

LEVITICUS

Lesson 26 - Chapters 18 and 19

As we open our study today in Leviticus 18, this is a chapter that deals primarily with human sexuality and what is expected of Israel in that regard as opposed to what the rest of the world does during this time in history.

We read the entire chapter last week, so let's re-read only a short section this week to refresh our memories.

RE-READ LEVITICUS 18:6 - 16

Through verse 16 we're getting instructions on what constitutes incest. A man having sexual relations with a woman who was too closely related (whether biological or familial) in any of these forbidden circumstances is committing incest. Now because culture has changed so much over the centuries, and because these prohibitions and rules were introduced into an ancient Middle Eastern society, we can kind of lose the point of what it being laid out here; it was less a matter of putting binders on a predatory man looking for willing women than it was about defining who a man could MARRY and who he could not. Who a man could father children with and whom he could not. Bottom line: as much as anything, this had to do with setting boundaries around where a man could look for a wife.

And, in summary, we see that a man could not marry his own biological mother if his father died or divorced her. Nor could he marry his stepmother (his father's wife) if his father died or divorced the stepmother. The list continues with prohibitions against marrying his natural sister, his half-sister, or even a stepsister. A man could not consider as a wife his own son's daughter (a grandchild), nor that daughter's daughter.....that is, a female GREAT grandchild.

Better you look at this chart of no-no's.

I don't want to get too deep into this but considering that marital relationships in the remainder of the Bible sort of revolves around this set of commands, let's define a couple more terms: consanguineal and affinal. Basically consanguineal means one is closely related genealogically, by blood. Affinal means that the relative has, by marriage, been joined to a particular family and so there is either no genealogical, blood, relationship or it is a very distant one. From a legal standpoint, what has been set-up here in Leviticus 18 are the rules as to what constitutes consanguineal relationship, and when the relationship is distant enough to be considered affinal. This is important because back in Moses' day it was desirable to marry a family member; so the question was, just HOW DISTANT of a family member was legally

eligible to become a marriage partner. Marrying within the clan or the tribe was even promoted as a good thing, an important thing. A man marrying a cousin was seen as almost the ideal partnership. So just how close in blood relationship could one come and not violate God's laws on it? That's what Leviticus 18 establishes.

Now verse 16 talks about a man not entering into relations with his brother's wife. The thing to understand is that, in general, what is NOT being talked about here in this chapter is adultery. There would be some other reason for these sexual relations to be occurring.....and usually it was marriage to that particular woman. What is also a bit confusing is that once a man marries a woman, in some circumstances that woman's relatives become considered consanguineal relatives of the man, even though there may be NO actual blood relationship. That is because the Hebrew view was that marriage brought the man and woman together as one "flesh" (that instruction to mankind dating back to Genesis). And, therefore, if that woman was previously married and had children, those children were considered to be close blood relations even though technically they were not. So a man could not carry out a process whereby he married who then she died or he divorced her, and next marry her daughter, even if that daughter was not biologically his. This was because the Hebrew culture regarded that stepdaughter as just as much a blood relative as if she WAS biologically his own child.

I know this is detailed and can get confusing but Hebrew society was very complex, and these are things we need to understand at least on some level because we're going to have to deal with them throughout the Torah and the remainder of the Bible.

One other rule to understand: in general, as far as the OT era was concerned, men couldn't commit adultery; that was looked upon as a female crime. A man having sexual relations out of wedlock was usually looked down upon; but it was not something one would be necessarily be penalized for. Of course a man whose wife cheated on him certainly wouldn't be happy about it; in fact, he might well kill the "other man" in an honor killing (and maybe kill his wife as well) and usually it was considered justifiable killing. Anyway, Jesus kind of straightened all that flawed thinking out once He started His ministry.

As for this verse 16 and a man not being able to marry his brother's wife; there is a major exception to this rule that is introduced in Deuteronomy 25. If a man has a married brother and then the brother dies, if that dead brother's wife had not produced him a son for an heir, it became the DUTY of the surviving brother to marry her in order that she produce children IN THE NAME OF THE DECEASED BROTHER. This was considered critical in keeping intact Israelite family lines (and equally as important the ancient belief was that it was in a man's offspring that his life essence continued to exist after his physical death).

Let's re-read a bit more of chapter 18.

