

Leviticus

Lesson #14

*Everything You Wanted to Know about Sex . . .
and more!*

(Leviticus 18: 1 – 20: 27)

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

Review

If we hover above the Tabernacle and watch its operations—the Burnt Offering, Grain Offering, Peace Offering, Sin Offering and Guilt Offering—we may well be repulsed by the oceans of blood shed by an endless stream of bulls, lambs and goats. Indeed, in Hebrews 9: 22 we read: *“According to the law almost everything is purified by blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”* We might also recall the waters of the Nile River being turned to blood in Exodus 7; the meticulous attention given to menstrual blood, both normal and abnormal, in Leviticus 15; and to St. Peter’s statement that we are ransomed “with the precious blood of Christ” in 1 Peter 1: 18. Indeed, blood runs through Scripture like a crimson thread, a major motif in God’s plan of redemption.

In Lesson #13 we explored Leviticus 17 and the profound meaning of blood in our story.

Preview



Leonardo da Vinci. *La Gioconda [Mona Lisa]*
(oil on poplar wood), c. 1503-1506.
Louvre Museum, Paris.

In Leviticus 11: 14 God says: *“Be holy, because I am holy.”* Leviticus 19 sits at the very center of Leviticus and it speaks of holiness, yet Leviticus 19 is framed by chapters 18 and 20 that speak of sex; indeed, we learn that being holy has a lot to do with who we have sex with . . . and who we don’t.

In Lesson #14 we explore holiness, while taking an adventurous stroll through a sexual hall of mirrors!

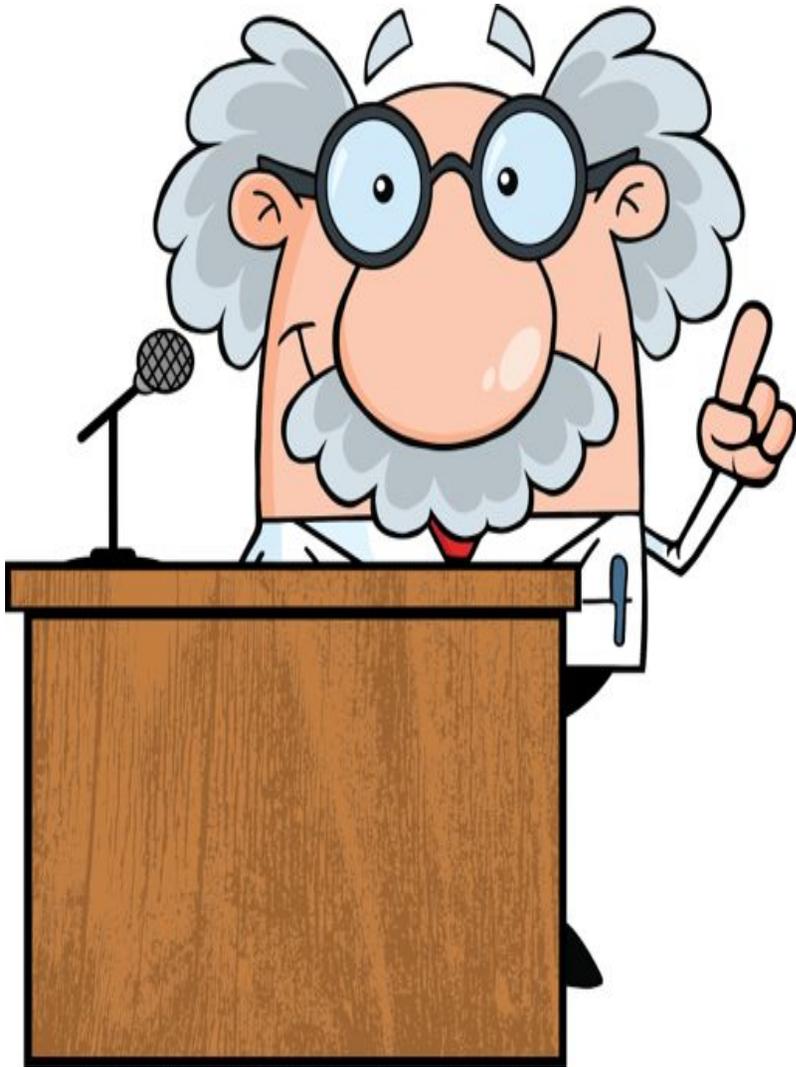


Recall the overall structure of Leviticus 17-27, the “Holiness Code”:

