

April 23

Scriptures: Read Leviticus 21 & 22

Key Verse: “You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel. I am the Lord who sanctifies you.” (Leviticus 22:23)

Overview

In the preceding chapters, we have seen the standards of holiness for the common Israelite. In these two chapters, we see the standards of holiness required for the priesthood. These are naturally high standards because of their position of responsibility, for “everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Luke 12:48). Whatever is to be done must be done in light of the holiness and perfection of God; therefore, the priest had to maintain a holy, pure, and exemplary life, so that he could then lead and teach the children of Israel the ways of holiness and how to truly hallow God’s holy name.

In their service to God at the tabernacle, the priests were to remain pure at all times. They were forbidden to touch any dead body and thereby defile themselves (since death is the result of sin), although exceptions were made in the case of a very close relative for whom the priest was responsible. Under no conditions was any priest to mourn for the dead in the manner of the heathen (21:5, 10). The rules regarding cleanness for the high priest were even stricter than for the other priests. He was never, under any circumstances, to go near a dead body, which would then defile him, for, he wore the holy garments and the consecrating anointing oil of God was upon him (21:12). He was to openly express no sadness or mourning, but be ready for the joyous service of God at all times. He, as all priests, was only to marry a godly, noble, virgin Israelite (21:7, 13-14), and his behavior was to be exemplary in all areas, for he was the people’s representative to God and God’s representative to the people.

The priests stood in a special place and were to exemplify the holiness of God by separating themselves from any defilement or evil. If any priest transgressed, it was very serious and the penalties were far more severe than for the rest of the people, since they had greater responsibility and were expected to know better. The priests’ families were also to be above reproach and live holy lives, for if not, they would bring extreme disgrace upon him (21:9). In the eastern culture, the family ties were (and still are) very close, so that whatever one member does effects the whole family in a personal way.

The priests and the sacrificial animals, which atoned for sin, were to picture, or typify, the perfect High Priest, Jesus Christ. Therefore, those priests who offered the holy things were to have no blemish or deformity (21:17). In God’s service at the tabernacle, everything involved was to display perfection and thus be glorifying unto Him, for anything short of perfection profanes His holiness. This regulation was another of the many external signs to show that it is a serious thing to approach God and was not to be taken lightly. God is holy; thing to approach God and was not to be taken lightly. God is holy; therefore His servants alike were to be holy and symbolize His holiness.

Believers today, as Christ's priesthood, are to have the same exemplary holy life that was expected of the Old Covenant priests. As the Apostle Paul exhorted: "We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be lamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: ...by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth,, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness..." (2 Cor. 6:3-4a, 6-7). The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit is desperately needed that we may live pure and holy lives in this unclean and defiled world.

Prayer

O Lord, we pray for our spiritual leaders. Grant to them the grace of purity so that their example will be excellent and so that they can say as Paul said, "Follow me as I follow Christ."