

Leviticus 20:1-26 • Set Apart

Introduction

When a naïve recruit arrives at boot camp, he is in for a shock. Instead of a warm handshake and pat on the back by the drill sergeant, he is thrust into a world unlike anything he has ever known. His suitcase full of clothes, including underwear and toothbrush, is quickly boxed up and shipped home. He is whisked down to the barber where a thirty-second haircut makes him unrecognizable by his civilian counterparts. Under the threatening scrutiny of the drill sergeant, he stands at attention while being issued standardized uniforms, including underwear and toothbrush. When he lays his head down on his government issue pillow at night, he quickly falls asleep from the exhaustion of being torn from one world for another. The last words he remembers are those of the drill sergeant shouting, “You belong to me. I own you now!”

The purpose of military boot camp is to set recruits apart from their previous civilian lifestyle. They are military personnel now. They have a different mission and purpose in life. Life as they knew it will cease to exist, and a new daily routine will capture every moment. Boot camp is designed to cause a new recruit to begin thinking according to his drill sergeant. His lifestyle, mannerisms, vocabulary and values will change. He is set apart to fulfill the goals and objectives of his recruiters.

God had a similar plan for the Hebrews. Boot camp began on the day of exodus from Egypt. Now that they are out of Egypt, their entire lifestyle, values and behavior must change. The question that will be asked in this study is, “Why?”

¹Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²“You shall also say to the sons of Israel: ‘Any man from the sons of Israel or from the aliens sojourning in Israel who gives any of his offspring to Molech, shall surely be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones. ³I will also set My face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given some of his offspring to Molech, so as to defile My sanctuary and to profane My holy name. ⁴If the people of the land, however, should ever disregard that man when he gives any of his offspring to Molech, so as not to put him to death, ⁵then I Myself will set My face against that man and against his family, and I will cut off from among their people both him and all those who play the harlot after him, by playing the harlot after Molech.

[Read v.1-5]

Q: What despicable acts are these verses referring to, and what do you know about Molech?

A: These verses refer specifically to child sacrifice. Molech was the name of the god of the Ammonites whose worship pervaded most of the land in which the Israelites would be settling. One form of sacrifice involved a large metal replica of Molech, its belly an oven heated to a white-hot fire. Children were made to stand in front of Molech while the priests swung open the doors. If the child was incinerated, the sacrifice was acceptable. Biblical archeologists have uncovered Canaanite temples next to burial grounds containing thousands of bones of infants and children. It is also highly likely that Canaanite children were abused sexually.

Q: If God is a God of mercy, why does He pronounce death to those Hebrews who participate in Molech worship?

A: God’s mercy does not preclude His justice and holiness. Child sacrifice is so horrendous to God that He requires the death penalty. Such idolatry is an extreme violation of the 1st commandment. God is the God of life, not of death. Tolerance by the Hebrews of their neighbors or relatives who practice this idolatry is also judged by God. Five centuries earlier, God had placed Melchizedek in the midst of the indigenous Canaanite people (Genesis 14:17-20) and given them plenty of time to repent (Genesis 15:16). Now He would raise up a nation who would carry out judgment on the land they had made unclean (“defiled”).

Application:

- Do you believe these verses could be applied to the issue of abortion? To issues of the sexual abuse of children? Why?
- Why do you suppose such judgments by God against practices such as these are not found in the New Testament, or are they?

⁶As for the person who turns to mediums and to spiritists, to play the harlot after them, I will also set My face against that person and will cut him off from among his people. ⁷You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. ⁸You shall keep My statutes and practice them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

⁹If there is anyone who curses his father or his mother, he shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother, his bloodguiltiness is upon him.

¹⁰If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

¹¹If there is a man who lies with his father's wife, he has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death, their bloodguiltiness is upon them.

¹²If there is a man who lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed incest, their bloodguiltiness is upon them.

¹³If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.

¹⁴If there is a man who marries a woman and her mother, it is immorality; both he and they shall be burned with fire, so that there will be no immorality in your midst.

¹⁵If there is a man who lies with an animal, he shall surely be put to death; you shall also kill the animal.

¹⁶If there is a woman who approaches any animal to mate with it, you shall kill

[Read v.6-8]

Q: Why do you think God warns His people against the occult?

A: Because it is through the occult that people gain direct access to demons. The occult is an important part of almost every false religion. Also, to seek the occult is failure to trust God, and pursuing the occult is always related to desiring power over possessions and people (usually the opposite sex).