Prohibition against eating blood (17)
thematic bridge between the sacrificial system (1-16) and the Holiness Code (18-27)

- Sexual prohibitions (18)** **Frame**
1. **Holiness (19)**
 2. **Sexual prohibitions (20)**
 2. **Holiness precautions (21-22)**
 3. **Holiness of time (23)**
 4. **Holiness of God’s name (24)**
 5. **Holiness of the land (25)**
 6. **The covenant (26)**
 7. **The consecrations (27)**

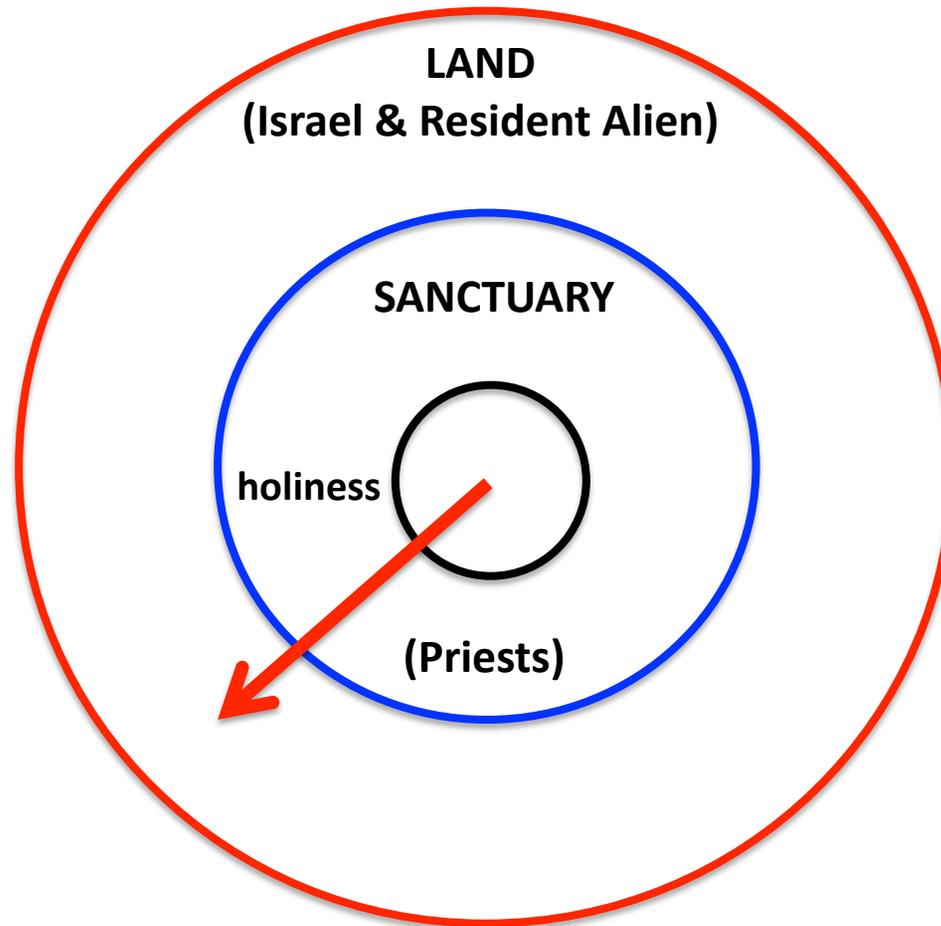
Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



Leviticus 17, the “prohibition against eating blood,” serves as a thematic bridge between the sacrificial system of 1-16 and the holiness code of 18-27. As we cross the bridge, ritual impurity expands to encompass moral impurity, and the domain of the sacred expands from the ark of the covenant through the sanctuary and priesthood, to encompass the entire land.

We might envision Leviticus 18-27 something like this:

EARTH (Humanity)



From: Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus (Continental Commentary)*, p. 249.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



Leviticus 19, which focuses on “holiness,” is framed by chapters 18 and 20, which focus on prohibited sexual relationships.

In doing so, chapters 18 and 20 touch on some of the most intimate and complicated social issues of its era, and of ours.

As we shall see, the motive behind these chapters is to protect the Israelites—especially women who live in a tribal, profoundly patriarchal culture—from the perceived vices of their day, as well as from exploitation by the men in their own family, clan and tribe.



