

Leviticus Chapter 18

Verses Attention now shifts from the matter of ceremonial defilement and its removal to the question of moral impurity and its consequences.

The literary structure is interesting in that it resembles the basic form of the vassal or suzerainty treaties of the kings of the ancient Near East.

The vassal treaties were made between a great king and a people whom he wished to bring under his rule.

He usually identified himself in the preamble; thus here, "I am the LORD your God" (verses 2, 4-5; and Exodus 3:15; 6:2-4).

Then he stated his generosity to previous vassals in a passage dealing with historical retrospect (compare verse 3).

"After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt" would remind them that He had redeemed them from bondage.

Then the basic stipulation(s) that comprised the agreement would be cited as in "do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein" (verse 4), followed by the detailed stipulations (compare verses 6-23).

A section of blessings and cursing was then given.

The blessings occur in the shortened form in verse 5 ("which if a man do, he shall live in them"), while the curses appear in verses 24-30), starting with "defile not ye yourselves in any of these things ... that the land spew not you out also ... as it spewed out the nations that were before you.

Leviticus 18:1 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,"

He continued speaking to him, after he had delivered to him the laws respecting the Day of Atonement, and the bringing of the sacrifices to the door of the tabernacle.

And particularly concerning the Israelites not worshipping devils, as they had done in Egypt.

The LORD proceeds to deliver out others, the more effectually to guard against both the immoral and idolatrous practice, of the Egyptians and Canaanites.

"Saying":

as follows.

Leviticus 18:2 "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the LORD your God."

To the heads of their tribes, that they might deliver to them the following laws.

Or Moses is bid to publish them among them, either by word of mouth, or by writing, or both.

"And say unto them, I am the LORD your God":

With which they were to be introduced.

Showing the right he had to enact and enjoin such laws, since he was Jehovah.

The Being of beings, and from whom they received their being.

Their sovereign LORD and King, who had a right to rule over them, and command what he pleased.

And also, the obligation they lay under to him to regard them, and yield a cheerful obedience to them, since he was their God.

Not only that had made them, but had redeemed them out of Egypt.

And who had made a covenant with them, and had taken special care of them, and had bestowed many wonderful favors on them.

And for this purpose is this phrase often used in this chapter, and very frequently in the next.

We find in the first 2 verses here that God is saying to the people, Remember I am your God.

You must do the ordinances that I have set down.

I am the only God for you.

This message was not given through Aaron, but through Moses.

This in itself showed the importance of none of this being lost in too many mouths.

Leviticus 18:3 "After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances."

"Doings of the land":

Repeating the sexual practices or customs of the Egyptians and Canaanites was forbidden by God.

We have discussed over and over in these lessons; how important it is for God's people to be a separated people.

Egypt was a type of the world.

In Egypt, and in Canaan, they worshipped false gods.

We may be in the world, but we must not be of the world, if we are to be called God's people.

These ordinances that God is giving His people here in Leviticus, are enough to live peaceable lives pleasing to God.

They will not need the laws of these heathens that are based on worldliness.

We are warned over and over not to be fellowshiping with those of the world.

2 Corinthians 6:14 "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

Leviticus 18:4 "Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I [am] the LORD your God."

"I am the LORD your God":

This phrase, used over 50 times, asserts the uniqueness of the One True and Living God, who calls His people to holiness as He is holy, and calls them to reject all other gods.

God states again why they should follow Him.

He is their only God.

Notice the "walk therein".

We Christians too, must walk in our salvation after we receive it.

The last few lessons we have been studying, have shown us the ordinances pertaining to the ceremonial laws.

In this lesson we will get into the moral laws of God.

Leviticus 18:5 "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I [am] the LORD."

"Which if a man do, he shall live in them":

Special blessing was promised to the Israelites on the condition of their obedience to God's law.

This promise was remarkably verified in particular eras of their history, in the national prosperity they enjoyed when pure and undefiled religion prevailed among them.

