

K'doshim

קדשים “Holy Ones”

Leviticus 19:1 – 20:27

Torah Together



This *Torah* portion begins with a listing of various commands, some of which are unusual and difficult to understand. Many of these are meaningful only in the culture of the time while others are timeless. It is important to try to understand the principle that God is expressing within the specific command so that we can see how we might apply it in our own lives today.

1. Various Laws - 19:1-37

a) To whom does Moses address the words in this chapter? According to verse 2, how does God summarize the commandments in this chapter?

Moses addresses his words to “the entire assembly of Israel.” God begins these commands by telling the Israelites to “be holy because He is holy.”

b) Which two of the Ten Commandments are referred to in verse 3? Why do you think these are mentioned together? Why should they be the first ones in this chapter?

“Honor your father and your mother”, (# 5, Exodus 20:12) and “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy”, (# 4, Exodus 20:8-11). Keeping the Sabbath is how one honors God as one honors his or her parents. Also, the heart attitude one has when honoring one’s parents and when keeping the Sabbath is the heart attitude required to keep oneself holy, separated for use by God. (Isaiah 58:13-14 expresses God’s thoughts about observing Shabbat.)

c) Which of the Ten Commandments is referred to in verse 4? ***“You shall make for yourself no idols”, (# 2, Exodus 20:4-6)***

Holiness and Perfection

Notice that God’s command to the Israelites in **Leviticus 19:2** (“Be holy because I, YHWH, am holy.”) does not mean to be **perfect**. To be holy means to be “set apart or reserved for use by God, for His purposes.” These commands help us see how we are to conduct ourselves so that we might be of use by God.

Scripture Link:

The first part of this chapter (through verse 17) is a restatement of many of the Ten Commandments. A comparison between this passage in Leviticus and **Exodus 20:2-17** may provide additional insight into God’s intention for these laws.

“Be holy because I, YHWH your God, am holy”

Leviticus 19:2

Gleaning

Leviticus 19:9-10

describes the activity known as “gleaning” which involves going back over a field after initially harvesting its crop. The gleaners would gather all the produce that might have been missed on the initial harvest. God instructs the farmers to leave the gleanings for the poor and the alien. A farmer who follows this practice shows that he has a heart for the poor and less fortunate in his community. The command implies that God wants us to take some responsibility for the poor among us and that we will be blessed for doing so.

d) What specific action was God prohibiting in verses 5 - 8? Why do you think this was important to God?

Fellowship offerings were to be consumed on the day of the offering or the day following, but none was to be leftover until the third day. God states that if any of the offering is eaten on the third day, it then invalidates the entire offering. It appears that God wants to make sure that his offering meals are not considered commonplace but special and holy.

e) What practice does God prescribe in verses 9 and 10? Who benefited from this practice? What do you think God was trying to teach with this command?

When a farmer harvests his crop, he is to leave the “gleanings” for the less fortunate to gather. Not only did this benefit the poor and disadvantaged, but it helped others realize that they have a responsibility to those less fortunate. God wants us to give of our blessings to those less fortunate.

f) Do you see a logical progression in verses 11 and 12? To which of the Ten Commandments do these instructions refer?

Stealing often leads to lying (to cover it up) then to deceiving others (to avoid facing the sin) and finally to swearing falsely as to ones innocence. “Do not steal,” (# 8, Exodus 20:15) and “Do not bear false witness,” (# 9, Exodus 20:16) are the commandments referenced here.

g) What character traits do you think God is reinforcing in verse 13? What about verse 14? Do these two come from the same heart attitude?

God is concerned about our personal and business ethics. It's important to treat everyone fairly and considerately, even those less fortunate than you. God wants us to know that he sees all our actions, even if no one else does.

The Spirit of the Law

Many of the commands in this chapter are obscure and appear arbitrary. However, *Yeshua* said that “not a single letter of the law would disappear until everything is accomplished” (**Matthew 5:17-20**). It may be best to assume that behind each law is an enduring principle that expresses part of God’s will for us. While some of the details will only make sense for Israel at that time in their history, the truths behind these laws are timeless and can be applied in our lives today. It is this “Spirit of the Law” that we should try to understand and obey.

