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# The perfect priest: an examination of Leviticus 21:17-23

Jared Wilson  
*George Fox University*

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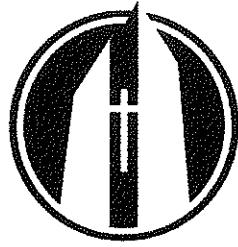
GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE PERFECT PRIEST-  
AN EXAMINATION OF LEVITICUS 21:17-23

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
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BY  
JARED WILSON

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# GEORGE FOX

## EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

### THESIS ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

**Title:**               **THE PERFECT PRIEST:  
AN EXAMINATION OF LEVITICUS 21:17-23**

**Presented by:**   **JARED WILSON**

**Date:**               May 1, 2013

We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree of Master of Arts in Theological Studies.



*(Roger Nam)*



*(Stephen Delamarter)*

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To Courtney, Jeremiah, Micah, Jedidiah, and Adley

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## **Preface**

“You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind.”

-Lev 19:14

This verse from Leviticus started my journey on this thesis. In a chapter filled with rules on holy living these words stuck out at me, they seemed out of place so I began to explore. The most I had had thought about disabilities and the bible in connection with one another was a small group discussion question in Old Testament class the previous semester. As I began to explore the field of biblical disability studies, I was both intrigued and overwhelmed. As an able-bodied white American male, I often find myself within the majority, and have had very little experience with minority theologies and hermeneutics such as the black theology or feminist hermeneutics. I also felt overwhelmed and unqualified as in most of the books I read, the author dealt with the experience of living with a disability in some way; either in their own life or in the life of a child.

It is from this feeling of inadequacy, and lack of experiential living, that I found my biggest challenge: choosing the right words to use. As the field of disability studies continues to grow, and change, the politically correct language continues to grow and change as well. In my research and writing, I faced several decisions in relation to the words used. When I came across a source using politically incorrect or offensive language, first I had to decipher if the point of view was valid, then I also had to decide if



the information was worth sharing even if it could be offensive. In most cases this was quite simple and many offensive sources were either not useful in this thesis, or I was able to find other sources who were politically correct. However, this was not always the case, most notably in the translation of the ancient texts. Most difficult for me was how to portray the subject of Lev 21:17-23 in a politically correct and yet succinct way. I chose to use blemish throughout the text of this thesis for this reason. I chose to use *blemish* because it accurately relates to the Hebrew מִם. In using *blemish* I am not implying imperfection or less value, I simply use the term to identify a person as having a certain identifiable characteristic or trait identified in Lev 21:17-23.

## **Abstract**

Leviticus 21:17-23 is a text that discriminates against priests who have one of the twelve blemishes listed, approaching the text with the intent to redeem the text for modern application. An exploration in the role of priests in the ancient Near East will show how the priests were human representations of the deity and many cultures and religions had physical restrictions for the priests similar to Lev 21:17-23. Examining the language of Lev 21:17-23 will show that the restrictions were not merely symbolic but intended to stop blemished priests from approaching the altar. However, they were not statements about the value of the blemished priest nor were they a call for further discrimination. The final chapter surveys other early Jewish literature dealing with restrictions in cultic activity. It will show that the restrictions of Lev 21:17-23 are intended to deter the stare of the people and keep the focus of worship on YHWH.

# Chapter One

## An Introduction to Biblical Disability Studies

“*Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.*” (Deut 6:4-7)<sup>1</sup> This passage is foundational in Judaism and Christianity. The principle of the message is simple: love God and teach your children to do the same. However, 1 million people in the U.S. have a hard time hearing, 2.5 million have a hard time being understood when they speak, and 3.3 million use a wheelchair while another 10 million need an aid to walk around; for these people reading these words can present a challenge because of their physical condition.<sup>2</sup> The Bible is read through the world one is embedded in, often without any regard to reading it differently.<sup>3</sup> For people with a disability, words associated with their disability can be an obstacle when those words occur in a biblical text because the bible “speaks of values that, for them cannot be values. It announces that God is on the side of, and has a preference for, a world that is

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<sup>1</sup> All Biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> All numbers are estimates and from *Americans with Disabilities 2005 "20th Anniversary of Americans with Disabilities Act: July 26"*, US Census Bureau [http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features\\_special\\_editions/cb10-ff13.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb10-ff13.html) (accessed May 5, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> John M. Hull, *In the Beginning There Was Darkness: A Blind Person's Conversations with the Bible*, 1st U.S. ed. (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002), 3.

not their world—a reality to which they have no access.”<sup>4</sup> A book that brings life and hope to so many, can also cause pain and confusion to others. Moreover, the Church has been just as confusing, uncertain, contradictory, and ironic in its interpretation and treatment of people with disabilities.<sup>5</sup> “The persistent thread within the Christian tradition has been that disability denotes an unusual relationship with God and that the person with disabilities is either divinely blessed or damned: the defiled evildoer or the spiritual superhero.”<sup>6</sup>

The intent of this thesis is not to right the wrongs of the past, but rather to redeem a biblical text dealing with disabilities that have contributed to the church being “a ‘city on a hill’—physically inaccessible and socially inhospitable.”<sup>7</sup> Leviticus 21:17-23 is a discriminating text; it identifies twelve blemishes that disqualify a priest from serving at the altar. In an age of political correctness and anti-discrimination, it is easy to see this text and criticize it for discrimination and archaic views. Yet how different is this text from Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964<sup>8</sup> that allows Bona Fide Occupation Qualifications, or the physical requirements of the United States military and NASA astronauts<sup>9</sup>, or even the United States Constitution that requires that the president be a

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 69.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>8</sup> “it shall not be an unlawful employment practice for an employer to hire and employ employees, . . . on the basis of his religion, sex, or national origin in those certain instances where religion, sex, or national origin is a bona fide occupational qualification reasonably necessary to the normal operation of that particular business or enterprise,” United States Congress, “Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.” <http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/titlevii.cfm>

<sup>9</sup> The branches of military all have different physical requirements of new recruits and NASA has specific physical requirements including specified blood pressure, vision, and a height between 58.5” and 76”. NASA, “Astronaut Requirements”, NASA [http://www.nasa.gov/audience/forstudents/postsecondary/features/F\\_Astronaut\\_Requirements.html](http://www.nasa.gov/audience/forstudents/postsecondary/features/F_Astronaut_Requirements.html) (accessed Oct 26 2012).

natural born citizen and above the age of 35<sup>10</sup>? These requirements simply state what is necessary for the person that has this job, they are not making statements about the worth or equality of any people. Just as these occupational qualifications are not making statements about the value of individuals, Lev 21 is not making a statement of worth or equality, it is simply laying out certain physical requirements of priest. In examining the socio-cultural role of priests in the ancient Near East, how the cultic language associated with Lev 21 classifies blemishes as physical characteristics and other Jewish religious texts that restrict cultic activity this thesis will show that the restrictions in Lev 21:17-23 are not intended to further discriminate nor are they a statement on the value of the priest, instead the restrictions are formed based on roles of priests in society and the social understanding of the body, intended to deter the stare of the people to ensure that worship focused on YHWH and not the priest.

## **Understanding “Disability”**

Disability is a complicated, multidimensional concept- a concept that has no neutral language.<sup>11</sup> The issues associated with disability are so complex that scholars in the field do not even have an agreed upon single definition of disability. Complications in discussing disability link to society’s views of disability and the language used to define and understand disability. Within disability studies, four models of disability emerge: medical, social, cultural, and the theological.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, disability was primarily viewed as a medical condition; this is called the medical model. In the medical model, disability lies

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<sup>10</sup> Article II, Section 1, Clause 5

<sup>11</sup> Gary L. Albrecht, Katherine D. Seelman, and Michael Bury, *Handbook of Disability Studies* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2001), 16?

within the body, or mind, of the disabled person. The focus is on the body and finding a cure. With the emergence of disability studies, scholars have uncovered a serious problem with the medical model: it minimizes and even ignores the social environment and its implications.<sup>12</sup> All of the focus and effort is put into removing the impairment, often treating the impaired person as having a sickness or contagious disease resulting in isolation or institutionalization. With all the focus on the individual and finding a cure, social practices that significantly affect people with disabilities are overlooked.<sup>13</sup>

The social model developed because of “blurring distinctions” between biological and social conditions that occur within the medical model.<sup>14</sup> Sociologists Tom Shakespeare and Nicolas Watson identify three elements to the social model. First, disabled people are identified as an oppressed people group. Second, a distinction is made between impairment, a condition that a person has, and disability, the experience a person has because of their impairment. The third element, which has some variations, identifies disability as a social group viewed as a minority group (according to the North American social model) or an oppressed social group (according to the British social model).<sup>15</sup> Within the social model, impairment is universally constant; however, the social implications that result from that impairment change from culture to culture.<sup>16</sup> The

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<sup>12</sup> Rebecca Raphael, *Biblical Corpora: Representations of Disability in Hebrew Biblical Literature*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (New York: T & T Clark International, 2008), 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Rebecca Raphael, "The Bible and Disability Studies: An Editorial Introduction," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 34, no. 1 (2007): 4.

<sup>15</sup> The North American social model does identify people with disabilities as a social minority group but does not go as far as redefining disability based on oppression. Tom Shakespeare and Nicolas Watson, "The Social Model of Disability: An Outdated Ideology," in *Exploring Theories and Expanding Methodologies: Where We Are and Where We Need to Go*, ed. Barbara Altman and Sharon Barnartt (Oxford: Elsevier Science, 2001), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 17.

social model helped to bring changes in the way society views impairment and disability and laid the groundwork for implementing changes like the Americans' with Disabilities Act of the 1990's. "Replacing a traditional 'medical model' view of disability- in which the problems arose from deficits in the body- with a social model view- in which the problems arose from social oppression- was and remains very liberating for disabled individuals. Suddenly people were able to understand that they weren't at fault; society was."<sup>17</sup>

While the social model has been liberating for many people with disabilities, it is not without problem. Deciphering where impairment ends and disability begins can be murky. In modern contexts, where do we draw the line on issues like anorexia or the inability to drive a car at night because of declining vision?<sup>18</sup> The difficulty in making this distinction amplifies when studying ancient texts.

More recently, scholars have begun examining disabilities through a cultural model. The cultural model, like the social model understands that society plays a role in defining disability. Disability is not only the result of social organization, but integral to social organization itself. Thus, the goal is not simply the removal of disabling barriers but interrogation of how society uses disability.<sup>19</sup> The cultural model takes into consideration biological, social, and environmental factors as integrating and understanding disability.

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<sup>17</sup> Shakespeare and Watson, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Schipper, 18. & Raphael, *Biblical Corpora: Representations of Disability in Hebrew Biblical Literature*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Schipper, 19-20.

Another key disability model that is not as prominent within academia, but is present is the theological model. This model holds one's physical condition in direct correlation with one's relationship with God and sin. Suffering and physical difference are viewed as divine punishment for sin—either by the individual or a parent.<sup>20</sup> “If the gods and their law are perfect, and, if disability, disease, and disaster are divine punishment for sin committed, then such traumas and tragedies must be the moral responsibility of those who experience them. The sufferer’s punishment is always deserved.”<sup>21</sup> This reasoning, which Rachel Magdalene labels an ableist theology<sup>22</sup> has, and continues to be, influential in certain circles. The theological model can be problematic because it does not simply look at the cause of disability and impairment; rather it provides an answer to the question “why me.” The theological model of disability is important to understand because it was within this model that the ancient world existed. In order to gain a proper disability hermeneutic it is necessary to understand, as best we can, the author’s message and the world at that time. Thus, throughout the pages of this thesis discussions of the theological connection between disability and divinity appear in more detail.