Obedience to God's law always insures temporal blessings, as this verse indicated.

But these words have a higher reference to spiritual life as indicated by the Lord (compare Luke 10:28), and Paul (compare Rom. 10:5).

Obedience does not save from sin and hell, but it does mark those who are saved (compare Eph. 2:8-9; see notes on Rom. 2:6-10).

God has given these laws to man to help him lead a pleasing life before God.

If a man keeps these laws, he will be able to live in peace with his neighbors.

These laws are sufficient in themselves, there is no need for other laws to govern God's people.

This is mentioned in the New Testament, as well.

Romans 10:5 "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them."

We have discussed the word righteousness before.

It means in right standing with God.

For these Israelites here, the only way to be in right standing with God, is to keep the law.

The way a Christian becomes in right standing with God, is to receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

He (Jesus), took our sin on His body, and clothed us in His righteousness.

We will now begin the study of the moral law of God.

Verses 6-20

This section contains a warning against incestuous and illicit sexual unions.

"Shall approach" is a euphemism for sexual intercourse (compare Gen. 20:4; Isa. 8:3).

It is explained by "to lie with" (20:11), and "to take" as a wife (20:21), and "to uncover the nakedness" (verse 14).

All four phrases mean the same thing.

“Any that is near of kin to him” is literally “to all [any] remainder of his flesh”.

Thus, the parties were so close, that one was the remainder of the other.

“To uncover their nakedness” is a phrase describing intercourse within marriage and outside of it.

Because the husband and wife are “one”, (Gen. 2:24), to uncover the nakedness of one partner was equivalent to exposing the other partner.

The following cases of incest are enumerated: sex with one’s mother (verse 7), stepmother (compare Reuben with Bilhah; Gen. 35:22); Absalom with David’s wives (2 Sam. 16:21-22; verse 8), sister (verse 9), granddaughter (verse 10), half-sister on the father’s side (verse 11), paternal aunt (verse 12), maternal aunt (verse 13), paternal uncle’s wife (verse 14), daughter-in-law (verse 15), brother’s wife (verse 16), stepdaughter or step-granddaughter (verse 17), or a wife’s sister (verse 18).

The last situation (verse 18), seems to forbid marriage to a second sister while the first is alive.

To have sexual relations during the menstrual period (verse 19), was forbidden.

Perhaps this was due to the sacredness of the blood (chapter 17), and also that God is total LORD, so that no man can claim total rights to a woman without limitations.

Leviticus 18:6 "None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover [their] nakedness: I [am] the LORD."

“Uncover their nakedness”:

This is a euphemism for sexual relations.

In verse 6, God is telling His people not to have sexual relations with anyone who is closely related to them.

In the next few verses we will find out who the near kinsman are.

God makes it very clear that this is not an ordinance of Moses here, this is God's law.

Incest (sexual relations within a family), is devastating our society.

God makes it very clear in this chapter of Leviticus that it is unacceptable in His sight.

We read that 25% of all the children in our society have been sexually abused by members of their own family.

This is an abomination, not only to God, but to moral man as well.

Leviticus 18:7 "The nakedness of thy father, or the nakedness of thy mother, shalt thou not uncover: she [is] thy mother; thou shalt not uncover her nakedness."

By uncovering a father's nakedness is not meant anything similar to what befell Noah.

Which Ham beheld with pleasure, and the other two sons of Noah studiously and with reverence to their father, covered him.

Nor any practice of a son with his father; as Gersom interprets it.

But the same is meant by both phrases, and the words are by many interpreters thus rendered, "the nakedness of thy father, that is, the nakedness of thy mother thou shalt not uncover".

For what is the mother's is the father's, and uncovering the one is uncovering the other.

Wherefore the mother only is made mention of in the next clause, where the reason of this prohibition is given.

"The nakedness of thy father, or the nakedness of thy mother":

This is but one fact, though expressed two ways, as appears from (Lev. 18:8, compared with Lev. 20:11).

