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“Leviticus 21-22”

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With

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Leviticus 21-22

Leviticus 21-22 overlaps a great deal with earlier material in Leviticus. This episode focuses on certain mourning rites and Israel's need to maintain a holiness distinction from pagan religions in that regard. Of special interest in this episode is Lev 21:5 (cp. Lev 19:26-28), a passage many use to condemn tattooing.

Papers referenced:

Roberts A New Parallel to 1Kgs18

Gevaryahu Lev1928 Tattooing or Branding

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 81, Leviticus 21-22. I'm your layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you doing this week?

MSH: Very good

TS: Good, it's the New Year so Happy New Year.

MSH: It is. Happy New Year.

TS: Any resolutions? You going to quit smoking or...?

MSH: Yeah, I'm not a big resolution guy. I don't do anything of any real interest that I have to quit. I can't say I'm going to quit reading or something like that.

TS: I'd probably have to quit coffee consumption but that's not going to happen. So if I could take the caffeine and inject it straight in somehow, I probably would.

MSH: You should be living in the Pacific Northwest because that's all they do here is drink coffee. I don't drink coffee so I guess I'm missing something but my wife's really into it.

TS: You drink tea though, correct? So you get your caffeine through tea.

MSH: Yeah, but the coffee drinkers say it's not the same so I'll take their word for it. I don't tremble at all.

TS: I wake up shaking, I'm just kidding. But I do get headaches if I take a day or two off which is not good.

MSH: That's interesting. Good for you. Well, we're doing two chapters again, closing in on finishing Leviticus. I'll give everybody a moment to wipe away the tear that I'm sure is forming. Here we are in Leviticus 21-22 and I'm still poking fun at Leviticus doing Leviticus, but I actually got a good bit of feedback from it. I've liked it. People seem to like it, so why not? Here we are today. I hope we learn something. We're going to take 2 chapters, 21 and 22, and there is actually going to be one thing I sort of park on for the most part. We'll hit on more than one thing but believe it or not, we're going to get into the tattoo question.

This is a question I actually have gotten an e-mail several times about what I think about tattooing and people always take you to Leviticus. And there was something in Leviticus 19 that I could've brought up then and gone into the tattooing thing but there was plenty to cover in that previous episode. So I'm going to pick it up here because there's something in Leviticus 21 that references back to Leviticus 19. So this'll be the episode we can talk about that. So having said, that let's just jump in here to Leviticus 21 and start reading. We'll pick up a few things and work our way to the sort of centerpiece for the episode. So Leviticus 21 says,

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). [**MSH: Now this, let's just throw in the fourth verse**] ⁴ He shall not make himself unclean as a husband among his people and so profane himself.

MSH: These first four verses are about whether, they're essentially about, since contact with the dead makes you unclean, we talked about this earlier in Leviticus whether it's a dead human being, a dead carcass of an animal, contact with death or with the dead makes a person ritually unclean, which is unfit for sacred space. And so in this chapter the issue comes up what about the priests because the priests are in some way responsible ritually with sanctifying people in this situation.

They're invariably going to be in contact with the dead because of the distress of someone dying and they may ask a priest to come over comfort them or do this or that. So they're in need of some special commentary for what happens with the priests. And what we have here in the first four verses gets us into, initially, the ordinary priest. In other words, the first four verses here are dealing with just your run-of-the-mill priests, not the high priest. The high priest is going to come later and have even stricter rules. But in the first four verses here we get the parameters for whether a priest can willingly make himself unclean with respect to contact with a dead relative. There's a list of what's allowable here. There's a similar verse in Ezekiel 44 that says, this is verse 25, Ezekiel 44:25,

²⁵ They shall not defile themselves by going near to a dead person. [**MSH: because you're a priest. Your job is to occupy sacred space and do things so you shouldn't just go to the situation we could be defiled, but the exception occurs in Ezekiel 44. The rest of the verse says,**]
However, for father or mother, for son or daughter, for brother or unmarried sister they may defile themselves.

MSH: So it mimics the situation here that we just read in Leviticus 21. So if we go back to that in the very first verse, speak to the priests, 'no one shall make himself unclean for the dead among his people.' The Hebrew word for people is *am*, which can be an entire people group, an entire nation or more limited group. But here in this context, it's obviously a reference to somebody's near kin. So the principle laid down is generally priests should not go into homes where there's a dead person. You're just going to be defiled and your job is on sacred space and that's just going to mess things up. But for the ordinary priest, if its father, mother, son, daughter, brother, unmarried sister, its okay to enter that house, comfort people. Or this is something you shouldn't do, even though people might want you to do or you might think your duty as a priest might involve this.