Q: In verses 7 and 8, three words are used to describe God's design for His people. What are they and what do they mean? Whose responsibility is each?

A: The words are "consecrate," "holy" and "sanctifies."

- To consecrate oneself means to be completely devoted to and set apart for God's purposes.
- To be holy is to be set apart from that which is common, mundane and unacceptable to God's standards.
- To be sanctified means to be cleansed.

It is God's people's responsibility to consecrate themselves and seek holiness, and in doing so, God will make them clean; that is, unstained by the wickedness in the world.

[Read v.9]

Q: Why is honoring one's parents so important to God?

A: It involves the purity, solidarity, protection and health of the family structure. If a healthy family structure is not maintained, the nation itself will suffer.

[Read v.10-21]

Q: This section repeats many of the sexual prohibitions given previously in chapter 18. Why is there such an emphasis on sexual behavior in Leviticus?

A: Because, like today, sexual temptations are so prevalent and powerful. There is virtually no sexual aberration left untouched. The Hebrews were moving into an environment where all these sexual practices were not only common but intimately tied into the worship of fertility gods.

Q: What does this say about God's standards of human sexuality?

A: It is quite clear from these and other verses that God considers adultery, homosexuality, incest, pedophilia and bestiality unholy sexual practices. The practice of monogamy also imitates monotheism, one of the foundations of the Jewish religion. It is monogamy that makes for healthy families, and healthy families make for a healthy nation.

Application:

- Are you beginning to see a difference in the character, lifestyle and behavior of God's people as opposed to the surrounding peoples? What is the difference that God expects?
- By providing so many laws and prohibitions for God's people, what is God's plan and purpose for them? How is He trying to shape them?
- How does this affect your feelings about your own present behaviors and lifestyle?

the woman and the animal; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.

¹⁷‘If there is a man who takes his sister, his father’s daughter or his mother’s daughter, so that he sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace; and they shall be cut off in the sight of the sons of their people. He has uncovered his sister’s nakedness; he bears his guilt.

¹⁸‘If there is a man who lies with a menstruous woman and uncovers her nakedness, he has laid bare her flow, and she has exposed the flow of her blood; thus both of them shall be cut off from among their people.

¹⁹‘You shall also not uncover the nakedness of your mother’s sister or of your father’s sister, for such a one has made naked his blood relative; they will bear their guilt.

²⁰‘If there is a man who lies with his uncle’s wife he has uncovered his uncle’s nakedness; they will bear their sin. They will die childless.

²¹‘If there is a man who takes his brother’s wife, it is abhorrent; he has uncovered his brother’s nakedness. They will be childless.

²²‘You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not spew you out. ²³Moreover, you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I will drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have abhorred them. ²⁴Hence I have said to you, “You are to possess their land, and I Myself will give it to you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey.” I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples.

²⁵‘You are therefore to make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; and you shall not make yourselves detestable by animal or by bird or by anything that creeps on the ground, which I have separated for you as unclean. ²⁶Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.

[Read v.22-26]

Q: What is God’s plan for the people He rescued from Egypt?

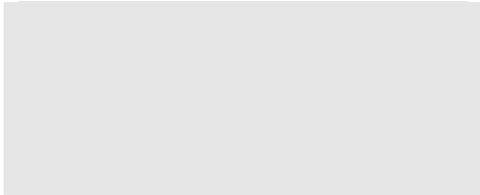
A: He will make the Hebrews His own people, His own possession.

Q: Can you list at least three reasons God would do this?

- First, God’s people are to reflect and imitate His holiness and righteousness.
- Second, by obeying God’s standards, they will be safe and have abundance.
- Third, by following God’s laws, they will receive all of God’s blessings, and He will dwell in their midst.

Q: There is a fourth reason not mentioned in these verses. It is alluded to by the abundance of verses referring to their sexual practices, and alluded to further by the prohibitions against Molech worship. (Hint: it has to do with the person of Jesus Christ.)

A: By being pure, holy, consecrated, set apart and sanctified, God is raising up a holy nation to provide a hedge of protection around the genetic seed line that would lead from Adam to the Messiah. This messianic seed line was in great jeopardy through the sexual exploits of Jacob’s son Judah. God is raising up a nation that would harbor the seed line to the Messiah. Intermingling with the nations around them would greatly jeopardize the purity and integrity of that line.



Final Application

- *As a Christian, God has called you to be set apart from the world through the person of Jesus Christ? Why?*
- *Once again, how has this study changed your view of yourself, your calling by God, your lifestyle, choices and behavior?*