In some cases, however, some of these rules may defy explanation. Perhaps in these cases, the purpose is just to emphasize God’s desire that we are to be His “set apart” distinct people. Our obedience to these commands simply points to our “separateness” from the rest of the world.

h) In verse 15, does God's attitude toward the poor surprise you? What does this say about God's viewpoint on justice?

God's justice is "no respecter of persons," either rich or poor. Justice is based strictly on the law (the Torah), not on the person or situation. Justice is "blind."

i) How do you think the two statements in verse 16 are tied together?

Spreading slander or gossip about another could easily endanger his life. God is encouraging us to understand the power of our words. (This relates to lashon ha'ra, explained in the sidebar on page 20,)

j) Verses 17 - 18 address our heart attitude toward others. Can you recall any of Yeshua's comments on this topic? How important do you think this command is?

See Matthew 5:43-48; 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-39. Romans 13:8-10 also speaks to this passage.

k) What do you think God intended with the instructions in verse 19?

It is not clear why God wanted the Israelites to keep species and types separate. It could be a reinforcement of the concept of not mixing the sacred with the common. Even the Jewish sages cannot shed much light on this. (See also Deuteronomy 22:9-11)

l) Do you think the situation described in verses 20 - 22 has any cultural significance for today or did it apply only to social customs at the time it was written?

It appears that this command applied to a social custom of the period.

m) What restrictions were placed on the fruit from a newly planted orchard? What do you think the effects of this command would be?

After planting an orchard, no fruit was to be harvested for 3 years. The harvest in the 4th year belonged to God. The owner got the 5th and subsequent year's harvests. This would naturally make the trees more fruitful.

Scripture Link:

Does it surprise you to see "...love your neighbor as yourself" in this passage? Many people think that this is a strictly "New Testament" concept. In **Romans 13:8-10**, Paul explains how **love** fulfills the Law (or *Torah*).

What's Wrong with Hybrids?

It's not clear why these practices were to be avoided by the Israelites. Some have suggested that not blending unlike things symbolized the separation that Israel was to have from their pagan neighbors. Others suggest that these practices may have had something to do with pagan worship and God wanted to assure the separation between His worship and the worship of pagan gods.

Issues of Style

Things like hair styles, tattoos, and body piercings are elements of the culture in which we live and are constantly changing. Some people interpret the intent of these rules as God trying to ensure that his people didn't adopt the cultural and worship practices of their pagan neighbors. Another interpretation is based on **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**: "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies." In any case, it is always good to consider God's will for us before adopting any of the customs of our society.

Who is Molech?

Molech was an Ammonite god (see **Genesis 19:30-38**) who was worshiped by the Canaanites. Practices are thought to include the sacrifice of live infants by fire to the god of Molech or Chemosh. It's easy to understand why God would detest the worship of this god. Israel continued to fall victim to this idolatry until the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Babylonian Captivity of Judah.

n) Verses 26 - 32 seem to list a hodge-podge of commands. Which ones do you find particularly interesting? Can you find anything that ties them together?

It seems that most of these commands relate to pagan worship practices. In contrast, the commands to observe the Sabbath and not to cut the sideburns or beard seem to promote separation of the Israelites from other cultures.

o) How were the Israelites to treat strangers living in their land? What was God's rationale for this command?

Aliens were to be treated well, like native-born Israelites, because the Israelites themselves were once aliens in a foreign land.

p) Why do you think the instructions given in verses 35 and 36 are important to God?

God is just and demands fairness in all our dealings with our fellow man.

2. Punishment for Sins - 20:1-27

a) What punishment does God decree for one "who gives any of his children to Molech"? What do you think it meant to do this? Did this command apply only to Israelites?

Anyone, Israelite or foreigner, who sacrificed a child to Molech was to be put to death. The sacrificing of infants to the god Molech was practiced by the Canaanites and, judging from the language of this command, was particularly abhorrent to God.

b) What was the punishment for consulting mediums and spiritists? Who carried out this punishment? What happened to one who was a medium or spiritist?