## **Identifying Disability in the Ancient Near East**

Hebrew does not have a specific word equivalent to disability; however, scholars have identified a noun pattern that conceptually categorizes physical traits as “defective.” This pattern is called the *qittel* noun pattern because it uses a *hireq* and *sere* and doubles the second consonant. “This pattern suggests that the biblical authors did not see these

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<sup>20</sup> F. Rachel Magdalene, “The Ane Legal Origins of Impairment as Theological Disability and the Book of Job,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 34, no. 1 (2007): 26.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Magdalene defines ableist theology as one that “intentionally or inadvertently bolsters prejudice and discrimination against people with disabilities.” Ibid.



particular traits as isolated or unrelated physical features, but rather instances of a larger conceptual category that helped organize and narrate physical differences.”<sup>23</sup> Often the *qittel* words appear in clusters, (Ex 4:11 Lev 21; Lev 19:14) which Jeremy Schipper identifies as another factor contributing to these words being part of a larger conceptual category. Arabic has a similar pattern, the *qattil* pattern; it almost exclusively identifies either colors or physical defects in individuals.<sup>24</sup> The *qittel* noun pattern does differ from the Arabic *qattil* pattern because the *qittel* words do not always represent physical defects. References to the “third (*sillesim*) and fourth (*ribbe'im*) (generations)” in Ex 20:5; 34:7 follow the *qittel* pattern but do not refer to a physical defect.<sup>25</sup> Many times biblical authors use the *qittel* words symbolically to portray negative character traits; while the negative character traits are connected a physical defect they rarely refer to people with disabilities. “In other words, the Hebrew Bible separates much of its language of disability from the context of people with disabilities and applies it rhetorically to able-bodied people. One can only accomplish such a move, however, by encoding non-intrinsic, symbolic meanings into a culturally meaningful conceptual category.”<sup>26</sup>

## Disability and Illness in the Ancient Near East

Also important to understand is the close relationship between disability and illness, especially in the context of the ANE. While the contemporary models of disability would separate impairment, illness and disease, in the ANE these categories

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<sup>23</sup> Schipper, 65.

<sup>24</sup> Joshua Fox, *Semitic Noun Patterns*, Harvard Semitic Studies (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 285. Quoted in: Schipper, 66.

<sup>25</sup> Schipper, 65-66. It is suggested that these words are closely related to the Piel passive participle (*piqqeah*) which is then used in an analogy with its opposite *'iwwer*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

were synonymous and closely related in the biblical text.<sup>27</sup> Using Ps 63:1 as an example, John Wilkinson posits that within the Hebrew Bible a person was made of two primary aspects- the soul (נפש) and the body, or flesh (בשר). While these are two different aspects they are not viewed as separate parts but synthetic in nature- both the soul and flesh are taken into account when examining a person's health.<sup>28</sup> As a result of this synthetic thinking, the vocabulary used in the biblical text is very different than what is used today. Words like *health* and *body* are virtually nonexistent in the text because the emphasis of health is not about the physical body but about the entire person.<sup>29</sup> This paradigm is present not just in the Hebrew Bible but in the New Testament as well. John 5 provides an example of the synonymous use of sickness and impairment. The NRSV uses ill and sick to describe the man healed by Jesus but simply implies that the man is paralyzed while the NIV refers to the man as an "invalid." The Greek word used in this text ὁσθενέω translates as *sick, weak, ill, or invalid*. To categorize illness and impairment in the same category today may seem frowned upon; Raphael suggests that using "disabled" for the "ill" in biblical texts is fitting with little distortion because the effects of an illness or disease significantly affected daily life.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> While these ideas are not synonymous in the field of disability studies today, there is still a close correlation between these three terms. Where is the line drawn between these three when examining the effects polio on a person? "Polio is a disease; loss of the use of one's legs on account of polio is an impairment; further, limitations that result from the body-environment misfit are disabilities." Rebecca Raphael, "Things Too Wonderful: A Disabled Reading of Job," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 31, no. 4 (2004): 401.

<sup>28</sup> John Wilkinson, *The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1998), 10.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 10

<sup>30</sup> Raphael, "Things Too Wonderful: A Disabled Reading of Job," 401.

Leviticus 13-14 details how to treat a person with “leperous disease”.<sup>31</sup> John Hartley compares the symptoms described in Lev 13 and the modern diseases of cancer or AIDS saying they both “convey strong feelings of dread and repulsion.”<sup>32</sup> King Uzziah (2 Chr 26), and Naaman and Elisha’s servant Gehazi (2 Kings 15) are examples of people being cut off from society because of skin disease; and Jesus encounters several lepers all of whom are viewed as outcasts because of their disease.<sup>33</sup> While, in modern society disease, illness, and disability are separate classifications and treated differently, when examining ancient texts, it is appropriate to classify these together. Not only is appropriate to classify disease and illness as disability, it is helpful in understanding disability in the ancient world as it gives us a broader scope of literature to examine.

The Sumerian creation myth of Enki and Ninmah provides one of the earliest literary portrayals of disability in the ANE. The myth is an explanation of the origins of humanity-both normal and abnormal forms.<sup>34</sup> The second half of the myth portrays a contest between two of the deities, Enki and Ninmah. Ninmah claims she is able to control the fate of humanity by her will and the way she shapes the embryo in the womb. Enki attempts to counter this claim. Ninmah then proceeds to create six different people, each with some sort of impairment: weak hands, blindness, “one with broken feet,” incontinence, a barren woman, and an asexual creature. Despite the impairments, Enki is able to place each of them in a role that is socially acceptable and economically

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<sup>31</sup> צרעת often translated as “leprosy” is best thought of as a change of the skin as in a rash or various other medical conditions on the skin. J.E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1998), 187.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Leper, or leprosy occur 13 times in the Gospels and on at least two occasions, while speaking Jesus groups the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf, the dead, and the poor together. (Matthew 10:8, 11:5; Luke 7:22).

<sup>34</sup> Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper, *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, Semeia Studies (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 17.

productive.<sup>35</sup> Enki then proceeds to create a human in a new and innovative way: sexual procreation. When Ninmah inspects Enki's creation, named Umul, she responds, "The man you have fashioned is neither dead nor alive. He cannot support himself."

Enki and Ninmah is an important text when it comes to disability studies because it "recognizes the non-normative medical conditions of these persons, but it does not categorize them as 'disabled' or unemployable...[it] recognizes an 'otherness' to each of Ninmah's children... The text of Enki and Ninmah thus distinguishes between those humans with physical or functional abnormalities who are integrated into their community in economically productive ways and those humans (represented by Umul) who are unfit for productive labor of any kind."<sup>36</sup>

## **Problems Facing Biblical Disability Studies**

Scholars in the field of Biblical Disability Studies face several obstacles. As with any biblical scholar, in order to understand the text of the Bible, one must understand the culture and to whom it was written. Scholars must put aside their modern thinking and political correctness and immerse into an ancient culture in order to get at the meaning of a text. Within disability studies, scholars examine texts using various models of disability- theological, medical, social, and cultural.

Another difficulty facing scholars is that there is limited evidence to study, most of the evidence comes from ancient texts, although there have been recent archeological finds that scholars have given new evidence to examine. While there are a great number

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 19.

of texts that mention people with disabilities, most of the texts give us very little insight into the daily life of the disabled. *Enki and Ninmah* shows the integration of many of the people with disabilities into functioning economic roles within society. Unless something out of the ordinary occurred it is unlikely anything would have been written about an integrated member of society with an impairment. On the other hand, those not integrated were probably too impaired and thus unlikely to be included in any literary or public records.<sup>37</sup> When disabilities appear in ancient texts, it is often a literary device rather than a description of a person's life, or the person experienced or did something out of the ordinary.

## **Aim and Methods of this Thesis**

The aim of this thesis is to take a redemptionist approach to Lev 21:17-23 and show that the text and early interpretations were not intended to imply the inequality of a priest with a disability, instead the restrictions placed on the priests were intended to ensure proper worship and keep the focus off the priest at the altar. Chapter 2 examines the role of the priest in the ancient Near East and I will show how the priests were an elite social class in society, viewed in many societies as an extension of the deity. Therefore, it was customary that priests adhere to strict ritual purity guidelines, therefore purity was the reason for implementing a list of physical blemishes that disqualified a priest from certain activities. Through an examination of the cultic language of Lev 21, in chapter 3 I will claim that the blemishes are not symbolic but classify physical characteristics and while they disqualify a priest from certain activity, the priest is not

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 15.

considered ritually impure. In chapter 4 I will connect some early Jewish literature discussing cultic restrictions or physical blemishes and argue given these early interpretations the intent of Lev 21 was to deter the stare of the people.

## Chapter Two

### Priests as Icons

In order to understand the priestly restrictions of Lev 21, one must examine the social and cultural issues surrounding the text, especially in relation to the roles the priest played within the society of the ANE. Although the religions throughout the ANE are complex and hard to generalize because they exhibit “change and continuity,”<sup>38</sup> several common threads exist among these religions. Within the religions of the ANE the temple and the priests played a key role for the priest was the mediator between the deity and the people. The temple was not simply another building but it was the home of the deity, and although it was the ultimate place for serving the gods, temples were not open to the public, but only to a select few. A priest was not an occupation a person chose, but rather the priest was an icon of the deity. This chapter will examine how the expansion of agriculture and need for administrators led to the rise of the priests as a special social class in society. In order to maintain their elite status priest perpetuated the religious ideas of the ANE that the temples were the homes of the gods and thus reserved for only a select few. Finally, through examining other ANE texts, that restrict blemished priests from cultic activity, I will argue Lev 21 is based on the social practices and understanding of the ANE.

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<sup>38</sup> Tammi J. Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2011), 51-53. Some of the earliest Sumerian texts contain over five hundred and sixty names of deities, while a list from the middle of the second millennium contains almost two thousand names of deities.

## Origins of Priests

At a basic level the religious systems across the ANE consisted of a set of rituals and festivals whose purpose “consists of averting evil which may threaten an individual or the community, by following a fixed set of rules which describes how humans must serve the gods and in return enjoy a secure and pleasant life.”<sup>39</sup> A primary role of the priest was to offer sacrifices to the gods; which many of the early cults believed the sacrifices actually fed the deities.<sup>40</sup> The societies in the ANE began as agricultural communities; the deities linked to nature (sun, wind, fire, rain) and fertility; as agriculture became more sophisticated it resulted in stability in residence, and the formation of societies and changes in religion.<sup>41</sup> In Society, people no longer relied strictly on what they grew, instead they began to work with other family clans living nearby to provide a variety of food and goods. Eventually, people became better at growing their specialized crop and a surplus began to occur. With a surplus of food, a need arose for someone to control the administration of the society; the priests were the first to do so.<sup>42</sup>

Initially priests expanded their role to include economic distribution and administration as well as continuing to perform the cultic activities to appease the gods.<sup>43</sup> Several priests were involved in the cultic activities of the temple and several priests were

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<sup>39</sup> Marc J. H. Linssen, *The Cults of Uruk and Babylon: The Temple Ritual Texts as Evidence for Hellenistic Cult Practises*, Cuneiform Monographs, (Boston: Brill, 2004), 23.

<sup>40</sup> By the time of the Israelite cult, this idea ceased. Michael V. Fox, *Temple in Society* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1988), 20.

<sup>41</sup> Benjamin R. Foster, *From Distant Days: Myths, Tales, and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 1995), 55. As societies grew and became more developed the gods changed too, becoming associated not only with nature and fertility but also issues like justice and the human afterlife.

<sup>42</sup> There are some exceptions, where the king also served as priest. In the old and middle kingdom of Egypt the king served as the high priest and there was no separate priestly class. Most Egyptian men served as priests for a period. However, in the new kingdom, there is evidence of a full-time priesthood, yet most of the priests only served part-time.

Byron E. Shafer and Dieter Arnold, *Temples of Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1997), 9.

