

### LEVITICUS

#### Lesson 29 - Chapters 19 and 20

We began to touch on the subject of death and the afterlife at the end of last week's lesson. Because since about the 4th century A.D. Christianity has worked backwards by taking what was revealed in the New Testament and then trying to read it into the Old, we tend to read some of the Old Testament writings and say that the words they used were referring to heaven or hell even though the actual word wasn't employed. Any good Jewish scholar can tell you that this is not the case; that what it says is what they meant, and the concept of a man going up to heaven to be with God, or descending to a place where the Devil resided was not envisioned to the inspired writers of the Hebrew Bible.

Certainly we see the concepts of death and the afterlife evolve as we progress through the Old Testament, but never will we find an explicit thought of a man dwelling in heaven in God's presence.

As scattered and uneven as the subject is, particularly in the OT, in general one could say that death revolved around Sheol. From an OT perspective Sheol was NOT Hades or Hell, but it certainly was not a desirable place either...even though it was inevitable for all men. Rather it was the common place that every human could expect to visit; the grave. Whether wicked or good, an Israelite or a heathen, Sheol was the end of physical existence. For the most part there was a very hazy, undefined sense of an afterlife in an underworld thought to exist. Undoubtedly this was a holdover from Israel's 4 centuries in Egypt where there was a HIGHLY evolved and practiced doctrine of death, the underworld, spirits, even a kind of resurrection that was similar to, but not identical, to reincarnation. The entire purpose of the fabulous Pyramids had to do with making the spirits of the departed kings or queens or aristocrats comfortable and safe.

Ancestor worship played a significant role in practically every known culture of the world in the Bible era. Ancestor worship is not necessarily as it sounds; it did not always involve "worship". Sometimes it was but "honoring" spirits of the dead out of an obligation to do so (because YOU are going to want someone to do the same for you). In other cases there was a kind of worship in that it was thought that the dead person's spirit was in close contact with the god of the underworld, and perhaps you could ask your ancestor's spirit to get the underworld god to do something for you. We know for sure that the ancient Hebrews incorporated ancestor worship in their death cult, and their afterlife beliefs. We find reference to it in several passages of the Bible, especially as it pertains to Jacob and Joseph insisting that they be buried outside of Egypt, with their ancestors, so that they could commune with them in their afterlife.

Yet by no means was the Biblical literature on death and afterlife in the mold of the Egyptian

theology. Death was a negative for the Hebrews. Whatever vague sense of life-after-death was contemplated was also negative. Physical life was the best and highest form of existence for a human being, and death was just an unpleasant fact. Living a LONG life was a blessing; going to an early grave was called, in general, being cut-off.....particularly if one was seen as either wicked or having trespassed against God.

Just as Sheol is the fulcrum of the Hebrew's thoughts on death, the term "Shades" is the generic term for whatever form of existence, if any, a human assumed upon his death. In general, though, the MOST pleasant prospect of death was to "sleep with one's Ancestors".....a phrase that is hotly debated. The accepted thought is that WHATEVER happens in the grave, to "sleep with one's Ancestors" meant that one was in a peaceful state, as opposed to being in perpetual anxiety or torment.

In Jesus' day not only had the idea of a place where the spirits of the dead existed come into vogue.....spirits waiting for something....probably judgment.... but the concept of bodily resurrection was the hot religious topic of the day. Some, like the Sadducees, said, no to bodily resurrection while others like most sects of the Pharisees said yes.....to the possibility of bodily resurrection.

But even the concept of bodily resurrection wasn't what we typically now think of; that is, that our spirits are either in Hell or with God, and then our physical bodies are resurrected and we go to a spiritual place.....Heaven.....if we were Believers.....for further existence. Rather for the Jews of Jesus' day, and for centuries before, and in many cases it remains so; resurrection of the dead was most often ONLY a metaphor for the restoration of an apostate and subjugated Israel. It did NOT mean to literally have a dead person come back to life in a better body. For some in that it era it meant that AFTER Israel was purified by the Lord and made the dominant nation on earth as God's kingdom, then perhaps those who died as righteous members of the great and perpetual kingdom were brought back to life.....an earthly physical life....in this restored and purified kingdom of God, Israel. But certainly NEVER had they been at any point in God's heaven.

