

# Focus on the Family

## The Reason for the Sexual Ethics of Leviticus 18

Leviticus 18:1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,  
2 "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God.

3 You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes.

4 You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God.

5 You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.

6 "None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the LORD.

7 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness.

8 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness.

9 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether brought up in the family or in another home.

10 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son's daughter or of your daughter's daughter, for their nakedness is your own nakedness.

11 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife's daughter, brought up in your father's family, since she is your sister.

12 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister; she is your father's relative.

13 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is your mother's relative.

<sup>14</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother, that is, you shall not approach his wife; she is your aunt.

<sup>15</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law; she is your son's wife, you shall not uncover her nakedness.

<sup>16</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness.

<sup>17</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and of her daughter, and you shall not take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter to uncover her nakedness; they are relatives; it is depravity.

<sup>18</sup> And you shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive.

<sup>19</sup> "You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness.

<sup>20</sup> And you shall not lie sexually with your neighbor's wife and so make yourself unclean with her.

<sup>21</sup> You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

<sup>22</sup> You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

<sup>23</sup> And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion.

<sup>24</sup> "Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean,

<sup>25</sup> and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.

<sup>26</sup> But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you

<sup>27</sup> (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean),

<sup>28</sup> lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you.

<sup>29</sup> For everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people.

<sup>30</sup> So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs that were practiced before you, and never to make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God."

# Family Blood

“Friendship is everything. Friendship is more than talent. It is more than government. It is almost the equal of family.” With that, Don Vito Corleone, better known as The Godfather, understands in his own twisted way something that is not merely being lost, but deliberately and viciously attacked to the end that it might be destroyed in modern times. The Corleone family had an ethic where the means justifies the ends. Extortion, theft, murder, it didn't matter. Anything goes so long as the family is protected.

I would argue that **the family** is the most basic of all human institutions and therefore the most fundamental to the survival of the human race. If it is destroyed, then like the bark, branches, leaves, and fruit of a tree that has a rotten root, everything is destroyed. Civilization cannot survive without a strong family.

**What makes up a family?** As we continue to see in Leviticus, just about everything goes back to the first few chapters of Genesis. In this case, God made a **man and a woman** and gave them a command: “**Be fruitful and multiply**” (**Gen 1:28**). He then **performed a marriage**

ceremony (2:23-24) and they soon began to have children (4:1). So, there are three things here. There is a biological ability to reproduce,<sup>1</sup> they must reproduce in accordance with prescribed rules (marriage), and there is the product of the union, namely, children. In Genesis, these children then go on to begin carrying out the rest of the initial command, “fill the earth and subdue it” (1:28; see Gen 4-5). Some do it like the Godfather. Others do it by God’s grace by calling on the name of the LORD. But in all cases, it is through the family that everything else begins to take place.

When the union of the husband and wife produces children, it creates a blood (consanguineal) relationship, or what is sometimes called the nuclear family or the immediate family. Biblically speaking, there are six of these blood relations (Heb: *she’er*) which serve as the foundation of all other amended relationships to a family. These are mother, father, son, daughter, brother, and sister (see Lev 21:2-3). Anything that perverts or disrupts this is viewed as an extremely serious violation of the created order and, therefore, of the integrity of human civilization.

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<sup>1</sup> I’m talking here about a natural ability, i.e. man and woman and not exceptions that come because one or the other of them has some physical defect that prevents conception.

There are a lot of things that can create **rot** and decay in the family. One could argue that the violation of any of the Ten Commandments in a family's interactions with one another would apply. Some (the last six or second table) harm the physical, emotional, psychological integrity of the family. Others (the first four or first table) go directly to the spiritual unity of the family. But there seems to be one sin above all others that attacks the family at every level. This is sexual sins that take place in the family between people that should not be joined together. This is what we are going to look at in Leviticus 18.

## Leviticus 18 in Context

Let's get some context for this chapter. First, Leviticus 18 presents us with a long **list of sexual sins** that Israel was not to participate in. These include many variations of incest (**Lev 18:6-18**), during monthly bleeding (**19**), adultery (**20**), sodomy (**22**), and bestiality (**23**). There is one law in this list, however, that seems totally unrelated at first glance. It deals with **children sacrificed to Molech** (**21**). If this is the only seemingly non-sexual sin in a whole list of sexual sins, then it means it is important for us to try and figure out why it is

here. We will do that as we get into looking at the specifics of the chapter in more detail.

