the [high priest](#).

[Vs. 10](#) tells us this is about, “[The priest who is chief among his brothers](#).” He is set apart by having the anointing oil poured on his head and the consecrated garments placed upon his body. We have seen him previously in the book. He is Aaron, and when he dies, the son of succession.

He “[shall not let the hair of his head hang loose nor tear his clothes](#)” ([10](#)). This is a restatement of [Leviticus 10:6](#). That law was for Aaron *and his sons*. This one is for the high priest. We are getting more specific. Curiously, this seems to imply that normal priests could do these things.

“[He shall not go in to any dead bodies nor make himself unclean, even for his father or for his mother](#)” ([11](#)). Things are [more restrictive](#), not because he is to be more morally pure, but because the [proximity](#) he has to the LORD is

closest of any human being on earth. Aaron has already learned some difficult lessons about this kind of law with the death of his two sons (Lev 10, the same context the hair and clothes passage occurs).

“He shall not go out of the sanctuary, lest he profane the sanctuary of his God, for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is on him: I am the LORD” (12). There is a priest among the Copts whom they say never leaves the precinct of the Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion in Axum, [Ethiopia](#), for, they say, he guards the true Ark of the Covenant with his very life. Only he has ever seen it. He may never leave the precinct and it is an appointment for life. Is that what’s going in this law? [Did God force Aaron to never leave the tabernacle precinct in the same way?](#)

We know that in the NT it says the high priest lived somewhere near, but outside, the quarters of the Temple ([Mark 14:53-54](#)). The rabbis agree (m. Yoma 1:1). As they are discussing this law, they always seem to discuss it in the context of the high priest [not being allowed to follow immediately behind the bier](#) (the moveable frame that carried a person’s coffin to its final resting place). In other

words, they read this law as being a continuation of the previous law concerning mourning rites of the dead. Milgrom summarizes it, “The text naturally assumes that if a death occurred at his home while he was officiating at the sanctuary, then he would not be allowed to return to his premises, but would be quartered on the sanctuary grounds for the week of mourning while his home would undergo ritual purification (cf. Num 19:18–19).”⁹ The point was to keep him isolated from any temptation that might bring contamination into the sacred space.

Like the priestly laws, it then moves from the dead to marriage. “And he shall take a wife in her virginity” (13). This is the positive command. It is followed by the negative. “A widow, or a divorced woman, or a woman who have been defiled, or a prostitute, these he shall not marry. But he shall take as his wife a virgin of his own people, that he may not profane his offspring among his people, for I am the LORD who sanctifies him” (14-15). I believe extra things are mentioned here simply to demonstrate Heiser’s point.

⁹ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1817.

He is more restricted than the priest because he serves closer to the holy God's special presence and proximity.

High Priest, Priests, and Physical Blemishes

The passage concludes with five verses (17-21) addressing the physical condition of any priest and a couple of examples (22-23) concerning the descendants of Aaron who are blemished, may not serve as priests, but may still have some of the privileges God granted to all the sons of Aaron.

Vs. 16 shows that a newish kind of section has arrived, for we have our formula again, “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying...” “Speak to Aaron, saying, ‘None of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the bread of his God’” (17). What’s going on here? It is talking about the various offerings that Israel would bring to God that would become food offerings and sacrifices. Recall that these were given to the priests to be their food (e.g. 7:35). To put it another way, it was their salary, their payment for their work. What the law is establishing is that a blemished priest could still be paid for

the other tasks they could perform in the courtyard. As vs. 22 puts it, “He may eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy and of the holy things.” But he was forbidden as vs. 21 says from coming near to offer the LORD’s food offerings or coming near the bread of his God. Vs. 23 adds, “He shall not go through the veil or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries, for I am the LORD who sanctifies them.” In other words, he still serves in some capacity as a priest, but not in a full capacity. Why?