Don't defile yourself by contacting the dead. Don't enter a house where there's a dead person except in this situation, this narrow group. So as a general rule, an ordinary priest should not become defiled by contact the dead, even of his own extended clan but only for the members of his clan who are the most closely related him, his immediate family. So it's an issue because attending the burial of clan relatives was sort of a traditional thing to do in the culture. But the priests here are actually a little bit restricted from doing that. They can only do that in certain situations. So right away we're starting off, I think it was important to mention that because

Leviticus 21 very clearly is in a context of priestly duties, sacred space, something religious. Let's just be as broad as we possibly can. There's a religious context to what we're reading now in Leviticus 21, and if we want to use this, a ritual context, a priestly context, whatever the vocabularies we want to use. Now that becomes an important setup. It helps us get the flow of things for when we hit verse 5. Leviticus 21:5 says,

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.

MSH: Now this is a verse that typically comes up with the tattooing situation so right away, the context for this, we're talking about priests here. We're not talking about anybody in general. We're talking about priests. That's the first thing. But this comment in Leviticus 21:5, notice what's grouped here, make bald patches on the heads, shave off the edge of the beards, or make any cuts in the body. That harkens back to Leviticus 19 and I didn't bring this up in the previous episode but we'll pick it up here. Let's just get a few verses, the cluster of versus here and you can see where this same kind of language, where it falls into here. Leviticus 19:26-29 says this,

²⁶ "You shall not eat any flesh with the blood in it. You shall not interpret omens or tell fortunes. ²⁷ You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. ²⁸ You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the LORD.

²⁹ "Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, lest the land fall into prostitution and the land become full of depravity.

MSH: So it's grouped in here with a bunch of other rules, and the eating of the flesh, the blood of an animal was only, blood of a sacrifice was only for God. Blood was really only for God. We talked about how people would have to bury it, put dirt over it so that it couldn't be used in ritual purpose. We talked about that in the last episode. The life force belongs to God, it goes back to God. That's the idea why you shouldn't consume blood. Then we go from that to interpreting omens or telling fortunes, treading on the area of divine knowledge, sacred space, really the other world, spiritual world contacting beings who inhabit that world to get special divine information. You're not supposed to do that. We talked about that a little bit last time, what the logic is.

Then we get right after that Leviticus 19, don't round the hair off your temples or mar the edges of your beard, don't make cuts on your body or tattoo yourselves. Then we go to don't profane your daughter by making her a prostitute. A lot of scholars think that refers to sacred prostitution, in other words, you don't have your daughter function as a cultic prostitute. Generally, a prostitute would be bad, too, but since this is in the context of this other religious stuff, this is an oblique reference to sort of idolatry, some of the things the Canaanites did. I want you to get the flavor that this is not just so broad and wide. There is a religious reason, a religious flavor or context for these laws that has something to do with your vow, your status as the people of Yahweh to have only him as your God.

There are certain things you did not do religiously because the Canaanites do that. The Egyptians do this stuff, fill in the blank. Somebody else does this. Someone else who is loyal to another god does these things. And as we're going to see here with the "tattoo" question, there is

a consistent ritualistic religious flavor to these commands in Leviticus. Let's just jump in here full bore with us this whole question. So I'd start by saying this, just to make the point, again, the context of Leviticus 19 here. We're in Leviticus 21, so 21:5 I think is pretty clear. The practices listed are all associated in some way with religious practices practiced by pagans. There's this context. We don't do this as a follower of Yahweh.

We don't do this as a priest of Yahweh because people who have other gods and worship them and do certain rituals for them do these things. We're not going to do them. They do. We are maintaining a separation between us and them because of our loyalty to Yahweh of Israel over and against other gods. So the practices listed here are all assisted in some way with other religions' idolatrous rites, and everything listed here was well known in the ancient world as having that context, having something to do with what an Israelite would look at and say is an idolatrous ritual, some divination practice, or some ritual conducted. And that's at the heart of why these things are prohibited. So if you go to Leviticus 19, it's consumption of blood. We talked about that. You don't use blood ritualistically. Blood belongs to Yahweh because it's a life force.

