

LEVITICUS

Lesson 30 - Chapters 20 and 21

We began Leviticus chapter 20 last week, and it's purpose is NOT to repeat the same laws that have been set down in the previous couple of chapters (although at first glance it may seem so); rather this is what our modern court system would call "the penalty phase". If a person is judged guilty of the listed crimes, then chapter 20 comes into play because it carries a parallel list of the required consequence. Often that consequence is death.

Let's reread a little of Leviticus chapter 20:

RE-READ LEVITICUS 20:1 - 9

In the first part of the verse 3 we get a fairly common, but odd sounding, Biblical phrase: "I will set my face against that man". To **set one's face against** means the intent to inflict punishment. And the notion in this context is that the person who worships Molech is going to die physically by stoning, and in addition he will be separated from God for all eternity, spiritual death; and if the people won't bring the criminal to justice God will inflict terrible judgments on that perpetrator for the rest of his days and THEN, upon his physical death, disavow that person as one of His people. Folks, it simply doesn't get worse than this; death at every possible level.

And why is there this threat of a terrible judgment for violation of these particular laws? Because the people of Israel a) committed idolatry, and b) showed no respect for life. Further by God's own people having the audacity to worship a false god they have defiled His Sanctuary (the Wilderness Tabernacle) and profaned His Holy name and thus God's personal holiness was trespassed by this act. As we have seen over and over again the Lord WILL protect His personal holiness at unlimited cost. If He has to destroy the whole universe and start all over again to maintain the infinite level of holiness that is His very essence, He will. And in fact Revelation reveals that this is exactly what He will eventually do.

I have some time ago come to the conclusion that we get an entirely wrong perception of just what it means in Holy Scripture to defile God's name; or when we say that we do something in God's name (or just as often in Jesus' name) it really doesn't mean to us what the Bible intends for us to understand. When it says here in Leviticus 20 that Israel defiles God's holy name by sacrificing to Molech it means that Israel perverts and misrepresents God's holy attributes, His holy nature. As the people of God, Israel (and we) are commanded to "be holy" in the same way that the Lord is holy. But HOW do we do that; HOW do we behave in a holy way, and how can a mere man defile God's holiness? What does HOLY behavior look like?

This concept of our being holy and thus mimicking God's attributes works hand-in-glove with the well-established principle that mankind was created in the image of God. And I would like to offer this definition of the term, the image of God: the image of God is the sum of all of His attributes. While all men were made in the image of God and expected to reflect that image in their daily life, most have fallen away and do not. The people who Yehoveh has redeemed and set-apart for Himself are expected to mimic the Godhead as close as is humanly possible due to the special status that the Lord has bestowed upon them.

This is important, so bear with me. When we speak of the **image of God** there are differing teachings on the subject but they all tend to get bogged down by saying, well the image of God means that there is the spiritual aspect of the Lord that is present in men and Christ represents the physical fleshly aspect that is in men, and since God is eternal so we were made ideally to be eternal and so on. And while all this is true, it misses the whole point in my opinion. The point ought to be that God made man in a way that reflects God's attributes; and we're the ONLY living beings on earth that He made with the capability to embody God's attributes. God's attributes aren't so much about what KIND of being He is (physical, spiritual, eternal, etc.), rather His attributes are all about His character. In the image of God man was made to be mobile, to move around, we weren't made like plants that are stuck in one spot during their entire life cycle. Like God we can make moral choices and even have preferences, we can discern good from evil; we aren't creatures who react only by instinct. Man was given the ability to create (albeit not on the same level as the Lord), to be the masters of our domain, to handout forgiveness and mercy, to bestow blessings upon others, to be truthful and faithful. In the image of God man was given the capacity to love AND to hate, to accept and to reject. Man was meant to display heavenly enlightenment, to be righteous, and to judge. Every one of these things that I've listed are attributes of men, and they are attributes of God. When all of these attributes are displayed in our lives, as directed by the spirit of God, THAT is holiness.

Therefore when we think of the phrase, "God's name", it is primarily referring to His attributes, His characteristics. When we come to someone in God's name, it means we are to come to that person while embodying and displaying His characteristics. We are to come to people in love, mercy, forgiveness, discernment, righteousness, truthfulness, and judging right from wrong.....all based on God's definition of these things. When the Bible says that as Believers we are to bear the name of Christ, it means that we bear Christ's characteristics; it doesn't mean that we are to have the fish symbol stitched on our shirt pockets, a Christian bumper sticker on our car, or wear a jacket that proudly displays the church or mission group we are attached to. Therefore when a person who publicly claims allegiance to Yeshua and to the God of Israel behaves in a manner that reflects something OTHER than God's characteristics (like sacrificing to Molech), we defile the holy characteristics of God that He put into us, and that we're supposed to be reflecting and upholding.

So, please, due to the modern, common every day usage of the word "name" (as meaning only a formal form of identification of a person) from this point forward mentally erase the word "name" when you come across it in Holy Scripture and replace it with either the word "characteristics" or "attributes".

Let's move on and deal with the matter of executing a criminal.

