

BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger... John 6:35

LEVITICUS 19-20

Leviticus, *Vayikra* in Hebrew, means “He called,” taken from the first words of the book— but it is also known as *Torat Kohanim*, “instructions for the priests”. This title defines Leviticus as a guidebook for the proper worship of the God of Israel—how they were to express their loyalty to the Lord. Micah 6 poses the question: With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings? ... “What does the LORD require of you, but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? Ultimately these are the things desired by God more than sacrifice. How Israel was to live as a holy nation is the theme of Leviticus, and this chapter opens the Torah Portion called, *Kedoshim*, which is Hebrew for “holy ones”.

CHAPTER 19 – You Shall be Holy

The structure of chapter 19 is considered one of the most bewildering in the whole Torah. It contains a vast and varied selection of divine commandments which embody many core principles of Torah life, but without a particular theme. It contains the major moral commands, like: love your neighbour as yourself; honour your father and your mother; do not steal. It contains social commands that lead to a just and compassionate society, like: do not cheat your neighbour; treat the poor and the powerful person alike; don’t be a tale bearer. It also contains some seemingly irrational commands such as: do not shave around the sides of your head; do not make tattoo marks on yourself, or use linen and wool in the same garment.

So what are we to make of this? The answer lies in the first two verses:

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”

You shall be Holy — What does it mean to be Holy?

First of all: “What is holiness? And how can flesh and blood be expected to be holy as God Himself is holy? Surely holiness is precisely what separates God from human beings—He is totally transcendent, eternal, all-powerful beyond our understanding. How could following these laws possibly make one holy? The Torah’s definition of holiness comes out of the truth that God is completely separate from all other things—His people are also called to be a people set apart.

The words: “I am the LORD your God” feature heavily in this chapter – continually reminding them of who **He** is, and who **they** are in relation to Him.

“You shall be holy” – this is not only a command to be holy, but can also be read as a promise and a guarantee – which is a beautiful way to look at this. God has faith in man’s ability to be holy. He took them out of Egypt to be God to them—to be a life force that sustains them... SO THAT they will have the ability to sanctify Him in this world. And how are they to do that? Through thought, word and deed—by living in obedience to his ways as revealed in His commandments. That also means developing Godly characteristics: being gracious, merciful, forgiving and just. Holiness is not just what we do but also the kind of person we become—it is a process of character formation and moral

growth. We also find specific reference to this in the New Testament: 1 Peter 1:15-16 "...but as He who called you is holy, you also be **in all your conduct**; because it is written, "BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

As we saw in our last study, Israel was called to be a nation *set apart* to sanctify God, to represent His holiness on Earth. They must sanctify themselves *in order to* sanctify God in this world. These words are spoken to the whole assembly. Each one is called to surrender himself to the whole, as part of a unified nation, not emphasizing their individuality at the expense of others, or at the expense of the whole. The nation is holy when it is unified under one code of ethics – serving one God.

Q. Did Israel remain a people set apart? What obstacles did they face?

Q. Has the Church displayed this "set apartness"? What obstacles do we face?

A Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation

We will recall that in Exodus 19, God said to the people, through Moses: "if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant... then you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." We have witnessed the sin of the Golden Calf and the consequent setting up of the Levitical priesthood since that time, but God is still charging the people with laws and precepts in Leviticus to enable them, collectively, to be a holy, priestly nation. That is why the commands we read here cover every aspect of their lives. It's not just a call for obedience, it is a declaration that if they live their lives according to these precepts they will merit to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

We would also be familiar with Peter's reference to "a royal priesthood and a holy nation":

1 Pet. 2:5-9 You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.... 9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...

The Church has traditionally read 1 Peter as speaking to Christians, but there are a number of strong reasons to consider that the recipients of Peter's first letter were particularly Jewish Christians.¹ In his letter, Peter draws on many scriptures from the Hebrew Bible which would have been familiar to Jewish believers. I am not saying that converted Gentiles cannot apply these truths to themselves, but simply that it is best understood against the backdrop of an audience of Jewish believers .

As we know, it was always God's plan that all men everywhere would walk in His ways. The New Testament writers well understood this and one can only imagine how excited they must have been to share the Good News with Jew and Gentile alike.

Although the Jewish people did remain "a people set apart" in many respects, it was not until their Messiah came that those who received the Good News, were set free and empowered by the Holy Spirit to become a kingdom of priests, as we read in Revelation:

Rev. 1:6 "From Jesus Christ ... who loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood, who has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father..."

Q. What does being part of a Kingdom of Priests mean to you?

¹ <http://christianmonthlystandard.com/index.php/to-whom-was-1-peter-written/>

You shall Love your Neighbour as Yourself (Lev. 19:18)

One text in the Torah is famous above all others, the phrase “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”. This is the great principle of the Torah.² Even the Jews of Jesus’ time knew very well that this commandment, along with loving God ‘with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength,’ formed the essence of all the Commandments. (Mark 12:28-32) Christians instinctively attribute this saying to Jesus, but Jesus took it explicitly from Leviticus 19:18.

