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Priests with Defects

21: 16-24

Priests with defects DIG: Why do you think there's such an emphasis on physical perfection and ritual cleanliness for the priests? How does this relate to God's holiness? Do you think this indicated that priests with deformities were of less value to God? Why? Why not?

REFLECT: How do you view people with spiritual defects? Do you avoid them? Feel sorry for them? Try to help them? What does ADONAI know about your defects, physical or spiritual? Why are you able to approach a holy God with these defects? Who can you tell?

Since the animal which was offered was required to be free from defects, the priest who offered it on behalf of the sinner, had to be just as free from defects.

The priesthood was not an equal opportunity employer. **Priests** with a physical **defect** or **blemish** were disqualified from serving at **the bronze altar** of **sacrifice** and entering into **the holy place**. Standards of **holiness** increased as those around **YHVH** moved closer to **Him**. It was like a pyramid with the common **people of Isra'el** at its base, then, as you move up were **the Levites**, then **priests** with **defects**, then **priests** without **defects**, and finally at the top of the pyramid was **the high priest himself** who went into the Most Holy Place once a year.



ADONAI said to Moshe, “Tell Aaron, ‘None of your descendants who has a defect may approach to offer the bread of his God’ (21:16-17).” Four times in Chapter 21 (verses 6, 8, 17 and 21) we are informed the reason *why* the **priests** were to remain **ritually clean**, having no **blemish**, **physical handicap**, or any **bodily defect**. Since the animal which was offered was required to be free from **defect**, the **priest** who offered it on behalf of the sinner, had, therefore, to be just as free from **defects**. **They were to be holy for their God and not defile the name of their God. For they are the ones who present ADONAI with offerings made by fire, the bread of their God; therefore, they must be holy (21:6).** Sacrificial **offerings** are often called *lehem*, translated **bread** or **food**, and, at least in a symbolic sense, are considered **bread** for YHVH. **The priests** needed to observe strict codes of purity for **they** were the mediators between the worshiper and ADONAI.³⁸³ It seems that what gave **God** great joy was the fact that **He** was obeyed by worshipful people who offered **the** prescribed **sacrifices** just as **He** had commanded (**to see link lick Ah - The Offerings from the People’s Perspective**). This is what pleased Ha’Shem and the **offering** became a sweet aroma to **Him**. In other words, **God’s bread** was **mankind’s** seeking to draw near to **Him**.³⁸⁴

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, What a joy it is that **You** actually enjoy mankind’s seeking to draw near to **You**! **You** are so Almighty, All-Wise and absolutely wonderful! We know that **Messiah** made it possible for us to draw near to **You**, our **Father God**. **In Him we have redemption through His blood . . . He did this in order to create within Himself one new man from the two groups, making shalom, and to reconcile both to God in one body through the cross - by which He put the hostility to death. And He came and proclaimed shalom to you who were far away and shalom to those who were near - for through Him we both have access to the Father by the same Ruach. So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with God’s***

people and members of God's household (Ephesians 1:7a, 2:15-18).

*Thank You for Messiah's one-time perfect **sacrifice** so no more **sacrifices** are needed. The One who does remain forever has a permanent priesthood. Therefore He is also able to completely save those who draw near to God through Him, always living to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:24b-25). We seek to draw near to You by abiding in Your Word that became flesh (John 1:14). We love You! In Yeshua's holy name and power of His resurrection. Amen*

Physically **defective** or **deformed priests** were not allowed to function as **priests** by **offering sacrifices**. Kefa cutting off the right ear of the high priest's servant is an extreme example of this (see [The Life of Christ Le - Jesus Betrayed, Arrested and Deserted](#)). The abnormalities listed here are probably examples rather than a complete list (a complete list of animal **defects listed** in **22:20-25**), although this passage comprises the most comprehensive discussion on the subject of defects in the Bible. The ritual wholeness of the Levitical **sacrificial** system found physical expression in wholeness and normality.³⁸⁵ These defects include only those observable on the surface of the body. Nothing is mentioned of internal ailments. **No one with a defect may approach - no one blind, lame, with a mutilated face or a limb too long, a broken foot or a broken arm** (such injuries would be permanent because broken limbs were not set properly in ancient times), **a hunched back, stunted growth, a cataract in his eye, festering or running sores, or damaged testicles - no one descended from Aaron the priest who has such a defect may approach to present the offerings for ADONAI made by fire; he has a defect and is not to approach to offer the bread of his God (21:18-21).**

