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A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

HOLY AND UNHOLY MORAL CONDITIONS (18:1–20:27)

The Place of the Passage

This section contains a general collection of laws about holiness surrounded by commands about sexual purity. It follows the same pattern as that used for purity laws earlier in the book. Because of the strangeness of some laws in this section and the stunning variety of topics addressed, this portion of Leviticus can seem bewildering in many points. However, the overarching emphasis woven through the whole section is clear: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (19:2).

The Big Picture

Because God atones for sin and dwells in the midst of his people, we are to anticipate victory over sin, separation from worldliness, and growth in godliness.

Gospel Glimpses

RESTORED TO GOD’S IMAGE. Mankind was created to live in joyful communion and shared perfection with God—in other words, to live in holiness. But sin broke our relationship with God and deformed our reflection of his likeness (Romans 3:10–19). On the one hand, Leviticus 19 convicts us of our sinful condition by its repeated emphasis on the command we cannot attain: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (19:2). However, read in its full context—namely, as part of the laws on purity (chapters 11–15) and holiness (chapters 17–20) set in orbit around the Day of Atonement (chapter 16)—the same words also minister as words of promise to the atoned: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” This is the great hope that the apostle John echoes: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. . . . Beloved, we are God’s children now, and . . . when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:1–3).

Whole Bible Connections

SEXUAL PURITY. The standard of sexual purity throughout Scripture is tied to the vision set forth in Leviticus 18 and 20. For example, II Samuel 13:1–19 tells the tragic story of Amnon’s violation of his half sister Tamar. As Amnon was about to force Tamar, she pleaded, “No, my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel” (II Samuel 13:12). Her cry was rooted in the standards of sexual purity taught in Leviticus 18. Remarkably, the parameters established in Leviticus 18 also critique the marriages of some of the patriarchs,¹ like Abraham, who married his

half sister, and Jacob, who took a “woman as a rival wife to her sister”. None of the Bible’s heroes, until Jesus, measure up to the holiness of perfect Godlikeness.

LOVING NEIGHBOR. The structure of Leviticus 19 suggests that the command to “Love your neighbor as yourself” is more than just another law on the list. In its position at the center of the list, it serves as the heart of what the chapter teaches about what it means to be holy. This significant role is further indicated by how the New Testament writers and other law experts of their day (Luke 10:25–28) regarded this verse as an important summary of the whole law.

Theological Soundings

HOLINESS. Most people think the term holiness refers to a constraining, abstract ideal. But Leviticus 19 repeatedly emphasizes that holiness is not abstract but relational. Holiness is the very likeness of God, and human holiness can be attained only by relationship to the holy God. Furthermore, since God is supremely joyful in his holiness, we are led by a passage like Leviticus 19 to regard holiness as freeing rather than constraining. Holiness is a deliverance from the misery of worldly corruption and entrance into true, divine pleasure.

Glossary of Terms

EXCOMMUNICATION. The earliest ancestors of Israel, primarily Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Please answer the following questions:

Leviticus Chapter 18

1. Who did God say He was to the Israelites? (vv. 1-2)
2. What did Egypt and Canaan have in common? (v. 3)
3. Whose practices did God tell the Israelites not to follow? (vv. 3-4)
4. What happens to the man who obeys the laws of the Lord? (v. 5)
5. Who was allowed to have sexual relations with close relatives? (v. 6)
6. What did God say about having sexual relations with one's mother? (v. 7-8)
7. What was God's command to the Israelites regarding sex with one's sister? (v. 9)
8. Why were the Israelites not allowed to have sexual relations with grandchildren? (v. 10)
9. Who is the daughter of "your father's wife"? (v. 11)
10. What were the Israelites told about sexual relations with close relatives? (v. 12-14)

11. Why were the Israelites not to have sex with daughters-in-law? (v. 15)

12. Who is dishonored if an Israelite had sexual relations with his brother's wife? (v. 16)

13. What were some of the regulations regarding sexual relations? (v. 17-20)

14. Whose name was profaned when children were sacrificed to Molech? (v. 21)

15. Who was Molech? (v. 21)

16. What was the practice in the worship of Molech? (v. 21)

17. What was considered detestable to the Lord? (v. 22)

18. With what were men and women told not to have sexual relations? (v. 23)

19. Why did the Lord tell the Israelites not to defile themselves? (v. 24-30)

20. Why do you think God gave these laws to man?

Leviticus Chapter 19

1. Why did God say for His people to be holy? (v. 1)
2. Are just the leaders of the church to be holy?
3. What does the word holy mean in this verse? How can we walk holy? (v. 1)
4. In verse 3, God says to respect whom? (v. 3)
5. What is the twofold purpose of the Sabbath? (v. 3)
6. What did the LORD God say not to turn to, or to make? (v. 4)
7. What does the word “elilim”, which was translated idol, mean? (v. 4)
8. The peace offering that could be eaten on the first or second day was, also, called what offering? (v. 5)
9. If any of it is left after the second day, what should be done with it? (v. 6)
10. What were they to do when reaping the harvest of the land? (v. 9)

11. Who were some of the grapes to be left for? What lesson do you think God is teaching in this? (v. 10)

12. Who will punish you, if you steal? (v. 11)

13. Is deafness and blindness a punishment from God? (v. 14)

14. The fruit of trees is counted as uncircumcised for how many years after planting? What is the fruit of the tree used for in the fourth year? (v. 23)

15. What is meant by not printing any marks upon you? (v. 28)

Leviticus Chapter 20

1. What false god is mentioned in verse 2? What was the punishment for giving your children to this false god? (v. 2)
2. What is worshipping a false god really? Why was everyone to stone them? (vv. 2–3)
3. What happens to those who refuse to kill someone who has been worshipping Molech? (v. 5)
4. What one word, in verse 5, tells us this is spiritual adultery? (v. 5)
5. In verse 6, who does God set His face against? (v. 6)
6. Why did God say “consecrate yourselves”? Who sanctifies us? (v. 7)
7. What shall surely happen to anyone who curses mother or father? (v. 9)
8. What is the punishment for those who commit adultery with another man’s wife? (v. 10)
9. What did the stoning death show the world?
10. Someone who slept with his father’s wife would be sinning against whom? (v. 11)

11. What is the sin called, if a man takes a wife and her mother? What is the punishment for each of the people involved in this sin? (v. 14)

12. What is this type of sin called? (v. 14)

13. If a woman approach unto any beast, and lie down there to, what shall be done to the woman and the beast? (v. 15)

14. What was the punishment for a man seeing the nakedness of his sister? What would be the way of saying this in modern language? (v. 17)

15. When was it alright to marry your brother's wife? (v. 21)

16. Why were they to keep all of God's statutes and judgements? (vv. 22–23)

17. Why had God abhorred the nations that would be driven out before the Hebrews? What does abhorred mean? (v. 23)

18. If the Israelites do not obey God, what will happen to them? (v. 23)

19. What was the Promised Land to be flowing with? (v. 24)

20. What does God say we must be in verse 26? (v. 26)