

Parashah 30

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?

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?

c) Which of the Ten Commandments is referred to in verse 4?

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?

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?

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

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?

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?

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

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?

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

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?

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

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?

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

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

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?

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?

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

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?

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

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?

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 his nakedness,” 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?

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