In the intertestamental days of Antigonus, he had the ears of the high priest Hyrcanus II (40 BC) cut off so that (as a result of this mitzvah) he would forever be disqualified from being high priest again. Also, Deuteronomy refers to a physical defect that if it existed among the congregation at large would prohibit a man from worshiping in the covenant community (see the commentary on [Deuteronomy Eb - Purity in Public Worship: Eunuchs](#)). Such a **priest** was not disqualified from **the priesthood**. He still enjoyed the privileges and rights of being a **priest**. He was not banned from **the outer court of the Tabernacle** (see the commentary on [Exodus Ex - The Courtyard and Gate of the Tabernacle](#)). He was able to participate in the services and eat the sacred **offerings**. While **the priest's** family could partake of **the holy offerings**, **the most holy offerings** could be eaten only by **the priests** and had to be eaten in **the Tabernacle courtyard**. However, **he was not to go into the Holy Place through the outer veil** (see [Exodus Fj - The Outer Veil of the Sanctuary](#)) or approach the bronze

altar of sacrifice, because he has a defect - so that he will not profane my holy places, because I am ADONAI, who makes them holy. Moshe said these things to Aaron, his sons and all the people of Isra'el (21:22:24).

Isn't it unfair to discriminate against **the priest** with a **blemish** or **defect**? It may well be, but it is also unfair to exclude all but **the sons of Aaron** from **the priesthood**, and it is unfair to tell **the priests** that **they** could not **mourn** while on duty (see [Do - Prohibited Practices for the Priests: The priests and the dead](#)). It may not have been fair, but it was purposeful.

You may recall that **the priesthood** played an intermediary role between **God** and mankind. **The** officiating **priest** could not be **blemished** or less than whole because **he** represented the invisible **God**. **He** represented the Kingdom of **YHVH**. For the same reason that **they** were not to mourn while on duty, **the priests** were to be without **defects**. Since the animal which was offered was required to be free from **defects**, **the priest** who offered it on behalf of the sinner, had, therefore, to be just as free from **defects**. Thus, **God's** perfection demanded the highest degree of perfection possible among those who minister and among **the offerings** that were presented to **Him**. This demand for perfection of both **the priest** and **the offering** was ultimately and uniquely fulfilled in **the Person of Yeshua Messiah**, who, as our **High Priest**, was not only **holy, blameless, and pure (Hebrews 7:26)**, but as **the sacrificial Lamb of God**, was a **sacrifice** without **defect**. **You should be aware that the ransom paid to free you from the worthless way of life which your fathers passed on to you did not consist of anything perishable like silver or gold; on the contrary, it was the costly bloody sacrificial death of the Messiah, as of a lamb without defect or spot (First Peter 1:18-19).**³⁸⁶

Through the ministry of **the Master**, we learn that physical **defects**, infirmities and diseases are ultimately not in agreement with **God's** Kingdom. When **His** Kingdom comes and **His** full and perfect will is accomplished on the earth, disease, **defect** and human suffering will be eradicated for believers because they will have their resurrected bodies. The Messianic Temple represents that ideal state of the Kingdom, where **Yeshua Messiah** will reign and rule for a thousand years from **the Most Holy Place** (see the commentary on [Isaiah Db - The Nine Missing Articles in the Messiah's Coming Temple](#)). Therefore, **the priests** who served on duty inside **the Sanctuary** were to be representative of that not-yet realized state of renewal.³⁸⁷