RE-READ LEVITICUS 18: 17 - 21

In verses 17 and 18 we move from the issue of marriage to blood relatives, to simply moral matters involving sex. For instance, a man should not marry or have sexual relations with

BOTH a woman AND her daughter (this is referring to a woman who had that daughter with another husband), nor with that woman's granddaughter. Nor, in verse 18, is a man to marry two or more sisters having them both as wives at the same time.

Before we get to the next section of Leviticus 18, let's pause momentarily and discuss something many of you are likely already thinking: didn't Abraham marry his own half-sister? And how about Israel himself.....Jacob.....that great Patriarch who married two sisters, Rachel and Leah? Well certainly this occurred before the time of Leviticus. Yet, we must ask the question: did they do something wrong? Well we have little choice but to accept that even if was not God's ideal will that they would not marry sisters or so close in family blood lines, it was His general will to allow it at the time. I cannot tell you why; but neither am I going to allegorize and make up some flowery reason or defend Yehoveh's choices. The point is, much like it was with Noah when after the flood he could eat meat but it was prohibited before that great deluge, so it is with the definition of consanguineal or close relatives when it comes to marriage; a different dynamic emerged on Mt. Sinai.

We now move further into sexual matters that are not about incest, but that God says are immoral. And as we've already studied the state of impurity that a female enters when she is on her monthly cycle, I find it interesting that it is once again brought up here, and it is lumped in not with "unclean", but with "immoral". Not that the woman is immoral for having what is but a natural bodily function.....but that the man, the husband, is doing something immoral in God's eyes to have sexual relations with his wife during that period of time when she is in the state of niddah, a state of uncleanness.

Next in verse 20 is the prohibition against a man engaging another man's wife in sexual relations. Actually, this verse is a little more explicit than what most translators have allowed: it literally says that a man is not to place his seed into his neighbor's wife. It really means the man is not to get this married woman pregnant. Besides the immorality of it all the cultural reality was that children produced from these types of illicit affairs were looked down upon, shunned, and they suffered greatly from it although they were innocent. Notice that it also says that the male who does this thing is defiled right along with the woman; that is BOTH male and female are doing something wrong and they are unclean from it. It is interesting how even the most pious of the Hebrews skipped over that part of the Law and made it Tradition that it was only women who were committing the crime of adultery. They Jewish culture also didn't appreciate it when Jesus reminded the men of their hypocrisy and sinfulness when they had affairs with women other than their wives.

Then in verse 21 we have a command that really doesn't seem to fit with all the rest; it is an order not to allow the Israelite children to be offered as human sacrifices to the Middle Eastern god Molech. Just a word here: for a long time it was thought that Leviticus had to have been written NOT sometime around the Exodus but considerably later, partially because of the mention of Molech. All evidence was that the Canaanites didn't worship Molech before about the 7th century BC.....about 6 hundred years after the Exodus. But in the last few years an altar was found that dates to the 14th century BC just outside of Amman, Jordan. And lo and behold buried underneath this altar were the skeletons of many small children and infants. One could debate whether this was an altar dedicated specifically to Molech, but it was for certain

an altar to some god or another. So it is no longer debatable that in what amounted to a section of the land of Canaan at the time of the Exodus, child sacrifice was most certainly occurring in Canaan during that era.

RE-READ LEVITICUS CHAPTER 18: 22 - end

In verse 22 we get an explicit command against homosexuality. Remember, now, this admonition was directed to males. Male homosexuality is well attested to among the ancient Canaanites even in non-Biblical records. And God says that for a man to do such thing it is, in Hebrew **to'evah**; which is usually translated as an abomination, an abhorrence.....it was the strongest possible term to describe just how terrible a transgression same-sex relations was to God. There have been found ancient depictions of Canaanite priests performing ritual homosexual acts to their gods and Yehoveh made it abundantly clear that HIS people were not to engage in such perversion. In Deuteronomy, the Hebrew term **Mehir kelev** is used to describe the wages....the monetary payment....usually paid to a homosexual prostitute; it translates as "the wages of a dog". A dog was an idiom for a male homosexual prostitute.

So there is no need for a Christian to be defensive about our stand.....or what should without reservation be our stand concerning homosexuality; it is an abomination to God, it is stated directly as such here and in a number of places in both the OT and the NT. Therefore homosexuality must not be tolerated in the Body of Christ and we should do all that we can to encourage the end of it in our society. Nobody is saying that if we have a gay daughter or son or friend that we should stop loving them or acknowledging them. But love them by praying fervently for Yehoveh to rescue them from such destructive behavior, and never by excusing it as an acceptable alternative lifestyle or by making light of it.