The concept proposed by Yeshua, and then expanded upon by Paul, of Believers living eternally in the presence of God.....in Heaven.....in a higher spiritual plane....was new. The Jews indeed believed in a "world to come" (in Hebrew, **olam habbah**) but generally it looked more like the widely accepted Christian view of the Millennium (the 1000 year reign of Christ that takes place, physically, on Earth), than Heaven. Though different Jewish sects believed differently, the thought was that a new golden age for Israel was at hand.....the world to come, **olam habbah**.....in which Israel would be the preeminent world power. And, Israel, governed by God, would finally take its rightful place as a godly kingdom governing the whole earth. The entire world would, in essence, convert to Judaism and follow the Torah perfectly and fully.

But the thought that the spirit of man could live in God's heavenly dwelling place was not there.....until the advent of Jesus. In fact the idea that man.....whom at our best is so impure and unrighteous and sinful.....could be allowed into God's Heaven and His very presence was anywhere from laughable to blasphemous. And of course that concept was forthrightly rejected by the bulk of the most learned Jews. The least learned Jews.....the peasants.....were more

open to the idea. Therefore it was the common folk who came to Jesus in droves, and the highly educated whom, but for a handful, shunned Him.

The bottom line as concerns our study of Leviticus is that whether ghosts existed or not, one was not to try to contact them (and most Israelites believed that they DID exist). Nor was one to have anything to do with someone who did the contacting of the dead as a paying profession. My best take on this is that God was not saying that the spirits of dead people could actually be contacted; rather it was unclean and unholy to be dealing with such matters, and only unholy people try such things. The dead are dead. And death is an abomination to God. The spirits of the dead exists somewhere, but in the Scriptures it is only the heathen who try to consort with these spirits....a living being communing with dead being. But the attitude towards attempting to commune with spirits of the dead is akin to idol worship, the worshipping false gods; first and foremost they're not real.....these gods don't exist in the first place.....the Bible will at times call them false gods, lo elohim.....non-gods. And really, what the spirit mediums are sometimes consorting with, or worshipping, are demons that lie and CLAIM to be the spirit of the dead person that somebody is trying to contact. Because then they can influence that person, deceive that person, at the behest of Satan. There is utterly no doubt that ANYONE can contact and consort with a demon, and we get Old and New Testament examples of exactly this thing.

Back to Leviticus 19.

In verse 32 God instructs that Israel should respect the elderly. This is not ancestor worship, nor does it mean that the oldest living member of the household is necessarily dominant and in authority. It means to honor them usually by taking care of them and seeing to their needs because at this point in life they are not physically able to fully care for themselves. But it also means that the wisdom the elderly have gained should be put to good use; appreciated and not ignored.

Next, we have another command that won't have meaning for about 4 decades; do not wrong a stranger.....a **ger**.....that lives with you in your land; the land, of course, being the Land of Canaan. This theme of a duty to treat foreigners fairly and to even allow those foreigners who wanted to give up their heathen gods and make the God of Israel their god as welcome members of the nation of Israel, is repeated time after time and no doubt was the physical precursor.....the earthly and physical side of the Reality of Duality.....to prepare for the time that Yeshua would come and offer gentiles (foreigners, strangers), by means of faith in Him, to join Israel. More specifically to join Israel in a spiritual sense, not a physical sense. To join in the covenants made between God and Israel. To join in the Heavenly ideal of Israel.....a nation of people completely devoted to Yehoveh...thus we have Romans 11 and Paul explaining how gentiles who have faith in Christ are grafted into Israel.....in a spiritual, not a physical, sense of course; alongside, not in place of; and as the younger brother, not the elder.

Not only that but the reason Israel is to do this is yet another admonition by God to "love him as you love yourself". And Israel should not have a hard time identifying with the foreigner who wants to be among them because as it says at the end of verse 34, "for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt". Part of the reason for the Egyptian experience was to learn valuable

lessons; and one of those lessons was that these foreigners are valuable in God's eyes and He loves them so YOU are to love them.

