

Study 29: Leviticus, Part 2 Leviticus 16-20

Two weeks ago, we read about the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), which pictures the sacrifice of Christ magnificently. On this day, a trumpet was blown, the **last trumpet** in the series of feasts in Israel, and it was also on this day that the year of Jubilee began every 50th year, during which all debts were cancelled.

Leviticus 16 [Verses 23-28 give further instructions regarding the disposition of the sacrificial remains (they are to be burned outside the camp), and for the man who releases the “scapegoat.”] 29 “... On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves [i.e. fast] and not do any work—whether native-born or a **foreigner residing among you**— 30 because **on this day atonement will be made for you**, to cleanse you. [In other words, Gentiles could also receive the atonement!] Then, before the Lord, **you will be clean from all your sins**. 31 It is a day of sabbath rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance. 32 The priest who is anointed and ordained to succeed his father as high priest is to make atonement. He is to put on the sacred linen garments 33 and make atonement for the Most Holy Place, for the tent of meeting and the altar, and for the priests and all the members of the community.

34 “This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites.” And it was done, as the Lord commanded Moses.

Leviticus 17 [Chapters 17-26 are sometimes called the “Holiness Code” because it contains regulations designed to make the whole nation holy (not just the priests). The people are told that if they sacrifice an animal outside of the tabernacle,] 4 ...that person shall be considered guilty of bloodshed; they have shed blood and must be cut off from their people. [...] 7 They must no longer offer any of their sacrifices to the goat demons [or *idols*] to whom they **prostitute** themselves. This is to be a lasting ordinance for them and for the generations to come. [...]“I will set my face against any Israelite or any foreigner residing among them who eats blood, and I will cut them off from the people. 11 For **the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves** on the altar; **it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life** [or *atonement by the life in the blood*]. 12 Therefore I say to the Israelites, “None of you may eat blood, nor may any foreigner residing among you eat blood.”

Leviticus 18 The Lord said to Moses, 2 “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘I am the Lord your God. [In the ancient Near East, this was the standard way of beginning a list of legal injunctions that came from a king, e.g., “I am so-and-so, the great king of all the land of such-and-such...”] 3 You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. 4 You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the Lord your God. 5 Keep my decrees and laws, for the person who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord. [There follows a list of forbidden sexual relationships—basically, no marriage between close relatives. This may have been because by this time, genetic defects began showing up in people that married close relatives. Other prohibitions include having sex with a woman during her time of menstruation, having sex with your neighbor’s wife, participating in sodomy, and bestiality (v 23), and sacrificing your children to **Molek**. Molech (alternate spelling) was a Canaanite god, whose name is spelled the same as the Hebrew word for “king” (*melech*), but vocalized using the vowels from the Hebrew word for “shame” (*bosheth*). This practice of substituting vowels is similar to the name Baal-zebub. It probably meant “lord of heaven,” but the way the Hebrews pronounced it, it became “lord of flies.” Later, in their history, apostate Israelites used the valley of Hinnom (from which comes the name “Gehenna,” i.e., the “lake of fire”) as the place to offer child sacrifices to Molech. In order to appease this “god,” they would burn their own children to death (see: (2 Chr. 28:3, 33:6; Jer. 7:31, 19:2–6). According to Rabbinic tradition, the idol of Molech, which had the **head of a bull**, was made of brass and heated to a high temperature. The child was then thrown onto its outstretched hands where it died. The screams of the children who were being sacrificed was covered up by loud drums and flutes that were played by the priests. It may have been Molech that is referred to in 2 Kings 16:3, where it says that Ahaz, king of Judah, “followed the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.” Why would this ever become a practice in Israel? Desperation to appease the Lord’s anger by offering the most precious thing they had? Or, was it possibly a misinterpretation of the command given by the Lord in Ex 13:12: “you are to offer to the Lord the first offspring of every womb”?)]

24 “Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. 25 Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. 26 But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the foreigners residing among you must not do any of these detestable things, 27 for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. 28 And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.

29 “Everyone who does any of these detestable things—such persons must be cut off from their people. 30 Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the Lord your God.”

Leviticus 19 The Lord said to Moses, 2 “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: **‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.** [Here, the Lord reiterates and elaborates on the 10 Commandments:]

3 “Each of you must respect your mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God.

4 “Do not turn to idols or make metal gods for yourselves. I am the Lord your God.