Other pagan religions, they did lots of things with blood to their gods, that sort of thing. So the law wants to hem that in, maintain loyalty to Yahweh. Don't consume the blood. Don't do what these other people do. Then there was interpreting omens, telling fortunes, soliciting divine knowledge from other gods or spirit beings, and then rounding off the hair and the beard. Now as odd as it might sound, in the Ancient Near East, hair, as well as blood, as well as semen, and some of these other things, symbolized life force. It did so because it grew. It was perceived as being alive because it grows, just like a plant. So consequently, people who occupied sacred space, priests, were not to cut their hair or their beard short. This is one of the bits of logic, part of the rationale that goes into this.

It's kind of interesting but locks of hair have been found and there are ancient texts outside the Bible that describe the practice but hair has been found late tombs, put in funeral piers in ancient Syria, some of these other archaeological sites. Hair is described as being brought to sanctuaries, temples, as part of dedicatory offerings to some god. It was just because of the way it was perceived, and we have a religious context. Now for those of you, I'm not going to get into 1 Corinthians 11 again, but for those of you that I sent those articles to that asked for them, this ought to sound familiar right now because even in the 1 Corinthians 11, the head covering thing, that whole situation, the hair was the key to understanding what Paul is thinking when he's talking about the woman's head covering in 1 Corinthians 11. It had something to do with life force, with fecundity, with the ability to conceive children.

As odd as that sounds to us, this is part of ancient thinking, ancient prescientific thinking, and ancient religious thinking. So the hair trimming described would also be something associated with pagans because they would take that hair and make it part of an offering or they would make it part of a mourning ritual or some other temple ritual. And so the rule is don't do that. Don't round off the side growth of your head. Don't do this kind of stuff. You're not supposed to do it because of the religious denotation and connotation. The fourth item, don't cut, don't make cuts in your flesh or cutting marks on your body for the dead, did we catch that? Back in Leviticus 19, let's just go there. It adds that detail. It says in verse 28,

²⁸ You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the LORD.

MSH: Leviticus 21:5 is more abbreviated.

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.

MSH: They shall be restricted. It's about maintaining fidelity to Yahweh. But let's just go back to this cutting the marks, cutting or marking yourself on the body for the dead. Now sure, you can look at that and sort of ignore the context for the dead or whatever because right away that tells us, that takes us into mourning rituals, which is an inherently religious thing, and the belief that the ancestors lived on. We think this way, too. We believe in an afterlife. The ancient person certainly did whether they were pagan or Israelite, so you would take offerings to tombs. You would take offerings to where your dead loved ones were. We do this thing, too. We leave flowers.

We leave little tokens. It is to maintain some sort of "contact", maintain the relationship, so to speak, with the dead. The ancients did this, too, but they actually thought that what they left there was actually going to be used, food offerings, and drink offerings, in some way. So this whole idea of an ancestor cult or a cult of the dead scholars would use that kind of terminology, and it sounds like a zombie movie or something. But it's a little less dramatic than that but you assume that your ancestor would benefit in some way that you were contributing to their existence on the other side. And so any kind of mourning ritual, any kind of dedicatory offering or mourning offering, you're mourning you're dead, that kind of thing, was an inherently religious thing that involved what you believed about who's in charge of the underworld, what god you were worshiping, what you believe about your relationship to spirit beings.

And for the Israelite, look, there's only one conduit for this. It's Yahweh of Israel, and if you want information, you go to the high priest. He does the urim and thummim thing, or the ephod, or you talked to a prophet. Contact with the other side is very circumscribed and funneled through Yahweh himself or agents that Yahweh had designated as being permissible agents using permissible means to communicate with him, or to discern or divine the will of God, casting lots, that sort of thing. So all of these things are inherently religious and if Yahweh is telling you not to do it and you're doing it, it's inherently idolatrous. So that's really how we need to be thinking about this. So how do we know, though, that cutting the hair or cutting your flesh, do we know for sure that this was part of idolatry? Well the answer is yeah, we do. The Bible tells us that these things were associated with mourning rituals, which are inherently religious. Jeremiah 16:6 says,

⁶ 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.

MSH: There you have both the things, bald spots on the head, cutting your flesh. These were mourning rituals. The principle here in Leviticus is we don't do this here. The pagans do this kind of stuff. We don't do this. There's an association with pagan idolatry so this isn't a coincidence, the connection between Jeremiah 16, Leviticus 19, Leviticus 21, this is not a

coincidence. This is how it was perceived. You could go to Deuteronomy 14:1. There's another one.

You are the sons of the LORD your God. You shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead.