<sup>43</sup> Schneider, 80-82.



required for the economic activities: raising money through tithes, participating in money exchange and trade, and owning land, livestock and slaves.<sup>44</sup> A list of temple staff at Ninruta's temple in Lagash shows that most of the temple staff performed the daily routine tasks: guard, miller, fuel-carrier, water-carrier, oil-presser, cow herder, coppersmith, steward, boatman, boat-tower, weaver, courtyard sweeper, barber, water-pourer, mat-maker, runner, stone carver, king's butler, palace guard, house supervisor, accountant, treasurer, cupbearer, overseer of the oil-pressers, and scribe.<sup>45</sup> Eventually the tasks of the priest became so great that they began to allow others to perform some of the tasks in the temple, these were not priests, but special laypersons who were granted access to the temple for a specific task, many times these temple workers had to meet certain physical requirements just as the priests did. While the daily routines changed in each society and with each deity, it is clear that offering sacrifices was not the only thing required of those working inside the temple.

The increased roles of the priest lead to a rise in the status in society; Leopold Sabourin identifies two key contributing factors to the priests rise in social status: priests were above their fellow man and they lived apart from their community.<sup>46</sup> As city administrators and economists, priests needed a system of record keeping and thus relied on technological advances in writing and bookkeeping.<sup>47</sup> Priests used their writing skills to keep administrative records and form creation myths, legal codes, and more. Sabourin

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<sup>44</sup> Linssen, 13.

<sup>45</sup> Karen Rhea Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1998), 191.

<sup>46</sup> Leopold Sabourin, *Priesthood. A Comparative Study*, Studies in the History of Religions Supplements to Numen, (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 6.

<sup>47</sup> Marc Van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City* (New York: Clarendon, 1997), 28.

suggests that priests were elevated because they are generally more intelligent<sup>48</sup> - although it is not clear if the priest was chosen because of the higher intelligence, or if because of the priest was viewed as more intelligent due to their training and ability to write. As the priestly class became more developed they became more elite as well. Many priests lived apart from the community in a temple and were elevated in status because they were generally more intelligent. "As mediators of the supernatural they are indeed expected to stand apart and above their fellow men."<sup>49</sup> While historical texts write about the elite status of the priests, biblical scholars question the accuracy in the depiction of priests in those accounts because many the nature of the sources. Especially in Israel, where it is likely that the preexilic evidence was compiled post exile and to the authors, likely priests, legitimizing the role of priests was more important than historical accuracy.<sup>50</sup>

## **Relationship of Priests and Deity**

In the Mesopotamian anthromorphic cults, gods lived in the heavens and in their own temple. The statues in the temples were not merely statues but manifestations of the gods.<sup>51</sup> Thus as the perceived home of the gods the temple provided a link between heaven and earth. The dwelling of the deity living in the temple appears in Judaism (Ex 29:45). Biblical archeologist George Ernest Wright states that the temple was "the point where the Divine touched the human, where the transcendent became immanent, and where the ultimate source of power became available to alleviate human weakness and

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<sup>48</sup> Sabourin, 6-7.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Kugler, "Priests and Levities," in *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Mary Catherine Dean(Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 596.

<sup>51</sup> Linssen, 12.

need.”<sup>52</sup> Heaven and earth link spatially and spiritually; this correlation transfers to the high priest who is a reflection of the heavenly high priest above.<sup>53</sup> The temples and priests were the intermediaries between humanity and God. “The temple is the place where the best representatives of humanity meet with God. This is the theology of the temple and its cult recorded in our earliest texts up to our latest ones.”<sup>54</sup> Author and scholar Judith Abrams describes the priests as exceptional elite of the spirit, comparing them to United States Marines. “The priests operated in a dangerous environment; the temple. The temple was filled with a holiness that could be lethal to those lacking the right protective qualifications. These qualifications- correct bloodline in a blemishless, perfectly life-filled body- allowed the priests to enter the realm between heaven and earth and mediate between God, and God’s heavenly retinue, and Israel.”<sup>55</sup>

Scholars attribute the idealistic paradigm for the priest to the close association of priest and deity. Thomas Hentrich calls priests “the closest persons representing God’s ‘perfect’ incarnation of earth.”<sup>56</sup> John Davies does not go as far as seeing the priest as an incarnation, instead the priest is “a visual model of what ideal humanity is to look like, humankind in their original created dignity and honour in relation to God and the world around them, then to have an evident disability will send the wrong signals.”<sup>57</sup> Davies is

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<sup>52</sup> George Ernest Wright, "The Significance of the Temple in the Ancient Near East," *Biblical Archaeologist* 7, no. 3 (1944): 42.

<sup>53</sup> Judith Z. Abrams, *Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach through the Bavli* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University, 1998), 21.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Hentrich, "Masculinity and Disability in the Bible," in *This Aabled Body*, ed. Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 83.

<sup>57</sup> John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 156-57.

unclear in exactly who receives the wrong signals and exactly how that message is perceived, and in doing so Davies himself sends out a wrong signal.

The creation story says that God created *בצמ* in our image and God said it was good (Gen 1:27), there is no mention of disability here or even after the fall in Gen 3. In fact Ex 4:11 YHWH declares that it is YHWH who *ישום* the mute, deaf, seeing and blind- and while making this declaration there is no statement about the mute, deaf, seeing or blind being less dignified or honoring to YHWH. Even if Davies idea of “ideal humanity” is based on a cultural context, either ANE or current culture, what is the wrong signal apparently sent? If one were to use the cultural understanding of disability and disease as a punishment from the gods, having a priest with an evident disability would proclaim a message of YHWH’s *חסד* (Ex 34:6; Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2).

Ultimately, priests were an elite class of individuals; regardless of where their elitism stemmed from, economic status or divine call, the priests were believed to provide a needed link to the divine. The link with the divine increased the expectation upon the priests; as representatives of the deity to the people, and of the people before the deity. Ultimately “the priests had to be worthy of the heavenly beings whose company he shared.”<sup>58</sup>

### **Priestly Restrictions in ANE Literature**

“Ever since human beings have sought a relationship with the deity, they have also been aware of the dangers emanating from the holy. The closer one comes to the deity, the more careful one must be. Anyone who by profession comes into proximity with the divine dwelling and with the divine power concentrated there

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<sup>58</sup> Abrams, 17.

must exercise even greater caution. In our own world, such reticence before the holy corresponds to the risk one undergoes when dealing with x-rays and radioactive substances. The x-ray physician is far more at risk than is the patient. Thus those who work directly at the hearth of danger must implement heightened precautions." <sup>59</sup>

Throughout the ANE requirements of physical perfection for those with access to the gods was common, this should not be surprising given the physical perfection expected of royal attendants (Dan 1:4).<sup>60</sup>

Several Babylonian texts exist that show just how common priestly perfection requirements were. The diviner (*baru*) must be "perfect to his appearance and limbs" and includes the following disqualifying blemishes: cross-eyed, chipped teeth, bruised finger, and the "leper"<sup>61</sup> who was banned from sacral office.<sup>62</sup> Another text explains the priestly candidate for Enlil's temple was inspected from head to toe. The text is too fragmentary to translate all of the blemishes, but it includes several translated features: disfigured face, mutilated eyes, and irregular features like being branded disqualified a person.<sup>63</sup> Another text calls for the priest to be of certain familial descent, flawless in body and

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<sup>59</sup> Erhard Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, 1st American ed., The Old Testament Library (Louisville,: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 306.

<sup>60</sup> While the royal attendants were expected to maintain physical perfection there is always not the same expectation of the king himself. Evidence suggests King Esarhaddon of Assyria had a debilitating disease which made him at temporarily give up his administrative duties to his son, however the disease did not disqualify him from being king. "Esarhaddon's chronic illness constitutes a serious disability and cultic impurity, yet it did not disqualify him from kingship; it was apparently not regarded as the mark of a heinous sin." Neal H. Walls, "The Origins of the Disabled Body," in *This Abled Body*, ed. Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 26. The narrative of Mephibosheth creates another interesting dynamic in this idea of royalty and disability. While the biblical text clearly identifies Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, as lame it is unclear if the lameness is reason enough for Mephibosheth not to be king. (See Schipper.

<sup>61</sup> Here the term "leper" is more specific than *לֵצָרַת* but is not necessarily understood to be equivalent to modern leprosy.

<sup>62</sup> K. van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia: A Comparative Study*, Studia Semitica Neerlandica (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1985), 29.  
TEXT (check van der Toorn) *ibid*.

limbs, not having squinting eyes, chipped teeth, a cut-off finger or a ruptured testicle.<sup>64</sup>

“In all likelihood, similar standards will have been customary for cultic experts in other temples.”<sup>65</sup>

Other literature in ANE civilizations shows similar requirements of their priests. In Hittite, no equivalent word for priest has been found, but Jacob Milgrom suggests that one existed because there is an unambiguous law declaring bestiality with a horse or mule permitted but such a person may not approach the king, nor may he ever become a priest.<sup>66</sup> Another Hittite text reads:

*“Furthermore, those who prepare the daily (sacrificial) bread are to be pure. They are to be bathed and shaved, their [body?] hair and their na[ils] are to be cut. They are to wear clean clothes. They are not to prepare it [in an unclean state (?)]. (Only) those who are [agreeable] to the gods' soul and body are to prepare this (bread). (Lines 14-15 KUB XIII 4)”*<sup>67</sup>

In another Hittite text, *Investigating the Anger of the Gods*, omen readers attempt to discover why the gods are angry and in the text they seek to see if the presence of “deficient people” in the temple angered the gods. Unfortunately, the text is broken and we are left without an answer, but the mere presence of “deficient” or “mutilated” people defiling the temple and angering the gods suggests that this was a belief.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, an Egyptian papyrus found from the Roman period calls priests “seal bearers” because they inspected sacrifices for blemishes and stamped with a seal those

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Wilfred G. Lambert, "The Qualifications of Babylonian Diviners," in *Festschrift Fur Rykle Borger Zu Seinem 65*, ed. Stefan M. Maul, Cuneiform Monographs (Groningen: Styx, 1998). in Walls, 26.

<sup>65</sup> Toorn, 30.

<sup>66</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed., The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000).

<sup>67</sup> Walter Beyerlin, *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 180.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 497.

that were acceptable.<sup>69</sup> While the priests of Egypt did not have any moral requirements or special training, the priest did have to meet the conditions of physical purity. These requirements were met by being circumcised, washing in cold water twice a day and twice a night, and before entering the sacred place rinsing their mouth with a mixture of diluted water and natron and removing all the hair from their body. While the priests were serving they had to maintain a specific diet, be sexually abstinent, and they were restricted from wearing certain types of clothing.<sup>70</sup>

Examples of priestly perfection are not limited to the ANE. The Greeks, in the writings of Plato, show the requirement for priestly perfection. While Plato says priests and priestess who hold hereditary priesthoods “should not be disturbed,” there is a realization that there will be a time to establish new priesthoods partly by election and partly by lots. After being chosen the candidate is to be tested: “first, to see as to whether he is sound and true-born, and secondly, as to whether he comes from houses that are as pure as possible, being himself clean from murder and all such offences against religion, and of parents that have lived by the same rule.” (*Laws* 6:759).<sup>71</sup> The only physical requirement laid out is that he is under sixty. Even in the Hindu culture, Brahmans born with a bodily defect, or obtaining one before 16 are excluded from the holy caste. Others excluded include liars; calumniators; those who are passionate or quarrelsome, malicious

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<sup>69</sup> Milgrom, 261-262; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004).

<sup>70</sup> Serge Sauneron and David Lorton, *The Priests of Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 2000), 36-42.

<sup>71</sup> Plato, "Laws," (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0059.tlg034.perseus-eng1:6.760>).

or spiteful, haughty or averse to prayer; those who are blind or deaf; those whose teeth are large; and those who have any symptom that threatens to undermine life or health.<sup>72</sup>

## Conclusion

Since the formation of stabilized societies, priests have been an elite class of people able to continue their elitism through economic and intellectual power. Seen as linking heaven and earth, being a human connection with the deity, priests have the duty, privilege, and dangerous task of approaching the holy and sacred spaces to appease the gods. Cultures do not take this task lightly and have placed specific restrictions upon priests. Whether the reasoning is to protect the image of their god, as might be suggested by John Davies, or to protect the people from the anger of the gods, as suggested by the Hittite omen text; people have put restrictions on who can enter the holy and sacred spaces. Many of the lists include physical and moral requirements.

