The Book of Leviticus

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Section Outline

I. Sacrificial System (Leviticus 1–7)
II. Ministry of the Priesthood (Leviticus 8–10)
III. Laws of Purification (Leviticus 11–15)
IV. Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16)
V. Covenant Ordinances (Leviticus 17–24)
   A. Sanctity of Blood (chapt. 17)
   B. Sanctity of Marriage (chapt. 18)
   C. Sanctity of Societal Ethics (chapt. 19)
   D. Sanctity of Justice (chapt. 20)

B. Sanctity of Marriage (18:1-30)

Lewdness (zimmah: 18:17; 19:29; 20:14): That which is shameful and infamous behavior. Especially applied to fornication and incest.

Abomination (to’evah: 18:22, 27, 29): That which is detestable, loathed, abhorrent, and offensive; an atrocity.

Perversion (tevel: 18:23; 20:12): That which is a contamination or confusion. Used only of bestiality and incest.

1. Biblical Foundation (18:1-5)

☐ Divine authority expressed in the identity of the Lord (vv. 1-2). See vv. 4, 6, 21, 30.

☐ Israel must be doers of the Law of Moses (vv. 3-5).
  ✔ It is a matter of covenant loyalty, not just sound advice.
This is what Paul meant as “the works of the law” (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5). Such works do not save from sin or bring forgiveness (Titus 3:5; Phil 3:8-11).

Cp. Ephesians 2:8-10; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; James 1:22.

Obedience produces progressive sanctification (see John 17:17).

Ephesians 5:25-27.

2. Prohibition of Marriage with Close Relations (18:6-18)

Mother (v. 7), step-mother (v. 8), sister or step-sister (v. 9), grand-daughter (v. 10), half-sister (v. 11), aunt (vv. 12-14), daughter-in-law (v. 15), sister-in-law (v. 16), step-daughter or step-grand-daughter (v. 17), sister-in-law as concubine (v. 18).

3. Prohibition of Other Sexual Relations (18:19-23)

During menstruation (v. 19; 15:19-30). Uncleanness disqualifying from access and service to God in the Tabernacle (cf. 15:31; 20:18). Willful disregard changes the situation from mere contamination to outright rebellion against God.

Adultery (v. 20; cf. 20:10).

Child sacrifice or prostitution (v. 21; cf. 20:2-5).

Homosexuality (v. 22; cf. 20:13).

Bestiality (v. 23; cf. 20:15-16).

4. Restatement of Biblical Foundation (18:24-30)

God removed the inhabitants of the land of Canaan for such sins (vv. 24-25; see Gen 15:16).

If Israel acts like the Canaanites, God also will remove them from the land (vv. 26-28).

These are capital crimes against God (v. 29; see chapt. 20).

Divine authority expressed in the identity of the Lord (v. 30; cp. vv. 1-2). This inclusio brackets the entire chapter.

C. Sanctity of Societal Ethics (19:1-37)

“The chapter provides a ‘rapid panoramic tour’ of what it means to be holy.”

1. Call to Holiness as Summary of the Law and Levitical Sacrifices (19:1-8)

Holiness is the goal of the Ten Commandments (vv. 1-4).

See 1 Peter 1:15-16.

Holiness is the goal of the levitical sacrifices (vv. 5-8). The “peace (or, fellowship) offering” is the culmination of levitical ritual indicating fellowship both with God and with man.

See 7:11-38. These were the last offerings God prescribed.
2. **Call to Love as Summary of the Law (19:9-18)**
   - God prohibits deeds that demonstrate a lack of concern for one’s fellow human being (vv. 9-16).
     - Dealing with the love and care of others is a natural topic following the peace/fellowship offerings.
   - God demands love for one’s fellow human beings (vv. 17-18).
     - Compare Hebrews 13:15-16.

3. **Call to Holiness in the Details of the Law (19:19-32)**
   - Note the introductory declaration (“You are to keep My statutes,” v. 19).
   - Note the possibility of atonement and forgiveness (vv. 21-22).
   - Note the ultimate spiritual attitude is the fear of the LORD (vv. 31-32).
     - See 2 Corinthians 5:11.
     - Revelation 15:3-4.

4. **Call to Love in the Details of the Law (19:33-37)**
   - Note the emphatic repetition of the command (“love”) and its comparison (“as yourself”) (vv. 18 and 34). Proves that “neighbor” (v. 18) includes all people, even strangers (vv. 33-34).
   - Note the example applying even to the area of commerce or business (vv. 35-36).
   - Note the inclusio created by vv. 19 and 37 (cp. 18:4-5, 26).

D. **Sanctity of Justice (20:1-27)**

**Relationships between Chapters 18 and 20:**
- Sins are introduced in chapter 18, but the penalties are included in chapter 20.
- Chapter 18 is apodictic (“Do not …” = prohibition) while chapter 20 is casuistic (“If a man …” = case law).
- Both chapters demonstrate the close connection between idolatry and immorality (especially sexual immorality).

1. **Punishment in Cases of Idolatry (20:1-8)**
   - Idolatry is the ultimate rebellion against God and violation of His covenant.
   - Progressive, daily holiness (sanctification) is the result of obedience to God’s Word.
2. **Punishment in Cases of Immorality (20:9-21)**

- Immorality and sexual sin is the natural consequence of disobedience to or disrespect for one’s parents (v. 9).
  - See Ephesians 6:1-3.

- Violations of God’s laws are punished by direct capital punishment at the hands of fellow citizens (vv. 9-16; cp. vv. 4-5), by a premature death at the hands of God (vv. 17-19), and by childlessness (vv. 20-21).
  - In some cases God requires the community to expel the offender and to leave their demise to God (see 1 Cor 5:1-13; Heb 10:29-31).

3. **How One Lives Does Make a Difference (20:22-27)**

- The ultimate punishment for Israel as a whole will be exile from the Promised Land (v. 22; see 18:25-28).

- Israel is not to act like the heathen (v. 23; see 18:3).

- Since it makes a difference to God, it should make a difference to Israel—they are to be distinct from the heathen (vv. 24-26). Review the lesson outline for Leviticus 11–15.

- Note the close of the chapter returns where it began with the condemnation of idolatry (v. 27; see vv. 1-6). This inclusio re-emphasizes the spiritual crime of rebellion against God and violation of His covenant.

**Summary of Applications from Leviticus 18–20:**

- We must obey the Word of God rather than conform ourselves to the practices of unbelievers (see Eph 4:17-24; Rom 12:1-2; James 1:22).

- Immorality is connected closely to idolatry, because both are outright rebellion against God and a practical denial of His lordship (see Eph 5:5; 1 Cor 6:9).

- Immorality also is connected closely to disobedience to or disrespect for parents (see 2 Tim 3:1-5).

- Love for one’s fellow human being is absolutely inconsistent with immorality (see 1 Thess 4:1-12).

- Capital punishment for violation of God’s teaching regarding holiness and love indicates the serious nature of disobedience (see Rom 6:23; 1 Cor 5:5; 1 John 5:16).

Believers must avoid reverting to pagan practices. Churches must never approve of practices contrary to the Word of God.