

Leviticus Chapter 20

Verses 1-27: Here capital and other grave crimes are discussed. Many of the same issues from Chapters 18 and 19 are elaborated, with the emphasis on the penalty paid for the violation. This chapter deals with holiness in worship (verses 1-8, 27), and holiness in family relations (verses 9-26).

The laws in earlier chapters (specifically chapters 18 and 19), addressed would be offenders and specific actions, but the ones in this chapter address the entire community and give specific punishments for certain crimes, most of which receive “death” (Exodus 21:12-17). These harsh penalties were essential to prevent sin from infecting God’s people.

Leviticus 20:1 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,"

After he had delivered the above laws to him in the preceding chapter, he added penalties, to many of them. Or declared what punishment should be inflicted on the transgressors of them.

"Saying": As follows.

Verses 2-8, 27: The death penalty was prescribed for those who fell into Molech worship, which was forbidden (in 18:21). Death by stoning was also required for goring oxen (Exodus 21:28-31), necromancers (verse 27), blasphemers (24:16; 1 Kings 21:10-13), Sabbath breakers (Num. 15:35-36), idolaters (Deut. 13:10; 17:5), intransigent children (Deut. 21:21), and adulterous brides (Deut. 22:21, 24). Turning to “familiar spirits” and “wizards” would incur similar judgment. God’s people were to “sanctify” themselves (set themselves apart from the world), and “be ... holy”, because He was the One “sanctifying them”.

Leviticus 20:2 "Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever [he be] of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth [any] of his seed unto Molech; he shall surely be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones."

“Giveth any of his seed unto Molech”: Molech, the Ammonite god of the people surrounding Israel, required human (especially child), sacrifice (see note on 18:21).

Molech had been mentioned in a previous lesson. Molech is a false god. To worship Molech, or allow your children to worship this false god, is committing spiritual adultery. This crime is punishable by death. This should be a public killing, and the method would be stoning. All the people were to stone him, to show that all the congregation disapproves of this crime against God.

Leviticus 20:3 "And I will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people; because he hath given of his seed unto Molech, to defile my sanctuary, and to profane my holy name."

To worship false gods, was a very grievous sin before God. The very first of the 10 commandments says,

Exodus 20:3 "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

Jesus said the most important commandment was to love God.

Mark 12:30 "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this [is] the first commandment."

To worship a false god, is to commit spiritual adultery. In the next Scripture, you will see that all believers in Christ must be chaste virgins in the spirit.

2 Corinthians 11:2 "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present [you as] a chaste virgin to Christ."

Those who follow other gods are not chaste virgins in God's sight. In the following Scripture, we will see what God requires of the church (all who believe in Christ).

Ephesians 5:27 "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

The only way we can do this is to stay faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Leviticus 20:4 "And if the people of the land do any ways hide their eyes from the man, when he giveth of his seed unto Molech, and kill him not:"

That is, the people of the house of Israel, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan. If the friends, relations, and neighbors of such a man, though they know what he is about to do, or has done, yet they shut their eyes willfully, or look another way. Or, however, wink and connive at his wickedness, and will not discover him, and bear witness against him. Or if a court of judicature, before whom he comes, does not take the evidence of his crime, nor condemn for it. Or are negligent in punishing him as the law directs, a gift having blinded their eyes, or they careless and remiss in their duty.

"When he giveth his seed unto Molech": A crime so heinous and abominable.

"And kill him not": Do not bring witness against him, so as that he may be put to death. Or do not upon the evidence given, condemn him to death. Or do not take care to have sentence executed, by stoning him to death.

Verses 5-6: "Cut him off": This means to kill. It is synonymous with "put to death" (in verse 9).

Leviticus 20:5 "Then I will set my face against that man, and against his family, and will cut him off, and all that go a whoring after him, to commit whoredom with Molech, from among their people."

That man that sees him do the fact, and winks at it, or the judge that connives at him, and will not condemn him, as well as the man that has committed the iniquity.