Leviticus 21:17-23 has many similarities with these other ancient priestly restrictions, yet it also has some striking differences; mainly the lack of moral requirements in the list. Some scholars point to the parallelism between Lev 21:17-23 and Lev 22:22-24 claiming that including moral blemishes is senseless because animals cannot have moral flaws. Ultimately, the entire nation of Israel was assumed to have the same moral code, thus regardless of one's position, the Israelite was called to a high moral standard.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1843.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 1821.



## **Chapter Three**

### **The Blemishes and Cultic Language of Leviticus 21**

Leviticus 21:18-20 contains the most comprehensive list of physical impairments in the Hebrew Bible; it includes impairments acquired congenitally or from injury or accident, and because of its unique nature it can be difficult to understand.<sup>74</sup>

Understanding the blemishes has lead scholars to debate why the particular conditions are listed and influence their hermetical interpretation of the text. This chapter will examine the textual variations and interpretations of the individual blemishes, explore theories regarding the composition of the group, and survey the relationship of the blemishes and the holiness words associated with the cultic activity in Israel.

#### **Understanding the Cultic Language of Blemishes**

There is no Hebrew equivalent word for “disability”, the closest word is מום. מום most often refers to “an imperfection or blemish in the physical characteristics normally

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<sup>74</sup> Gerstenberger, 316-17.

attributed to a creature or person”<sup>75</sup> and occurs 21 times in 19 verses. מום is used five times in Lev 21:17-23, each time describing the priest. מום is also used to describe the condition required of animal sacrifices (Lev 22:20, 21, 25; Num 19:2; Deut 15:21; 17:1). In Lev 24:19, 20 a person that blemishes someone else is to receive the same treatment and suffer the same injury. In all of the above passages, מום is general descriptor with no specific connection between a particular condition, impairment, sickness, or disease. There are three separate passages which use מום with a negative, either לא or אינ, and in these occurrences the physical beauty and appeal is being described. Absalom is described as more beautiful than anyone in Israel; from head to toe because “לא היה בו מום” (2 Sam 14:25). The young men brought into Nebuchadnezzar’s court were without a blemish in them (יְיָ־בָהֶם כָּל־מֹאֻם) (Dan 1:4). In Song of Solomon, details the beauty of the bride from head to toe, then summarizes “כָּל־ךְ יָפָה רָעִיתִי וּמוֹם אֵין” (Song 4:7). This use of מום with the negative לא and אינ is intriguing because it suggests that there is a difference between a person with no blemish (לֹא מוֹם) and an unblemished person (תָּמִים).

Nance Eiesland suggests that although תָּמִים does not appear in Lev 21 it is conceptually present;<sup>76</sup> It is the omission of תָּמִים from Lev 21 which may bring important insight to this passage. 51 of the 90 occurrences of תָּמִים describe the required condition of a sacrificial animal- the animal was to be “complete,” “perfect,” or “without

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<sup>75</sup> James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997). While it is not in the scope of this thesis it is important to note that (

<sup>76</sup>Eiesland suggests that Lev 21:17-23 and Lev 22:19-21 are parallel because each list contains twelve blemishes, and show the requirements of those approaching the altar Nancy L. Eiesland and Don E. Saliers, *Human Disability and the Service of God: Reassessing Religious Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 66.

blemish.” The connection with the sacrificial animal places תמים most frequently in Leviticus (22 times), Numbers (19 times), and Ezekiel. (13).

Outside of texts describing animal sacrifice, the semantic range of תמים moves away from the physical aspect of perfection and incorporates moral completeness or perfection. Noah was תמים (Gen 6:9), Abraham is commanded by YHWH to be תמים (Gen 17:1), and David describes himself as תמים (2 Sam 22:24; Ps 18:23), in Psalms and Proverbs תמים positively describes those who walk in the law of the YHWH (Ps 119:1), whose heritage will abide forever (Ps 37:18) and they will receive goodly inheritance (Prov 28:10). תמים is also used to describe the work of God (Deut 32:4), the way of God (2 Sam 22:31; Ps 18:30; 19:7; 101:2) and the knowledge of God (Job 37:16). If Lev 21 was symbolic or a call for the higher moral standards of priests then one would expect תמים in the text. תמים is used elsewhere in the Holiness Code; twice it describes a complete calendar year (Lev 23:15; 25:30) and four times, including twice in the parallel passage of Lev 22, it is used describing the sacrificial animal (Lev 22:19,21; 23:12,18). In all of its occurrences, תמים does not describe physical characteristics or appearances of an individual. The distinction between תמים and לא מים, and the omission of תמים from Lev 21, suggests that the disqualifying blemishes are strictly physical conditions, although moral blemishes may have disqualified a priest, they were not the concern of this list.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, 266.

## The Individual Blemishes of Lev 21

The list begins with the blind (עור) and the lame (פסח), two widespread impairments in antiquity,<sup>78</sup> the grouping of blindness and lameness is a common rhetorical reference to people with disabilities in the bible.<sup>79</sup> Scholars, such as Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, who claim that given the rarity of the blemishes the text is simply symbolic, do little to explain the inclusion of these two impairments in the list.<sup>80</sup> Karl Elliger and Baruch Levine claim that the blindness must be referring to blindness in one eye;<sup>81</sup> even if this were the correct reading of עור it does not address the reasoning for including the lame. פסח may refer to a person who is lame in only one leg: 2 Sam 9:13 makes a clear distinction that Mephibosheth was lame in both his feet<sup>82</sup>; Sipra' allows for פסח to mean one or both legs (*Emor*, Parashah 3:4)<sup>83</sup>; Qumran literature and the Tgs. use פסח to denote lameness in one leg and חגר identifies lameness in both legs (1QM 7:4; 4QD). חרם, a hapax, has been interpreted as “short limbed” (Ibn Ezra) or “amputated limb” (Ibn Janah; cf. Abravanel); more commonly it refers to a mutilated face, traditionally understood as a problem with the nose, but could be as broad as “having something abnormal on the face.”<sup>84</sup> שרוע simply means “deformed”, given its close relation to the Aramaic (ܫܪܝܥ)

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<sup>78</sup> Gerstenberger, 317., R. Laird Harris, “Leviticus,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 617.

<sup>79</sup> Walls, 27.

<sup>80</sup> Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2007), 398.

<sup>81</sup> Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New Jps Translation*, 1st ed., The Jps Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 145.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 145 and n. 22.

<sup>83</sup> Bailey and Milgrom both cite this: Lloyd R. Bailey, *Leviticus-Numbers*, The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 270; Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1826.

<sup>84</sup> René Pêter-Contesse and John Ellington, *A Translator's Handbook on Leviticus*, Helps for Translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1990).

(*sri* 5) which means mutilated<sup>85</sup>, the Vulgate translated it as “long nosed” and DBL identifies it as “pertaining to a condition of any kind in which an object has an abnormal shape or appearance.”<sup>86</sup> The LXX translates it as “ears cut off” which may be a reference to the story of Hyrcanus, a priest whose ears were cut off to ensure he would never be high priest (Josephus, *Antiq.* XIV, 366). שֶׁבֶר רֶגֶל אוֹ שֶׁבֶר יָד, a broken foot or a broken hand could refer to either a temporary or permanent condition, especially considering that many minor medical conditions did not receive the same kind of treatment we are accustomed to today, so even with a minor break the bones may not be properly set and thus permanent damage could result. גִּבָּן, a hapax legomenon, is generally translated as “hunch back”, although the NEB understands it to be referring to a “misshapen eyebrow.” דָּק, literally means “withered” or “thin”, such as the cows in Pharaoh’s dream (Gen 41) yet most versions translate it as “dwarf.” תַּבְלִל בְּעֵינָיו, another hapax legomenon, refers to variation in the eyes; some kind of obscurity, defective spot, or blurring of the iris and pupil, yet the exact meaning or condition is beyond our information.<sup>87</sup> יִלְפַת and גֶּרֶב both refer to some sort of skin condition, different from צִרְעָה in Lev 13 which would have isolated them from the community. גֶּרֶב is generally understood as an itch, scab, or festering wound as it is closely related to the Arabic for eczema and the Akkadian for leprosy, scabies, and festering rash.<sup>88</sup> יִלְפַת, used only here and Lev 22:22, often translated as lichen, scurf or a skin eruption of some kind possibly ringworm or herpes.<sup>89</sup> The twelfth blemish, מְרוּחַ אֶשֶׁךְ, another hapax legomenon, clearly refers to the testicle, and

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<sup>85</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, “Enhanced Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament,” (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos, 2000).

<sup>86</sup> DBL

<sup>87</sup> HALOT and Harris.

<sup>88</sup> HALOT

<sup>89</sup> DBL quoting TWOT but not in TWOT, possibly LN

Levine suggests it literally means “one whose testicles are rubbed, crushed.”<sup>90</sup> While Deut 23:2 (H) forbids anyone with crushed testicles, פְּצוּעֵ־דֶשֶׁכָּא, from entering the assembly this is believed to be in specific reference to eunuchs, or those who intentionally mutilate their own genitals in cultic worship or those who had been officials in foreign governments,<sup>91</sup> because of Deut 23:2 (H) the blemish in Lev 21:20 should not be understood as referring to eunuchs. Hentrich suggests that due to the crude medical conditions in the ANE Lev 21:20 refers to an unsuccessful circumcision<sup>92</sup>, others suggest the text refers to swollen testes, a hernia, and a man with only one testicle. The blemishes, which are the most comprehensive list of physical impairments in the biblical anthology<sup>93</sup>, raise many questions and scholars have just as many educated guesses, ultimately the exact meaning of these blemishes is moot;<sup>94</sup> in fact many of the blemishes would not be classified as disabilities today.<sup>95</sup> Yet the text is clear: it identifies certain physical conditions that disqualify a priest from performing priestly duties at the altar and in the sanctuary.

## Theories of Composition

While a medical diagnosis of each blemish in Lev 21 could help, more significant to scholars is an understanding of why the particular blemishes were chosen. Various theories are scattered throughout commentaries on why these blemishes were chosen, yet

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<sup>90</sup> Levine, 146.

<sup>91</sup> Earl S. Kalland, "The Expositor's Bible Commentary," in *Deuteronomy*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, Earl S. Kalland, Donald H. Madvig et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

<sup>92</sup> Hentrich, 84-85.

<sup>93</sup> Gerstenberger, 316. And Saul M. Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 27.

<sup>94</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1826.

<sup>95</sup> Walls, 26.

three general theories recur: obscurity, parallelism, and categorization. These general theories draw from one another, yet when interpreting, scholars tend to lean more heavily toward one of the theories.

Kiuchi suggests that the defects were uncommon, suggesting that if the priest's body was ordinary he was qualified to be a priest. The list intentionally uses obscure defects to direct the attention away from the looks of the priest and emphasize inner holiness, so in composing a list of uncommon defects the list becomes about the priest having an unblemished heart. "A believing heart is wholehearted, sincere, and has nothing to hide, just as with Noah (Gen 6:9), Abraham (Gen 17:1), and David (2 Sam 22:24/Ps 18:23 [24]). Such a condition is in fact the essence of holiness. Thus the idea of having a priest meeting the outward qualifications without having the inner qualifications appears ridiculous."<sup>96</sup>

On the surface, this theory appears to address the discrimination of the blemished priest; however, there are problems with this theory in the accuracy of the obscurity of the blemishes, and it creates a new problem in the portrayal and understanding of disabilities. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, one of the problems facing biblical disability studies is that physical descriptions are rare in biblical texts-it is only those who have physical characteristics out of the ordinary that are described, either negatively (2 Sam 4:4) or positively (1 Sam 9:1)<sup>97</sup>. With the possible exception of the blind and lame integration into society, with no additional accommodation, was possible for a person

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<sup>96</sup> Kiuchi, 398.