Verses 35 and 36 tell the Israelites that they are not to cheat one another, or foreigners, in doing business. They are to use fair and just dry and liquid measures, and the scale they use is to be accurate and set to cheat the customer. Again as I mentioned over time more than once, it was and remains Middle Eastern culture to cheat, deceive, bribe, and do whatever it takes to "win" in business transactions. The best and most revered businessmen are those who are the cleverest and can cheat the best. God's people are, instead, to emulate God; be fair and just to all.

This chapter ends with God's reminder to follow ALL of His Laws and Commands...not just the convenient ones.

Let's move on to Leviticus Chapter 20.

Chapter 20 continues God's lesson in holiness to the general population of Israel. The thing for us to notice is that in the previous chapters, particularly 18 and 19, God laid down a series of rules and ordinances that basically said "don't do this as the pagans do, INSTEAD do that". Now in chapter 20 Yehoveh backs up and says, "IF you do any of these forbidden things I've already told you not to do, THEN this is what will happen". In other words the penalty for violation of God's commands is more the point of chapter 20.

And just as in modern civil society where we can determine the level of seriousness that a particular culture assigns to a particular moral failure by means of the nature and severity of punishment meted out, so we can also see which crimes against Yehoveh He sees as most offensive to Him according to the severity of penalties He prescribes for each.

As we read chapter 20 the general structure is that we move from the most serious trespasses against God, which requires the violator to forfeit his life; to the level just under that in which the person is cut-off by some means. Please keep in mind that every violation listed in Chapter 20 is terribly serious; even sins of the slightly lower level of violations in which one is cut-off are, at times, called "abhorrent" to God. In modern day legal thought every one these moral failures are serious felonies; the issue is analogous to whether a crime is a capitol offense or one in which you might suffer life imprisonment, so to speak.

### **READ LEVITICUS 20 all**

I'm going to focus us on some important principles brought up here in chapter 20 because we have already thoroughly studied the meaning of most of the sinful acts discussed in these verses. And I'm just liable to be up on my soapbox a little more than normal today because these principles are so visible in our modern lives.....so buckle up.

Notice that between the end of verse 1 and the first part of verse 2 we get a solid definition of whom these laws are addressed to; and it is anyone from among the Israelites.....INCLUDING

any stranger living among them. It is referring to any citizen of Israel, which could be a natural born Hebrew or a foreigner who has given up their god in order to worship Yehoveh, and thereby has formally joined Israel; AND it includes any **ger** living among Israel. A **ger** is a foreigner who has not joined himself to Israel, but he is living among Israel presumably for the benefits such a relationship brings to him.

I point this out because it is so often said, “the laws of the O.T. are just for Israel”...meaning, of course, for those of Hebrew descent. And therefore nothing of the OT applies to modern gentile Christians...those NOT born as Hebrews, or as we say today, Jews. Well I hope by now I’ve demonstrated to you that nothing could be further from the truth.....but also noting that just as it is not obedience to God’s Laws that brings us redemption neither was that so for the Israelites. The Law is about teaching us what holiness is, and what it looks like. What is acceptable to God and what is not. What is good in God’s eyes and what is not. The purpose of the Torah is to show a redeemed person how to live a holy life, not to redeem an unredeemed person.

And here we find that if someone wants to live among God’s people without formally BEING one of God’s people, that’s permissible; but they’re going to be subject to these SAME rules and laws of Israeli society.

And, Law #1 is, no idolatry (specifically no Molech worship). Molech worship was of particular concern to Yehoveh because it was practiced by a significant segment of the Canaanites, the current inhabitants of the Promised Land, and by some of the other cultures throughout the known world that the Israelites would encounter. Just as important many people would come to the Promised Land who wanted to join Israel, or to just stay with Israel for awhile usually for economic reasons, who were worshippers of other gods. So it was necessary to lay out the law about this subject because God’s laws were to apply throughout God’s land.