Second, the **immediate cultural context** is given in the introduction of the chapter. “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD’” (1-5). Israel is to be **different from the nations** around them, not merely in who they worship, but in how their lives are lived out differently.

There is also the **context** this chapter comes **in the book**. Looking at what comes right before, we have Leviticus 17, which is a chapter dealing with **blood**. While that chapter talks about the blood of animals (sacrificial and edible), this chapter deals indirectly with blood through the “**blood relatives**” (Lev 18:6; NAS) we talked about a moment ago.

This makes for a smooth transition to the **second main section of the book** which begins now in Ch. 18. Recall that

Leviticus sets up its material in the form of the three-tiers of the tabernacle. Chs. 1-17 dealt with things in the [courtyard](#). Ch. 18 now begins a series of chapters (18-24) that relate to the [holy place](#). This section concludes by discussing the priest's duties regarding the candelabra ([24:2-4](#)) and the table of showbread ([24:5-8](#)), both of which are found in the holy place.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, these chapters will deal with [families](#) ([18-20](#))<sup>3</sup> and [priests](#) ([21-24](#)). This makes good sense because only the priests were allowed to go into the Holy Place and, unlike Roman Catholic priests, they could marry and have families. Also, when God created Adam, he put him in the holy place from somewhere outside and then married he and his wife, thus creating the first family while they were in this place.

There is one more thing to understand about ch. 18. It has a [twin chapter](#)—chapter 20. In fact, both of these chapters deal with almost the exact same sets of sins, with ch. 20 adding only a couple more to the list.

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<sup>2</sup> See Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 227-28.

<sup>3</sup> Ch. 19 we might call laws for the “family” of Israel.

Twin Pillars of Leviticus 18 and 20 <sup>4</sup>			
Leviticus 18 Prohibitions		Leviticus 20 Prohibitions	
6–18	Incest with near kin and in-laws, mother, father's wife, sister, son's daughter, daughter's daughter, father's wife's daughter, father's sister, mother's sister, father's brother's wife, son's wife (daughter-in-law), brother's wife, a woman and her daughter, wife's sister	2–5	Devote children to Molech
		6–8	Mediums and Wizards
		9	Cursing father or mother
		10	Neighbor's wife (adultery)
		11	Father's wife
		12	Daughter-in-law
		13	Sodomy
		14	A daughter and her mother
		15–16	Bestiality
19	Menstrual uncleanness	17	Sister
20	Neighbor's wife (adultery)	18	Menstrual uncleanness
21	Devote children to Molech	19	Mother's or father's sister
22	Sodomy	20	Uncle's wife
23	Bestiality	21	Brother's wife
24–30	For all of these abominations the men of the land did, who were before you, so that the land became defiled; lest the land vomit you out, when you defile it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you.	22	You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out. You shall not walk in the customs of the nation which I am casting out before you.

These two chapters act as twin pillars that surround a central shrine. That shrine is Leviticus 19, which is in some ways, the very center of Leviticus.<sup>5</sup> Previously, I said that *Leviticus 16* is the center of *the Pentateuch*, and it is. The Day of Atonement is the pivot of all the books of Moses. But

<sup>4</sup> Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 237.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 236. She also uses the proscenium arch as an analogy.

*Leviticus 19* is the pivot of *this* book, as we saw way back in the first week of our study in the following outline:

- A. Exposition: Leviticus 1-7 (5:1-6 accounts for sins)
- B. Clean and Unclean: Leviticus 8-17
- C. Sexual Ethics: Leviticus 18
- D. **The Holiness of God: Leviticus 19** (19:33-35 Egyptian reference)
- C<sup>1</sup>. Sexual Ethics: Leviticus 20
- B<sup>1</sup>. Clean and Unclean: Leviticus 21-22
- A<sup>1</sup>. Exposition: Leviticus 23-25 (24:10-23 “eye for an eye”)
- D<sup>1</sup>. **Holiness of the Name: Leviticus 26** (26:44-46 Egyptian reference)
- Conclusion: Holy Things Belonging to the LORD: Leviticus 27<sup>6</sup>**