<sup>97</sup> Jeremy Schipper, *Disability and Isaiah's Suffering Servant*, Biblical Refigurations (Oxford: Oxford University, 2011), 18. Other examples of physical descriptions include Isaac (Gen 27:1), Jacob (Gen 32:26

with any of the conditions listed in Lev 21:18-20. The other conditions may be obscure and rare in ANE literature but that obscurity may be the result of how well people with these conditions were able to integrate into society. A second problem with this theory of obscurity is the inclusion of עור and פסח, two conditions that appear to be quite prevalent in literature and various archeological findings<sup>98</sup>, and are often used as general categories for those with physical impairments. Another problem with this theory arises when considering priests with one of these conditions. If, as the theory states, the conditions were rare, they existed-so, was a priest with תבלל קעיני disqualified from approaching the altar? If the answer is yes, the text is still discriminating and does not in fact redeem the text; if the answer is no, it also poses a problem for disability scholars because of the message it sends about the disabled. By associating these physical conditions with a lack of holiness, people with disabilities become categorized, devalued and marginalized.<sup>99</sup>

A second theory asserts that the list of blemishes in Lev 21:18-20 is parallel with the blemishes in Lev 22:22-24 that makes an animal sacrifice unacceptable. Just like Lev 21, Lev 22 composes a list of twelve blemishes: עורת (blindness), שבור (fractured), חרוץ (mutilated, cut), יבלת (wart), גרב (scab), ילפת (ringworm), שרע (deformed), קלט (stunted, shortened), and testicles that are מעך (pressed), כמות (crushed), נתוק (torn), or כרות (cut).<sup>100</sup> Of the twelve conditions, four of them use the same words: עור, שריע, גרב, ילפת; three conditions (injured testicles, lame, and a mutilated face) convey the same idea but use

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<sup>98</sup> Carol R. Fontaine, "'Be Men, O Philistines' (1 Samuel 4:9)- Iconographic Representations and Reflections on Female Gender as Disability in the Ancient World," in *This Abled Body-Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, ed. Hector Avalos, Jeremy Schipper, and Sarah J. Melcher (Atlanta: SBL, 2007).

<sup>99</sup> Olyan, 6.

<sup>100</sup> All definitions from Lev 22:-22-24 are from BDB.



different words and five of the conditions listed in Lev 21 are not found in Lev 22. Given the differences in the anatomy between humans and the animals there are bound to be different words for similar conditions; some conditions, such as a broken hand, which would not have an equivalent in an animal; and some conditions, e.g. hunch back, may be less noticeable, or less impairing in animals than in humans. Therefore, it would be unreasonable to expect an exact replica of the two blemish lists. The visibility of the blemishes is a key contributing factor to the parallelism between the two lists; the composer is restricted to physical blemishes, the result is moral, mental, emotional, and non-visible (e.g. mute and deaf) blemishes are omitted.<sup>101</sup> Those that hold primarily to this theory would understand the texts to equate the perfection required of animal sacrifices with the perfection of priests.

It is hard to deny that the passages are parallel with one another; however, this theory does face two difficulties. First, the lists only contain seven conditions that are actually parallel with one another. As stated earlier, there are clearly anatomical differences between humans and animals; however, it would seem that one could find more than seven similarities between the two. Eiesland points to the careful arrangement of styles and eye for detail found in the Holiness Code reason for the deliberate correlation between the two lists.<sup>102</sup> If there is such an eye for detail and a careful arrangement of style, why are the two lists not more carefully ordered? Although seven of the blemishes are parallel, they appear in different orders between the two texts. The second difficulty with this theory is that it appears contradictory. In his commentary,

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<sup>101</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, 262, 266.

<sup>102</sup> Eiesland and Saliers, 66.

Milgrom suggests that the deaf and mute are omitted because the list deals with visible defects, yet he appears to agree when he quotes Elliger who suggests, “this ostensibly exceptional defect was arbitrarily chosen to match its equivalent in the animal list.”<sup>103</sup>

A third prominent theory of composition posits that the list is not limited to the twelve blemishes listed, but the twelve blemishes are general categories of blemishes. This theory originates in the Mishnah as the rabbis turned the twelve blemishes into one hundred forty two blemishes (m. Bek 7:1-7). Erhard Gerstenberger suggests that the priestly instructions throughout Leviticus are not thorough and complete; Leviticus neglects to address idol worship, disregard for the Sabbath and violating the commandments of YHWH. The fragmentation is therefore, not specifically in regards to blemishes in Lev 21 but since the entire book is fragmented, it would be understandable that these blemishes are also fragmented.<sup>104</sup> Milgrom proposes the text has a sophisticated structure and the structure of the text leads to understanding the expansion of the blemishes.

The many fine points in this sophisticated structure are almost too numerous to mention. The most glaring and, hence, most important point is that it consistently keep the key word 'blemish' (x) in the middle: in each of the two panels (axb, a1xb1; in each of the two chiasms (a1'xa'; b1'xb'); and in the overall structure (AXA') not by the word 'blemish' but by enumerating twelve of them. The twelve blemishes (X) are enveloped by twelve clauses (axb; a1'xb'; b1'xb'), which themselves are of equal number (4a + 4b + 4x). Thus, the number twelve is the structural key to the pericope. This implies that the twelve blemishes are enumerated not because there are no more. Rather, the enumerated twelve are generic categories from which specific blemishes

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<sup>103</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, 266; Karl Elliger, *Leviticus* (Tübingen,: Mohr & Siebeck) 1966.).

<sup>104</sup> Gerstenberger, 317.

of each genre can be derived. Thus, the rabbis are justified in adding many others to this list.<sup>105</sup>

This theory, like the others discussed, leaves some unanswered questions. If this list composed of blemishes that make up generic categories why are some, such as a broken hand and foot or itching and scabs, so similar? Why use such literarily obscure blemishes instead of conditions that were more common? From a redemptionist viewpoint, this theory may appear most damaging, for the theory expands the list to the one hundred forty two blemishes of the rabbis and possibly even more; however it is from this expansion and the understanding and insight of the rabbis, which will be discussed in the next chapter, that can bring redemption to this text.

### **The Priestly Blemishes In Relation To Holiness Word Group<sup>106</sup>**

With an understanding of the individual blemishes from Lev 21, the focus now shifts to the implication a blemish had on a priest by examining the basic concepts of holiness words. Although all of the holiness words are not in Lev 21:17-23, they are connected and thus present conceptually, and are the driving purpose behind the Holiness Code (Lev 19:2), and the entire book of Leviticus (Lev 10:10). The holiness words are the four possible statuses-holy, common, pure, and impure-placed upon people or things.<sup>107</sup> While two statuses can coexist, the impure can never contact the holy. The

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<sup>105</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1837.

<sup>106</sup> The term 'holiness word group: קדש, חל, טהר, and טמא. Philip Peter Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series (JSOT, 1992), 42.

<sup>107</sup> The semantic range of these words can create some confusion for modern readers. קדש, the least troublesome of the words is understood as holy or set apart. חל translated as 'profane', 'defile' and sometimes as common. טהר is translated by some as 'pure' and by others as 'clean.' טמא is translated as 'impure' by some and 'unclean' by others. The idea of purity and impurity or clean and unclean can create confusion for the reader if they are associated with hygiene. Mary Douglas writes that Levitical purity and

common and pure are static while the holy and pure and mutually antagonistic and dynamic seeking to extend their influence and control over the other categories.<sup>108</sup> An examination of the holiness words, and the implication that each had on the cultic activity, especially as it relates to priests, will show that the priestly blemishes of Lev 21 did not show ill will toward those with the blemishes.

The holiness words center around the idea of holiness, for YHWH instructs the Israelites to be holy because YHWH is holy (Lev 19:2). In the Hebrew Bible, holiness comes from YHWH, and only YHWH- holiness is an extension of the character of YHWH who allows certain things- such as land (Israel), people (Israelites and priests), places (the sanctuary) and times (Sabbath)- to be designated as holy.<sup>109</sup> Holiness is not stagnate, but an active force initiated by YHWH.<sup>110</sup>

"Holiness is thus a very comprehensive concept indeed. It is, really, not such a religious aspiration, or even just a moral code. Holiness is rather a way of *being*: a way of being *with* God in covenant relationship, a way of being *like* God in clean and wholesome living, a way of being God's people in the midst of an unholy and unclean world. Preserving that holy cleanness among God's people- ritually, morally, physically, socially, symbolically- is the primary thrust of the laws in the book of Leviticus."<sup>111</sup>

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impurity are not synonymous with clean and dirty nor are they an indication of the state of an individual's soul. [Mary Douglas, *Purity & Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution & Taboo* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1984), 5.] Hannah Harrington points out that while purity is a physical condition it has nothing to do with personal hygiene and suggests that there is evidence that after a ritual bath, most people would bath themselves in a bath of drawn water in order to clean themselves. [Hannah K. Harrington, *The Purity Texts*, Companion to the Qumran Scrolls (T & T Clark International, 2004), 12.] Throughout this thesis I will use the terms holy, common, pure, and impure within my own writing.

<sup>108</sup> Douglas, 5.

<sup>109</sup> Jacob Milgrom, "The Changing Concept of Holiness in the Pentateuchal Codes with Emphasis on Leviticus 19," in *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas*, ed. John F. A. Sawyer and Mary Douglas, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament (Sheffield Academic, 1996), 65-66.

<sup>110</sup> Harrington, 9.

<sup>111</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 286-87.

While the thrust of Leviticus might be holiness, according to Milgrom the understanding of holiness is different throughout the Pent. In P, holiness applies only to certain space, persons, and times; in H the barrier between the priesthood and the laity is broken thus holiness is available to all Israel, not just the priests. Holiness becomes more than obeying prohibitions but about embracing positive “ethical” commands; the adherence of these commands either enhances or diminishes the holiness of Israel. Observance of the commands is how Israel attains holiness, and although for the priests holiness is genetically transmitted, they must also obey the commandments to retain their own holiness and to keep Israelites from becoming impure and sinning (Lev 22:16).<sup>112</sup> Thus, for H holiness is a dynamic concept, towards which all of Israel, priests and laity alike, must continuously strive: priests to retain it, lay persons to attain it.”<sup>113</sup>

While holiness is reserved for YHWH and those things designated by YHWH as set apart, impurity are those things that threaten the pure status of Israel and its sanctuary. Scholars identify two kinds of impurities throughout the texts: ritual and moral impurities.<sup>114</sup> Moral impurities were the results of sexual sin (Lev 18:24-30), idolatry (Lev 19:31; 20:1-3), and bloodshed (Num 35:33-34). Moral impurity resulted from sin and while not contagious it lead to long-lasting or permanent degradation of the offender. Purification from moral impurity required repentance and sacrifice, or punishment. While moral impurity does defile the sacred places (Lev 20:3), “the effect of moral impurity

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<sup>112</sup> Milgrom, 67-69.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 67. Milgrom suggests that JE’s formula for holiness is abstaining from idolatry, Sabbath labor, and torn flesh. D includes the prohibitions and incorporates the idea that Israel *is* a holy people because of the covenant, it retains its’ holiness through observance of the covenant. “In D holiness is the *reason* for the prohibitions; in H, the prohibitions are the *means* for holiness. (p 69)

<sup>114</sup> Some scholars classify the impurities as permitted, tolerated, or levitical (ritual) and prohibited (moral).

does not penetrate the holy realm by the entrance of sinners into it. Moral impurity is a potent force unleashed by sinful behavior that affects the sanctuary even from afar.”<sup>115</sup>

Sin, while not tantamount with impurity, is the greatest impurity.