MSH: Don't do this. And it's inherently associated with mourning rituals. Don't do this. So as mourning practices, inherently religious practices, pagan religious practices, that's how we need to be reading this text. We shouldn't be thinking of modern tattooing, getting a little flower on my hand or something like that. There's an immediate context so we have to judge what's being done by, hey, maybe somebody walks in a tattoo parlor is doing that. I want a picture of Satan. I want a picture of this deity.

I'm doing this for some religious ritual. Who knows? That certainly can happen but that's not inherent to the situation as we know it today. Back in the Israelite time, there was no ambiguity there. This is why you did these things. Probably the classic passage is 1 Kings 18 on this, the prophets of Baal and Elijah confronting the prophets of Baal. We know the story about how the god who sends fire and all this kind of stuff of he's coming. We know the story. I'm not going to read the whole story, but there's part of it in 1 Kings 18:28 where we read,

²⁸ And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them.

MSH: So cutting was also used in other ritualistic contexts, it wasn't just mourning, even though that's pretty clear. But they cut themselves, the prophets of Baal, after their custom. This was part of the worship of Baal. Now, I'm going to read a little selection here from the Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible that deals with this episode. It reads like this.

"In the Ugaritic texts we find a cult-cry: "Where is mightiest Baal, where is the prince lord of earth". The ecstasy of these prophets is reminiscent of the prophetic ecstasy reported in the tale of Wen-Amon (*ANET* 25-29); there are other extra-biblical parallels, too (*GASTER* 1969:504-510). Of the self-mutilation of the ecstatic Baal-worshippers, "as was their custom", we also have parallels in the Ugaritic texts: "he harrowed his collar-bone, he ploughed his chest like a garden, he harrowed his waist like a valley" (*KTU* 1.5 vi:20-22: *CML* 73). The somewhat enigmatic words of the mocking Elijah: "he is deep in thought, or he is otherwise engaged", do not reveal anything specific about Baal. The absence, the journey, the sleeping and awakening of Baal are all in line with the idea of Baal as god of vegetation and fertility. This god is precisely the god who in later times was called the god of the Carmel" or the god Carmel". It should be noted that it is told that Elijah "repaired the altar of Yahweh which had been tom down" (18:30). This confirms the older statement that there was already an altar on Mount Carmel before the time of the 'contest' of the gods, but not a temple. From 2 Kgs 2:25 and 4:23-25, we may infer that Mount Carmel was a place of pilgrim- age for

Israelite and Canaanite people, and a spiritual retreat for Elisha and other charismatic prophets too (THOMPSON 1992). The special circumstances for these festivals were new moon festivals and Sabbaths.

MSH: Ouch, so they're serious. They're cutting themselves in ecstatic worship of Baal. This was part of Baal religion and that's what we have alluded to back in 1 Kings 18, so the cutting of the flesh. It's the same terminology that we read back in Leviticus. Are we really talking about tattooing here? Are we talking about some religious ritual? I think it's pretty obvious we're talking about the latter. So like I said, you can pull these texts out of Leviticus and say this is a condemnation of the tattoo artist or something like that, but to do that is really to rip it out of its context. There's a couple of things I can provide for listeners here. Some of what I just read actually appears in an article by a guy named JJM Roberts called A New Parallel to 1 Kings 18:28 and 29.

It's about prophets bathing themselves in their own blood and all this kind of stuff. In parallel to 1 Kings 18, I can have Trey put that up on the website if people are interested in that kind of material. They can read it. I want you to know that this is the context for it. Go back into the primary text, this is what you find. So where is this going? I would say it this way. Unless you want to argue that we don't really need to pay attention to context, which I think for this audiences probably approximates blasphemy because I'm big on interpreting the Bible in light of its own context, so unless you're not willing to do that, if you just want to throw context out, then take these verses in Leviticus and make them about tattoo parlors. But it's really going to miss the point. What they're really about is loyalty to Yahweh. What they're really about is fidelity here with respect to the priests.

We do the rituals Yahweh says we can do and the ones he says not to do, we don't do. We are creating distinction between us, the way Yahweh is worshiped, the meaning that we attach to do things like blood and hair and all this. We are circumscribing how we view these things, how we view the world, how we view ourselves, how we view the other side, how we view spiritual beings, how we view the other gods against Yahweh, how we view all these things dictates to us what we do and what we don't do in a ritual context so that by obeying these things, we make it very clear that we're different, that we're aligning ourselves with not only a different God but only one God and that is Yahweh of Israel. And we live by his laws. We are thinking about the world that he made, the way he wants us to think about it, and we're thinking about our relationship to him and other spiritual powers in a very specific way. He is the lone access, the lone conduit for true knowledge about the other side, about what goes on in the spirit world.