What is happening here is that these twin pillars of sexual ethics are guarding the central holy idea that most people think is something Jesus made up: *Be holy for I the LORD your God am holy* (Lev 19:2). Like the two angels on the top of the ark of the covenant, these chapters guard chapter 19, because they deal with keeping the family intact, which is the foundational way that all ethics of a civilization are transferred and carried out by the next generation ... or are destroyed through disintegration, rot, and decay of that

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<sup>6</sup> Another chiasm takes into account the three books of Exodus-Numbers. In this structure, *Leviticus 16 and the Day of Atonement is the center*. Raymond R. Hausoul “Leviticus 25-27 in de metafysische grootheid van Exodus-Leviticus-Numeri,” *Das Heilige Herz der Tora: Festschrift für Hendrik Koorevaar* zu seinem 65, Geburtstag, Theologische Studien, ed. Siegbert Riecher, Julius Steinberg (Germany: Shaker Verlag Aachen, 2001): 130.

foundational structure. Therefore, if you want to destroy a civilization, you have to go after the sexual ethics that keep the family strong.

As we move through Leviticus 18, I'm going to refer to chapter 20 on more than one occasion. Therefore, it is helpful to know a few of differences up front. **First**, generally speaking, **the order of the laws in the two chapters are reversed**. Leviticus 18 begins with various kinds of forbidden sexual relations and ends with worship to Molech, while again, generally speaking, Leviticus 20 begins with Molech and moves to various kinds of forbidden sexual relations.<sup>7</sup>

**Second**, the **explanation of the two chapters is identical**. Both result in “**the land vomiting**” the people out (**Lev 18:28; 20:22**). “Vomiting” (*qi*) is only found in these two verses in the entire Pentateuch.

**Third**, looking at specific laws, all of the laws in Ch. 18 are found in Ch. 20, but they are found in **different orders**, with slightly different pairings of laws in the two places. The reason for this is that Ch. 20 is focusing on *the punishments* of these sins, while Ch. 18 doesn't talk about punishments at all.

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<sup>7</sup> For this reason, **Douglas** sees this reversal as the “turn” of the book in her fascinating and I think correct analysis that Leviticus is a giant “ring.” See *POMEGRANATES*, P. 251.

In Lev 20, those punishments create a **chiasm** which necessitates putting the laws in different positions in the two lists:

## CHIASTIC ARRANGEMENT OF LAW IN LEVITICUS 20

### Introduction (1-2a)

- A. Stone with stones (Molech; 2-5)
- B. Cut off (consult mediums; 6-8)
- C. Put to death (curses father/mother, adultery, father's wife, daughter-in-law; sodomy; 9-13)
- D. Burned with Fire (woman and her mother; 14)
- C<sup>1</sup>. Put to death (bestiality; 15-16)
- B<sup>1</sup>. Cut off (sister, menstrual; 17-19) (childless: uncle's wife, brother's wife; 20-21)

### Conclusion (23-26)

- A<sup>1</sup>. Stoned with stones (medium/necromancer; 27)

This has at least one important practical implication that is worth mentioning, then we will deal with it later. One of the chief ways the family is being undermined today is in the publicly coerced toleration and militantly enforced acceptance of homosexuality. For many, acceptance of

homosexuality must trump even the First Amendment and someone's freedom of religion.

Now, sodomy (male/male) makes it into both lists of laws. Some argue that the sin mentioned here (Lev 18) is not a blanket statement against all male homosexuality, but only a particular example of the act where otherwise heterosexual men engage in it as a religious act in a perverted kind of worship to the gods (i.e. temple prostitution). So, for example, some will say that Leviticus 18 lays out two kinds of laws. The first deal with forbidden sexual sins and the second deal with cultic/ritual sins (specially towards Molech). Because sodomy is not found listed with the other sexual sins, but comes after Molech worship, it is supposedly framing this as a practice done in a pagan religious service. But Ch. 20 undermines this kind of thinking, because it places sodomy in the same list as non-cultic sexual sins.<sup>8</sup> So let's turn to the passage.