5 “When you sacrifice a fellowship offering to the Lord, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf. 6 It shall be eaten on the day you sacrifice it or on the next day; anything left over until the third day must be burned up. 7 If any of it is eaten on the third day, it is impure and will not be accepted. 8 Whoever eats it will be held responsible because they have desecrated what is holy to the Lord; they must be cut off from their people.

9 “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God.

11 “Do not steal.

“Do not lie.

“Do not deceive one another.

12 “Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord.

13 “Do not defraud or rob your neighbor.

“Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight.

14 “Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord.

15 “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

16 “Do not go about spreading slander among your people.

“Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. [Literally: “You shall not stand over the blood of your fellow man,” i.e., don’t just stand around while someone is being killed. The implication is that if you do nothing, you are complicit in the crime.] I am the Lord.

17 “Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. [Notice that *not* reproving is seen as “hating” your neighbor. This is why evangelism is seen as a form of “loving your neighbor.” You are, in a sense, reproving them, but also giving them the invitation to receive life everlasting.]

18 “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but **love your neighbor as yourself.** I am the Lord.

19 “Keep my decrees.

“Do not mate different kinds of animals.

“Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed.

“Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material. [Deut 22:11 says, “Do not wear clothes of wool and linen woven together.” This may be a way of saying they are not to mix their religion with any others. (This is called “**syncretism**,” defined as “the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought.”)]

20 “If a man sleeps with a female slave who is promised to another man but who has not been ransomed or given her freedom, there must be due punishment. Yet they are not to be put to death, because she had not been freed. [If this happened to a woman who was betrothed, but not a slave, both she and the man would be subject to capital punishment. It may be that the woman in

this case, being a slave, may not have had a choice in the matter.] 21 The man, however, must bring a ram to the entrance to the tent of meeting for a guilt offering to the Lord. 22 With the ram of the guilt offering the priest is to make atonement for him before the Lord for the sin he has committed, and his sin will be forgiven.

23 “When you enter the land and plant any kind of fruit tree, regard its fruit as forbidden [Hebrew: *uncircumcised*]. For three years you are to consider it forbidden [Hebrew: *uncircumcised*]; it must not be eaten. 24 In the fourth year all its fruit will be holy, an offering of praise to the Lord. 25 But in the fifth year you may eat its fruit. In this way your harvest will be increased. I am the Lord your God. [Apparently, waiting until the 4th year to harvest the fruit makes good horticultural sense, and is practiced even today by those who grow fruit trees.]

26 “Do not eat any meat with the blood still in it. [Literally, “You shall not eat over the blood.” This may have been a form of divination, during which the person would eat a ritual meal while staring into a container of blood, hoping to conjure up the spirits of the dead. This would tie it in to the next part of the verse:]

“Do not practice divination or seek omens.

27 “Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard. [Like not harvesting the corners of the field.]

28 “Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put **tattoo marks** on yourselves. I am the Lord.

29 “Do not degrade your daughter by making her a prostitute, or the land will turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness.

30 “Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the Lord.

31 “Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God.

32 “Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord.

33 “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. 34 The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

35 “Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. 36 Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah [a dry measure having the capacity of about 3/5 of a bushel or about 22 liters] and an honest hin [a liquid measure having the capacity of about 1 gallon]. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt.

37 “Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am the Lord.”

Leviticus 20 The Lord said to Moses, 2 “Say to the Israelites: ‘Any Israelite or any foreigner residing in Israel who sacrifices any of his children to Molek is to be put to death. The members of the community are to stone him. 3 I myself will set my face against him and will cut him off from his people; for by sacrificing his children to Molek, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. 4 If the members of the community close their eyes when that man sacrifices one of his children to Molek and if they fail to put him to death, 5 I myself will set my face against him and his family and will cut them off from their people together with all who follow him in **prostituting** themselves to **Molek**. [God considers His people to be His “wife,” having made covenant vows to Him. Therefore, any form of idolatry is “adultery” and “prostitution.” See, e.g.: Isa 1:21; Jer 2:20; 3:1-3; Ezk chapters 16 and 23; Hos 9:1; Rev chapter 17 and Rev 19:2.]

[Verses 10-21 reiterate the prohibited sexual relations stated in chapter 18].

22 “Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not **vomit you out**.

25 “You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean animals and between unclean and clean birds.26 **You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.**

27 “A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.”