We are avoiding doing anything that would solicit contact with other deities or that would allow people to presume that we think other deities are a good source of information or they're worthy of any worship because they're not in both respects. Now, there's another issue here we need to talk about with cutting, and this one actually even includes writing on your flesh. And that is, the ancient world had another purpose outside of religious. It wasn't totally divorced from religion but it could be "secular." In the ancient world, marking the flesh either by cutting it or by writing on it, also had the connotation of slavery. And this gets into things, into parts of Leviticus when they were written, different parts of the Torah, what was done with slaves and all that sort of thing. So we have situations where because of the surrounding culture, depending on the time of history, were cutting and writing on the flesh was used to indicate to

mark a slave. I have a quotation here from Milgram from his Leviticus commentary, and he writes this.

“The prohibition of tattoos bans the legally accepted practice of marking a perpetual Israelite slave. [MSH: **So there were ways to mark slaves. Remember Exodus 21? The slave would put his ear up against the post and you would drive an awl through. That would put a little hole in the ear and that was a mark that this person had willingly decided I want to be associated with this household forever, that kind of thing.**] This fact alone should indicate that the Holiness code abolishes the statute to perpetual slavery entirely. Since the Holiness code maintains perpetual slavery for resident alien or foreigner, we can presume that it also permitted such slaves to be tattooed in certain contexts, just like driving through the awl. So this is an instance where marking a person [MSH: in this case by driving an awl through their ear,] was something you did to a servant.

MSH: In this case, a servant who wanted to join the household more permanently and we get that. That was okay but sometimes there are laws in Leviticus that forbid doing this kind of thing, such as cutting the flesh, tattooing, that kind of thing. And his point is in Exodus 21 when you get this law about the perpetual slave, and in Deuteronomy 15 and some other passages, it changes. So the idea of marking slaves, marking people in perpetuity as slaves or as servants of the household, that fades out of Israelite life and culture and it even fades out of the Israelite law as time moves on.

So Milgram’s point is that the Torah allowed for some of this and culturally, everyone knew what was going on. The person marked was a slave, but eventually that fades out of Israelite culture. Good enough. The Code of Hammurabi mentions the same thing. Slaves were branded in Babylonia. Sometimes their hair was cut, their heads were shaved. I’ll just read you a section here from the Anchor Bible dictionary about Hammurabi’s policy here.

“The Code of Hammurabi, paragraph 282, permitted the master to cut off the ear of a disobedient slave. In Mesopotamia, starting with the end of the third millennium, many slaves were already being marked with marks of the *Abu Tuma*, Akkadian word there. This was probably a special mark placed on the shaven headed by a barber who also functioned as the professional marker of slaves. According to the Code of Hammurabi, paragraph 226, if a barber shaved this particular mark from a slaves head without the knowledge and consent of the owner, the barber’s hand could be cut off.”

MSH: So it was a serious thing to not mar or distort or erase marks put on certain people. In the culture, everybody knew that person who was marked, who either had something drawn on them or something branded on them or something with the hair, there were things you did to the body to mark the person as a slave. So where does this leave us? Go back to the tattoo issue. To use these verses to condemn tattooing just *en toto*, completely, you have to assume two logical leaps. You have to assume that the tattooing is about idolatry. You have to assume that it

involves the worship or some ritual of another god, or you have to assume that the person who's getting the tattoo is a slave or the person giving a tattoo is marking a slave.

The contexts just don't fit, so unless tattoo artists are branding people for slavery or cutting someone or themselves as part of mourning rituals associated with the worship of foreign gods, modern tattooing doesn't mimic. It doesn't fit contextually with what's condemned in Leviticus and other passages. I don't think we need to prayerfully consider why we're getting a haircut or what we're doing with the hair that is cut or, by analogy here, if somebody wants to get a tattoo. I guess you could ask them and if you have a person that says I'm doing this because I serve Satan, that's something I think they can clearly be condemned. I know Christian tattoo artists that they actually do question people and if there's some religious connotation going on, they won't do it because they're a little more familiar.