Finally the commands on sexuality come to a conclusion with a prohibition against bestiality; sex between a human and an animal. I don't think I need to go into detail on this one. What is interesting, though, is the REASON put forth that this is wrong.....and it is one we've encountered before. This sexual behavior is wrong because it is an act of "tevel". Usually INCORRECTLY translated as perversion it more literally means "confusion" or "improper mixing". Confusion and improper mixing is an offense to the Lord and He commands against it. The idea is that it is **confusion** to mix the species; it is improper mixing to mix man and beast. What is intended as good and proper sexual behavior WITHIN a species is to remain there. And confusion, or improper mixing, is the opposite of order and purity. Therefore confusion is not something God's people, who are to emulate God as much as a man can, are to engage in. I should mention as well that this in no way refers to a mixing of the human races. Never, ever does the Bible deal with race even though it does draw a distinction between Hebrews and gentiles; yet in reality this is also NOT about race because people of ANY race have always been perfectly welcome to join Israel. Rather this is about mixing people with animals.

Yet beyond mixing humans with animals this command DOES have implications with mixing people within the human species. Let me be clear, however, in that the concern is about the mixing of unholy people with holy people. Or in OT context the mixing of the people of Israel with anybody else who is not, and does not want to be, joined to Israel. Even then, however,

this wasn't referring to racial or genealogical purity; it was referring to people whose loyalties were to Yehoveh versus those who weren't. For from the earliest times in the Bible, foreigners.....people of other races.....were welcome to join with Israel, and welcome to marry racial Hebrews. The caveat was that they MUST give up worship of their false gods and worship only the God of Israel.

This chapter wraps up with the warning that you.....meaning the Israelites and those foreigners among them.....are not to do any of these prohibited sexual things or what happened to the Egyptians (and what is about to happen to the residents of the land of Canaan) will be divinely visited upon Israel.

This is not an idle warning and neither is it but symbolic. In verse 25 it says that "the land will become defiled" by violating these laws on sexual behavior. We have seen in Leviticus a basic principle of uncleanness developed: it is that uncleanness can and IS transmitted from people to inanimate objects and back again. Every one of the improper acts spoken against in Leviticus 18 creates ritual impurity.....uncleanness....in the violator. A sufficient number of these acts committed by a sufficient portion of the ruling population of a nation, will cause the land of that nation to become defiled....unclean. And as a result God will take action and remove that people from that land as a judgment against them. Throughout the Word Yehoveh makes it clear the land and its inhabitants are intertwined. Being exiled out of one's land, or having a nation's economy collapse, or a nation experiencing a terrible series of natural disasters wreaking havoc on it are but a few of the ways that God will cause nature itself to come against the inhabitants of a land full of wicked people who have defiled their land. And of course there is some balance point at which some acts of rebellion against Yehoveh become too much and God takes action. We don't know exactly where that point is, but it does exist. Listen to God's word to Abraham in Genesis **NAS Genesis 15:13 *And God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. 14 "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions. 15 "And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 "Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete."***

Abraham was up in the land of Canaan when Yehoveh spoke this to him. And God tells Abraham that many years into the future his descendants will go from this land to another land and become enslaved. And then later they will come out and return to the land of Canaan. What is the determining factor as to WHEN this will happen? Look at the last half of verse 16: "for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete". In other words once the Amorites have reached some level of wickedness and evil....when child sacrificing and homosexuality and sexual immorality of all kinds and more have become sufficiently widespread and accepted by the Amorites, THEN God will act by bringing Abraham's descendants.....the Israelites.....back into the land where the Amorites live, and the Amorites will be cast out and the remainder subjugated by the Hebrews.

I hope others here are as uneasy about this as I am. This is not just an ancient Bible story; this is how Yehoveh operates. Every nation on earth that has reached some level of depravity that

God determines is too much, has been terribly judged. Whether it's WWII Germany, or some of the Middle Eastern nations that have bedeviled Israel, or some currently godless European nations who are near financial collapse, the time inevitably comes when God takes action against them. How about America? How much longer will God allow our modern version of child sacrifice, abortion to go on as an acceptable national policy? How much longer will God allow homosexuality to be glorified to the point that some church denominations now openly market to gays, and even ordain them as servants of God? How much longer will God allow a relatively few people on this planet to live in a place that calls having only one car and one color TV set "poverty", while the majority of the planet goes to bed hungry? How much longer will God allow His removal from every government and public place and school and activity in our nation?