The expression imports, that such an action is doing the greatest dishonor to one's father and mother.

This is directly forbidding sexual relation by parents and children.

This also includes homosexual and lesbian acts.

There is an instance of this very thing in Genesis.

Lot's daughters got him drunk and slept with their father.

The ancestors from these sexual acts produced very worldly people.

This happened before the giving of the law.

It would be impossible to break God's law, before He had given the law.

It did not however, keep the results of such a union from bringing less than godly people.

You may read this terrible story (in chapter 19 of Genesis).

The Ammonites and the Moabites were the results of this evil union of father with daughters.

The restriction (in verse 7) above, is that you must not have sexual relations with your father or mother, period.

Leviticus 18:8 The nakedness of thy father's wife shalt thou not uncover: it [is] thy father's nakedness.

“Thy father’s wife”:

Actually a stepmother is in mind here (compare verse 7).

This verse above extends this ordinance to the stepmother as well.

Even though the stepmother is not blood relation to the son or daughter, there should not be sexual relations with her, because she belongs to your father.

She is your mother by your father marrying her.

Leviticus 18:9 "The nakedness of thy sister, the daughter of thy father, or daughter of thy mother, [whether she be] born at home, or born abroad, [even] their nakedness thou shalt not uncover."

To lie with one in so near a relation is exceeding criminal, and for which the law curses a man (Deut. 27:22).

And to marry her is not lawful.

For though it was necessary for the propagation of mankind that a man should marry his sister, for who else could Cain and Abel marry?

Yet afterwards, when there was an increase of mankind, and there were people enough remote from each other, it became unlawful for persons in such near ties of consanguinity to marry with each other.

Though the Egyptians did, in imitation of Isis and Osiris, and so the Persians, following the example of Cambyses.

"The daughter of thy father, or daughter of thy mother":

Whether she is a sister both by father and mother's side, or whether only by the father’s side and not the mother's, as Sarah was to Abraham (Gen. 20:12).

Or only by the mother's side and not the father's.

"Whether she be born at home or born abroad":

Not whether born and brought up in his and her father's house, or born and brought up in another place and province.

Though there were some, as Aben Ezra observes, that so interpreted it, according to the sense of the word in (Gen. 50:23).

But rather the sense is, as that writer gives it, whether born according to the law of the house of Israel, after espousals and marriage, or without it.

That is, whether begotten in lawful marriage or not.

Whether a legitimate offspring or spurious, born in adultery and whoredom, whether on the father or mother's side.

So, the Targum of Jonathan, whom thy father begat of another woman.

Or of thy mother, or whom thy mother bore or brought forth, of thy father, or of another man.

"Even their nakedness thou shalt not uncover":

Neither lie with, or have carnal knowledge of, nor marry one or the other.

This ordinance is not just for your blood relation full sister or brother, but for your half brother and sister as well.

In the case of Abraham and Sarah, the law had not been given, so they were not breaking God's law.

Abraham and Sarah were half brother and sister.

Leviticus 18:10 "The nakedness of thy son's daughter, or of thy daughter's daughter, [even] their nakedness thou shalt not uncover: for theirs [is] thine own nakedness."

A man might not marry his granddaughter, whether a descendant of his son or of his daughter, nor any further off descending from him in a right line.

Not his great-granddaughter, and so on.

And if he might not marry his granddaughter, much less his own daughter, as Jarchi observes, for the relation is still nearer.

Therefore, that being prohibited, this in course must, though not mentioned.

"Even their nakedness thou shalt not uncover":

Neither debauch nor marry such a one.

"For theirs is thine own nakedness":

Which sprung from his, being the descendants either of his son or daughter.

The Targum of Jonathan is, "for they are as thy nakedness," his own flesh and blood.

This now extends to the granddaughter.

There shall be no sexual relations between grandparents and grandchildren.

Leviticus 18:11 "The nakedness of thy father's wife's daughter, begotten of thy father, she [is] thy sister, thou shalt not uncover her nakedness."