They've actually spent a little more time thinking about what the context for the commands are and they want to stay clear of aiding and abetting someone to worship a false god, a foreign god, a god that is lesser than Yahweh, a being that is relatively speaking, when it comes to Yahweh, a flunky. They take care actually to be circumspect in their own industry. That's not common a lot but there are Christians who obviously get tattoos, obviously do tattooing and it just doesn't work to blanket condemn the practice based on these Leviticus passages. You can talk about it other ways, talk about is it wise, get it removed? Are you wasting your money?

There other ways to talk about the wisdom, making it a wisdom issue. That's certainly on the table but to actually just use Leviticus for this really doesn't honor the context that's going on but it can have an overlapping application. So if you know people who want to get a tattoo, my first question would be why are you doing it? And you might want to ask them. You might want to bring this discussion, this kind of material up and say this is the way it could be perceived. I just want to make sure that you're not thinking this. We're going to do anything demonic here, all that kind of stuff.

Those are conversations you can have but there is no one-to-one correspondence between these Leviticus passages and what we have going on today. Now I'll give Trey another article. It's by a guy named Gilad Gevaryahu, and it's specifically about Leviticus 19:28. And it's about tattooing and branding. It's from the Journal of the Jewish Bible Quarterly. So if you want to do some background reading in this sort of thing, you might find it interesting but I figured we hit this. We might as well say something about it because I get this question not a lot but I've probably gotten it a half a dozen times so I figured it was worth discussing here. Let's move on to verse 7.

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.

MSH: So it's a capital offense. And the whoring there, it might be general. It's certainly going to be cultic prostitution or at least that possibility has to be wrapped into this, but this is something talking about willful prostitution in verse 9, but let's go back to verse 7, defiled by

whoring, by harlotry, and this whole thing about the priest can't marry a woman divorced from her husband, all that kind of stuff. Verse 7, the whoring translation or harlotry, depending on what your translation is, is the Hebrew word *zonah*, which is a term that is typically applied to a woman who is habitually given to prostitution, and not to a woman who may have had a moral lapse on a particular occasion.

Zonah is used throughout the prophets of cultic prostitution and just general prostitution, somebody who habitually exchanges sex for money. It's not someone who had a moral failure on one occasion so the two are not the same by virtue of the vocabulary. But then we have this line about one divorced from her husband, what's that about? Well, the priestly marriage, we haven't gotten to the high project yet because it's even stricter there, but the priestly marriage represents an ideal. The priests have greater sanctity. They penetrate sacred space further than the normal person does. So the rules for them are going to be generally more restrictive than the rest of the population. For instance, if you go to Deuteronomy 24, this is the famous passage about what's the cause for divorce. This passage always comes up.

“When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house,² and if she goes and becomes another man's wife,³ and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife,⁴ then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

MSH: Did you notice in verse 2 that there's no condemnation for just generally Joe Israelite to marry this woman? The second man can marry this woman. So when we go back to Leviticus, the point of the Levitical law here is that for priests you can't do that. The standard for priests is more restrictive than the general Israelite. And when we get to the high priest in a few moments, it's even more restrictive. So there's a teaching point here. So that the laws are supposed to convey this idea that the ideal, there's an ideal here for the marital couple and the culture is going to contribute to that as well, but there's an ideal here.

And so the closer to the presence of God we get the more restrictive this sort of thing is going to be to reflect holiness, to reflect the idea of sort of the perfection or the near perfection. I'm trying to think of a better word for that, sort of getting back to the original marital couple, they were innocent. They were pure, that kind of thing, that kind of thinking. So the idea is that we make things more restrictive for the people who are closer to the presence of God in terms of the sacred space they're allowed to occupy. And so when we get to the high priest, I'll just read it here. The high priest begins in verse 10.

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.

¹¹He 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,

MSH: So it actually tightens the restriction for the high priest. It's just about a teaching point. It's not that he's better and women are worse or anything like that because normal Israelites had less restrictions. But the high priest, he can't even go to the funeral of his mom and dad. He has to marry a virgin and it's because of his proximity on sacred space to the most holy place and the holy presence. It just ups the ante for him in this case. It's the same kind of logic that when you go beyond these rules for the high priest and you get to Leviticus 21:16-24, that's the end of the chapter, this is the part in Leviticus where we have a list of people who are excluded from sacred space. I'll just start off here.

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.

MSH: That's the end of Leviticus 21. What's the point? The point is not sin. The point is not moral inferiority. The point is not there's something wrong with you in a spiritual sense. The point is wholeness must be associated with the divine presence. The whole idea of excluding someone whose body was not whole, was not complete, was not the way God had made it. There's something wrong with it. The whole point of excluding that person from, and we're talking here for the priest but it's going to apply more generally, too. But the point of excluding that person, even if they're a priest, from sacred space is that the presence of God is associated with life and with wholeness, with completeness, with the way things ought to be.