I don't know the answer. But I do know that if He will harshly judge His own set-apart people....those He calls His Precious Treasure.....then He certainly will not turn a blind eye to the rest of us.

Let's move on to Leviticus 19.

LEVITICUS CHAPTER 19

This particular chapter of Leviticus is often set apart as something rather special by the Hebrews. It's a long chapter and is often referred to as a Torah within the Torah. That is chapter 19 is a sort of mini-Torah, or a summation of the rules and regulations that form the foundation for all the other rules and regulations of the Law.

Just as we're told that the command to "love Yehoveh with all your heart, soul, and might, and to love your neighbor as yourself" is the basis upon which all the Torah Commands stand, Chapter 19 lays out what amounts to a definition of what it means to "be holy"; what a holy life looks like for one of God's people.

The ancient Rabbis taught that this chapter is to be read before the whole assembly because the Ten Commandments are embodied in it. Therefore in the same way that Moses read the Ten Commandments to the whole nation of Israel (at God's instruction), so chapter 19 is to be read before the whole congregation.

And indeed we will find direct reference to at least 6 of the 10 commandments and indirect reference to the remaining 4. Those 6 commandments begin with the one that is omitted in modern Christian canon: "I am Yehoveh your God". Yes it surprises most people to know that "I am Yehoveh your God" was the original 1st Commandment. If you'll remember back several months ago in our lesson on Exodus 20 and the Ten Commandments, I told you that the earliest Hebrew Manuscripts discovered number the Ten Commandments just as our modern Bibles do. But whereas our Christian 10 Commandments always begin with "You are to have no other gods before me" as the 1st Commandment in fact the original Scriptures make "I am Yehoveh your God" the first commandment and "you are to have no other gods" as the second.

Sometime in the 4th or 5th century A.D. the Roman Church decided to abolish the first commandment: but since the Bible clearly states that there are 10 and not 9 Commandments the Church authorities solved the problem by splitting the original second commandment into 2 commands: the first being “you are to have no other gods”, and the 2nd being “you are not to make a graven image”.

The other 5 commandments directly referred to in Leviticus 19 are the 2nd, (no other gods), the 3rd (no false oaths), the 4th (observe the Sabbath), the 5th (honor your parents), and the 8th (no stealing).

Here’s the thing: it was a sad day in Christianity when the changeover from Jewish leadership to gentile leadership of the Church became complete because at that moment those things about Scripture that felt comfortable and familiar to the gentile world became dominant, and those things about Scripture which were overtly Jewish and therefore UNCOMFORTABLE and UNFAMILIAR to gentiles were set aside. Among those Jewish things set aside was the entire Torah. And with it went the proper context for all that would follow in the Bible. Holiness and it’s supreme importance, and what God’s definition of holiness IS, was also set aside. So as we study Leviticus 19 let us each pray that God will put the admonitions contained in this chapter deep into our hearts and that He will show us how to re-apply, and **not** reinterpret, these divine ordinances into our 21st century Western culture. Because indeed we are to be holy for HE is holy.

READ LEVITICUS 19 all

Chapter 19 is the general definition of how holiness should be manifested in the life of persons set apart for Holiness.....in the OT those persons were Israel.....in the NT those persons are those who have come into union with Messiah Yeshua. Now we can have legitimate arguments over whether or not we are to follow the letter of the 613 laws and regulations set before us in the Torah; but what is **not** arguable is that the principle and pattern of what was holy in 1300 or 1400 BC.....when the Torah was first given to Moses.... is still the same today.

I’d like to quote to you a brief passage of an essay written by Joseph Hertz who was the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations during the time leading up to, and during, WWII. He says this about Leviticus 19 in general and about holiness specifically:

“Developing the idea of holiness as order, not confusion, this list (the verses of Leviticus 19) upholds rectitude and straight-dealing as holy, and contradiction and double-dealing as against holiness. Theft, lying, false witness, cheating in weights and measures, all kinds of dissembling such as speaking ill of the deaf (and presumably smiling to their faces), hating your brother in your heart (while speaking kindly to him), these are clearly contradictions between what seems, and what is.”

