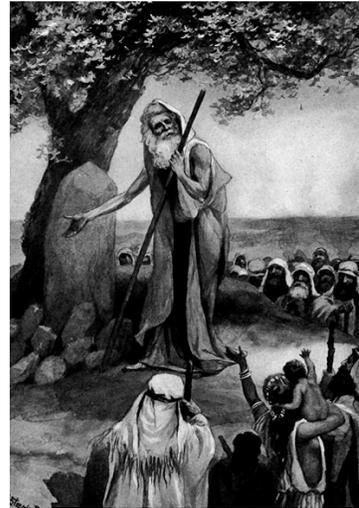


Leviticus Chapter 19

40 Commandments For the Congregation of the Sons of Israel



Admittedly, there are different ways to slice up these commands, so some may have a few more or less numbers in the list, but these 40 seem (to me) to number the specific commands of the chapter. I have counted the commands as I have listed them and commented on them selectively as I felt was needed.

[Picture is of Moses teaching the congregation (from ancienthistory.about.com).]

First, we should notice once again the formula introduction in verse 1: *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying....* This is direct revelation from God to Moses.

Second, we should also notice this was not addressed to Aaron or to his sons or to the Levites. It was addressed *to all the congregation of the sons of Israel*.

Third, we should notice that verse 2 gives us the reason, and the only reason, for these commands. It should be considered the motto of Leviticus: *You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy*. There are 15 reminders of this throughout the chapter, with statements like: *I am the LORD*, or *I am the LORD your God*.

Here are the 40 commandments of Leviticus chapter 19:

1. *Verse 3— Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father.* The same word for reverence of parents is given for the fear of God in verse 14. It is the very common Hebrew word יָרֵא (*yare*) for “fear,” used repeatedly of showing reverence for and being afraid of God.
2. *You shall keep My Sabbaths.* This repeats the directive in the Ten Commandments. This would include complete rest every Saturday.
3. *Verse 4—Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods.* This is a repeat of the directive in the Ten Commandments, and is probably the worst sin one can commit.
4. *Verses 5-8—Now when you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD what remains until the third day shall be burned with fire. So if it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an offense.* This command was given earlier in 7:15-20.
5. *Verses 9-10—Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger.* This was the basic welfare system in Israel, best illustrated in the book of Ruth.

[Gleaning picture from www.st-andrews.ac.uk.]
6. *Verse 11—You shall not steal.* This is another one of the Ten Commandments.



7. *Nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.* Admittedly, it is hard to tell if this is one command or two. I made it one so I could end up with 40 instead 41 commands. But, seriously, it does sound like two aspects of the same command. This is essentially the 9th of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:16).
8. *Verse 12—You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God.* This is an elaboration on the 3rd of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:7). It probably includes a prohibition of both taking false oaths and verbal blasphemy.
9. *Verse 13—You shall not oppress your neighbor.* The word *oppress* can also be translated *defraud*, but it probably means not to bother him or make his life difficult.
10. *Nor rob him.* Another repeat of one of the Ten Commandments.
11. *The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning.* This command is repeated in both testaments (Deuteronomy 24:15 and James 5:4). If you are an employer, don't try to figure out clever ways to cheat your employees (like, say, letting them go shortly before retirement, or when they are due for a raise, so you don't have to pay them benefits).
12. *Verse 14—You shall not curse a deaf man.* This and the next command are about cruel bullying. Jesus' statement *whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also* (Luke 6:29), does not refer to those who observe others being bullied. The people of Israel were not to allow it.
13. *Nor place a stumbling block before the blind.* See the comment for #12.
14. *Verse 15—You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.* Judgment was always to be about the truth (the way things actually are), not the status of the people involved. Personally (like when called upon to give advice in a conflict) or judicially (like when you are on a jury), don't give favors to the poor or the rich.
15. *Verse 16—You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people.* Slander is false gossip.
16. *You are not to act against the life of your neighbor.* This would include anything which endangered the life of any fellow Israelite.
17. *Verse 17—You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart.* This is the first of several commands which go beyond physical action into thoughts, feelings, and motives. Jesus expanded on this in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:22ff.
18. *You may surely reprove your neighbor but shall not incur sin because of him.* Reproof is an essential part of love. But it's tricky business. Paul said: *restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted* (Galatians 6:1).
19. *Verse 18—You shall not take vengeance.* A common biblical theme (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19).
20. *Nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people.* A *grudge* is a mental substitute for vengeance.
21. *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* This command, hidden in these 40, not part of the Ten Commandments, is echoed by Christ and the New Testament authors as one which summarizes the whole Law (Matthew 5:43; Romans 13:9; James 2:8).
22. *Verse 19—You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle.* This and the next two commands are clear, but the purpose and reason for them cannot be known. So don't guess.
23. *You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed.*
24. *Nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together.*
25. *Verses 20-22—Now if a man lies carnally with a woman who is a slave acquired for another man, but who has in no way been redeemed nor given her freedom, there shall be punishment; they shall not, however, be put to death, because she was not free. He shall*