"Thy sister":

Here he is forbidden to marry a stepsister.

This also is speaking of a half sister or brother.

There shall be no sexual relationship between half or whole brothers and sisters.

Leviticus 18:12 "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy father's sister: she [is] thy father's near kinswoman."

His aunt by his father's side, an instance of which we have in Amram (Exodus 6:20).

And Maimonides says, an aunt was forbidden whether she was a father's sister in lawful wedlock or in fornication.

"She is thy father's near kinswoman":

Or, the rest of thy father; the residue of his flesh, one of the same flesh and blood with him.

Wherefore, as he could not marry her himself, so his son likewise was too near akin to enter into such a relation with her.

Leviticus 18:13 "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy mother's sister: for she [is] thy mother's near kinswoman."

Which is the same relation as before, an aunt by the mother's side.

Wherefore, if such a marriage was unlawful, this must also, and for the same reason.

"For she is thy mother's near kinswoman":

The same phraseology is used here as in the preceding verse (see notes on Lev. 18:12).

And by the same rule a woman might not marry her uncle, whether by father or mother's side, the relation being the same.

And this reaches to great-uncle and great-aunt.

Both of the above Scriptures forbid sexual relations with an aunt, whether an aunt on the mother's side or the father's side.

Leviticus 18:14 "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy father's brother, thou shalt not approach to his wife: she [is] thine aunt."

Which Gersom understands of committing sodomy with him, on which account he was doubly guilty.

Partly because of lying with a male, and partly because of uncovering the nakedness of his father's brother.

But it rather seems at first sight as if the sense was, that a woman should not marry her father's brother, that is, her uncle.

As a man might not marry his aunt, whether by father or mother's side (as in Lev. 18:12).

But Jarchi directs to a better sense than either, when he asks, what is his nakedness?

In answer to which he recites the following clause as explanative of it.

"Thou shalt not approach to his wife":

In the use of the bed, as the Targum of Jonathan adds, that is, to lie with her, her husband being living, or to marry her, he being dead.

"She is thine aunt":

Even as a father's or mother's sister, only they are aunts by blood, this by marriage or affinity.

The above Scripture forbids a person from having sexual relations with an uncle, or with his wife.

The wife would be an aunt by marriage.

Leviticus 18:15 "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy daughter in law: she [is] thy son's wife; thou shalt not uncover her nakedness."

Shall not be with her in his son's lifetime, or marry her after his death.

"She is that son's wife":

And so one flesh with him, and who is of the same flesh and blood with his father, and therefore the nearness of the relation forbids such incestuous copulation or marriage.

"Thou shalt not uncover her nakedness":

Or have carnal knowledge of her, whether in the life or after the death of his son, even then marriage with her is not lawful.

This would be forbidden, not from the problem of her being a near kinswoman, but in respect for your son.

She belongs to your son.

She did not marry you, she married your son.

They two became one flesh.

Leviticus 18:16 "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife: it [is] thy brother's nakedness."

Neither debase her nor after the death of the brother marry her.

That is, unless he dies without issue; and then, by another law, he was obliged to marry her (Deut. 25:5).

Hence the Targum of Jonathan adds; by way of explanation.

"In the life of thy brother, or after his death, if he has children."

But then that law was but an exception from this general rule, and so did not make it void in other respects, but bound it the more strongly.

And besides, it was a special and peculiar law to the Jews, until the Messiah came to make it manifest of what tribe and family he came.

And the reason of it ceasing, the law itself is ceased, and so neither binding on Jews nor Gentiles.

Hence John the Baptist boldly told Herod to his face, that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife (Matt. 14:3).

And even such marriages were condemned by the heathens.

"It is thy brother's nakedness":

That is, his wife is, being by marriage one flesh with him, and his brother being so to him, the relation is too near to intermarry.

And more especially when there is issue by the first, which connects them strongly.

It was forbidden to have sexual relations with your brother's wife while the brother was living.