Leviticus 18 consists of 3 parts:

A Exhortation (1-5)

B Sexual prohibitions (6-23)

- Blood relatives (6-13)
- Those related through marriage (14-18)
- Others (19-23)

A' Exhortation (24-30)



Leviticus 18 consists of 3 parts:

A Exhortation (1-5)

B Sexual prohibitions (6-23)

- Blood relatives (6-13)
- Those related through marriage (14-18)
- Others (19-23)

A' Exhortation (24-30)

Exhortation

(18: 1-5)

“The Lord said to Moses: Speak to the Israelites and tell them: **I, the Lord, am your God.** You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you once lived, nor shall you do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you; do not conform to their customs. My decrees you shall carry out, and my statutes you shall take care to follow. **I, the Lord, am your God.** Keep, then, my statutes and decrees, for the person who carries them out will find life through them. **I am the Lord.**”



- The laws in Leviticus 18 address the **Israelites**, who live in a highly structured, patriarchal society of family, clan and tribe, where women—daughters, widows, concubines—could easily be handed around to other men in the family, as the patriarch permitted.
- This happened habitually in Egypt and Canaan; it shall not happen with the Israelites.
- Why? Because **“I, the Lord, am your God,”** and I said so. (It’s repeated three times!)



Leviticus 18 consists of 3 parts:

A Exhortation (1-5)

B Sexual prohibitions (6-23)

- **Blood relatives (6-13)**
- Those related through marriage (14-18)
- Others (19-23)

A' Exhortation (24-30)

Sexual Prohibitions—Blood Relatives (18: 6-13)

“None of you shall approach a close relative to have sexual intercourse”:

- Mother
- Father’s wife
- Sister
- Granddaughter
- Half-sister
- Aunt



- The expression “having intercourse with” in our *Catholic Study Bible* is literally “**uncover [their] nakedness,**” a graphic Hebrew idiomatic expression or euphemism for “having sex with.” It is used eight times in these verses.

- It is also used in Genesis 9 when Noah became drunk and his son, Ham, “saw his father’s nakedness” (18-29). In this story, the clear implication is that Ham had sex with his father Noah, bringing Noah’s curse upon him.

- The relationships are arranged from closest to most distant within family blood relationships.



Maimonides, the greatest Rabbi of the Middle Ages, saw clearly the sexual reality of Israel’s tribal, patriarchal culture.

“All illicit unions with females have one thing in common: Namely, that in the majority of cases these females are constantly in the company of the male in his house and that they are easy of access for him and can easily be controlled by him—there being no difficulty in making them come to his presence . . . most people . . . constantly succumbed and fornicated with them.”

Mosheh ben Maimon (“Maimonides”), c. 1135-1204.

Maimonides was born in Córdoba (Spain) at the end of the “Golden Age” of Jewish culture in the Iberian Peninsula. He is buried in Tiberias, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Guide to the Perplexed, 3.49

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

A cartoon illustration of a man with brown hair, wearing a white shirt, a red tie, and blue pants. He is leaning against a vertical black line on the left side of the page. He has a thoughtful expression, with his hand to his chin.

Well, that makes sense. A family becomes quickly dysfunctional if such things happen, not to mention that such things victimize the women.

A cartoon illustration of a grey dog sitting down. It has a thoughtful expression, with its hand to its chin.

And create weird offspring!

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



Leviticus 18 consists of 3 parts:

A Exhortation (1-5)

B Sexual prohibitions (6-23)