This particular false god, Molech, was especially taboo because his chief attribute was that he demanded human blood; child sacrifice actually.

Now just as we have already seen that the names of people in the Bible varied from culture to culture (for instance Nimrod was a Babylonian name and Ashur is that same name only in the Assyrian language) so we see it with Molech. When we find a god with almost exactly the same attributes being worshipped among various far-flung cultures, although going by different names, we can be fairly certain that it is the same god that is being worshipped. For instance Ashteroth, Ishtar, Astarte, and Eostre are all the same goddess (the fertility goddess); just the language of the culture where she is worshipped is different (by the way, this goddess’s name eventually gained an Anglo-Saxon name that is rather familiar to us .....her name: Easter. And yes, that is exactly where we got the name for the Christian holiday.

Molech was a high deity, a chief-god, an El. Because the world’s people worshipped many gods, a hierarchy of gods was developed.....gods were put into a pecking order.....with some gods subservient to, or at least less powerful than, other gods. A fertility goddess, a god of the rains, a god of the underworld, and a god of the harvest were lesser gods; so, invariably there was a chief-god.....the god above the other gods who sat at the top of the hierarchy.....and

Molech (and his various names) was the chief-god.

In fact, this concept of a one god preeminent over the others appears in Hebrew culture; the Hebrew “El”, as in Elohim, or El Shaddai, simply means “highest god”, or “chief-god”. Such a term has no meaning if there are no other gods to be compared to. And “El” is a language cognate of the Akkadian “IL” which, of course, also means highest God. When we see phrases in our Bibles like “lord of lords” and “god above all gods” and “king of kings” ascribed to Yehoveh, even to Yeshua, these are but cultural language holdovers from the days of multiple-god worship among the Israelites. Yes, in Hebrew, and even among the nation of Israel, the thought of there being multiple gods was prevalent during the period of the entire Old Testament, and on into the time of the NT. We’ll talk about that more in just a minute.

In Moab, which bordered the Promised Land, the Moabites called Molech Chemosh. In Ammon, another bordering nation, the Ammonites called this same god Ba’al Peor, and he was also probably Ba’al Zebub. Later in Greek and Roman culture, Molech would be called Mars and Saturn. Same god, different names for different societies.

We first heard Molech’s name in Leviticus 18 and now we find it again in Leviticus 20. But in one language or another his name will be repeated often throughout the Tanach, the OT. Now we’re going to see several terms and phrases about just what it was that Molech wanted from his followers, especially as concerned their children. We’ll see the terms, **handed-over**, **devoted to**, **offer-up to**, and a few others. At one point it was thought that only one or two of those terms actually indicated the most extreme version of child-involvement for Molech, which was the killing of a child and giving him/her to Molech as an appeasement. The idea was that the other forms of offering children to Molech simply meant that the child was dedicated to Molech, much as we have baby dedications to God in some churches today. That is that it was a rather benign, albeit heathen, event that meant that the parents would raise up that child to worship the god Molech. General agreement now, however, is that all these terms are just various idioms for the same result; the child is ritually executed. Sometimes the child would become a burnt offering; perhaps even more often a child would be killed and buried in the foundation of a new building to dedicate the building to Molech, or call for Molech’s blessing upon that building or family or activity that took place there.

Now, very sadly, Israel’s history is replete with bowing down to the false god of this horrendous cult; Israel at times merely accepted the worship of Molech by foreigners living among them....obviously for the sake of tolerance.....but Israel also even established the worship of Molech for themselves in various eras.

Turn your Bibles to 1Kings 11. We’re going to look at verses 1-8.