If the brother died and there were no children, you were to marry the brother's wife and raise a child in the dead brother's name.

Deuteronomy 25:5-6 "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her." "And it shall be, [that] the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother [which is] dead, that his name be not put out of Israel."

Leviticus 18:17 "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, neither shalt thou take her son's daughter, or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness; [for] they [are] her near kinswomen: it [is] wickedness."

That is, if a man marries a woman, and she has a daughter, which is the man's daughter-in-law, after the death of his wife he may not marry this daughter.

For this daughter is of the same flesh with her mother, who became one flesh with the man she married, and therefore his relation to her daughter is too near to marry her.

"Neither shalt thou take her son's daughter, or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness":

Not any of her granddaughters, either in the line of her son or daughter; that is, might not lie with either of them.

Or marry them, and much less then marry her own daughter, these being a further remove from her.

"For they are her near kinswomen":

One or other of them, even every one of them.

"The rest" and residue "of her", of her flesh, who together made one flesh with her.

And therefore not to be married to her husband, either in her life, or after her death.

"It is wickedness":

A very great wickedness, abominable in the sight of God, and to be detested by man as vile and impious.

It is whoredom, as the Targum of Jonathan renders it.

It is forbidden to have sexual relations with any woman and her daughter, or her granddaughter.

When you enter into sexual relations with a woman, she becomes part of your flesh.

You two become one flesh.

Her children and grandchildren become your children and grandchildren by marriage.

Leviticus 18:18 "Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister, to vex [her], to uncover her nakedness, beside the other in her life [time]."

“In her life time”:

The principle on which the prohibitions are made changes slightly.

Instead of avoiding sexual involvement because it would violate a relational connection, this situation defaults to the principle of one person at a time, or while the other is still alive, i.e., it forbids polygamy.

Commonly in Egyptian, Chaldean, and Canaanite culture, sisters were taken as wives in polygamous unions.

God forbids such, as all polygamy is forbidden by the original law of marriage (see Genesis 2:24-25).

Moses, because of hard hearts, tolerated it, as did others in Israel in the early stages of that nation.

But it always led to tragedy.

This forbids a man to marry two sisters at once.

When your wife is dead, then you are permitted to marry her sister.

I believe (in her life time), shows that it is permissible to marry her sister after she is dead.

In all of the moral prohibitions of marrying or having sexual relations with near kinsmen, it is not only to please God, but to keep down insanity in families.

In many cases when even first cousins marry, there is a high percentage of insanity in their children.

Leviticus Chapter 18 Questions

1. Who did God tell Moses to tell the Israelites He was?
2. Why did God not give this message through Aaron?
3. God forbid the Israelites not to do after what 2 countries doings?
4. What is Egypt a type of?
5. What did Egypt and Canaan have in common?
6. We may be ____ the world, but we must not be ____ the world, if we are to be God's people.
7. The laws of these heathens were based on what?
8. What does 2 Corinthians 6:14 tell us?
9. What lesson can we Christians take from the statement “walk therein”?
10. What kind of law does this lesson describe?
11. Why has God given these laws to man?
12. Old testament righteousness is by the _____.
13. Where does the Christian's righteousness come from?
14. Jesus took our _____ upon His body. We were clothed with His _____.
15. Who are they forbidden to have sexual relations with?
16. What is the meaning of incest?
17. How many children are sexually abused by members of their family in America today?
18. What does 18:7 of Leviticus forbid?
19. What man in Genesis had sexual relations with his daughters?
20. What 2 evil peoples came of those unions?
21. What is meant by father's wife in verse 8?
22. In verse 9, who is the prohibition for?
23. Why were Abraham and Sarah not guilty of breaking God's law?
24. Name several of other near kinsman that it is forbidden to have sexual relations with.
25. When was it forbidden to have sexual relations with your brother's wife?

26. When the brother died without children, what was his brother to do?
27. When is it permissible to marry your wife's sister?
28. What advantage other than pleasing God, is there in not marrying near kinsman?