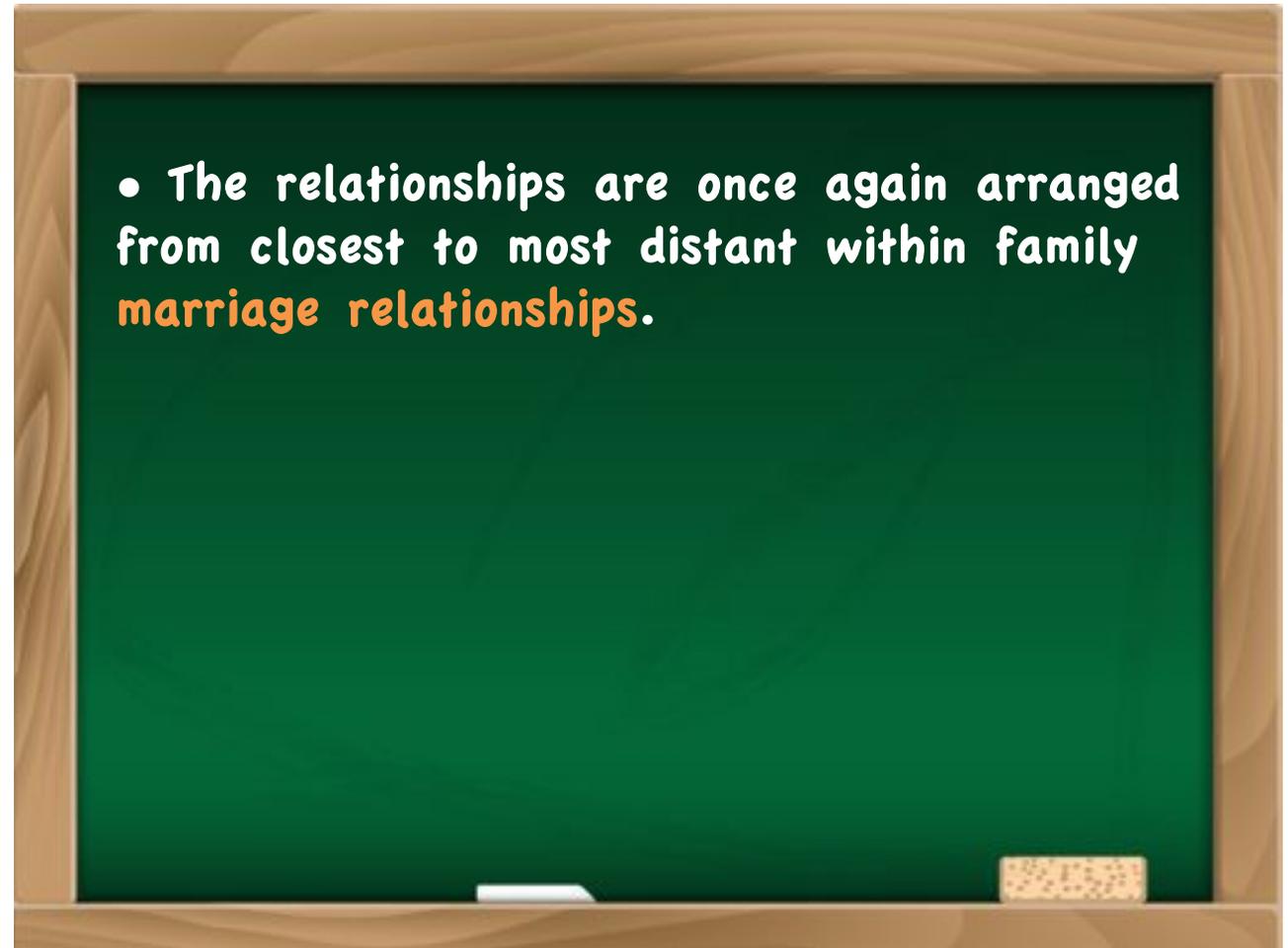
- Blood relatives (6-13)
- **Those related through marriage (14-18)**
- Others (19-23)

A' Exhortation (24-30)

Sexual Prohibitions—Related through Marriage (18: 14-18)

You shall not have sexual intercourse with your:

- **Uncle's wife**
- **Daughter-in-law**
- **Sister-in-law**
- **Mothers and daughters**
- **Step-son's daughter, and**
- **You shall not marry your wife's sister while your wife is still alive and have intercourse with her.**



- The relationships are once again arranged from closest to most distant within family **marriage relationships.**



Leviticus 18 consists of 3 parts:

A Exhortation (1-5)

B Sexual prohibitions (6-23)

- Blood relatives (6-13)
- Those related through marriage (14-18)
- **Others (19-23)**

A' Exhortation (24-30)

Sexual Prohibitions—Others

(18: 19-23)

- You shall not approach a woman to have intercourse with her while she is in her menstrual uncleanness.
- You shall not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife, defiling yourself with her.
- You shall not offer any of your offspring for immolation to Molech, thus profaning the name of your God. I am the Lord.
- You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; such a thing is an abomination.
- You shall not have sexual relations with an animal, defiling yourself with it; nor shall a woman set herself in front of an animal to mate with it; that is perverse.”