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<sup>8</sup> These arguments have become quite sophisticated over the last couple of decades, so I'm being rather simplistic in my explanation. For example, some would want to see Ch. 20 as being the context of idolatry and false pagan worship as well (notice how the chiasm above begins with Molech and ends with necromancy). But these kinds of arguments are all category mistakes, the logic of which would lead not just to the acceptance of homosexuality, but of every single one of the sexual taboos in both lists, so long as they weren't done for specifically cultic reasons. Sadly, this is the position of Mary Douglas (*Leviticus As Literature*, 235-38), whose analysis of Leviticus is usually so brilliant and helpful; but her liberalism got in the way at this point and would not let her see what is so patently obvious in the text. A much more helpful starting point for all of this is found in Ian Paul, "Leviticus and Same-Sex Relations," *Psephizo* (May 29, 2014), <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/leviticus-and-same-sex-relations/>.

## Incest (6-18)

The first section consists of a dozen laws that involve incest, and in each case the male takes a female. Incest is sexual relations with people that are too closely related to one another. In other words, these laws center on the nuclear family. Each is described with the strange phrase, “uncovering the nakedness of...” We need to spend a moment thinking about the phrase.

Importantly, it appears earlier in the Bible in a story that has puzzled many-a-reader for a very long time. It is the story of Ham, one of the sons of Noah who “*saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside*” (Gen 9:22). Whatever Ham did, it is obviously bad, because God curses his son Canaan (25). So what was going on here?

Common interpretations are that Ham 1. Lustfully gazed at his naked father which implies some kind of homosexual desire; 2. Gleefully broadcasts his father’s drunken stupor which lead to his becoming naked; 3. Castrated his father; 4. Raped his father. These are all just guesses. Strangely, they are uneducated guesses when you compare Scripture with Scripture. When we have a problem

interpreting a difficult passage, our Reformed Confessions wisely teach us to go to easier related passages for help. This is what we find in Leviticus 18.

For example, what does it mean to “**uncover the nakedness of your father**” in **Leviticus 18:7**? It tells you explicitly. It is “**the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness.**” In other words, to uncover the nakedness of your father is to have sexual relations with your mother. She is his nakedness, because she belongs to him. It also means that the perpetrator is coming to a personal experiential awareness of the woman through intercourse with her. That’s what **Leviticus 18:7** explicitly tells you. This is the reason God cursed Canaan rather than Ham. Canaan was the product of an incestuous relationship between Ham *and his mother*—Noah’s wife.<sup>9</sup> So who is included in the laws against incest?

1. *Close kin/blood relatives* (*she’er*) (6). Vs. 6 is not an introductory formula but implies what is explicit in **21:2-3**: **mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister**. This is that nuclear family we mentioned. Since all the rest of the list deal with taking a

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<sup>9</sup> John Sietze Bergsma, “Noah’s Nakedness and the Curse of Canaan (Gen 9:20-27),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124/1 (2005): 25-40. Available online: <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Hahn-Bergsma-Noahs-nakedness-and-the-curse-on-Canaan.pdf>.

woman, the father, son, and brother are probably not in mind, though it is beyond absurdly obvious that they are forbidden. All sexual relations with any of them are forbidden and do not need to be mentioned again.

2. *Your mother* (7). Strangely, mother was implied in the previous verse, yet is brought out here explicitly. Why? This is where the phrase “*nakedness of your...*” is important. While vs. 7 explains that the mother is in view, this phrase compounds the sin by letting you know that to sin against your mother is to sin against your father! She is *his* “nakedness.” She belongs to him, not to you. The two are “*one flesh*” (Gen 2:24), and as Roy Gane rightly says, this includes even after the marriage ends by divorce or his death. So uncovering her nakedness is tantamount to shaming him by exposing his nakedness.<sup>10</sup>
3. *Your father’s wife* (8). This would mean your *step-mother* or, in their context, possibly one of his many other wives.
4. *Your sister* (9). Here, this specifically includes *half-sisters* who come from your father but not your mother, or your mother but not your father. It also says it doesn’t matter if they grew up in your house or in another house. That’s irrelevant.
5. *Your child’s daughter* (10). This refers to your *granddaughters*. This is called “your own nakedness” because they literally came from your body, through your son or daughter.

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<sup>10</sup> Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 318.