The word “blemish” is elaborated in vv. 18-20. It includes being blind or lame, having a mutilated face or a limb that is too long (18). He could not have an injured foot or hand (19). He could not be a hunchback or a dwarf or have problems seeing (curious that Eli was almost blind) or a itching disease or scabs (discussed previously in the book) or have crushed testicles (such as a Eunuch; 20). Why? For the same reason we’ve seen throughout Leviticus. These things keep a person from being whole, and anything short of complete wholeness exudes disease and decay and death and these things are the opposite of what God is. Therefore, they

must not contaminate the sacred holy space.¹⁰ But even more, the priest was a human representation of God to the people.¹¹

The passage ends as many do in the Pentateuch, by telling us that Moses obeyed God. “So Moses spoke to Aaron and to his sons and to all the people of Israel” (24).

NT and Leviticus 21

The NT never quotes from Leviticus 21. But I would argue that it plays a powerful below-the-surface role in many of the stories. Consider for example the time that a man named Jairus begged Jesus to come to his house to heal his sick daughter. By the time Jesus arrived, she had died. But Jesus went into the house and told the people she was only sleeping (Luke 8:52). Luke makes sure we know she was dead in the next verse, because the people all laughed at

¹⁰ A couple of papers on this section are Jeffrey Stackert, “Blemishes, Camouflage, and Sanctuary Service: The Priestly Deity and His Attendants,” *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 2 (2013): 458-78, https://www.academia.edu/7481504/Blemishes_Camouflage_and_Sanctuary_Service_The_Priestly_Deity_and_His_Attendants. Jared Wilson, “The Perfect Priest: An Examination of Leviticus 21:17-23,” *George Fox University Masters Thesis* (2013), https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1007&context=seminary_masters.

¹¹ Wilson, especially 17-18.

Jesus. But Jesus went over to her and told her to arise, and at once, her spirit returned and she got up and ate (54-55).

How is this relevant to Leviticus 21? Because Jesus is the Great High Priest. Yet, here he is going to the place where a dead person is. Any normal priest would have been defiled, but not Jesus. Why? Because Jesus has the power over death. To him, she was merely sleeping, even though she was truly dead. So he raised her from the dead and in this way, **Jesus was not capable of being defiled by being in the presence of death.** Jesus overcame the problems inherent in these priestly regulations, that the priests had to maintain strict distance from death in order to avoid contaminating the sacred space.

But there's more about Jesus. It isn't that he is a really powerful shaman who can conjure spells that are so powerful that the dead come to life. It is that **Jesus is himself the ideal priest** because he is **as close to God as you can get**—because **he is God**. Jesus bridges the distance between sacred and profane by being fully God and being fully man. He alone can be the intercessor between us and God, because he alone is the bridge between them—a bridge that cannot be defiled in any ritual sense because he alone is God.

We said earlier that the priest had the responsibility to sanctify people who were ritually and morally unclean. But what if he is unclean himself? How can he perform his job? **In Jesus, the answer is fully solved.** Nothing can penetrate into his being and essence and person to make him unclean. Therefore, his responsibility to sanctify the people who are ritually and morally unclean cannot be thwarted. He performs his duty day and night without ceasing because he solves the pollution and contamination problems raised throughout the book of Leviticus. Therefore, all things in the new covenant are now seen through his high priesthood.

Let's transfer this now to **some** of these other people in Luke's books that Jesus or the Apostles touched or healed or, even if he didn't heal them, saved. Jesus touched the **bent women** with his hands and made her straight (**Luke 13:13**). A man **lame** from birth was led every day to the temple, and Peter told him to get up and walk in the name of Jesus, and the man did so (**Acts 3:6**). These kinds of stories display the power that Jesus has over those things that made priests unfit for service. Yet, these people were not priests, so why even bring this up in the context of Leviticus 21?

Let's turn to another story like them found in Acts 8. This is the story of an **Ethiopian eunuch** who is riding along with Philip, reading the book of Isaiah. Now, a eunuch is one who is explicitly forbidden from being a priest in Leviticus 21 (crushed/missing testicles). What people fail to realize about the fact that he is reading Isaiah is that the portion he is said to be reading from (Isa 53) quickly moves to this, "Let not the eunuch say, 'Behold, I am a dry tree.' For thus says the LORD: 'To the *eunuchs* who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give *in my house* and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters, and the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, *to minister to him*, to love the Name of the LORD, and to be his servants'" (Isa 56:4-7). Then at the end of the book it completes the thought, "I will take for priests and for Levites" people from among all the nations (Isa 66:19-21). What is this man, but both a **eunuch** and a **foreigner**? Is not the promise that he would be able to serve God as a priest? Hence, he asks why he can't be baptized, because baptism is the initiation ceremony into the new covenant priesthood, as we saw in our study of Leviticus 9.