- You shall not approach a woman to have intercourse with her while she is in her menstrual uncleanness.

We covered the rationale for this prohibition in 15: 19-24.

- You shall not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife, defiling yourself with her.

No only would this constitute adultery, but it would also undermine the social fabric and cohesion of the community.



• You shall not offer any of your offspring for immolation to Molech, thus profaning the name of your God. I am the Lord.

Molech was an ancient Ammonite god worshipped by the Canaanites, Phoenicians and related cultures in North Africa and the Levant. Worship of Molech involved the human sacrifice of children by burning them to death. Even the Israelite king, Manasseh, “immolated his child by fire” (2 Kings 21: 6), and Ezekiel rails against the practice in Ezekiel 16: 20-21; 20: 26, 31; and 23: 37. Some Israelites sacrificed their children by fire to Molech in the Valley of Gehenna in Jerusalem, within eyesight of the Temple!

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



- You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; such a thing is an abomination.

This was a “hot button” topic in ancient Israel, as it is in our culture today. What—exactly—do the Hebrew Scriptures have to say about it?

Jacob Milgrom serves as our guide.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



Jacob Milgrom (1923-2010)

Professor Milgrom says:

“Does the Bible prohibit homosexuality? Of course it does, but the prohibition is severely limited . . .

- It is addressed only to Israel;
- It is a condition for residing in the Holy Land, but is irrelevant outside of it;
- It is limited to men; lesbianism is not prohibited.

Thus, it is incorrect to apply this prohibition on a universal scale.”

“In the eyes of the Bible, there is a fundamental difference between the homosexual acts of men and women: in lesbianism there is no spilling of seed. Thus life is not symbolically lost, and it is for that reason, in my opinion, that lesbianism is not prohibited in the Bible.”

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



Jacob Milgrom (1923-2010)

“Thus, from the Bible, we can infer the following: the female half of the world’s homosexual population, lesbians, are not mentioned. Over ninety-nine percent of the remaining gays, namely, non-Jews, are not addressed. This leaves the small number of Jewish gay men subject to the prohibition. To those who argue that the Bible enjoins homosexuality, a careful reading of the source text offers a fundamentally different view. While the Bible never applauds homosexuality, neither does it prohibit most people from engaging in it.”

Leviticus (Continental Commentary), p. 197.



- You shall not have sexual relations with an animal, defiling yourself with it; nor shall a woman set herself in front of an animal to mate with it; that is perverse.”





Leviticus 18 consists of 3 parts:

A Exhortation (1-5)

B Sexual prohibitions (6-23)

- Blood relatives (6-13)
- Those related through marriage (14-18)
- Others (19-23)

A' Exhortation (24-30)

Sexual Prohibitions—Exhortation

(18: 24-30)

“Do not defile yourselves by any of these things, because by them the nations whom I am driving out of your way have defiled themselves. And so **the land** has become defiled, and I have punished it for its wickedness, and **the land** has vomited out its inhabitants. You however, must keep my statutes and decrees, avoiding all these abominations, both the natives and the aliens resident among you—because the previous inhabitants did all these abominations and **the land** became defiled; otherwise **the land** will vomit you out also for having defiled it, just as it vomited out the nations before you. For whoever does any of these abominations shall be cut off from the people. Heed my charge, then, not to observe the abominable customs that have been observed before your time, and thus become impure by them. **I, the Lord, am your God.**”

LOGOS BIBLE STUDY.COM



- Notice that the main thrust of the concluding exhortation is **the land**. In the chapters on sacrifice, sin pollutes God's sacred space; now we see that it has expanded beyond the Tabernacle to pollute the land itself.
- In addition, in the chapters on sacrifice, holiness was enjoined upon only the priests; now holiness has been enjoined upon all the Israelites.
- Again, the Israelites must obey these commands, for **"I, the Lord, am your God"** . . . and I said so: to obey is life; to disobey, death.



As we turn to Leviticus 19, we find a practical guide to holiness:

- Sexual prohibitions (18)
- 1. **Holiness (19)**
- Sexual prohibitions (20)
- 2. Holiness precautions (21-22)
- 3. Holiness of time (23)
- 4. Holiness of God's name (24)
- 5. Holiness of the land (25)
- 6. The covenant (26)
- 7. The consecrations (27)

Frame



Leviticus 19 opens with God telling the Israelites: *“Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.”* That’s a tall order!