Most impurities are the result of the human condition and are brought on by death, disease, or sexual discharge. Ritual impurity, outlined in Lev 11-15 and Num 19, is necessary, natural and unavoidable, even if obeying the commands of YHWH.<sup>116</sup> Ritual impurity in some cases was contagious<sup>117</sup> and therefore in order to safeguard the community, the ritually impure were hindered from participation in cultic activity and access to the sacred spaces. The purification procedure for the ritually impure involved either bathing or the passage of time and occasionally sacrifices.<sup>118</sup> The primary concern of the priest was to safeguard the separation between the spheres of ritual purity and impurity, for when the holy contacts the impure it brings grave punishment and effects.<sup>119</sup> If the spheres of the holy and the impure ever did meet different terminology was used between the various kinds of impurities; טמא (defile) is used with both ritual and moral

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<sup>115</sup> David Noel Freedman, "Purity and Sacrifice," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 55.

<sup>116</sup> Since ritual impurity could be brought on through sexual intercourse and childbirth, God's command to Adam and Noah to multiply would have resulted in such impurity. Harrington, 10. And David P. Wright, "The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity," in *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel*, ed. Gary A. Anderson and Saul M. Olyan, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (JSOT, 1991), 157.

<sup>117</sup> David P Wright identifies two sub-classifications of ritual impurities based on its communicability and purification sacrificial requirements; while all impurity was restricted from the sacred spaces, some impurities required the exclusion from the area of habitation because it was feared that these impurities posed a greater risk of contaminating the sacred spaces. Wright, 157.

<sup>118</sup> The ritual impurities which required sacrifices are those related to a lochial discharge, an abnormal sexual discharge, and a diagnosis of צרע. It was believed that these impurities were so potent that they could pollute the sanctuary, even from afar; thus a הִתָּח offering was required to purify the altar. Ibid., 155-56.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 1583.

impurity, but חנק (pollute) and תועבה (abomination) are used only in the context of moral impurity.<sup>120</sup>

The primary concern of biblical texts, and scholars, is the identification of those things that are holy and impure, little time or effort is spent on the counterparts<sup>121</sup>, the common and the pure; for Mary Douglas simply defines purity as the absence of impurity and common as the absence of holiness.<sup>122</sup> To grasp Lev 21:17-23 one must understand חלל, and the implication of חלל את־מקדשי (profane my sanctuaries). Bibb proposes that חלל, which is best translated as common, is the “non-cultic counterpart of holy,” thus anything not set aside for cultic use was common. The simplicity of this definition and the obvious nature of the distinction between ‘holy’ and ‘common’ is the reason for the absence from P.<sup>123</sup> Leviticus highlights three things that can be profaned: YHWH’s name, the sanctuary, and one’s own family. YHWH’s name is profaned when the Israelites participate in child sacrifice (Lev 18:21; 20:3), swear falsely by the name of YHWH (Lev 19:3), and by not obeying YHWH’s statutes (Lev 21:6). Bryan Bibb suggests that these acts are profaning because they are public acts that show malice toward YHWH by declaring that YHWH has no authority in that person’s life.<sup>124</sup> The sanctuary is profaned when the priest goes outside the sanctuary for mourning while in anointed as holy (Lev 21:12), when a blemished priest approaches the altar or curtain (Lev 21:23) and when the priests fail to be diligent in keeping the regulations of the sanctuary (Lev 22:9). The

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<sup>120</sup> Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University 2000), 37.

<sup>121</sup> Profanation plays a minor role in P, the only occurrence of the nominal form חל appears in Lev 10:10, which Milgrom assigns to H. Bryan D. Bibb, *Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds in the Book of Leviticus*, T & T Clark Library of Biblical Studies (T & T Clark, 2009), 141.

<sup>123</sup> Bibb, 141.

<sup>123</sup> Bibb, 141.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 143.

sanctuary was holy; it was the place YHWH intersected with his people. The people needed to have trust in the sacredness of that place. Those things that profaned the sanctuary were not evil, outside of the sanctuary, they were very common, and for this reason, they were prohibited inside the sanctuary. Finally, a person profanes their own family when a daughter is a prostitute or of questionable character (Lev 19:29; 21:9; 21:15) or a priest may profane himself by disobeying the rules of social engagement (21:4). “Profanity here is not primarily a cultic issue, but a concern for how people view the priests and how they conduct themselves before the watchful eyes of the congregation.”<sup>125</sup>

According to the text, the blemished priest who approaches the sacred spaces of the altar and the curtain profanes the sanctuary. Milgrom suggests that because of the proximity to the inner sanctum, the incense offerings (Ex 30:7-8), attending the lampstand (Lev 24:1-4), and presenting the bread at the table (Lev 24:5-8) were also forbidden for the blemished priest.<sup>126</sup> Eiesland uses Milgrom’s analysis and extends it by suggesting that although a blemish did not make a priest impure, the physical defect represented a threat to the holy places and objects, a serious offense that could result in death.<sup>127</sup> Eiesland is correct that the blemished priest was not deemed impure, no mention is made about the status of the priest, but the text states that the blemished priest “may eat the food of his God, the most holy as well as the holy” (Lev 21:22) an activity reserved for pure priests (Num 18:13), to occur in a sacred place (Lev 6:16). Because the text includes the blemished priest as one who can partake of the most holy food, Olyan

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>126</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, 266.

<sup>127</sup> Eiesland and Saliers, 66.



presents a viewpoint different from Milgrom. “Clearly, the priest’s blemish is not constructed as generally profaning to holy space and holy items. If it were, he would not be able to remain in the sanctuary sphere, nor would he be able to eat the holy foods brought to the sanctuary by worshipers. The priest’s blemish is constructed as profaning only when he participates in the proscribed rites, as v. 23 suggests.”<sup>128</sup>

## Conclusion

The heightened precautions of Lev 21:17-23 layout specific physical blemishes, evidenced by the use of מום. Although obscure, the blemishes should not be viewed as merely symbolic emphasizing the heightened morality priests were called to because תמאם, used in the parallel text of Lev 22:20-24, is omitted from the text. A blemish prohibited a priest from approaching the altar and the curtain, but the priest was not deemed as impure or restricted from the cultic sphere; in fact, the text is clear that the blemished priest is still eligible to eat the holy and most holy food. The blemished priest is ineligible for the prestigious cultic activity of sacrifice in order to prevent the profanation of the sanctuary; yet the text gives no other reasoning for this restriction and it makes no further statements regarding the priest.

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<sup>128</sup> Saul M. Olyan, *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2000), 113.

## Chapter Four

### Priestly Restrictions As Understood in Other Ancient Jewish Literature

The Hebrew Bible, and other Jewish literature use disability in a variety of ways, both positively and negatively; however, the literature builds on the foundation that all are created in the image of YHWH, therefore to treat a person with a disability unjustly is the same as treating YHWH unjustly.<sup>129</sup> For the succinctness of this thesis, examination will be limited to those passages that deal with the activity of the priest or texts restricting the greater population with a blemish especially in regards to cultic activities. This chapter will cover portrayals throughout the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the rabbinic literature of the Mishnah and the Talmud. These texts cover centuries and Abrams suggests:

*It is logical to assume that society continually underwent such transmogrifications that were likely to have been part of ancient life as well. ...particularly when it comes to issues such as the physical perfection of priests or the role of disabilities in the Bible, we must overcome the distance of 3,000 years or more.”*<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Roy McCloughry and Wayne Morris, *Making a World of Difference: Christian Reflections on Disability* (London: SPCK, 2002), 50.

<sup>130</sup> Judith Z. Abrams, "Misconceptions About Disabilities in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 10, no. 3-4 (2008): 74.

Through an examination of ancient Jewish texts, we will discover that the priestly restrictions of Lev 21:17-23 were not intended to imply impurity or inequality of the blemished priest, instead they were put into place in order to deter the “stare” of the people so that the focus was the cultic activity at the altar and not the priest himself.

### **Other Biblical Texts Regarding the Priestly Restrictions**

While no other passages specifically restrict a blemished priest from approaching the altar, two texts may provide insight into the restrictions of Lev 21. First, Ezek 44 identifies “all those who are to be excluded from the sanctuary” (Ezek 44:5). The list includes the rebellious, foreigners, and the uncircumcised. When praising the Levitical priests who remained faithful to YHWH, there is no mention of blemishes. On its own, this omission of blemishes is not surprising, yet the passage bans priests from drinking wine in the sanctuary and says “they shall not marry a widow, or a divorced woman, but only a virgin of the stock of Israel,” words which seem to clearly echo Lev 21:7.<sup>131</sup> The second passage, 1 Sam 3:2-3 informs us that Eli the priest was serving in the temple even though his “eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see,” and later in the narrative it says again: “his eyes were set, so that he could not see anymore” (1 Sam 4:15). Some scholars, such as John Barry suggest that “Eli’s “physical malady represents his spiritual condition,”<sup>132</sup> however, the placement in the text may suggest otherwise. The paragraph’s preceding the call of Samuel contain the prophecy against Eli’s household a logical place to make a note about Eli’s spiritual blindness, yet the author places the note about Eli’s blindness in the narrative concerning Samuel. Of more

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<sup>131</sup> “neither shall they marry a woman divorced from her husband” (Lev 21:7)

<sup>132</sup> (John D. Barry, Michael S. Seiser, and et al., "Faithlife Study Bible," (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012).

importance though is what is not in the text. The blemished priest was restricted from approaching the altar and coming near to the curtain so “that he may not profane my sanctuaries” (Lev 21:23). 1 Sam makes no mention of Eli profaning the sanctuary because of his blindness. This omission might suggest that there were blemished priests in the temple.

Also important are the texts that deal with the laypersons admission and restriction in the temple and community. Deuteronomy 23:2(H) says the man “whose testicles have been crushed or whose penis is cut off shall not be admitted to the assembly of YHWH.” Similar to Lev 21:20 restricting the priest with crushed testicles, yet Deuteronomy focuses on those who intentionally mutilated their genitals either as an act of worship to a foreign deity or as an act of allegiance while serving in a foreign government.<sup>133</sup> The text not only prohibits the eunuch from the temple, but from the “assembly of YHWH,” the group of adult men who made decisions, participated in the cultic activity and served in the military.<sup>134</sup> This prohibition fits well within the framework of other Deuteronomic prohibitions, which often highlight the differences between Israel and the nations of Canaan.<sup>135</sup> Thus, the prohibition in Deuteronomy focuses on keeping Israel pure and faithful to YHWH not at alienating persons with disabilities.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Kalland.

<sup>134</sup> The “assembly of YHWH” also referred to as the “assembly of Israel.” John H. Walton, Victor Harold Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The Ivp Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000), Deut 23:8.

<sup>135</sup> Kalland.

<sup>136</sup> Lam 1:10 states that the enemies of Israel were forbidden from entering the congregation and yet now they were invading the sanctuary in Jerusalem.

One final biblical text to containing a restriction is 2 Sam 5:8b that restricts the blind and the lame from entering the אֶל־הַבַּיִת. Noting that the verse does not fit within the narrative, Saul Olyan claims a consensus among scholars that this verse is a later addition;<sup>137</sup> not clearly understood is the exact meaning of the text. While most scholars contend that “house” is referring to the temple, as the LXX translates the phrase as “to the house of the LORD,” it is unclear exactly who the “blind” and “lame” in the text are referring to.

Anthony Ceresko believes the adage to be symbolic: "2 Samuel 5:6-10 admittedly has its share of textual and exegetical problems. Nonetheless, attention to the literary coherence of the unit and the distinctive use of key terms such as 'lame,' 'blind,' and 'house' suggest that the passage employs irony and foreshadowing to make a statement about dynasty and kingship."<sup>138</sup> Ceresko lays out how the “lame” through Mephibosheth narrative represent the Saulide dynasty; and the “blind” refer to Zedekiah, the final king in the Davidic monarchy. Jeremy Schipper agrees with Ceresko but takes it further; "This verse is actually part of a larger rhetorical technique that uses imagery of physical disability and weakness to characterize both parties. One should not read 2 Sam 5:8b simply as an epigram with the 'lame' applying to Saul's house and the 'lame' applying to David's house, but rather as part of a more subtle and ironic depiction of the relationship between these two houses."<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Saul M. Olyan, "“Anyone Blind or Lame Shall Not Enter the House” : On the Interpretation of Second Samuel 5:8b," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (1998): 218. Olyan cites the work of Caquot and de Robert, McCarter, Hertzberger, and Schafer-Lichtenberger to backup his claim for scholarly consensus.