"And against his family": Either the family of the witness, who could and should have testified against him, or of the judge negligent of his office, or of the man himself, whose family must be privy to so shocking an action, and were abettors of it, and aiders and assisters in it. And so Onkelos renders it, "and his helpers".

"And will cut him off": The head of the family, whether judge, witness, or the criminal himself.

"And all that go a whoring after him": That commit the like idolatry after his example, and encouraged to it by the connivance of others at it. Speaking figuratively of spiritual idolatry.

"To commit whoredom with Molech": That is, idolatry, which is spiritual whoredom, and often so called in Scripture, and with great propriety. For since God had espoused these people to himself, and was their husband, as he was from the time of his bringing them out of Egypt, and making a covenant with them (Jer. 31:32). And their sacrificing to and serving other gods being a breach of their matrimonial covenant with him, it was no other than whoredom in a spiritual sense, for which he threatens to cut them off.

"From among their people": By an immature death, even all that were guilty of such abominable actions, or made themselves accessory to them, by any ways conniving at them, either as judges or witnesses.

Notice the word whoredom in the verse above. You can easily see, as we said in the verse above, that to worship a false god, whether Molech or any other, is to commit spiritual adultery. We are the bride of Christ, to follow after any other would be spiritual adultery. This is so serious, that to know of someone committing spiritual adultery and not reporting it is a serious crime as well. Perhaps one reason this is so is because, if you do not report it, you would be saying it is alright. In the Old Testament, the father was the agent for the whole family. We can see that to neglect reporting this, would be as if he were telling his family and the world, that it was ok to commit this sin. This would make him an accessory to the sin.

Leviticus 20:6 "And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people."

The Lord strictly forbade occult practices (19:31), and consistently condemned "familiar spirits" (20:27), commanding the death penalty for those who consult them. Trafficking with Satan in any form is dangerous.

“Familiar spirits ... wizards” (see note on 19:31). “Spiritists” refers to demons (compare 20:27).

We will find that the first king of the Israelites (Saul), had this very thing happen to him when he disobeyed God and sought help from those with evil spirits. We have gone into this in a previous lesson. I will touch one more time, on who these are. Palm readers, witches and warlocks, hypnotists, and those who tell fortunes. This also includes all sorts of mind control believers. All of these things are very dangerous to get involved in. So many people today innocently get involved with some of the above and with horoscopes as well. We should not seek answers to life's problems from anyone but God.

Verses 7-8: “The Lord which sanctify you” is a translation of a divine title that means “Yahweh Who Makes You Holy”. While the people had to “sanctify” themselves and keep God’s “statutes”, God was the One who ultimately sanctified them. The process of any believer being conformed into His image is a cooperative process: His people participate in the work, but only God accomplishes it.

Leviticus 20:7 "Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I [am] the LORD your God."

By abstaining from such impious and idolatrous practices, and separating themselves from all that gave into them, as well as by observing the holy commandments of the Lord. Otherwise internal sanctification is not the work of man, but of the Lord himself (as in Lev. 20:8).

"And be ye holy": Or a separate people from all others in worship and conversation.

"For I am the Lord your God": Who is a holy God, and therefore it became them to be holy, in imitation of him (Lev. 19:2).

Sanctify means to cleanse. We are to cleanse ourselves of worldly things and follow the living God. God is the answer to all of life's problems. Be ye holy, means that we must walk in our salvation after we receive it. Notice (I Am), the LORD, and God in the verse above. We are to be holy, because He is holy. This does not mean that we might unknowingly sin sometime, it does mean that the desire of our heart is to live perfectly before God.

Leviticus 20:8 "And ye shall keep my statutes, and do them: I [am] the LORD which sanctify you."

Not only those respecting the above things, but all others, which would be a means of preserving them from sin, and of promoting holiness in their lives and conversations.