6. *Your father's wife's daughter* (11). This refers to your **step-sister** rather than your full sister.
7. *Your father's sister* (12). This is your **paternal aunt**.
8. *Your mother's sister* (13). This is your **maternal aunt**.
9. *Your father's brother's wife* (14). The nakedness of your father's brother is his wife, your **aunt by marriage**.
10. *Your daughter-in-law* (15). Your son's wife is your **daughter-in-law**.
11. *Your brother's wife* (16). This is your **sister-in-law**.
12. *A woman and her daughter* (17). This refers to two women who are related to one another. It may or may not have the added idea of marrying them both, which goes beyond the sexual act (*laqach* = "to take" which may or may not involve taking a wife). This one adds a word not found in the others: **depravity** (*zimmah*). The word means "to **plot, conspire**." These people are relatives, and to do this to a woman and her daughter is a special form of degenerate, which to normal people is obvious. But God spells it out in the law for those to whom it isn't obvious.
13. *Your wife's sister* (18). This isn't talking about adultery, since that comes up in a moment. It refers either to marrying your wife's sister as a second wife (**polygamy**) or to some kind of **fornication** with your wife's sister.

As you can see, each of these deals with a man and some kind of forbidden female sexual relationship. All are close kin. After reading such a list, you might ask, “Why not just have one law that lumps them all in together, like, ‘Don’t have sex outside of marriage?’” That would have done the job.<sup>11</sup> Obviously, the OT forbids sex outside of marriage. There are laws about fornication in other places. But there is a special reason for naming these shameful sins in such an explicit manner and it has to do with the conclusion of the passage and the land vomiting the people out.

Not all sins are of equal devastation, not even all sexual sin. Incest is a special kind of evil that causes the land itself to become sick. Because the land is vomiting them out, we have no reason to think that these are culturally specific only to Israel and wouldn’t apply before or after. That’s the point of the introduction. The nations were not to do these things either. To lump all sexual sin into one overarching law is to make it harder for God’s people to see the reality of this truth. Therefore, the LORD spells it out in no uncertain

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<sup>11</sup> Curiously, the Orwellian nightmare that is *1984* talks about how Big Brother intentionally destroys language so that people no longer have words to put to thoughts. Specially of sex his appendix says, “His sexual life, for example, was entirely regulated by the two Newspeak words sexcrime (sexual immorality) and goodsex (chastity). Sexcrime covered all sexual misdeeds whatever. It covered fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and other perversions, and, in addition, normal intercourse practised for its own sake. There was no need to enumerate them separately, since they were all equally culpable, and, in principle, all punishable by death.” George Orwell, “1984,” Apple Books.

terms. Incest will not be tolerated in this new people that God is taking to be his treasured possession.

There is one elephant in the room to talk about here. Many argue that the closer you get back to creation, it may have been acceptable and now God is changing things. I mean, where did Cain get his wife, right? The closest marital relations we know about explicitly prior to this are [Isaac and Rebekah](#), who were first cousins once removed. True, [Abraham does call Sarah](#) his sister ([Gen 20:2, 12](#)), but we do not know her exact lineage. The Talmud tells us that Sarah was actually the daughter of Abraham's brother, making her his niece of one form or another. Clearly, these laws seem to have applied in Noah's day. And even more clearly, they are now totally forbidden. God's people must be different. They cannot be like the nations around them. They must exemplify holiness and purity at a level the rest of the world does not understand so that his holiness and difference might be seen through his covenanted children who shine his light when others come near to them.

## Menstrual Uncleanness (19)

There are two more laws that deal with **a man taking a woman** in a way that is forbidden and brings such a calamity upon the land. The first is when he approaches a woman to have sex while she is in **her menstrual uncleanness (19)**. We've seen this law previously (**15:24**), when we dealt with the unclean laws of a woman's period. This one deals with that ceremonially unclean flow which signified death (the loss of life through blood).<sup>12</sup>

## Adultery (20)

The second one reinforces this point. It concerns **adultery**. “**You shall not lie sexually with your neighbor's wife and so make yourself unclean with her**” (**20**). In the ancient world, adultery was simply known as “**the great sin**.”<sup>13</sup> God puts no conditions on it here. You must not do this. To do so is to make yourself unclean. This completes the list of sins dealing with men and women and sex.