<sup>138</sup> Anthony R. Ceresko, "The Identity of "the Blind and the Lame" ('iwwēr Ūpissēah) in 2 Samuel 5:8b," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2001): 63.

<sup>139</sup> Jeremy Schipper, "Reconsidering the Imagery of Disability in 2 Samuel 5:8b," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2005): 433.

While the “blind” and the “lame” may have symbolic meaning, some saw it as a legitimate ban.<sup>140</sup> Olyan suggests that “the blind and the lame” may be synecdoches representing all blemishes advocating that the broader understanding is appealing given the long lists of blemishes that disqualify sacrificial animals (Lev 22:22-24), restrict priests (Lev 21:17-23), and other synecdochic passages (Mal 1:8,13; Deut 15:21).<sup>141</sup> Still unanswered is who the prohibition applies to: is this simply an expansion of the priestly restrictions in Lev 21 or does the prohibition apply to worshipers, expanding on Deut 23:1. Hector Avalos believes worshipers were restricted; if the priest were restricted and Lev 21 and 2 Sam 5:8b were contemporaneous then we face with a double standard. Avalos contends that it was not a fear of contagion, but the restriction was for socio-economic reasons.<sup>142</sup> Olyan also believes the restriction is aimed at worshipers yet suggests it is due to the popularity of the adage as well as the fact that the priests are not directly identified, and the use of the idiom בָּאֵלֶּיךָ , which is used in connection with both groups.<sup>143</sup>

While Lev 21 and 2 Sam 5:8b exclude those with blemishes, either priest or worshiper, several prophetic texts paint a picture of restoration and inclusion. Isaiah uses disability throughout the text. “The deaf shall hear the words of the scroll;” and “the eyes of the blind shall see” (Isa 29:18; 35:5). The “lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy” (Isa 35:6). The eunuchs and foreigners that “hold fast to my

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<sup>140</sup> For example, Acts 3:2-3 portrays a man who was lame sitting outside the temple gate begging for money.

<sup>141</sup> Olyan, ""Anyone Blind or Lame Shall Not Enter the House" : On the Interpretation of Second Samuel 5:8b," 227.

<sup>142</sup> Hector Avalos, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East : The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel*, Harvard Semitic Museum Publications (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995), 320.

<sup>143</sup> Olyan, ""Anyone Blind or Lame Shall Not Enter the House" : On the Interpretation of Second Samuel 5:8b," 224.

covenant” (Isa 56:5) YHWH will give “an everlasting name that shall not be cut off” (Isa 56:5). In Jeremiah 31:7-9, the blind and the lame are among those who YHWH is saving and bringing together. In Micah the lame will be made a remnant and the afflicted will be made a strong nation (4:7). Finally in Zephaniah YHWH saves the lame and gathers the outcasts and he will “change their shame into praise” (3:19).

The Hebrew Bible presents disabilities in a number of different ways, not a shock given the timeframe and number of authors. Yet there is also uniformity in how the Hebrew Bible portrays disabilities. Roy McCloughry and Wayne Morris summarize the texts this way:

*The Old Testament does not have just one approach to disability. It builds on the idea that all people are made in the image of God. It sometimes uses disability language as metaphors for divine judgment, but is this a comment on all disabled people? Quite the reverse; we find that to treat a disabled person unjustly is to do the same to God. It is true that God demands perfection because he is holy and it is true that this is represented in the idea of priestly perfection, but this is because the temple represents a perfect world that the prophets tell us will come one day when all disabilities will be no more. Perfection is a standard that we all fall short of.”<sup>144</sup>*

## **Disqualifying Blemishes in Qumran Literature**

The sectarian community at Qumran had very strict and prohibitive laws in regards to ritual purity and blemishes. The community placed a high importance on impurities, new members of the community were restricted from eating the community meal and touching ritually pure items for the first year, and were banned from touching the community drink for the first two years. If, as many scholars believe, priests who broke away from the Jerusalem cult and regarded themselves as the true Israel founded

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<sup>144</sup> McCloughry and Morris, 50.

the community this would explain the strict rules regarding purity.<sup>145</sup> This may also explain why the priests filled so many roles<sup>146</sup> and had great importance in the community; the priest was so important that according to the Community Rule when ten or more men were gathered to debate, study scripture, or pray a priest must be present (1QS VI). Despite the high importance priests played at Qumran, they were unable to perform sacrifices, to replace the void prayer and praise became acceptable substitutes (1QS ix. 4-5).<sup>147</sup>

In addition to the texts from Qumran, the archaeology at Qumran also portrays the high priority placed on purity within the community. At least 16 pools have been found in archaeological remain at Qumran; of the 16 pools found 10 of them have been identified as miqva'ot used for the specific purpose of ritual cleansing. Bryant Wood estimates that the pools at Qumran have a storage capacity of 577,800 liters of water. According to Bryant's calculations, there was more than enough water storage for the essential daily activities of a community of 200; therefore some of the pools must have been used for miqva'ot. Another important element in identifying these pools as used for ritual purity is the addition of wide steps within the structure. If these structures were simply used for water storage, the addition of wide stairs would diminish the storage capacity, the only reason to add wide steps is for easy access in and out of the water is in

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<sup>145</sup> Géza Vermès, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Allen Lane, 1997), 105.

<sup>146</sup> The roles of priests included: leading the community in prayer, interpreting the law, judging disputes, and controlling communal wealth and affairs.. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam, *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University, 2000), 110.

<sup>147</sup> Vermès, 110.



the case of a miqva'ot.<sup>148</sup> “The large number of miqva'ot at Qumran are a physical expression of the community's unique concerns regarding purity.”<sup>149</sup>

The emphasis on correct lineage diminished with Qumran as the priestly ideas of the Torah expanded to include everyone within the community-“everyone in the community must basically be blemishless: fully functioning and sensate.”<sup>150</sup> The Qumran list of blemishes found in *Rule of the Community* (1 QSa ii:3-9):

And no men smitten with any human uncleanness shall enter the assembly of God; no man smitten with any of them shall be confirmed in his office in the congregation. No man smitten in his flesh, or paralysed in his feet or hands, or lame, or blind, or dead, or dumb, or smitten in his flesh with a visible blemish; or an old man so crippled that he cannot hold himself up in the congregation; none of these shall co[me] to stand [a]mong the congregation of the m[e]n of renown, for the Angels of Holiness are [with] their [congregation].<sup>151</sup>

The text claims the presence of the “Angels of Holiness” as the reason why these persons are blemished. Another list of priestly disqualifications found in 4Q266, of most interest is the first restriction: “Whoever speaks too fast {or: too quietly, lit. swift or light with his tongue) or with a staccato voice and does not split his words to make [his voice] heard, no one from among these shall read the Book of [the] La[w] that he may not misguide someone in a capital matter.”<sup>152</sup>

Other texts highlight the restriction of those with blemishes from entering the city, for YHWH dwells there (Col XLV:12-14) and restriction of the blemished, children, women, and men those who are impure because of a nocturnal emission from entering the

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<sup>148</sup> John R. Bartlett, *Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 87.

<sup>149</sup> Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 158.

<sup>150</sup> Abrams, *Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach through the Bavli*, 49.

<sup>151</sup> Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1977), 291.

<sup>152</sup> Vermès, 146.

war camp in the War Scroll. “These texts intensify the purity standards in the Hebrew Bible and reinterpret the Bible’s stipulations to apply to the community’s particular situation.”<sup>153</sup>

## **Disqualifying Blemishes in the Rabbinic Literature of the Mishnah and Talmud**

Passages discussing blemishes occur frequently within the rabbinic literature; in the Mishnah alone “blemish” occurs 168, “deaf-mute” occurs 94 times, “blind” occurs 30 times, and “lame” occurs 25 times. As with the other literature examined, the rabbis presented different viewpoints on disability. Throughout the writings disability can be seen as a punishment from Yahweh (m. Pe’ah 8:9; b. Sukkah 53a), a catalyst providing important insight (m. Meg. 28a) and simply as the result of an accident (b. Sukkah 53a), unsanitary habits (b. Sabb. 109a) or old age (b. Sabb. 152a). Although various reasons exist for a disability, the rabbis’ reflection on Exod 4:10-11 make it clear that YHWH is the one that makes bodies function as they do. It is God who “gives him spirit and breath and beauty of face and seeing eyes and hearing ears and walking legs and understanding and insight” (b. Nid. 31). Throughout the Talmud, disability is a problem in the eye of the beholder and the rabbis use it “to underscore the instability of the body to grapple with the experience of physicality, frailty, and embodiment.”<sup>154</sup>

A classification of disabilities is in these writings, the classification centers around the *cheris shoteh va-katan*. The classification links hearing and speaking with

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<sup>153</sup> Abrams, *Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach through the Bavli*, 67.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 5.

cognitive ability and reasoning.<sup>155</sup> Another category of deaf people is referred to as "deaf mute," "deaf and can speak," one who has "become a deaf-mute", a "deaf mute who recovered his senses," and "deaf." The ultimate concern was the ability of the deaf person to develop *da'at*. M. Arachin 1:1 shows how this concern played out in everyday life. The deaf-mute was restricted from making a vow, however, they were given more leniency in criminal matters because it was believed that they had a limited ability to think and soundly or morally (m. B. Qam. 4:4). Since learning relied heavily on verbal arguing, discussing, and questioning of others, it is easy to see how one could conclude that a deaf-mute was unable to develop knowledge and reasoning.

Yet hearing was also important in the religious activity as well, as Jews were required to recite the *shema*. The rabbis discussed exactly what the first command in the *shema* means and if it simply meant to hear or if it actually implied to understand, which some argued could be done without hearing an audible sound.<sup>156</sup> The rabbis understood that at least for the person who became deaf after displaying intelligence and reason, communication was possible through the hands. Therefore, some deaf people could have access to *da'at* and thus were allowed to continue in activities such as marriage, divorce, and even business communication via signs.<sup>157</sup>

In regards to worship in the temple, a shift takes place in the rabbinic literature. B. Hagigah 1:1 declares "All are liable for an appearance offering [before the LORD] (ex

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<sup>155</sup> The second category shows an Aristotelian influence linking the voice to the soul and imagination, auditory is connected to rational, and hearing is linked with intelligence."Ellen C. Wertlieb, "Attitudes Towards Disabilities as Found in the Talmud," *Journal of Psychology and Judaism* 12, no. 4 (1988): 195.

<sup>156</sup> Bonnie L. Gracer, "What the Rabbis Heard," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 10, no. 3-4 (2007): 93.

<sup>157</sup> Note only do the rabbis make a distinction between those with congenital deafness and acquired deafness, but there is an acknowledgement of all disabilities being either congenital or acquired. In a discussion about which blessing to use when one comes across a person with a disability (m. Brachot 9:2).

23:14; Deut 16:16) except for (1) *cheresh*, (2) *shoteh*, (3) *katan*,” and 8 other people are listed. These ‘blemished’ people are not prohibited from entry, instead they are shown leniency. The blemished listed are not required to appear in Jerusalem for the festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot; for the journey to Jerusalem is difficult and those who are lame, blind, sick, or old do not need to make it<sup>158</sup>. However, the Bavli also requires those that the deaf (only) and the mute (only) were not only to appear at the temple but also rejoicing. (b. Hag 2b-3b). The priestly ideal is still held onto; Abrams writes: “If, at these moments, God is inspecting the troops, as it were, and determining if they were worthy of further support and agricultural bounty, and if the priests were considered the finest representatives of the Jewish people, then it is logical that at such a moment of transition, all Israelites who appeared at the Temple for God’s inspection would be required to be as close to the priestly ideal as possible.”<sup>159</sup>

When the rabbis examined the blemishes that disqualified a priest from service, they expanded the blemishes from the twelve in Lev 21 to 65 in m Bekherot 7:1-7 and 142 in b. Bekherot<sup>160</sup>. The expanded blemishes describe various shapes of the body, problems in the eyes and the way one walk, and the amount of hair on one’s head and face. All of the problems are visible except two: one who is ambidextrous and the deaf-mute. The rabbis explain why the blemish is listed: “A man whose eyelashes have fallen out and a man whose teeth have been taken out are disqualified ‘on the account of the appearance of the eye’ (i.e., because of how they look).”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Abrams, *Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach through the Bavli*, 53.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>160</sup> See Appendix A for a comparison of the blemishes in Lev 21, Lev 22 and m Bek.