God "set his face against" the person who consulted mediums or spiritists and "cut him off from his people." In other words, God would no longer communicate with one who did this. According to verse 27, a medium or spiritist found among the Israelites was to be stoned.

c) Can you paraphrase the admonition given in verse 7?

One paraphrase might be “Set yourselves apart from other peoples and obey my commands that you may be used by me.”

d) List the specific sins mentioned in this chapter that are punishable by death. What do you think is meant by “his blood will be on his own head”? What insight does this give you into God’s view of sexual sin?

The top of the list is child sacrifice to Molech. Then 1) cursing one’s parent, 2) committing adultery, 3) sex with a close relative, 4) homosexuality, 5) sex with both a mother and daughter, and 6) sex with animals. The phrase “his blood is on his own head” implies that the sinner will pay the just penalty for his sin with his own life’s blood. Jewish Sages believe this meant death by stoning. God clearly takes sexual sin very seriously - it defiled the land.

e) What punishments are required for some of the “lesser” sins described in this chapter? Who do you think carries out these punishments?

Some sins carried the penalty of being “cut off from his people,” presumably carried out by the community itself. For others (like marrying a brother’s wife while he is still living), God exacted a penalty of childlessness.

f) According to verse 22, why **should** the Israelites keep these commandments? According to verse 26, why does God **want** the Israelites to keep his commandments?

The Israelites were to keep these commands so that they would not defile the land and so that it would not “vomit them out.”

Scripture Link:

In this passage, the phrase “has sexual relations with” or “lies with” comes from a Hebrew idiom that literally translates as “uncovers the nakedness of.” Some Bible scholars believe that this applies to the story of Noah when he became drunk and Ham “uncovered the nakedness of his father,” as told in **Genesis 9:20-25**. The implication is that Ham had sexual relations with his mother. If the result of that union was Ham’s son, Canaan, it would help explain why this was such an egregious sin and why Noah cursed Canaan and not Ham himself.

The Land Vomits?

The imagery of the land vomiting out its inhabitants is quite graphic. It evidently describes how God feels about the desecration of His land by the sinfulness of the people who live in it. God shows that he will not show favoritism to the people who live in the land of Israel. Regardless of who they are, if they sin in the ways that the Canaanites sinned, they will be expelled from the land.

Digging deeper

1. How many times does the phrase “I am the Lord” or “I am YHWH” appear in chapter 19? Can you find any significance in the apparently random order in which these commands are listed?

The phrase “I am the Lord” appears at least 15 times in this chapter. Perhaps the seemingly random order is meant to emphasize the fact that all commands are equally important to God in that they separate the sinner from God. Also, there are often subtle connections between seemingly diverse commands providing additional insight into God’s character. Note also that “I am the Lord your God” is how God starts the Ten Commandments. Indeed, many consider it the First Commandment.

Because I said so . . .

In some sense, the phrase, “I am the LORD” is like a stern parent saying, “because I’m the Dad – that’s why.” Indeed, our Creator and the Creator of the Universe certainly has the right to command whatever He wishes. However, in much of the *Torah*, God pleads with the Israelites (and us) to obey His teaching and instructions because in so doing, the people would be blessed. If we fully understood that the blessing of a full and meaningful life was dependent on our following his teaching and instructions, then we might view obedience in a more positive light.

2. This *Torah* portion indicates that God takes a dim view of mediums and spiritists. (Generally speaking, a medium is one who consults with the spirits of the dead and a spiritist is one who communicates with evil spirits. Both can be lumped under the heading of witchcraft.) The book of **1 Samuel** tells the story of King Saul: how he was chosen by God, how he united the 12 tribes of Israel, and how he lost God’s favor. **1 Samuel 28:3-25** relates the story of Saul trying to communicate with Samuel at the end of his life. Does reading this story give you any better understanding of God’s view of witchcraft?

For further study, see

Haftarah : Jeremiah 46:13-28

Brit Hadashah : Luke 2:22-24; John 19:31-37; Acts 13:16-17;

Revelation 8:6 – 9:12; 16:1-21