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<sup>12</sup> It is curious that it is found here in a list that most even to this day would to this day say are things that should not be done. Yet, this one is taken much more lightly by people today.

<sup>13</sup> See Gen 20:9. **W. L. Moran**, “The Scandal of the ‘Great Sin’ at Ugarit.” *JNES* 18 (1959): 280–81; **J. J. Rabinowitz**, “The ‘Great Sin’ in Ancient Egyptian Marriage Contracts,” *JNES* 18 (1959): 73.

## Children and Molech (21)

Out of the blue, the topic seemingly changes. “You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD” (21). What we know of Molech is not well established. His name appears about eight times in the OT. It seems to be a proper name that comes from the word *mlk* meaning “to rule, to be king.” He clearly is very closely associated with a cult of child sacrifice. Similar names to his among the gods of the Amorites may very well associate him with funerary rites, the place of the dead, the shades of the underworld, the Anunnaki (biblical “sons of God”), a cult of the dead, and the biblical Rephaim (giants).<sup>14</sup> His cult was a temptation to the likes of Ahaz (2Kg 16:3); Manasseh (2Kg 21:6) and other kings to sacrificed their own children to this evil entity in the valley of Hinnom (2Kg 23:10), which is where we get the idea that Gehenna is a place of everlasting fire.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes he is associated with Baal. I do not think he *is*

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<sup>14</sup> G. C. Heider, “Molech,” ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 581-85.

<sup>15</sup> Todd Bolen, “The Myth of the Burning Garbage Dump of Gehenna,” *BiblePlaces.com* (April 7, 2011). <https://blog.bibleplaces.com/2011/04/myth-of-burning-garbage-dump-of-gehenna.html>. Todd’s post is no longer online that I can find. He does have a follow-up still online: <https://www.bibleplaces.com/blog/2011/04/fires-of-gehenna-views-of-scholars/>.

Baal, more like an associate of Baal (2Kg 23:5, 10), perhaps one of his seventy brothers (i.e. one of the sons of God). Whatever the case, Milton was surely right to call him, “That horrid king besmeared with blood” (*Paradise Lost*, I. 392).

Rather ominously, tech giants such as AOL<sup>16</sup> and Verizon<sup>17</sup> are using Molech/Moloch as a name in services they are offering. Even more disconcerting, there is a whole underground network of people who believe that Molech worship is at the center of the mass kidnapping and ritual-child abuse/sacrifice that is happening in the modern world at unprecedented levels.

One would hope it would be self-evident that such a law would be rooted in preventing Israel from committing great evil. Of course, Ahaz and Manasseh should have known, but it didn't seem to matter much to them. And there is probably a Christological point in this verse, because if Molech is one of the sons of God, this makes good sense of why the verse speaks about profaning the “name,” which should be

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<sup>16</sup> “Legacy Internet Brand AOL Created ‘Moloch’ Database System That Features Owl As Its Logo,” *CloverChronicle* (Apr 23, 2020), <https://cloverchronicle.com/2020/04/23/legacy-internet-brand-aol-creates-new-database-system-called-moloch-that-uses-owl-as-its-logo/>.

<sup>17</sup> “MolochON 2019,” *Evensi* (Oct 1, 2019), <https://www.evensi.us/molochon-2019-yahoo/319616459>.

capitalized, as “Name” is a title for Christ in the OT—Christ, the Son of God, the God of Israel, I AM, the Angel who spoke to Moses and gave himself this very name.

But why would this law be here? Let’s not answer that yet but look at the last two sins in this list first.

## Sodomy (22)

The first of these is sodomy. “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (21). This returns us back to sexual sins, which seems to make Molech look even more out of place. What can we say about this law? First, this is the first sexual sin that does not deal with a man and a woman. This is a man laying with a man. It is clearly homosexual sin; what is sometimes called sodomy.

