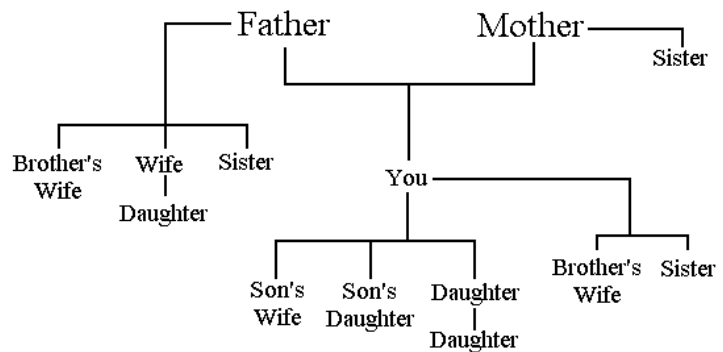


Leviticus

Chapter 18

Laws Restricting Sexual Relations



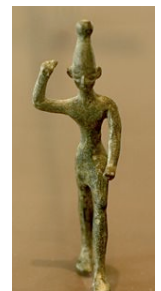
Leviticus 18:1-5 Separation From the Surrounding Culture

Many commentators suggest chapter 18 is in the form of a typical eastern covenant treaty. Hence, the phrase *I am the LORD your God* is a preamble to the covenant treaty. It could be that Moses used a common literary form to present God's commands, or it could be the other nations copied the form Moses used. At any rate, this phrase is not just a formula opening because it occurs five other times in the chapter (vv. 4-6, 21, 30). It seems it is given as a motivation for keeping particular laws. An almost identical phrase introduces the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6). [The graph charts forbidden marriages in Leviticus 18:6-16 (from www.christianpoly.org).]

The second point being made in this introduction is:



You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes. You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes (18:3-4).



[The picture on the left is of several Egyptian gods including Hathor and Horus (from www.lmolonde/.../kings.img.php?pic=7&comm.=add, on the right is a 14th-12th century BC (about the time of Moses and Joshua) bronze figurine of the Canaanite god Baal (from en.wikipedia.org).]

The overwhelming point is, do not be like the cultures around you, where you came from or where you are going. The people of God are to get their cultural habits from God, not the culture they grow up in or move in to.

The third point being made here is:

So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD (18:5).

Many suggest God is giving Israel a way to prosper and be happy. But the Hebrew word here is *חַיָּה* (*chayah*), which is never translated as prosperity or happiness. This is a common word, but it always has to do with things like giving life, staying alive, preserving life, or survival.

Leviticus 18:6-18 The Prohibition of Sex With Close Relatives

Before we list the sexual prohibitions, there are two observations we should make. One, all these commands, and almost all sexual commands, are addressed to men, and two, the specific command is to not *uncover the nakedness of* someone. The reason these are addressed to men is probably because God held the man ultimately responsible for sexual activity.

I suggest the Hebrew phrase לֹא תגלה עֲרוֹתָהּ (not uncover the nakedness of) is more than just a figure of speech for sex. It is not that there is no other way to describe sexual relations. Notice that the word *intercourse* is used in verse 20 and *lie with* in verse 22. Of course, this phrase implies having sexual intercourse, but it would also prohibit looking at their naked bodies. This would include a prohibition of what we call “pornography.”

The specific list of the people whom men were not to *uncover the nakedness of* includes:

1. *Any blood relative*—this is a general category which includes any blood relative not otherwise mentioned
2. *your mother*
3. *Your father’s wife*
4. *Your sister, either your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, whether born at home or born outside*
5. *Your son’s daughter*
6. *Your daughter’s daughter*
7. *Your father’s wife’s daughter, born to your father*
8. *Your father’s sister*
9. *Your mother’s sister*
10. *Your daughter-in-law*
11. *Your brother’s wife*
12. *A woman and of her daughter*
13. *Her son’s daughter*
14. *Her daughter’s daughter*
15. *A woman in addition to her sister as a rival while she is alive.*

Leviticus 18:19-23 Prohibitions Against Sexually Deviant Behavior

There are six specific sexually deviant behaviors mentioned here:

1. *You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness during her menstrual impurity.*
2. *You shall not have intercourse with your neighbor’s wife.*
3. *You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech.*
4. *You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.*
5. *Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it.*
6. *Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion.*

A few of these require some clarification.

Numbers 1, 4, 5, and 6 seem to be self explanatory.

Number 2 is adultery. It’s one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (note for Leviticus 18:20), Walvoord and Zuck describe Old Testament adultery as follows:

*Adultery in the Old Testament is described as **intercourse** between a married or betrothed woman and a man other than her husband. It did not include intercourse between a married man and a single woman, which was a lesser crime (Ex. 22:16-17; Deut. 22:28-29).*



Number 3 has to do with child sacrifice to the idolatrous god Molech. I am not sure why this is in a list of sexual perversions. It may be saying that any sex, which has in mind producing children to be sacrificed, is perverse. [The picture is of the west end of the Hinnom Valley south west of the Jerusalem Jaffa gate, where children were sacrificed to the god Molech (from picasaweb.google.com).]

Leviticus 18:24-30 Warnings Concerning Abominations

The chapter concludes with a very specific warning from God. It is in two parts, a warning collectively and individually:

- Collectively—*You ... shall not do any of these abominations ... so that the land will not spew you out* (18:16, 28).
- Individually—*whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do so shall be cut off from among their people* (18:29).

The explanation God gives them is that He shall cast out the Canaanites because they did all these abominations. The Israelites were to not be like the Canaanites so the same thing would not happen to them. Of course, they were like the Canaanites, and they did get cast out of the land.

THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS

- At the beginning and the end of this chapter, God warns the Israelites not to be like the cultures that surround them. We are all sinners, and some sins are more common than others. But the most common sins always include sexual perversions, and they are generally the ones that are considered acceptable by the cultures in which we live.
- People are actually getting worse, not just staying the same, because they are following a global culture which is getting worse. Human nature is the same. But three things have changed: (1) The percent of people (not just the numbers) actively violating the character of God is greater than at any point in history (except just before Noah's flood). (2) The opportunity to do evil is greater than ever before in history. (For example, getting a divorce is socially acceptable). (3) The tolerance of evil is greater than ever before in history. (For example, most people believe: "Homosexuals are okay if they don't bother me.") The culture has a big bearing on our sin.

Practicing sin has a lot to do with living where sin is acceptable.

- Sexual immorality is not just about sexual intercourse. It is basically about *uncovering nakedness*. Viewing the nakedness of anyone other than your spouse offends God. Today's technology, like the Internet and YouTube, make pornography instantly and vividly available. No one can police this for you. You are the only one who can keep yourself out of this cesspool. It will likely destroy you, but that's not the biggest problem. The biggest problem is, it separates you from God.
- These commandments were given because violating them offended the glory of God, not because keeping them made people happy. There is no indication here that God wants His people to be happy because they keep His commandments. They were to live by His commandments because those commandments pleased God. The point is, they were commandments that would not kill them, they could survive keeping them. But they were for the glory of God, not the pleasure of the Israelites. If you think God is doing things for your happiness you don't understand. Idols are gods you get happiness from. With the God of the Bible, it is all about His Glory (John 12:28; 17:1).