<sup>161</sup> Abrams, *Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach through the Bavli*, 68.

The discussion regarding the blemishless priest and the concern for their look rises out of practicality and appropriateness, not out of inferiority. "Their concern was that the disability would be a distraction to the congregants. Deformity of the hands in this context was considered akin to pronouncing word differently from the local community members because of being raised in a different area of the country."<sup>162</sup> The intent was not to stigmatize the priest, or anyone with those blemishes, rather the Talmud is trying to ensure proper focus during worship. The intent of the rabbinic writings was to deter "the stare" of the people. "'The stare' is a disability studies term which refers to: 'the intrusive gaze of a viewer, which often objectifies and disables the person being stared at.'"<sup>163</sup>

The rabbinic writings say nothing about the stare in regards to priests and offering sacrifices; however it is important to remember that the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. limited the function of the priests. One of the ways they continued to serve was in giving the priestly benediction, in which they would raise their hands. Congregants are to refrain from looking at the priest during this time, since they believe God's presence descends during the blessing. Therefore looking at the priest during the benediction is the same as looking upon YHWH. The "atmosphere of lethal holiness that always obtained in the Temple is recreated in the synagogue."<sup>164</sup> The priestly blessing in the synagogue becomes a key, if not the key ritual moment during worship:

*The priestly blessing in the synagogue is a moment of ritual and religious performance, but it is a performance in which the bodies of the priests aim to be invisible to avoid the gaze of those in the gallery. The priest body is imagined as a*

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<sup>162</sup> Wertlieb, "Attitudes Towards Disabilities as Found in the Talmud," 195.

<sup>163</sup> Darla Y. Schumm and Michael Stoltzfus, *Disability in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Sacred Texts, Historical Traditions, and Social Analysis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 5.

<sup>164</sup> Abrams, *Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach through the Bavli*, 30-31.

*kind of negative space, one that avoids engaging the viewer. Whether because the blessing occasions a potent manifestation of the divine presence or because the priestly body might distract viewers from their reception of the blessing, the priests who transmit God's blessing strive to elude the eye.*<sup>165</sup>

m Megillah 4:7 states: “A priest who has blemishes on his hands should not raise his hands in the priestly benediction. R. Judah says, “Also, he whose hands are dyed with woad or madder should not raise his hands, “because the people stare at him.”<sup>166</sup> The Jerusalem Talmud expands on this teaching claiming that blemishes on the face also disqualify a priest, yet it provides a stipulation that, quoting t. Meg 3:29D, that if the priest is well known, the priest is able to proceed with the blessing, even with blemishes. For the blemishes of a well-known priest will not be a distraction. Although a priest with a blemish may offer a blessing, there is one exception: a priest who has a childlike appearance, or does not have a full beard, may not offer the blessing because he appears to be a minor. “The priest’s disqualification is based solely on his outer appearance and has nothing to do with his *da’at*, his cognitive ability to say the blessing with intention, or even with his being a man, as opposed to a minor. It is his *appearance* of being a minor that disqualifies him.”<sup>167</sup>

Further evidence the rabbis’ restrictions are based on deterring the “stare” of the people are seen in the importance they put on the correct flow of the service. Examining who could perform different activities within the service shows how important the flow of the service was. m Megilla 4:6 declares that a minor may read the Torah and translate, performed at the front of the synagogue, yet he may not recite the *Shema* or give the priestly blessing. The blind man and the man in ragged clothes may both recite the *Shema*

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<sup>165</sup> Schumm and Stoltzfus, 12.

<sup>166</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University, 1988).

<sup>167</sup> Abrams, *Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach through the Bavli*, 33.

and translate but they are not able to read the Torah or give the priestly blessing, for those activities would require them to make their way in front of the people and thus possibly disrupt the service. The prohibitions of the priest, and others with a blemish were not about a problem with the body. The problem is things marked and viewed as different and the stare that they invoke. The problem is the ‘lingering eye of the congregation.’<sup>168</sup>

## Conclusion

In her summary of texts dealing with priestly perfection, Abrams says the texts do portray a Jewish ideal personhood for the people to try to conform to; then she asks:

*Did this represent an attempt to raise the sanctity of lay Israelites nearer to the level of the priests? Or was it an attempt to exclude as many persons as possible from certain important moments in Jewish life? The answer may depend on the situation. For trials that incurred heavy punishments (e.g., the suspected adulterous wife and the stubborn, rebellious son) the latter motive was probably operant. For ritual and spiritual moments such as Torah study or appearing at the Temple, the former may have been in play. In either case, the unblushing Jew who could best meet every test, human or divine, was the blemishless, fullgrown, free man of priestly lineage: a group whose members were few and proud.*

YHWH does command Israel to be holy as YHWH is holy, which by definition of the word holy, word imply that they are in exclusive group. However, the portrayal of YHWH gathering the blind, the lame, eunuchs and foreigners together as remnant and a strong nation shows that Israel is to be inclusive. Israel is to be exclusive in their worship of YHWH but inclusive in their treatment of others. The priestly blemishes in Lev 21:17-23 highlight this, for of utmost importance in worshipping YHWH was focus on YHWH, nothing was to distract the people. Leviticus 21:17-23 intends to keep the focus on YHWH by excluding those who had a blemish that would have attracted the stare of the

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 36.

people. Yet to ensure that they are inclusive in their lives and love, the priests with a blemish were still included in the elite group of priests and able to partake of the blessing of the most holy food.



## **Chapter Five**

### **Conclusions**

The intent of this thesis was to examine Lev 21:17-23, a discriminating text, and redeem this text for the modern reader. Priests in the ANE were an elite social class, intelligent people, elevated in status because of the view that they were a reflection of the deity. Priests were mediators between the deities and the common people, both the deity and the people wanted a strong appearance before the other, so many societies certain physical requirements had to be met, anyone who did not meet these standards was unable to appear before the gods. Therefore, the idea of priestly perfection is not unique to Israel, rather, Lev 21:17-23 simply borrows the social and religious practices of the cultures around them.

The language of Lev 21:17-23 is not merely symbolic but refers to real physical characteristics and truly disqualifies a priest from certain cultic activities if the priest has one or more of these blemishes; however, the cultic language used does not imply impurity or inequality in any way. The priest may still partake of the most holy food, something an impure person was not able to do. When Lev 21:17-23 is viewed in light of other biblical and rabbinic texts the intent of restricting the blemished priest shows an intent to deter the stare of the people and is not a reflection the ability or inability of the

blemished priest being able to perform a task; this interpretation fits well within the purpose of Leviticus.

From the detailed procedures for offering sacrifices in the early chapters to the rules for holy living in the holiness code, Leviticus' purpose is to help the Israelites learn the proper ways to worship YHWH.<sup>169</sup> P depicts correct worship through rituals while H portrays worship through behaviors.<sup>170</sup> When viewed within the overall context of Leviticus, and seeing the historical setting, the cultic language used, and the interpretation of the rabbis, Lev 21:17-23 ultimately comes down to keeping the focus on YHWH and off the priest.

## **Areas of Further Study**

The field of biblical disability studies and a growing and widening field with much work to do. Books inspecting Mephibosheth<sup>171</sup> and the suffering servant of Isa 53<sup>172</sup> exist, yet no book exists focusing specifically on the priestly blemishes of Lev 21. Such a work could focus on the issues of identifying the medical conditions of the blemishes, comparing the blemishes similar blemish lists either biblical (Lev 22) or rabbinic (m. Bek 7). One other area to explore in relation to Lev 21 is the theological impact, especially in connection with resurrected bodies and disabilities.

Expanding beyond Lev 21, examining the ways in which different genres portray disabilities throughout the Bible, and changes in the way that people with disabilities are portrayed in different times could be groundbreaking. Creating such a work might lead to

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<sup>169</sup> William Sanford La Sor et al., *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), 80.

<sup>170</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, 4-5.

<sup>171</sup> Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story*.

<sup>172</sup> Schipper, *Disability and Isaiah's Suffering Servant*.

developing a disability hermeneutic and help the bible become not so foreign to people with disabilities.<sup>173</sup>

One additional area of study is in the area of biblical ethics as it relates to people with disabilities. While there are numerous biblical ethics works, many examine Lev 19:14 and mention YHWH's concern for the disabled and less fortunate, yet in doing so portray those with a disability as weak and unable to help themselves. Although Lev 21 restricts priests with a blemish, it does not imply that the blemished priest is weak and helpless.

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<sup>173</sup> Hull, 2.

## Appendix A

### Comparing the Blemish Lists

The following table shows blemish lists of Lev 21, Lev 22 and m Bek 7. The blemishes in bold are those I felt were parallel to each other in Lev 21 and Lev 22. The blemishes from Mishnah are placed according to their closest parallel in Lev 21. I included the blemishes from the Mishnah to show some of the progression and categorization of the blemishes; further progression can be seen when comparing the 65 blemishes in the Mishnah with the 142 in the Talmud. I omitted the Talmud blemishes from this list because wording them for this chart proved quite difficult and they are best seen within their context where one can see the arguments and reasoning the sages had for including or excluding certain blemishes.

Lev 21	Lev 22	m Bek 7
<b>Blind</b> (18)	<b>Blind</b> (22)	Deaf-mute Imbecile Drunkard
<b>Lame</b> (18)	<b>Injured</b> (22)	Smitten with epilepsy
<b>Mutilated face</b> (18)	<b>Maimed</b> (22)	Bald Without eyebrows Has only one eyebrow He whose eyebrows hang down Flat nosed Eyelashed fall out Ears are too small (Simmea) Ears look like sponges (Simmen) Upper lip sticks out over the lower Lower lip sticks out over the upper Teeth are taken out Lock jaw One born from the side

<b>Limb too long (18)</b>	<b>Limb too long (23)</b>	Body is too big for his limbs Body is too small for his limbs Nose too big for his limbs Nose too small for his limbs
<b>Itching disease (20)</b>	<b>Itch (22)</b>	Swarthy One who has clean <i>negaim</i>
<b>Scabs (20)</b>	<b>Scabs (22)</b>	Red-skinned Albino Dangling warts
<b>Crushed testicles (20)</b>	<b>Crushed testicles (24)</b>	Breasts like those of a woman Swollen belly Belly button protrudes Testicles too large Penis too large One who has no testicles One who has only one testicle
Broken Hand (19)	Torn testicles (24)	An extra finger that has been cut off but has a bone in it Six fingers and toes Ambidextrous
Broken Foot (19)	Cut testicles (24)	Knocks together his ankles or his knees Swollen feet Bowlegged One who puts together his soles and his knees do not touch one another Swelling on the big toe Heel juts out backward Sole as wide as that of a goose Toe lies one above the other Webbed toes to the middle joint
Hunchback (20)	Discharge (22)	One whose head is wedge-shaped Turnip-shaped head Hammer-shaped head One whose head is sunk in Flat on the back He who has two backs and two backbones
Dwarf (20)	Limb too short (23)	Giant Dwarf
Blemish in his eyes (20)	Bruised testicles (24)	Paints both eyes in one movement Those who cover their eyes from the sun Unmatched eyes Bleary eyes Eyes as larger as those of a calf Eyes as small as those of a goose
		Progenitor Progenitor's offspring

		One upon whom a sin was committed One who killed a man He who marries women that are forbidden One who contracts corpse uncleanness
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