"I am the Lord which sanctify you": Who had separated and distinguished them from all other people on earth, and who had given them holy laws, as the means of holiness. And who only could and did sanctify internally, by his Spirit and grace, such or them as were sanctified in heart, as well as outwardly.

This at first glance, looks like it is the same as the one above. Notice here who makes us in right standing with God. God Himself sets us aside to follow him (sanctify).

Verses 9-10: The Ten Commandments required children to honor their parents and prohibited “adultery” (Exodus 20:12, 14). The penalty for violating either commandment was death (20:10; Exodus 21:17). God’s laws show how seriously He takes marriage and family.

Leviticus 20:9 "For every one that curseth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he hath cursed his father or his mother; his blood [shall be] upon him."

“Cursed his father or his mother” (quoting this verse and Exodus 20:12). Jesus stresses the spirit as well as the letter of honoring one’s parents, by exposing the practice of claiming that what children might provide for elderly parents could instead be donated as a gift to someone else or an institution, such as the temple (see Matt. 15:1-6). This made the word of God of none effect through human tradition or practices.

Doing the very opposite of the command to honor or to revere (compare 19:3), had fatal consequences (see Mark 7:10), where Jesus referred to this text.

The only thing that I can see in this is that a child's very existence is because of their father and mother. We are also taught to show great respect for our parents. They are in authority over us until we are grown. We must honor them all our lives. They two are what we are. Many of our traits come from our parents. Next to God, our parents love us more than anyone. They want to see us do well.

Verses 10-20: Here are the punishments for violating the prohibitions of sexual sins detailed (in 18:1-30; see Deut. 22:13-30).

Leviticus 20:10 "And the man that committeth adultery with [another] man's wife, [even he] that committeth adultery with his neighbor’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death."

Which is a breach of the seventh command (Exodus 20:14).

"Even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor’s wife": Which is only an explanation of the former clause; though the Jewish writers, as Jarchi and Ben Gersom, say this is so expressed to except the wife of a stranger, or a Gentile. But it means whether a Gentile or an Israelite. And which may be confirmed by the instance of Phinehas slaying a prince of Israel, that lay with a Midianite woman (Num. 25:6).

"The adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death": On account of her that is espoused, by strangling, with a hard napkin within a soft one. And on account of her that is

married, by casting stones. Even both the adulterer and adulteress, as the Targum. And the Jews say, strangling was thus performed. They that were strangled were fixed up to their knees in dung, and then they put a hard napkin within a soft one. And rolled it about his neck, and one drew it to him this way, and another drew it to him that way, until he expired. And there is no unlawful copulation punished with strangling, according to Maimonides, but lying with another man's wife. And who observes, that the death which is spoken of in the law absolutely, that is, without specifying any kind of death, is strangling. But stoning seems rather meant, agreeably to (Deut. 22:24).

Adultery involves the flesh. It is a very bad sin, especially for a believer in Christ, because the Spirit of God dwells within us. Then a Christian who committed adultery would include the Holy Spirit in their sin. You can easily see how bad this sin is. Spiritual and physical adultery were both punishable by death. If the woman was not a willing participant, then she was not killed. This death was by stoning, showing the utter contempt of those who commit such sin.

Leviticus 20:11 "And the man that lieth with his father's wife hath uncovered his father's nakedness: both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood [shall be] upon them."

Whether she be his mother, or another woman, as the Targum of Jonathan. That is, whether she is his own mother, or a stepmother, or whether he did this in the lifetime of his father, or after his death. Or whether she was betrothed or married, it mattered not. According to the Jewish tradition, this is a breach of the law (Lev. 18:8); and a man guilty of this.

"Hath uncovered his father's nakedness": And which is a foul and shameful piece of wickedness. The penalty follows.

"Both of them shall be put to death": By casting stones on them, as the Targum of Jonathan adds. For, as before observed, wherever the following phrase.

"Their blood shall be upon them": Stoning is meant; and so, according to the Misnah, all those were to be stoned, after mentioned, of whom this phrase is used.