### **READ 1Kings 11: 1-8**

King Solomon built High Places, altars of sacrifice, to serve a litany of pagan gods INCLUDING Molech. He participated in the worship of a long list of the most detestable false gods, and he allowed his family and encouraged his people to do the same. It’s not that he necessarily

believed in these gods, but at the least he thought it politically advantageous to show that he was understanding towards those in his kingdom who did not believe as he believed. Not only that, it says he did it in “love”; that his motive was love. Does this shock you? Well it should. I’ve had more than one angry person come up to me after a Torah class and tell me that I was terribly wrong in my teaching about the great King Solomon worshipping other gods. How could a Bible hero who is credited with writing 3 inspired books of the Bible.....one of which, Proverbs, is likely the most read of any of the OT Scriptures, at least by the Church.....how could such a man of God be accused of worshipping other gods? Well here it is, straightforward in all it’s ugly truth. Solomon, builder of the 1st Temple, worshipped Yehoveh all right; but also eventually honored other gods largely, we’re told, to satisfy his foreign wives. Just so you understand: the reason Solomon married all those women was to create alliances. That was the usual way an alliance with another nation was created in that era; each wife represented an alliance with another nation.

What makes it doubly troubling is that it wasn’t as though Solomon began life as a pagan and THEN we have the happy ending of his disavowing those heathen gods and worshipping the God of Israel. Nope. He was raised under Levitical laws. He knew them well. The Scriptures paint a picture of a man who lapsed in and out of his desire for these other gods. Undoubtedly he worshipped Yehoveh at the same time he was worshipping these false gods (there is no evidence that he ever disavowed the Lord), thinking all the time he was doing a good thing. That’s what it means when it says he committed idolatry in “love”. He was deceiving himself; what he was doing he did to please others. Can you imagine the image of Solomon worshipping those other gods, making a mockery of all that Israel stood for, and how that must have hurt, angered and offended those citizens of Israel who had worked diligently to stay true to the God of Israel?

Glad you don’t ever have to witness that? Not so fast. To my dying day I will never forget the sickening picture of our President, shortly after 911, standing in a Mosque in a ceremony transmitted around the world, declaring that Allah was good, and that Allah was god, and that Allah was the same as the god of the Christians and Jews, and that Islam is a valid and true and peaceful religion to be favorably compared with the religion of the Bible. About 20 years after King Solomon did essentially the same thing his country fell into civil war and disintegrated, not to appear again as a unified nation for almost 3000 years. I’m not in the business of making predictions, nor has the Lord seen fit to tell me of His plans beyond what there is in the Holy Scriptures. But explain to me how it is that the elected leader of our nation, who professes on the one hand that Yeshua is Lord, can on the other say that a false god is also the Lord, and there be no reaction from God. Folks, we’ve all felt that we are on a slippery precipice and I’m not sure that there can be a much more serious offense against the Lord (made on behalf of a nation) than the one I just reminded you of; one that most of us witnessed as it happened. And to top it all off this same leader is using all his power to dislodge Israel from major portions of the Promised Land, even from the Temple Mount, and he says he is doing it in love and for the cause of peace.

Most of Christianity has just blown it off as a political leader of nation being political and it had nothing to do with anything more than that. That it’s OK to call on the nation to join with pagans to worship their god if it’s done in the name of peace and love. Well, it wasn’t OK

when Solomon did it, and I doubt it's OK now.

How often have you done something "in love" that was completely against God's Scriptures because it seemed so compassionate and merciful at the time? Honestly believing that "the law of love" as you saw it overrode His commands and ordinances? Even believing that the Yeshua, author of the Word, the Torah, has told us that we're to disregard the very principles He laid down in the Torah in exchange for moving in whatever direction our hearts lead us. Big, Big mistake. For the heart is deceitful beyond all our imaginings.

But it eventually got even worse for Israel. Kings Manasseh and then Amon.....kings of Judah in the years leading up to the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians.....INSTITUTED Molech worship **under pain of death** for those Israelites who refused to worship him. Even in Jesus' day there was an altar in Gehennom.....the valley of Hinnom that surrounds the eastern and southern edges of the Holy City.....where Molech was openly worshipped and children were burned to death in his honor.