Unlike the previous chapters in Leviticus, chapter 19 appears to be a miscellany of laws, addressed to individuals, as well as to the community as a whole, and the collection ranges from the mundane to the profound, enabling the common person to attain a degree of holiness heretofore restricted to the priests.

Although a miscellany, Leviticus 19 is simply structured with an opening and closing, framing eighteen units:

Leviticus 19—“Holiness”



“The Lord said to Moses: Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy” (1-2)

1. Honor parents (3)
2. No idols (4)
3. Proper fellowship offerings (5-8)
4. Care for the poor (9-10)
5. Do not steal or lie (11-12)
6. No exploitation (13-14)
7. No partiality (15-16)
8. Love your neighbor (17-18)
9. Do not mix animals/crops (19)
10. No sex with someone else’s slave (20-22)
11. Harvesting fruit (23-25)
12. No mutilation (26-28)
13. No prostitution (29)
14. Observe Sabbath (30)
15. No séances (31))
16. Respect elderly (32)
17. Respect aliens (33-34)
18. Honest measures (35-36)

“Be careful, then, to observe all my statutes and decrees. I am the Lord” (37)



We'll sample a few to get an idea.

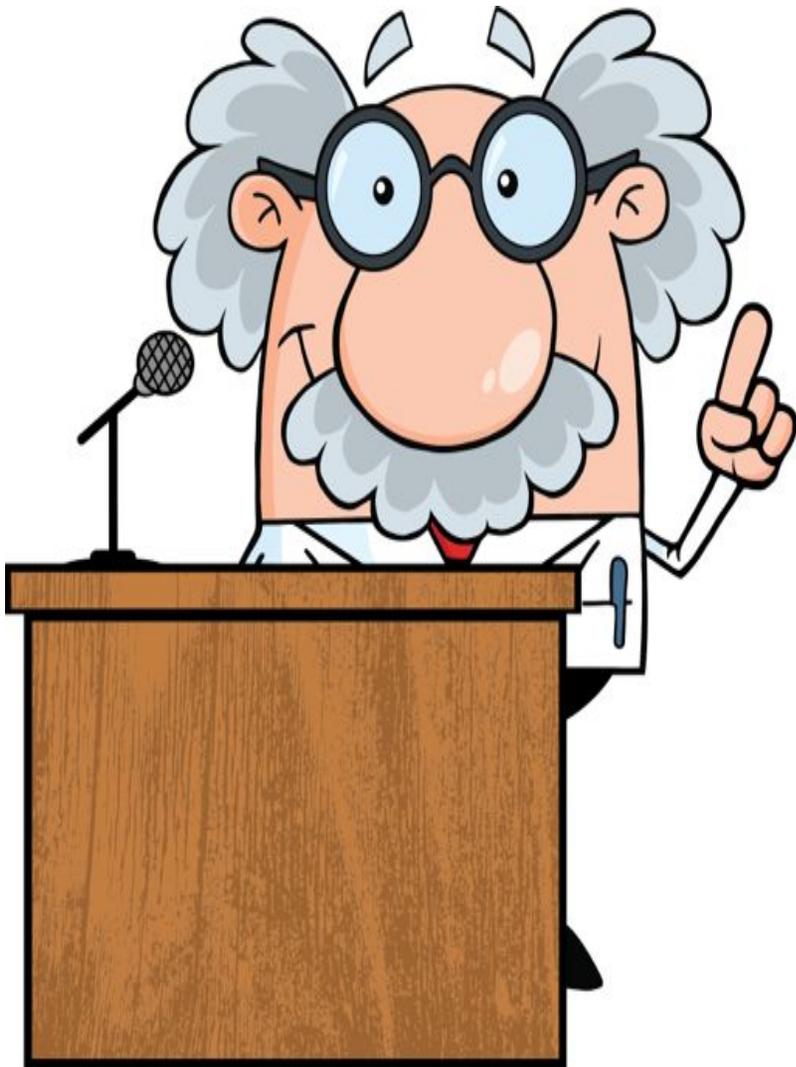
1. ***“Each of you revere your mother and father, and keep my sabbaths”*** (v. 3).

The foundation of living a holy life begins with honoring our fathers and mothers, those who gave us life. Its corollary is observing the Sabbath, which God gave commanded to make us aware of our dignity as human beings: we are not to be slaves to anything, including time.

