

mother (18:7) or with one's granddaughter (18:10), but the death penalty is to be assumed in both cases.

**20:22-26** Like chapter 18, the present discussion of penalties concludes with a solemn charge to obey the LORD and a warning against disobedience (18:24-30). Motivating obedience was the promised **inheritance** of Canaan, **a land flowing with milk<sup>90</sup> and honey,<sup>91</sup>** i.e., a very fruitful land (cf. Exod 3:8). Israel must not live **according to the customs of the nations** whose behavior was **abhorred** by the LORD and who were to be expelled from the land. Because the holy LORD had set Israel **apart from the nations**, Israel was to observe also the LORD's ritual commandments and thus be different in conduct from the surrounding nations. The laws regarding **clean and unclean animals** are given in 11:1-47 and Deuteronomy 14:3-21.

**20:27** Not only those who consulted **a medium or spiritist** (v. 6) but also these idolatrous practitioners themselves were to be executed.

## II. HOLINESS DEMANDED IN PRIESTHOOD AND OFFERINGS (21:1-22:33)

Continuing the emphasis upon holiness of conduct, chapters 21-22 are concerned with maintaining the sanctity of the priesthood (21:1-24), protecting the sanctity of the priestly portion of the offerings (22:1-16), and defining the qualifications for animals acceptable for sacrifice (22:17-33).

### A. LAWS OF PRIESTLY SANCTITY GIVEN (21:1-24)

This section sets forth requirements for the priests (vv. 1-9), special regulations for the high priest (vv. 10-15), and physical qualifications for priests serving in the sanctuary (vv. 16-24).

#### 1. Requirements Given for All Priests (21:1-9)

**21:1-9** If the LORD's covenant demanded holiness on the part of

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<sup>90</sup>The term generally refers to goat's milk (Hartley, *Leviticus*, p. 341).

<sup>91</sup>This term most likely refers to juice from the date, rather than the honey from wild bees (Milgrom, *Leviticus*, p. 1760).

the people, how much more it required holiness of conduct on the part of the LORD's chosen ministers, the priests. The priests were, of course, subject to the holiness laws incumbent upon all Israel, but beyond these, additional, more stringent, requirements were placed upon priests. Except for the members of his own family mentioned in verses 2-3 and for his wife (who is assumed, being regarded biblically as closer than his nearest kin, Gen 2:24), a priest could not **make himself ceremonially unclean** by coming in contact with a corpse,<sup>92</sup> either by preparing the body for burial or by entering the room where the body lay prior to burial.<sup>93</sup> Further, priests were not to **shave their heads or shave off the edges of their beards or cut their bodies**. All these practices were forbidden to the priests as idolatrous mourning customs (19:27-28; Deut 14:1). It is noteworthy that such prohibitions would guard the priests and all Israel against idolatrous veneration of the dead or ancestor worship.<sup>94</sup> As servants of the LORD's altar who **present the offerings**, the priests were to be particularly holy. As in 3:11, the offerings are called **the food of their God** several times in the present context.<sup>95</sup> Again, as the LORD's ministers, priests were to marry in keeping with their holy profession. Forbidden to marry a woman **defiled by prostitution**,<sup>96</sup> a violated woman, or one **divorced**,<sup>97</sup> the priest could marry only a virgin or a widow, and the high priest could only marry a virgin (vv. 13-14). The priest's family was also to live in a holy manner. A priest's daughter who became a harlot was therefore to be executed (20:14).

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<sup>92</sup>Hartley contrasts the elaborate tombs built for the Pharaohs (pyramids) with the uncleanness of death in Israel (*Leviticus*, p. 347).

<sup>93</sup>Levine draws attention to the fact that roles in a funeral ceremony were denied to the priests ("Leviticus, Book of," *ABD*, 4.316).

<sup>94</sup>The cutting or pulling out of hair is attested in several ancient cultures (the Moabites, Isa 15:2; the Philistines, Jer 47:5; in Babylonia, see *ANET*, pp. 339-340; in Persia, see Herodotus 9.24).

<sup>95</sup>This is obviously anthropomorphic language since Scripture elsewhere denies the notion that God physically consumes sacrifices from the altar (Ps 50:12-13).

<sup>96</sup>Levine notes, "This term is most often applied to a woman habitually given to harlotry, not to one who may have lapsed on a particular occasion" (*Leviticus*, p. 143). However, Ezekiel 44:22 makes clear that a priest may marry only a virgin. Hartley offers a logical reason for the law: the priest could not be sure that his first child was his (*Leviticus*, p. 348).

<sup>97</sup>Levine argues that, in biblical times, divorce "always involved a charge by the husband of infidelity" (*Leviticus*, p. 144).