Is it any wonder that God made the Promised Land vomit Israel out of it on more than one occasion? Is it any wonder that Yehoveh speaks so passionately against Molech? I took you on this detour because I wanted you to understand the unbelievable abomination of tolerating the worship of other gods. And how cancerous the cult of Molech was and that Israel was infected by it to one degree or another at all times because they refused to take whatever action necessary to stamp it out. I also took you on this detour because this demonstrates how easy it is to sincerely believe we are worshipping the One True God at the same moment we are blind to the idolatry that is rampant in our lives because it serves some useful purpose for us. How easy it is for the Church of Jesus Christ to honestly believe that we are true only to Him when it is so corrupted by the desire for power, position, and money.....and NOT wanting to be ostracized by the world in general.... that there are almost no limits to how far it will go to be inclusive in order to prosper and grow. This is why the word "tolerant" must be eradicated from our vocabulary. Harmony and unity at any price.....tolerance and appeasement.....have been made into virtues in our day. They are not; they are cowardice, rebellion and sin against the Lord. It is choosing to be against God.

Yet let's be clear: Molech was not real no matter how sincere and dedicated his believers were that they would take their toddlers and throw them into a burning fire for the sake of the Molech cult. Molech was but man's evil inclination being easily led by that wicked Pied Piper, Satan. There is no "Molech"; Molech is really an ideal, a brainchild of mankind's fallen nature. And the ideal was that if the worshippers of Molech sacrificed some of their children they would receive the blessing of prosperity and well-being for the remainder of their family.....because that was almost always the POINT of those child sacrifices. You already know where I'm heading; but what kind of teacher would I be if I didn't tell you the truth.....that abortion is but modern day child sacrifice. Why are the unborn sacrificed? Almost always for **our** personal well being and prosperity and comforts. The doctor says, maybe there's a defect.....better get rid of it, because it could prove costly and troublesome, or even heartbreaking. The little blue ring in the bottom of the test tube says there is new life growing in the mother's womb..... oh, but that would put a burden on our already stretched-to-the-limit finances, better stop it now. The human secularist and environmentalist see new life as a threat to our over-populated (in



their view) planet.....so it is the kind and compassionate thing for those who already live to get rid of it. This is the ESSENCE of Molech worship.....this IS Molech worship. And the penalty for worshipping Molech (or better, the ideal of Molech) as verse 2 of Leviticus 20 says, is death. Not the death of the innocent victim.....OUR death; all those who would commit the act, and all those who would tolerate it.

Now verse 3 prescribes stoning as the means of execution for the person among Israel.....stranger or citizen.....who worships Molech. Further, it says just WHO is going to do the executing.....it is the **'am ha'arets**.....the people of the land. Ordinary Israelite citizens. Now this is not talking about vigilante justice; it is talking about duly appointed people designated for this task. But they were not the elders, the tribal leaders nor chieftains; they were not priests or members of a court. They were low-level leaders who had some kind of voice in ordinary community affairs. Why stoning? Why not shoot the condemned with arrows or stab them with a knife or decapitate them? It's hard to tell. Most scholarly thought is that these other methods typically required only one or two executioners; but stoning required many. The idea was of communal participation in the execution, and thereby communal acknowledgment of the wrongness of this crime....that they didn't want it among them so they were eradicating it. The idea was that the execution should **not** be quick and painless; it should be brutal and bloody. And from it Israel should learn that even if their hearts wanted to follow Molech they wouldn't do it for fear of the consequences.

Now, the next verse, 3, lays down another principle: death can be of a two-fold nature; it can be physical death and it can be spiritual death. This is one of those verses that the English kind of misses the mark because it is explaining that even beyond this dual aspect of death.....physical and spiritual.....that there is also the matter that if the people will not do their duty and prosecute a Molech worshipper, the person still doesn't escape; God will cut him off in His way, in His time.

We've talked about cut-off, in Hebrew **karet**, before. As a reminder it is a complex term. It means a range of things from dying short of a normal life span, to being excommunicated from the nation of Israel and therefore from Yehoveh; it could even mean a consequence that comes in a later generation of that family; it could mean out and out execution by the civil authority; it could mean immediate death directly at the hand of God as happened to Nadav and Avihu, sons of the High Priest Aaron. But underlying it all is that **karet**, the penalty of being cut-off, is a divine retribution. It is not the result of a civil court action.

We'll continue chapter 20 next week.