And so it teaches people when we exclude these people, we are reminded of the completeness, of the perfection, of the wholeness of God that where he is, and Lord willing some day we will be with him after we die because he is in covenant relationship with us and we worship no other besides him. We believe that he is who he is and that what he has said, that he loves us, that he will redeem us through these things that he's asking us to do. When we are with him, then we will be whole. We will lose these blemishes because in his presence these things

don't exist. They're not tolerated. Where he is there is perfection and completeness and wholeness.

And life is what it should always have been and what he intended it to be. These are theological teaching points. Now the priest who is excluded from conducting any of these offerings because of some personal blemish, bodily blemish, he was still allowed to eat. He still got a portion of the sacrifices. A physically defective priest was only kept out or kept away from officiating, from conducting the rituals. He wasn't denied the sustenance due to him as a priest. The intent was only to prevent his presence in the holy area, sacred space. The intent was not to deprive him of what he needed to live. That is not part of the law at all. So the priest is still allowed to participate in terms of what is due to him from his portion of the sacrifices and whatnot. It's just about sacred space. He's not being punished for anything. There's a teaching point here that we just talked about. Now if we drift into Leviticus 22, generally speaking here, I'm not going to say a whole lot in Leviticus 22 because there's a lot of repetition about earlier holiness laws. But in the first two verses we read,

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²“Speak to Aaron and his sons so that they abstain from the holy things of the people of Israel, which they dedicate to me, so that they do not profane my holy name: I am the LORD.

MSH: Now what this is about is if it's an instruction to Aaron, he's the high priest, and his sons, the priests, to be very careful about what happens to food items that are donated, that are dedicated either sacrificially or through peace offerings or whatever. They had to be scrupulous about taking any of that for themselves because if they're given to God, they're God's. So this is not the first time that they've been warned. There is a little bit of repetition here. But this is about sacred donations, sacred offerings, that the priests, Aaron and his sons, have to be careful that they don't steal from God is the point. We get down to versus 10-14. Let's just read them. We read this,

¹⁰“A lay person shall not eat of a holy thing; no foreign guest of the priest or hired worker shall eat of a holy thing, ¹¹ but if a priest buys a slave as his property for money, the slave may eat of it, **[MSH: because he's sort of attached to the priest's household. Whatever the priest gets, whatever the priestly portion is, those in his household may eat. But if there's a portion given over exclusively to God, that you don't eat. The rules here are who is part of the priest's family? Who can eat part of the priest's portion, and even the priests themselves? Look, you don't eat what's God's. What is given to you only you and those in your immediate family may eat because we want to distinguish you from the non-priests. And we also want to distinguish God from all of you. It's about this distinction, this "holiness". There are things set aside for God and that means they're off limits to others.]** ¹² If a priest's daughter marries a layman, she shall not eat of the contribution of the holy things. ¹³ But if a priest's daughter is widowed or divorced and has no child and returns to her father's house, as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food; yet no lay person shall eat of it. ¹⁴ And if anyone eats

of a holy thing unintentionally, he shall add the fifth of its value to it and give the holy thing to the priest.

MSH: So if something that was designated for the priests to somebody who shouldn't eat that eats, well, they have to restore it and add 1/5 to it, so they're penalized for it. We've seen some of these laws before about not stealing from God, making sure you do these rules to reinforce, and this is the whole logic of Leviticus here. We're doing these things to enforce the idea that God is different from us. He is different than we are. He is superior to us. He is completely holy. We're just trying to be holy, not so that he'll love us, he already loves us. He's already chosen to be in covenant with us. We're the descendants of Abraham.

We're doing this to honor him, to show that we do believe that he is the God of gods, to show that we do believe that he has entered into a covenant relationship with us, to show that we do believe that he supernaturally enabled Abraham and Sarah to have a kid and we're the results. We do believe these things and we align ourselves with the God of Israel. So we are doing these things to distinguish him from us and really, you've got God, you've got the priesthood, and within the priest to get the high priest distinguished from the other priests, then you have the laity of the community.