## 2. Special Regulations for High Priest Given (21:10-15)

**21:10-15** The **high priest** had been especially anointed and **ordained** for his position (8:12,30; 16:32). Because he had been especially consecrated (v. 12; 10:7), requirements more stringent than those for the other priests were placed upon the high priest. He was not to **let his hair become unkempt or tear his clothes**<sup>98</sup> as public signs of mourning (cf. 10:6, 7). He was further to avoid all contact with the dead and therefore could not ritually **make himself unclean**,<sup>99</sup> **even for his father or mother** (contrast vv. 1-2),<sup>100</sup> nor **leave the sanctuary** to participate in mourning.<sup>101</sup> The high priest was only to marry a **virgin** (vv. 13-14; contrast v. 7). An improper marriage would **defile his offspring**, i.e., corrupt the Aaronic line of descent.

## 3. Disqualifying Blemishes Listed (21:16-24)

**21:16-24** Like the sacrifices they offered, the ministers in the LORD's sanctuary were to be physically unblemished. Numerous defects disqualifying one for service are listed in verses 18-20. Descendants of Aaron who had such physical defects were permitted to share with their brethren in the priestly portions of the offerings, but were strictly prohibited from **sanctuary** service. Some priestly portions were designated as **most holy**, others as simply **holy**

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<sup>98</sup>Milgrom argues that only the sacred garments are in view here, and the act of tearing one's garments is forbidden to priests only in the mourning process (*Leviticus*, p. 1814; cf. Ezra 9:3-5).

<sup>99</sup>What if the high priest unintentionally comes into contact with a corpse? In Numbers 6:9-12, a Nazirite (also forbidden from contact with the dead) is given instructions to follow in order to re-achieve his status. The procedure probably was similar for the priests.

<sup>100</sup>Wenham states that his cultic responsibilities take precedence over his familial ones (*Leviticus*, p. 291).

<sup>101</sup>Some interpreters have understood this command to mean that the high priest could never leave the sanctuary precinct (Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, pp. 315-316). However, this law should be taken, along with Leviticus 10:7, to mean that the priests could not leave the sanctuary during a time of mourning (Milgrom, *Leviticus*, pp. 1815-1817). Indeed, it is clear that in later times the high priests were allowed their own homes (Matt 26:3; *m. Yoma* 1:1).

(cf. 2:3). The **curtain**<sup>102</sup> divided the most holy place from the holy place in the tabernacle (Exod 26:33). A priest disqualified by a physical **defect** could not **go near the curtain or approach the altar** for fear his blemish would **desecrate** the sanctuary.

## B. SANCTITY OF OFFERINGS PROTECTED (22:1-16)

**22:1-9** Certain portions of the **sacred offerings** were reserved for the priests. (Num 18:8-20 neatly summarizes the priestly portions.) Although intended as food for the priests, these portions were not to be treated totally as common food,<sup>103</sup> but rather their sanctity was to be protected in two ways: (1) no priest was to eat of them while in a state of ritual uncleanness (vv. 1-9); (2) no unauthorized person was to partake of them (vv. 10-16).

The laws of ritual uncleanness are recorded primarily in chapters 11–15. Like a nonpriest, a priest was made **ceremonially unclean** through leprosy (v. 4; cf. 13:45-46), bodily discharge (v. 4; cf. 15:2), contact with the dead (v. 4; cf. Num 19:11,22), emission of semen (v. 4; cf. 15:16), contact with unclean animals (v. 5; see 11:24), or contact with ritually unclean persons (v. 5; cf. 15:7,19).<sup>104</sup> The priest who became ritually defiled in any of these ways and ate of the priestly portions while in that state was to **be cut off**, which penalty in this instance apparently involved death (see v. 9).<sup>105</sup> The individual rendered unclean by touching unclean things remained unclean until sunset, the end of the day, at which time he could bathe and be ritually clean again. Uncleanness was also contracted by eating the flesh of **anything found dead or torn by wild animals** (cf. 17:15-16).

<sup>102</sup>Milgrom argues that the mention of the curtain specifies that Aaron's descendants refer only to potential high priests (*Studies in Levitical Terminology*, pp. 40-41). Indeed, if all male descendants of Aaron were in view, the text (he suggests) would have read, "But he shall not enter the Tent of Meeting" (*Leviticus*, p. 1830) rather than "he must not go near the curtain."

<sup>103</sup>Although the priests are not given "royal portions," their share is still unique in that they are given only what God himself has allowed (Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, p. 324). The description *qōdeš qādāšim* is applied to the priests (2:3; 6:17,25; 7:1,6; 10:12; 21:22; 24:8).

<sup>104</sup>These are given in order of decreasing severity (Milgrom, *Leviticus*, p. 1851).

<sup>105</sup>This penalty is more severe than that of the layman (see 7:20-21).