The God of the Old Testament has commonly been seen as a God of law and justice, whilst the NT is seen as revealing His grace and forgiveness. This couldn’t be further from the truth. The Hebrew Bible is the source of a vast range of love and moral commandments. Not only are His people commanded to love their God, and their neighbour, but we read in Lev. 19:34 *“The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself.”* This being just one of many laws that charge His people with a kind of love that was unknown in the ancient world, and is still a challenge to many in today’s world. Let’s take a look at this verse in context:

‘You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbour, and not bear sin because of him. ‘You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD. (Lev. 19:17-18)

This is not simply a command to love one’s neighbour, but shows a deep understanding of human nature and the reality of human relationships. What are we to do when we feel a brother/sister has wronged us? The LORD’s answer is: “You shall surely rebuke your neighbour, and not bear sin because of him.”

This verse is saying, “Do not hate your brother in your heart when he does something to you against your will, but instead you should remonstrate with him, saying, “Why did you do this to me?” and you will not bear sin because of him by covering up your hatred in your heart and not telling him, for when you remonstrate with him, he will justify himself before you [so that you will have no cause to hate him] or he will regret his action and admit his sin, and you will forgive him.”³

In other words, we need to clear the air, before revenge builds up in our hearts and we are tempted to slander, or retribution. The tragedy of conflict is that it prevents people from talking with each other, and listening to one another.

The inner logic of these two verses is therefore this: Love your neighbour as yourself. But not all neighbours are loveable. There are those who, out of envy or malice, have done you harm. I do not command you to live as if you were angels, without any emotions natural to human beings. I do, however, forbid you to hate. That is why, when someone does you wrong, you must confront the wrongdoer. You must tell him of your feelings of hurt and distress. It may be that you misunderstood him. Or it may be that he genuinely meant to do you harm, but now, faced with the reality of the injury he has done you, he may sincerely repent of what he did.⁴

“To ‘Be holy’ is the ability to stand above instinct and not allow our actions to become reactions. Our task is to act graciously to others even if they act ungraciously to us. This is difficult but necessary. The alternative is revenge, and revenge is forbidden.”

² Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation*, p.301

³ Nahmanides, Commentary to Leviticus 19:17

⁴ Sacks, *ibid* p.305.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount reflects the heart of God in saying: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you." He not only ratified the Levitical laws, but raised the bar to encompass how we should treat our enemies. Yet even that is not new to the New Testament, as we read in Proverbs 25: ²¹ 'If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. ²²For in so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you."

CHAPTER 20 – Penalties for breaking the Law

Whereas the most repeated words in our previous chapter were: "I am the Lord [your God]," here we find a different type of repetition in the form of penalties for serious sins—mostly to do with idolatry and sexual sin. Whereas chapter 18 dealt with sexual sin but didn't mention any penalties, this chapter adds the penalties: 'they shall surely be put to death'; 'I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people,' 'their blood shall be upon them,' 'they shall be childless', 'they shall bear their guilt'. Here we are confronted with the justice side of God.

The first judgment is against the giving of their descendants (children) to Molech. Molech is the biblical name of a Canaanite god associated with child sacrifice. Not only is child sacrifice a serious sin, but verse 4 states: *And if the people,... should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives some of his descendants to Molech, ...then I will set My face against that man...*"

We are all well aware of the prevalence of abortion in our world today. It is seen as the "right" of a woman to decide the fate of the child within her womb, and has been legalised virtually without restriction in virtually the whole Western world. Some believe that abortion is a modern day form of Molech worship – giving in to the god of choice and of pleasure.

Q. What are your thoughts? Can we equate abortion with sacrificing our children to Molech?

Another law found in this chapter that is very much part of our modern-day scene, is verse 13: "If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination." I don't need to elaborate on the relevance of this in today's society.

It is only relatively recently that these two practises have become largely accepted as 'normal' in our modern world—indeed they have been encouraged and lauded at the highest echelons of power—and those who oppose them considered 'abnormal' and behind the times. However the penalties listed here are certainly very grave, especially coming from the God who we know is merciful, forgiving and just.

Q. How are we to process this as Christians?

This chapter has a very different tone to the previous chapter. Nevertheless, we should read the two chapters in context. If the community acted in accordance with God's precepts laid out in chapter 19, one imagines that such serious sins would be very rare.

It is also worthwhile to know just how difficult it actually was to impose the death penalty in Jewish law, and it is doubtful that it occurred too often.⁵ But the message is there: We have a saying: 'a rotten apple spoils the whole barrel.' In other words, one person's actions can negatively impact an

⁵ https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1269629/jewish/Why-Are-Torah-Punishments-So-Harsh.htm

entire group of people. Our God knows this full well — His desire to set apart a holy people to Himself is His overriding concern here. (discuss)

In the Western world we are familiar with physical and scientific laws that are built into our world. We are far less familiar with the idea that there is also a moral order that, if followed, guards the integrity, peace and harmony of humanity. This is why Scripture emphasizes the imperative of hearing and obeying His words: “Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul... you shall teach them to your children...” “Treasure my commands and live...write them on the tablet of your heart... say to wisdom, ‘you are my sister’” —the references are endless.

