

Leviticus Chapter 20

Punishments for Perversions

After the formula introduction stating revelation from God to Moses (20:1), there are five sections in chapter 20.

Four deal with punishments for specific sins. All except those of verses 19-21 receive the death penalty.

1. Offering children to the god Molek (20:2-5)
2. Being, or going to, a medium or spiritist (20:6-8, 27)
3. Cursing one mother or father (20:9)
4. Committing various sexual/marriage perversions (20:10-21)
5. Being holy in *The Land* (20:22-26)

[Engraving of death by stoning is in Sant' Agnese in Rome (from civilliberty.about.com.)]



Leviticus 20:1-5 The Punishment For Offering Children to Molek

Anyone committing the disgusting sin of offering children to the idol Molek was to be punished in two ways:

1. *He shall surely be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones*
2. *I will also set My face against that man and will cut him off from among his people*



Molek was an Ammonite god which was worshipped by child or infant sacrifice, and possibly also sexual perversions. This sin was mentioned earlier (18:21) in the context of sexual sins. Ammon and Moab were the incestuous children of Lot (Genesis 19:38) who lived in the Transjordan area southeast of Israel.

The first punishment is clear—death by stoning, carried out by the people. The second is not as clear. Most commentators say the phrase *I...will cut him off* is another reference to the death penalty. Probably, but the text doesn't exactly say that. The Hebrew word כָּרַת (*khrt*) means to: *cut off a part of the body, e.g. head, hand, foreskin; cut down trees, idols; cut out, eliminate, kill; cut (make) a covenant* (“Theological Words of the Old Testament”). It is in the context of God saying that He would *set My face against that man*. So it likely means that, if the people don't kill him, God will.

[The picture of a priest offering an infant to the god Molek (from www.piney.com.)]

The reason God gives for the death penalty is not just because children were being killed. God often commanded the Israelites to kill the children of people they conquered (1 Samuel 15:3). The reason

for the death penalty in this case was because they did this act *so as to defile My sanctuary and to profane My holy name* (20:3).

Leviticus 20:6-8, 27 **Turning to a Medium or Spiritist, or Becoming One**



Verse 27 could be listed as a separate paragraph. I have combined them because they are about mediums and spiritists. Both passages require the death penalty. There are two differences in the passages:

1. One is about visiting a medium or spiritist, the other is about become one.
2. God put to death those who visited a medium or spiritist, but the people were to stone to death the one who became a medium or spiritist.

Both have to do with contacting the dead (a medium) or the demonic spirit world (a spiritist).

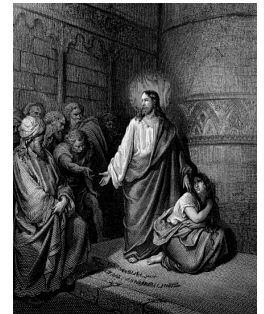
Leviticus 20:9 **Cursing One's Mother or Father**

The Hebrew word for *curse* is קָלַל (*qillel*). Its most common meaning is *to be slight, swift or trifling*, but it is most often translated as *curse* (“Strong’s”). It seems to refer to making slanderous comments about one’s biological parents. One’s biological parents are treated with more reverence in Israel than in the church age because the parents of the Israelites connected them to God via the Abrahamic covenant. Today, we are to honor our parents in the sense of taking care of them because it is a command for our age, but they do not connect us to God.

Leviticus 20:10-21 **Punishments for 12 Sexual and Marriage Perversions**

Here are the 12 perversion and the penalties for each. [The painting is of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery (from www.creationism.org).]

1. *Man who commits adultery with a friend's wife—both put to death* (v. 10)
2. *Man who lies with his father's wife—both put to death* (v. 11)
3. *Man who lies with his daughter-in-law... incest—both put to death* (v. 12)
4. *Man who lies with a male ... a detestable act—both put to death* (v. 13)
5. *Man who marries a woman and her mother—both burned with fire* (v. 14)
6. *Man who lies with an animal—both put to death* (v. 15)
7. *Woman who approaches any animal to mate with it—both put to death* (v. 16)
8. *Man and his sister, or half sister, who see the nakedness of each other ... he has uncovered his sister's nakedness—both shall be cut off in the sight of the sons of their people* (v. 17)
9. *Man who lies with a menstruous woman ... has laid bear her flow—both shall be cut off from among their people* (v. 18)
10. *Man who uncovers the nakedness of his mother's sister or his father's sister ... made naked his blood relative—they shall die childless* (v. 19)
11. *Man who lies with his uncle's wife—they will die childless* (v. 20)
12. *Man who takes his brother's wife ... abhorrent—they will be childless* (v. 21)



Leviticus 20:22-26 **Being Holy in A Land Flowing With Milk and Honey**

Verses 22-24 are similar to 18:24-30. But several things should be noted:



- It is not just the Ten Commandments that were to govern Israel in the land but *My statutes and all My ordinances*.
- The Israelites were not to follow the customs of the Canaanites. That would even include those customs which were not forbidden by the Law of Moses. Being like the people around them was a



sin in itself.

- The land of Canaan would become the land of Israel because God would give it to them.
- This piece of geography was important to God, *a land flowing with milk and honey*.

In verses 25 and 26, God reminds the Israelites of the clean/unclean food requirements. This does not seem to be an additional command but an example of the need for holy living in the land. The placement of verse 27 at the end of the chapter may be for the same reason.

THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS

- Religion seems to be the most powerful force in the world. Why would anybody sacrifice their own infants or children to an idol god? Same goes for seeing mediums and spiritists. Religious power is the ultimate power. One of the main factors that destroyed Soviet Communism is it attempted to destroy religion. Religion in humans is like creativity and morality. It will be expressed in some manner. Atheists point out the cruelties of religion throughout history. But their religion accepts the absurdity of evolution and socialized utopia. Religion gets people to do and think absurd things. It always has. It still does. Yet religious thought is inescapable. It is not something which can be eliminated by education or socialization. If a human is breathing, he or she is religious.
- Never try to get around the commandments of God by thinking “This particular thing was not specifically called a sin.” The first three plus the eleventh and twelfth sexual sins condemned here are all examples of adultery. They are given to illustrate adultery. It does not mean some other form of adultery is permissible.
- Notice the death penalty for homosexuality, and that homosexuality is called *a detestable act*. This is the most contested sexual perversion today. Actually, homosexuality is more acceptable than adultery in the Post-modern West. Homosexuality is unique today in that it is defended genetically under the assumption that whatever is genetic is “normal,” and what is “normal” can’t be bad. Homosexuality is also unique today in that one is condemned socially for opposing it.
- It is interesting that uncovering the nakedness in 20:17 is equated not with having sex but with seeing one another’s nakedness. The specific perversion is a brother and sister and the idea is one of sexual desire. This shows that sexual perversion is not just intercourse.