2. ***“Do not turn aside to idols, nor make molten gods for yourselves”*** (v. 4).

Obviously, we are not to make graven images of other gods to worship, but we can also make idols and gods of our careers, homes, possessions, political parties, and so on. God says, “Don’t do it!” We are to focus on him, viewing reality through his eyes, not through the eyes of the world.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



4. *“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not be so thorough that you reap the field to its very edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Likewise, you shall not pick your vineyard bare, nor gather up the grapes that have fallen. These things you shall leave for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God” (vv. 9-10).*

There will always be poor people among us, so we shall provide for them by leaving a 10% “fringe” around our fields when we harvest them, and when harvesting we make only one pass at a field, leaving the gleanings for the poor. In this way we will care for the poor, but we will not destroy their dignity by giving them handouts: they have to work to harvest and glean our field for themselves.

We have a perfect example of this in the book of Ruth, with Ruth gleaning in the field of Boaz behind the harvesters to support herself and her mother-in-law, Naomi.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



6. ***“You shall not exploit your neighbor. You shall not commit robbery. You shall not withhold overnight the wages of your laborer. You shall not insult the deaf, or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but you shall fear your God. I am the Lord” (vv. 13-14).***

All three examples are means of exploiting our neighbor: 1) robbing him; 2) withholding his wages; and 3) insulting the deaf or placing a stumbling block in front of the blind.

Each one takes advantage of a person’s vulnerabilities: 1) robbery is entry by stealth into another’s home when his guard is down; 2) withholding wages from an employee is keeping what is rightfully his, simply because you can; and 3) insulting the deaf or tripping up the blind obviously takes advantage of a handicapped person’s disability.

ALL people should be treated with dignity, respect and fairness, regardless of their status.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



8. ***“You shall not hate any of your kindred in your heart. Reprove your neighbor openly so that you do not incur sin because of that person. Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your own people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (vv. 17-18).***

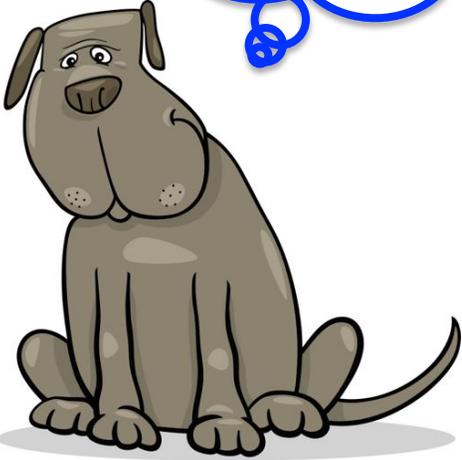
Hating another person can take many forms, from overt hostility to harboring a grudge in your heart. God calls us to be forthright. If you have something against your neighbor, get it out in the open, discussing it with him or her face to face, not bottling it up inside and letting your disagreement turn to anger, the anger congealing into hatred. Holding a grudge and then taking revenge result from such behavior. In the end, they destroy you, not your neighbor. Rather, you should “love you neighbor as yourself.”

That is precisely what Jesus said when asked about the greatest commandment. Quoting Deuteronomy 6: 5 he said the greatest commandment is this: *“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”* The second is from Leviticus 19: 18: *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matthew 22: 34-40).

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



I get the idea! This little miscellany in Leviticus 19 is a rich collection of sapiential pearls strung on a silver cord, wise sayings that reflect a very high moral and ethical plain.



Fancy talker!

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



As we noted, Leviticus 18 and 20 frame chapter 19, the “holiness” chapter. Leviticus 18 addresses sexual behavior, while Leviticus 20 addresses punishment for some of the worst violations of biblical law, arranged from the greatest violation to the least:

1. **Sacrificing to Molech (1-5);**
2. **Necromancy (worshiping or consulting the dead), (6-8, 27), and;**
3. **Sexual offences (9-21).**

Sacrificing to Molech

(20: 1-5)

“The Lord said to Moses: Tell the Israelites: Anyone, whether an Israelite or an alien residing in Israel, who gives offspring to Molech shall be **put to death**. The people of the land shall stone that person. I myself will turn against and **cut off** that individual from among the people; for in the giving of offspring to Molech, my sanctuary was defiled and my holy name was profaned. If the people of the land condone the giving of offspring to Molech, by failing to **put the wrongdoer to death**, I myself will turn against that individual and his or her family, and I will **cut off** from their people both the wrongdoer and all who follow this person by prostituting themselves with Molech.”