Second, it uses the unique word “abomination” here, unique in that it is not used elsewhere of any other particular sin in this long list. That doesn’t mean this word (*toebah*) isn’t used in other places. Curiously, it appears one time in our twin pillar chapter, where it also refers to the same sin. “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination...” (20:13). In Deuteronomy it refers to idolatry (Dt 7:25; 17:4; 27:15), worship of other

gods (13:14), unclean animals (14:3), blemished sacrifices (17:1), burning children in the fire (18:10), sorcery (18:10-12), women wearing men's clothing (5), what I can only call sin-money which is money earned from prostitution or from Gentiles which is then tithed to God (23:18), taking back a wife after divorce (24:4), and having bad weights and measures (25:14-16).

Most of these are dealing directly with matters of religion (again, this is the point leftists make in their justification of homosexuality as only forbidden as a religious act of worship). But remarrying a wife formerly divorced and having bad weights and measures are things that belong more to the civil than ceremonial law. Furthermore, if we add Proverbs to the list, it calls a devious person (Prov 3:32), haughty eyes, lying tongues, murderous hands, hearts that devise wicked plans, feet that run to evil, false witnesses to lie, people who sow discord (17-19), the thoughts of the wicked (15:26) and many more things to this list. So that leftist argument doesn't hold up to scrutiny.

Besides these, the word is actually found later in Leviticus 18 where it says that you are to do “none of these abominations” (26) because the people of the land of Canaan

“did all of these abominations (27; also vs. 29-30). In other words, everything in Leviticus 18 is an abomination!

What we can gather from this is paradoxical. On one hand, clearly this sin is singled out as a special kind of abomination. The word means, “something detestable and hated by God” (Prov 6:16; 11:1). It would be its own form of abomination for someone to try to justify all of the things in these other lists as not actually being hated by God. Yet, at the same time, this has to mean that this sin is not somehow the greatest most evil sin imaginable. It is on par with someone who sows discord among a group of people.

This is similar to how Paul deals with this sin. He deliberately starts off a list of sins with “men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error” (Rom 1:27). And yet, as he works his way through his list, he puts gossiping, arrogance, and disobedience to parents on par with it (29-30). This whole point is not to convict a few “really bad” people as sinners, but to level every single one of us as having fallen short of the glory of God. Thus, to single out one sin over another is in this sense to deny one’s own personal depravity, which is the ultimate form of hypocrisy. *All have sinned* and fall short of the glory of God.

Yet, this sin is indeed singled out in a special way. This is because it twists and perverts the family in ways that nothing else does. What we can say for certain about this law is that, unlike the incest laws, **this one is all inclusive**. Those were case specific. Like the adultery law, this one covers everything. Curiously, in the ancient world, homosexuality was regulated by Egyptians and Canaanites and Hittites and all peoples. It was often viewed as bad and punishable. But not always. In this, they probably looked more like the West is now becoming as it casts off the shackles of Christianity ala Psalm 2.<sup>18</sup>

Scripture is much harsher, because God knows what is at stake in this sin. Look carefully at this verse. There is **no ritual context** here that precludes some forms of the sin as being fine while others are wrong. Milgrom needs to be taken seriously when he says, **“The difference between the biblical legislation and other Near Eastern laws must not be overlooked: the Bible allows for no exceptions; all acts of sodomy are prohibited, whether performed by rich or poor, higher or lower status, citizen or alien.”**<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Studies on this include **Robert A. J. Gagnon**, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001), 44-66.

<sup>19</sup> **Jacob Milgrom**, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1566.

## Bestiality (23)

There is **one more** law found in our passage. It concerns another sexual sin: **bestiality**. “**And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion**” (**Lev 18:23**). Unlike the previous law, we still live in a culture where this one seems self-evidently evil to most people. But when you throw off the objective law of God, all bets are off, and we are already seeing inroads made in making even this “perversion” become something that all people must accept as a valid expression of one’s personal sexuality in our rapidly decaying world as people pick and choose according to the whims of their own fanciful imaginations which things they will be offended by (and therefore you should too) and which they will accept (and you must too).

This law adds that word “**perversion**” which means “**confusion**.” It is a confusion of the natural order of creation, a **mixing of kinds**, of species, and thereby, at its root it is a casting off of the most basic created order and the God who made it that you can think of. Yet, it is curious that this law is also found in Ch. 20 where it is grouped

(albeit in as a stand-alone in the second half of the chiasm) with the incest laws and homosexuality.