bring his guilt offering to the LORD... for his sin which he has committed, and the sin which he has committed will be forgiven him. This tells us there are varying degrees of sexual sin.

26. *Verses 23-25—When you enter the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden to you; it shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the LORD. In the fifth year you are to eat of its fruit.* Again, no reason for this is given. Clearly, the first fruits belong to God, but the reason for the wait can only be a matter of speculation. So don't do it.
27. *Verse 26—You shall not eat anything with the blood.* A command repeated throughout Scripture.
28. *Nor practice divination.* This was not considered a trick but actual contact with demons or the spirit world and is always forbidden (Deuteronomy 18:10; 2 Kings 17:17).
29. *Or soothsaying.* This was the practice of fortunetelling or practicing witchcraft. [Divination picture from www.eldritchmaven.co.uk.]
30. *Verse 27—You shall not round off the side-growth of your heads nor harm the edges of your beard.* Obviously, some group was doing this or God would not have condemned it. We do know the Egyptians shaved all the hair from their bodies. Apparently, God wanted the Hebrews to be hairy people.
31. *Verse 28—You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead.* This was probably a heathen practice for mourning the dead. It may have also been seen as helping the dead in the afterlife.
32. *Nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves.* It seems that most ancient cultures practice tattooing the skin. It was condemned by God, no matter what the reason for it.
33. *Verse 29—Do not profane your daughter by making her a harlot, so that the land will not fall to harlotry and the land become full of lewdness.* No comment needed.
34. *Verse 30—You shall keep My Sabbaths.* Because of the “sanctuary” context (#35 below), I suspect this is different from 19:3 (#2 above). It seems to go beyond the directive in the Ten Commandments and includes complete rest on the various festival days.
35. *And revere My sanctuary.* The Hebrew word for sanctuary means “holy place” and refers to the Tabernacle. *Revere* is יָרֵא (yare), the word for *fear* meaning to: *reverence or be afraid of.*
36. *Verse 31—Do not turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them.* Both these terms refer to someone who communicates with the dead or the spirit world.
37. *Verse 32—You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged.* [See comment on #38.]
38. *You shall revere your God.* Again the word here is יָרֵא (yare), the common word for *fear*. It was used of parents in 19:3 (#1 above), but it is different than the word הִדַּר (hadar, honor) for the aged which has more the sense of *majestic honor*.
39. *Verses 33-34—When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong... you shall love him as yourself.* It was easy for the Jews to get the idea that since Gentiles were not part of the Abrahamic Covenant, they were second-class citizens (Luke 10:30-37).
40. *Verse 35—You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity. You shall have just balances, just weights.* This command is repeated eight times in the Old Testament. Street-market honesty was part of the holiness expected by the LORD.



The chapter ends with the command: *You shall thus observe all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them; I am the LORD* (19:37). The phrase *I am the LORD* is intermingled (15 times in the

chapter) among the laws to remind the people that these commands were coming directly from Him and were given because of His holiness.

THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS

- The specific laws of God for our age should be kept, whether we understand the purpose for them or not. For example, we may not understand why God told Israel to not wear two kinds of clothing, and we may not understand why women are not to teach men. But both were commanded. Never ignore or change a command of God because of its original purpose.
- The application of these laws, as with all biblical commands, should reflect the mind of God. The question is: “From this command to Israel, what do I know pleases or displeases God?” Imagine sitting around a table discussing one of these commands. Application would be to pull up a chair for Moses and ask him: “How should we keep this in our Church Age today?”