In this way, you can see that what Jesus does is take away the physical requirements for the priesthood in the new covenant. Why? We can answer this in the story of the [healing of another lame man](#), this time in Luke's Gospel. This one is found in Luke 5.

This one is the story of the man who was brought to Jesus on a bed by going up on a roof and [lowering him](#) down through a hole. Jesus' does not first heal this man. Instead, [“when he saw their faith, he said, ‘Man, your sins are forgiven you’”](#) ([Luke 5:20](#)). But the Pharisees got angry, because Jesus doing something that only God could do (essentially, he is claiming to be the Angel of the LORD, see [Ex 23:21](#)). So to prove who he is, he heals the man of his paralysis ([Luke 5:24](#)).

How does this story help? The answer is in [the forgiveness of sins](#). When Jesus forgives someone's sin, they are not clean merely until the next sin; they are [clean once-for-all](#), just as Jesus is clean. This is because with the forgiveness of sins comes union with Christ. We literally become a partaker in his nature, his body on earth. This is part of the glorious gift that is salvation by faith. Complete forgiveness, even though we still sin—that's justification.

We are declared not guilty even though we are guilty. This is because Christ was not guilty and he died for us. What good news this is for sinners.

Is this good news to you? Do you understand yourself to be a sinner, someone who has fallen short of God's glory, someone who is constantly unclean both morally and ritually through the contaminations of this world, through sin, death, and the devil? Is this you? Of course it is you. It is all of us. But you have to come to a recognition that you are among the rest of us.

To truly recognize this means that **you confess before God** and man that you are in fact **a sinner** and that you tell both God and man that you need the **forgiveness** of Christ. Have you done this? Have you prayed to the Father and told him this? If not, you need to do this right now. Pray where you sit and tell God these things. He will hear you. There is no time to waste. Look at how the world is falling apart before our very eyes. You do not know what tomorrow will bring. But you do know that you will go on for eternity. Will it be with Christ in heaven or without him in hell? Tell him that you have sinned and that you need the once-for-all forgiveness that Jesus gives. Tell him that you believe what

you are hearing and that you need him to make you well. If you do this, then know that it has happened, for that desire is itself a demonstration that God has changed your heart by these very words.

Let's return, finally, to Zacchaeus. Do you remember how the song continues?

*And as the Savior passed that way
He looked up in the tree and he said,
'Zacchaeus you come down, For I'm going to your house today!'
For I'm going to your house today
(or in the Anglican hymnal, I'm coming to your house for tea)!*

Here we have Jesus, the High Priest, [going to the house](#) of this [wee little man](#). Now, the story tells us that he was a chief tax collector and was rich ([Luke 19:2](#)). He was despised because of this, a lot like the IRS is today. But Zacchaeus was not just rich, he was also short. What if his small stature was because he was a midget, someone born with dwarfism. This adds something to the story, because what does Jesus do for the man? He doesn't heal him physically. He heals him *spiritually*.

*Zacchaeus was a wee little man,
But a happy man was he,
For he had seen the Lord that day
And a happy man was he;
And a very happy man was he.*

The people said, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner” (Luke 19:7). Zacchaeus knew that he was a sinner. His whole life was one of misery set in ripping people off and being made fun of for his condition. But when Jesus came it all changed. “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold” (8). Jesus said, “Today salvation has come to this house” (9). And what did this salvation do?

It did the same thing for him that it did for the Eunuch and the lame man and the women bent over and all the rest who were saved. It brought him into the new covenant priesthood. And though his physical condition remained, Zacchaeus was able to begin ministering good as a priest should. And even though he was not physically allowed in the OT to partake of the sacrificial food, he and all other

Christians could now eat the manna from heaven and participate together in the new covenant thank offering—the Lord’s Supper. It is a privilege God gives to each Christian. But only to those who have faith in him.

The end of that story has Jesus saying, “**The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost**” (10). I pray you would hear and believe the goodness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as he fulfills in his person these many laws of Leviticus 21.

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