## What About Molech?

Having looked at all the laws, we are now in a position to try to understand **the insertion of the law regarding Molech**. Answering this answer will, in turn, help us understand more of the logic of the two laws that come after it. Look again and notice that the law with Molech isn't really about him at all. Rather, it is about the "**children**." "**Do not give any of your children to offer them to Molech...**" What can happen when a man lies with a woman, be it his wife or some incestuous relationship? Children can be conceived. What can't happen when a man lies with a man or with an animal? Children cannot be conceived. In other words, the thing that binds all of these laws together are *children* ... family.

Milgrom tried hard to find a common denominator in all of these laws and concluded, "**The common denominator of all the prohibitions, I submit, is that they involve the emission of semen for the purpose of copulation, resulting in either incest and illicit progeny or, as in this case**

[sodomy], lack of progeny (or its destruction in the case of Molek worship, v. 21). In a word, the theme (with Ramban) is procreation.”<sup>20</sup> This is why it was necessary to focus our attention at the beginning on the family. These laws are not prudish, misogynistic, patriarchal, puritanical rules that keep people from having a good time. They each involve the careful regulation of life so that the family will thrive and multiply and be able to carry out the first and greatest function God gave to us: proper dominion over the earth.

This just isn't on the radar of modern people so immersed in comfort and luxury that sex has become purely something done for pleasure. Pleasure is not its first or most important function (though it is important and good). Rather, God gave sex so that human beings would procreate and make other little image-bearers of God. A society fixated on birth-control and contraceptives and so infatuated with the murder of the unborn caused almost always by their own hedonistic pursuit of pleasure can't and won't comprehend this. But this is precisely why God's people are not to be consumed with the things of this world, lest we get caught up in thinking just like it to the eventual

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<sup>20</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1567.

destruction of our own souls and God's law and God's glory. You have new hearts and you can now understand the truth by God's Spirit.

## Conclusion (24-30)

Allow me to conclude by offering a few thoughts about the introduction and conclusion of Leviticus 18 for us with regard to these laws. These laws are **directed to the nation of Israel**. The LORD is *their* God; they are not to do as the nations who worship *their* gods. The NT parallel to OT Israel is **the church**. Therefore, unless we have some kind of good reason that these laws have passed away, these laws would apply to us today.

We have seen that many of the laws in Leviticus have in fact passed away. All of those laws dealt with the ceremonial activities associated with the OT courtyard. Sacrifices and cleanliness laws have been fulfilled in Christ. Those laws were never put in terms of not acting like people do in the land of Egypt or Canaan, as these are here. That's why understanding the divisions of the book is so helpful. There is a transition here and the transition moves into moral categories.

These moral categories make the people unclean, just like ceremonial things can. **But they do more.** They cause God to drive all the nations out of the land of Canaan (**Lev 18:24**). God would not do that if they were not also held to a moral standard that had some kind of respect for these laws. Thus it says, “**I punished [their] iniquity ... the land became unclean ... and vomited out its inhabitants**” (**25**). There is something transcendent about these laws that actually causes the land itself to become sick. Israel is told in no uncertain terms that if they do not follow God’s law on these things, the land will vomit them out too (**28**). Therefore, there are eternal moral principles that are behind these specific laws.

This explains why Romans 1 has the homosexuality sin mentioned first in its list of other moral sins. God has always held all humans accountable for the way they treat their body-temples with respect to the creation ordinances of marriage and sex. The only way around this is to make the Bible say things it doesn’t say and mean things in never meant, which of course a lot of people love doing these days. But that isn’t acceptable for those who follow the Holy God. We must not compromise these truths, especially in days when that’s what everyone wants us to do. If we do, there

will no longer be a family and if that goes, so also does civilization itself.

Most importantly, the family of God, which is a family born of faith in Jesus Christ would necessarily become meaningless too, because all categories that make understanding what family is will have been obliterated. This is precisely why in places where people dare to call themselves Christians while flaunting sexual immorality of the most basic kind, faith alone by grace alone in Christ alone is completely absent. No, people are known now by their sins and therefore there is no need for a Christ to save them. They haven't done anything wrong. Make sure that as you consider this passage today that you know you have fallen short of God's glory, turn to the living God through Christ, and you will be saved into the greatest family of all—the eternal family of the heavenly Father.