Be Separate

The final verses of chapter 20 sum up the theme we have seen time and time again: “I am the LORD your God, who has separated you... be holy for I the LORD your God am holy.”

20:22 ‘You shall therefore keep all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them, that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out. 23 And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am casting out before you; for they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them. 24 ‘But I have said to you, “You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.” I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples. 25 You shall therefore distinguish between clean animals and unclean, between unclean birds and clean, and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. 26 ‘And you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.

What I find particularly interesting here is the insertion of the clean/unclean foods law from chapter 11. Why does this find a place here? We will notice that it is bracketed by the main focus of the verses: ‘I am the Lord your God... you shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you...’ The unclean animals are also said to have been “separated” from them. Chapter 11 also contains the words “I am the Lord your God...You shall be holy for I am holy, twice, in regard to the clean/unclean laws. When we see this type of connection in Torah, it begs the question:

Q. Why is this verse brought in here? What is its particular relevance?

“The dominant voice in the Torah, is that of the Priest... Fundamental to priestly consciousness is the idea of order... God brought order out of chaos in the six days of creation. He separated the elements into distinct domains”⁶ He brought order out of the darkness of the formless void (Gen 1:2), and ordained that each living thing would produce ‘after their own kind’. “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” With all creation completed and in good order, he rested on the seventh day and sanctified it. Where there is order there is *shalom*. At this point He had no need to separate Adam from the evil influence of the world surrounding him—but as we know, that all soon changed.

The role of the priest is maintenance of distinction and separation—to bring about and to maintain, peace and order. Yeshua and the New Testament writers also pick up the importance of keeping ourselves separated from the evil in our midst:

2 Cor. 6:17 Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you.

⁶ Sacks, *ibid*, p 292.

Rom. 12:2 *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

Before finishing our study, and in the light of the subject of separation, we will briefly go back to chapter 19 and the enigmatic laws found in verse 19: *You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you.*⁷

First of all we can see the emphasis here is on keeping separate what God has created as separate—to do otherwise is to disavow each of its distinctive “goodness”. However, it is the final of these injunctions that has most baffled Torah scholars – so much so that it is categorized as *Chok* – a law that cannot be explained. If we do some searching, we will find many and varied suggestions. Certainly it seems that the distinction between a fabric that has its origins in the earth, and one which comes from a living animal seems relevant. But, is there another answer that has eluded the best of scholars, but which God knows makes perfect sense? This is what my research found:

Linen and wool both have distinct frequencies and science clearly tells us that when you put the two together, the frequencies cancel each other out. Linen has amazing properties that harmonize with our bodies, and can greatly enhance sleep and healing.⁸ (Follow web links below if you would like to know more). So, from a purely practical point of view, it seems clear that God well understood this when he set down these instructions—are we surprised!?

It should not surprise us to find that linen is such a remarkable fabric when we consider its significant use in the Bible⁹, beginning with the fine woven linen curtains and priestly garments in the Tabernacle, to the body of Jesus being wrapped in fine linen before being placed in the tomb, and ending with Revelation:

Revelation 19:7-8 *Let us rejoice and celebrate and give Him the glory. For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. She was given clothing of **fine linen**, linen bright and pure. For the **fine linen** she wears **is the righteous acts** of the saints.*

Consider Matthew 22:11-13 – the Parable of the Wedding Banquet – where the king saw a man who did not have a wedding garment on. What did the wedding garment represent? He certainly stood out to the king who entered, but apparently was unaware of his own ‘nakedness’, and even the other guests seem to have been blind to his lack.

The blood of the Lamb, the grace of God and the working of the Holy Spirit is more than enough to bring forth in us, “righteous acts”. The inner man is to be transformed now as we obey the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification. His Law is engraved upon our hearts – the laws set out in Leviticus 19 epitomise the righteous acts of every saint of God—“Faith without works is dead.”

The redemption plan of God is to restore lost righteousness to mankind. The old adamic nature is passing away and the new Christ Nature is taking its place.¹⁰ Now the Cain (flesh life) in us is able (Abel) to offer to God acceptable sacrifices¹¹ —“... sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

⁷ This final law is also found in Deut. 22:11.

⁸ <http://www.new2torah.com/2011/11/the-power-of-linen/>; ancienttruthshidden.files.wordpress.com

⁹ Linen is mentioned over 100 times in the Bible.

¹⁰ The Hebrew word *Adam* derives from a root word, *adamah*, meaning ground.

¹¹ Linen is made from flax, a plant grown in the ground – the same ground from which Cain brought his ‘unacceptable’ offering.