Or, as Professor G. J. Wenham says, “**holiness is expressed in moral integrity, which in turn is expressed by physical wholeness**”.

Bluntly: don't talk to me about the holy one, Yeshua, living in your heart at the same moment you're denying the need to live a holy life. Don't tell me that you can have the Spirit of God dwelling in you, but you see no need for obedience to God's Torah. And what is God's Torah but the spelling out of what we call "morality". Morality is what is good, as separated from what is not. No I'm not saying that we're necessarily to act out these laws established in an ancient Middle Eastern cultural context in exactly the same way they were acted out over 3000 years ago; however some things should be and other things should be brought forward as intact as possible (the Biblical Feasts for example). But the definition of what is moral and what is not was set down by God, it doesn't really have inherent cultural barriers, and thus these principles should not be altered by man.

It is interesting that Rabbi Hertz sees one of the primary defining attributes of holiness as order...again, as defined by God, not man.....as opposed to chaos and confusion because last week when we were looking at Leviticus 18 we saw that the sin of bestiality (humans having sex with animals) was wrong because it was tevel.....it was an act of confusion or improper mixing.

We're going to stop and look at a couple of instances in Leviticus 19 where "confusion" is the issue, and it takes on some interesting.....and I think profound.....applications.

After the introduction to Leviticus 19 and after the general command to "be holy for I am holy" we get reminded of 2 of the 10 Commandments of Mt. Sinai; in verse 4 Israel is told that they shall revere their father and mother and they shall "keep my Sabbaths".

What is it about one's father and mother that is so important to God? They gave you life, at least in the physical sense. And they were given the responsibility to be an authority over you in order to train you up. From a spiritual viewpoint it is similar to our relationship with Yehoveh: He gave us life, and we are to recognize His authority over us. This is the Reality of Duality in action once again. That is some principle is true in both the physical realm and in the spiritual realm simultaneously.

And of course here we find another reference to Sabbath observance put front and center. Keeping the Sabbath was a key part of God's plan for those who trust Him. Not as a part of Salvation but as obedience. As with anything God ordains Sabbath could be made into a burden and into a works based legal exercise. And in fact Sabbath DID become one of the most argued points of contention among the Jews. Not whether or not it should be observed or even WHEN it should be observed; rather the disagreements were over the details of HOW to properly observe Shabbat.

I'm not going to go into a spiel about Shabbat being the 7th day of the week and ONLY the 7th day (Saturday in our modern terminology), though it is so. What I want to point out is that Sabbath is one of those moral choices God sets before us. If you attended my lesson on Genesis 6 where we explored the source of evil and WHY and HOW it exists, then the idea of Sabbath being a moral choice is perhaps a little easier to grasp. For those who didn't hear it, it might be good if you obtained a CD or listened to it on our website; but in a nutshell the concept is that our will is that part of us that is put there by God to make MORAL choices. Will

is not about preferences.....like ice cream flavors or which deodorant soap you like best or what to have for lunch. God allows men many preferences that are neither inherently right nor wrong. But **the choice of the will** ALWAYS is about right or wrong, good or evil, obedience or disobedience. In the same way Sabbath is not about preference. HOW one **observes** Sabbath.....what exactly you eat, what you wear, where you observe it, do you light candles or not, what prayers do you recite, etc., are all a matter of preference as is made clear by Paul in Colossians 2:16. MRD **Colossians 2:16** *Let no one therefore disquiet you about food and drink, or about the distinctions of festivals, and new moons, and Sabbaths....”*

God’s Sabbaths and New Moons were no more abolished than food and drink. So along with Sabbath what we should begin to ponder is this: since our wills make moral choices and the choice is always for God or against God, and since God makes clear just what defines “for God” and “against God” (His commands and rules and ordinances), that indeed disobedience amounts to nothing less than a moral choice of our wills to go against God.

But also notice that there is some kind of connection made between honoring ones’ parents and Sabbath keeping. Not only are they the first things mentioned after the instruction to be holy as Yehoveh is holy but being in the same sentence connects them. This did not escape the eye of the great Rabbis for this particular sentence structure is intended to show that there **is** linkage between these two commands; it was demonstrating that even as honoring our parents stands as priority number one among our duties to other humans, the very first step among our duty to God and therefore towards being holy is to sanctify the Sabbath; to set it apart in our lives just as God sanctified the 7th Day, Shabbat, at the beginning of the world.

We’ll continue in chapter 19 next time.