Genesis 35:22 "And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard [it]. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve:"

1 Chronicles 5:1 "Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, (for he [was] the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright."

We find in these two Scriptures the horrible consequences of sleeping with your father's wife. This with Reuben happened before the law was given, or they would have been stoned to death. Even though there was no law, conscience should have told them that this was wrong. The father's wife belongs to him alone. The son that would do such a thing would be sinning against himself, against God, against the wife, and against his father.

Leviticus 20:12 "And if a man lie with his daughter in law, both of them shall surely be put to death: they have wrought confusion; their blood [shall be] upon them."

His son's wife, whether in the lifetime of his son, or after his death, or whether she was espoused or married, according to the above tradition.

"Both of them shall surely be put to death": It being a breach of the law in (Lev. 18:15); and this is the penalty annexed to it, even death.

"They have wrought confusion": Have been guilty of a shocking and shameful mixture, as Jarchi and Ben Gersom. As well as confounded the degrees of relation and affinity.

"Their blood shall be upon them": It being a capital crime, their, blood shall be shed for it. They shall be found guilty of death by stoning, as the Targum of Jonathan.

In a previous lesson, we got into the moral wrong in this. Now we see that this is so bad that it is punishable by death. In (chapter 38 of Genesis), we see this terrible act in Judah and Tamar. Read and see the outcome. This would be a sin against God and your son.

Leviticus 20:13 "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood [shall be] upon them."

Is guilty of the sin of sodomy, this is a breach of the law in (Lev. 18:22).

"Both of them have committed an abomination": He that lies, and he that is lain with, both consenting to perpetrate the abominable wickedness. Which may well be called an abomination, being contrary to nature, and more than brutish. For nothing of that kind is to be found among brutes.

"They shall surely be put to death": If he that is lain with is not forced, as Aben Ezra observes.

"Their blood shall be upon them": Be slain by stoning, as the above Targum.

Abomination in the verse above, means disgusting. This is more than just a sin. Homosexual activity is so disgusting to God, that it is the one sin where God turns them over to a reprobate mind.

Romans 1:27-28 "And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet." "And even as they did not like to retain God in [their] knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;"

Homosexuality is not an alternate life style; it is a disgusting sin unto God. They were not just put to death, but their blood was upon themselves for such a disgusting sin.

How can we view this so lightly today? GOD NEVER CHANGES.

Leviticus Chapter 20 Questions

1. What awful false god is mentioned in verse 2?
2. What was the punishment for giving your children to this false god?
3. Was this punishment just for Israelites who committed this sin?
4. What is worshipping a false god really?
5. Why was everyone to stone them?
6. Which of the ten commandments covers false gods?
7. What did Jesus say was the first commandment?
8. What must all believers in Christ be?
9. What is meant by this statement?
10. Whose bride are the Christians?
11. What happens to those who refuse to kill someone who has been worshipping Molech?
12. What one word, in verse 5, tells us this is spiritual adultery?
13. In verse 6, who does God set His face against?
14. Who was the first king of Israel?
15. What terrible sin did he commit?
16. What are some modern practices that are covered in familiar spirits?
17. Why did God say “sanctify yourselves”?
18. Who sanctifies us?
19. What shall surely happen to anyone who curses mother or father?
20. What is the punishment for those who commit adultery with another man's wife?
21. Why is it worse for a Christian to commit adultery?
22. What did the stoning death show the world?

23. What happened to Reuben, when he slept with his father's concubine?
24. Why was Reuben not killed for this sin?
25. Someone who slept with his father's wife would be sinning against whom?
26. Who were the two in Genesis 38, where the father slept with his daughter-in-law?
27. What was the usual punishment for this sin?
28. What one word does God call the sin of homosexuality?
29. In this particular verse, what does abomination mean?
30. God turns those who commit this sin over to a _____.
31. Is homosexuality, an alternate life style?
32. How can we view this so lightly today?