• As we saw in 18: 21, God strictly forbids the human sacrifice of children to Molech by burning them to death. Apparently, such behavior was more common than we might think. Sacrifice to Molech is mentioned 16 times in the Hebrew Scriptures as endemic. Psalm 106: 37-38 offers an example:

*They sacrificed to demons
their own sons and daughters,
Shedding innocent blood,
the blood of their own sons and daughters
Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan
desecrating the land with [bloodguilt].*

“Bloodguilt” is murder.



- In Leviticus 20 worship of Molech incurs both **death** and being “**cut off**” [kar’et] from the people; that is, God ending one’s family line. This is the most severe punishment in all of Scripture.

- Recall the death of the first born in Exodus. We noted at the time that the Egyptian first born were dedicated to the Egyptian gods. By the God of Israel killing the first born of Egypt, he deprives the Egyptian gods of what is rightfully theirs, thus demonstrating his dominance over them.

In like manner, when an Israelite sacrifices a child to Molech, he deprives God of what is rightfully his, demonstrating Molech’s dominance over God.



As we noted, Leviticus 18 and 20 frame chapter 19, the “holiness” chapter. Leviticus 18 addresses sexual behavior, while Leviticus 20 addresses some of the worst violations of biblical law, arranged from the greatest violation to the least:

1. Sacrificing to Molech (1-5);
2. **Necromancy (worshiping or consulting the dead), (6-8, 27), and;**
3. Sexual offences (9-21).

Necromancy

(20: 6-8, 27)

“Should anyone turn to ghosts and spirits and prostitute oneself with them, I will turn against that person and **cut such a one off** from among the people. Sanctify yourselves, then, and be holy; for I, the Lord, your God, am holy. Be careful, therefore, to observe my statutes. I, the Lord, make you holy . . . A man or a woman who acts as a medium or clairvoyant shall be **put to death**. They shall be stoned to death; their bloodguilt is upon them.”



- The dichotomy of life/death lies at the very heart of Leviticus. Recall God saying in Deuteronomy 30: 19—“I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse.”

Necromancy—the worshiping or consulting of the dead—fundamentally contradicts the message of Leviticus. As Jesus said: “He is not the God of the dead but of the living” (Matthew 22: 32).

- Like the worship of Molech, God punishes any form of necromancy by **death** and by being **“cut off.”**



As we noted, Leviticus 18 and 20 frame chapter 19, the “holiness” chapter. Leviticus 18 addresses sexual behavior, while Leviticus 20 addresses some of the worst violations of biblical law, arranged from the greatest violation to the least:

1. Sacrificing to Molech (1-5);
2. Necromancy (worshiping or consulting the dead), (6-8, 27), and;
3. **Sexual offences (9-21).**



The sexual offences in Leviticus 20 are among the most serious of the batch in chapter 18, all of them punishable either by death, by being “cut off” or by being childless.

Cursing father or mother sets the moral and ethical stage, leading a parade of lascivious, libidinal acts:

- Sex with a neighbor’s wife (10)
- Sex with one’s step-mother (11)
- Sex with one’s daughter-in-law (12)
- Sex between two men (13)
- Sex with a woman and her mother (14)
- Sex with an animal (15-16)
- Sex with a sister (17)
- Sex during a woman’s period (18)
- Sex with an aunt (19-20)
- Sex with a brother’s wife (21)

Questions for discussion and thought

1. In Leviticus 18-20, how does God protect a woman from being sexually exploited by her family, clan or tribe?
2. What is the primary reason for obeying the sexual laws in Leviticus 18?
3. God forbids offering a child to Molech. Aside from the obvious cruelty of burning a child to death, what is the primary reason for this prohibition?
4. The “holiness laws” in Leviticus 19 are commanded of the Israelites. Should a Christian to obey them, as well?
5. The punishments for disobeying the prohibitions in Leviticus 20 include death, being “cut off” and being childless. Why are the punishments so harsh?

Copyright © 2015 by William C. Creasy

All rights reserved. No part of this course—audio, video, photography, maps, timelines or other media—may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage or retrieval devices without permission in writing or a licensing agreement from the copyright holder.