There are things that tie them together. We talked in the last episode about the blue thread running through everybody's garment. It was supposed to remind them of something. There are ways that the community participates in the system and there are ways the community is kept apart from the system. So without repeating earlier content, this is the logic of Leviticus. It's not about, oh, this group of people's better than this other group of people. This group of people sins less than this other group of people. That is to misunderstand the whole logic of it. The logic is to elevate the holy one and set him apart from all others. Everybody else except for him has to be made fit for sacred space. He, by definition, is fit for sacred space. Where he is sacred space from the get go. Everybody else has to be prepared for it lest they contaminate it. And so these laws of explanation and inclusion just reinforce the idea. I wanted to make one comment before we're done here because a lot of Leviticus 22 is repetitive to places we've been before. We'll find that will be the case with later episodes, too, as we finish up the book. In the verse 26,

²⁶ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁷ “When an ox or sheep or goat is born, it shall remain seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as a food offering to the LORD. ²⁸ But you shall not kill an ox or a sheep and her young in one day. ²⁹ And when you sacrifice a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the LORD, you shall sacrifice it so that you may be accepted. ³⁰ It shall be eaten on the same day; you shall leave none of it until morning: I am the LORD.

MSH: I wanted to mention this law about not using the young of cattle as an immediate sacrifice right after it's born. Levine says this,

“The law forbids such sacrifice even after eight days. Traditionally, this prohibition has been explained as expressing compassion for living creatures. It has been understood to apply only to female animals and their

male offspring. [MSH: the Hebrew is literally its son *beno*.] Practically speaking, male animals account for the majority of sacrifices anyway.”

MSH: And Levine points out that this is the interpretation that runs through the rabbinic community. And frankly, he doesn't note anything, and I've never come across anything that actually contradicts this in a coherent way. So I just think it's interesting just sort of as a little thing to pull out of the chapter that apparently, that's why this law is there, to express compassion for living creatures. You say well, it's not real compassion if you can eat it after certain time. Well, as he says here, most of the sacrifices are males and the mothers and their offspring, the mothers are sort of not off-limits but they're not the focus of the sacrificial item.

And when they have young, again, I don't want to anthropomorphize or anthropopathize animals, attributing to them human characteristics or human emotions. But this does seem to be the logic that the mother and the little baby are allowed to bond, even if they're animals, that this was a token of compassion. I haven't come across anything that's better than that and that's very consistent with a stream of Jewish tradition so make of it what you will. But I just thought it was interesting to mention that this gets thrown in the Leviticus 22 amid all this other stuff and they wouldn't have to include it but they do. So what are the takeaways?

Just to reinforce I think, if we look at these two chapters, we get essentially two major thoughts by way of how to think about the chapters for ourselves that we can draw some application out of it. I think the one of the big ones is holiness refers to distinctiveness, not doing things the pagans do in the service of their gods, even down to how the Israelites mourned for their dead. Basically every area of life, we're here in Leviticus 22 now. We've covered sex. We've covered birth. We've covered injuries. We've covered childbirth, the whole process there, menstruation, what you eat, what you don't eat, where you go, what you do with the carcass, just everything in their lives, there was some point to be made about the distinctiveness, the set apartness, the holiness of God.

Yahweh of Israel as associated with life, with completeness, with perfection, life as it should be, life as it was intended to be upon its creation, the source of life itself. These are the things that all these really odd rules point to. This God, this being, this creator is really the thing that ultimately we want to live with and be like and share his living space, to be part of that family in as real a way as possible. Mentally, I talk about this a lot in the Unseen Realm, not specifically with respect to Leviticus, but mentally to make people long for the presence of God because that is where life is.

That as were wholeness is. That is where completeness is. That is where every idea we can imagine is and he has chosen us by virtue of what he did with Abraham and Sarah, raising us up out of nothing, creating us as a people after he disinherited the nations of the world. He has chosen to be in relationship with us and he is through these rules teaching us about himself and the kind of life that he has and is and dispenses and that we will have, if we are loyal to him. This is where the mind of an Israelite would be trained to go. The second lesson I think is what belongs to God is God's. We should not treat something associated with him, designated to be his, as ordinary because when we do that, that is to express contempt for the sacred. It is to express contempt for what belongs to him as opposed to what belongs to us. The chapter ends this way and I think it sort it captures this rationale. Leviticus 22 ends this way.

³¹ “So you shall keep my commandments and do them: I am the LORD.
³² And you shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified
among the people of Israel. I am the LORD who sanctifies you, ³³ who
brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the LORD.”

MSH: I am Yahweh. And I think that sort of captures the whole, the logic, the rationale and those two big takeaways if you will, and not only from these two chapters, but really from the book as we've gone through it.