A Holy Priesthood

Key Verse: "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." —I Peter 2:5

Selected Scripture: I Peter 2:1-10

At the outset of our lesson, Peter admonishes that all malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speaking are forbidden among the consecrated. In light of this exhortation, we should receive the Scriptures with an innocent, childlike heart. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." (I Pet. 2:1,2) From the divine standpoint, a babe is equally considered a member of Christ's body as the more well-developed Christian. The "milk of the word" then becomes a foundation for imbibing stronger food that is essential towards growing to spiritual maturity in Christ.—Eph. 4:14-16

"If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious." (I Pet. 2:3,4) Our Key Verse then asserts the completed church, made up of these "living stones," will constitute a "spiritual house" and a "holy priesthood," the means by which mankind will be taught and blessed when the coming earthly kingdom is in operation.—Matt. 6:10

As we look at present conditions in the world, it appears that soon the saints will be united with Christ in glory as suggested by the following Old Testament reference. "Who art thou, O great mountain [present

kingdom of Satan]? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone [Christ] thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it."—Zech. 4:7

As we continue our earthly sojourn prior to the establishment of the kingdom of righteousness, there are some reminders in the Bible that God's standard for his chosen "priesthood" people has always been one of holiness, as cited in our Key Verse, though none but Jesus was able to manifest this in the flesh perfectly. One example of priestly misconduct and unholy behavior that incurred God's great displeasure was manifested by Phinehas and Hophni, the sons of Eli, Israel's high priest. In their service as under priests they forcibly took from the people more than their share of the peace offerings. Additionally, they committed immorality with women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting.—I Sam. 2:12-17,22

Eli's sons were unfaithful in performing their duties as under priests. As the Lord's servants they should have been instructors by word and example in righteousness and in demonstrating reverence for the Heavenly Father. Ultimately, however, they were slain while bearing the Ark of the Covenant as the Israelites battled the Philistines. (I Sam. 4:11) This was a clear fulfillment of an earlier verse, where Eli asks: "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall entreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them."—I Sam. 2:25

There are many lessons from the Old Testament regarding the sanctification and holiness required of Israel's priesthood. When we probe these matters further, they will reflect the importance of Paul's words: "Now these things happened to them as an example and warning to us; they were written for our instruction to admonish and equip us, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." (I Cor. 10:11, *Amplified Bible*) Let us strive for holiness. ■