Let me share a difficult (and for some, unwelcome) principle with you that Yehoveh teaches us in Torah: to end the life of a person who takes innocent life unjustly, is actually preserving life. To kill a person who violates God's holiness ordinances is actually preserving holiness. When we justly execute a murderer in accordance with God's laws then two things have been accomplished: God's justice has been served, and this person who has a propensity to wantonly take life is no longer a threat. From the Law's point of view, to execute a person who violates God's holiness in a severe way serves to rid the community of a virulent cancer that can spread and ultimately take SPIRITUAL LIFE away from other individuals who might be swayed to do the same; from the family, from the community at large, even from the land itself because sin can even defile the land we live upon (remember, it is also a Biblical principle that a land and its people are organically intertwined).

It is only man's twisted notion of what compassion ought to be that seeks to take criminals who God says should forfeit their lives, and instead we allow them to live. Because in doing so we have chosen on some occasions not to take action against someone who has trespassed against God's holiness even though He has commanded it. By taking such a course we are making our opinions greater than God's commands. In the Lord's economy we have effectively sided with the guilty at the expense of the victim and perhaps future victims.

We're paying a terrible price in our society, today, for our arrogance. Why is violence increasing? Because the violent are allowed to live and harm more life, which is entirely against Yehoveh's instructions. We have seen an amazing surge in crimes against children because we have a revolving door justice system that wants to give these perpetrators chance after chance to harm more innocent lives, instead of terminating the life of the violator. Why? Because our human sympathies override God's laws. Our way of thinking is: better many innocent suffer than one guilty person is punished more than we are comfortable with.

Let me be clear that in no way am I advocating vigilante justice nor advocating that we disobey the law of the land. God has allowed mankind to set up governments to handle these matters in a just way. But the idea was that all human justice systems should be based on His laws and commands. When they are usurped and ignored the intended justice system crumbles and MORE life is damaged or lost, not less. We are watching this play out daily before our very eyes. In our American system of government it is important that we all obey the law, and I urge us all to do so; and that we also do our best to put people into power who value God's laws more than man's intellect. But how do we do that if all the doctrine that we, as Believers, have been taught.....and that many of the more liberal Jewish sects have adopted.....has come to the conclusion that the Torah is abolished? That the source document for determining right from wrong and for meting out proper justice, for obtaining and maintaining holiness, for the blueprint of how to achieve harmony with God and His creation, is made null and void? I maintain that this is the chief problem not only with the world in general, but within the ever-weaker institutional church as well.

Next, in verse 6, the penalty for turning to ghosts and familiar spirits.....the supposed spirits of dead people....is that God will punish that person by His own divine hand. Instead of Israel following their neighbors and doing such things as trying to contact the dead, they (and we) are to be sanctified and holy; quite literally, we are to separate ourselves in order to be holy.

Separate ourselves from who or what? From what Christians commonly call “the world”.....all that does not bow down to the will of the God of Israel.

RE-READ LEVITICUS 20:10 - 21

Starting in verse 10 and running through verse 21, we’re back onto the subject of sex; or better, forbidden sexual unions. But just before that the death penalty is ordained for one who “insults” or “curses” his/her parents. Actually the active word here, in Hebrew, is **qalal**; and the sense of **qalal** is “to make light of” something. Not “light of” in the sense of making a bad joke on a serious matter; rather, it is to not give the proper “weight” to honoring one’s parents as we should. We give it little thought; it’s low on our list; we diminish its importance. When we’re young and living at home the issue is primarily about respect and obedience. Once we’re married and have our own family it’s about respect and accepting their wisdom. Once the parents are older, their bodies are getting tired and they need help, it’s the respect of caring lovingly for them, in their best interest. Of doing for them, and being discreet in dealing with their problems and needs. To do anything other than this for our parents, says Yehoveh, we should die!

See, what’s interesting is that over time man has turned God’s laws upside-down. We put people in prison, long term, for stealing money and property. God’s way was for them to stay in society, as a servant if necessary, and pay restitution. We take violent people, feel sorry for them, and try to “educate them” into being better people. God says destroy them, for they will damage or kill life. We put our children above our parents; God says put your parents above your children. Nowhere does the Scripture make our children the most important thing in our lives. Nowhere does the Scripture say that if we dishonor our kids, or don’t do as well for them as we should, that we should be put to death, like for dishonoring our parents! And of course, this manmade philosophy has led to confusion and a steady downhill slide for our society.

What now follows is a list of more capital crimes (the death penalty) for violations relating to improper sexual relations:

1. Adultery with a married woman. Both offending parties are to be burned to death. Please note this is a specific case. If a man cheated on his wife with an unmarried woman, it was different. This is about a married man having sexual relations with a woman married to another man.
2. If a man has sexual relations with his father’s wife, both offending parties are to die. This does NOT mean a man having relations with his biological mother; this is assuming that the “father’s wife” is what we would today call a stepmother.
3. If a man has sexual relations with his son’s wife, both offending parties must die.
4. If a man has sexual relations with another man.....the crime of homosexuality... they shall both be burned up in fire.
5. If a man marries both a woman and her mother....having both at the same time.....all three shall be burned up in fire.
6. If a man commits bestiality, both the man and the beast shall be killed.
7. If a woman commits bestiality, both the woman and the beast shall be killed.

That was the end of the capital crimes. And we may see them as awfully severe, and their punishments as frightfully archaic. Be that as it may at the least we should take from this just how serious are these acts against Yehoveh.

More sexual prohibitions follow in verse 17, but the penalty is different. The penalty may not seem as severe as death but it actually about the same; being cut-off. For all practical purposes this is referring to a PERMANENT excommunication, and it is a spiritual excommunication. For the ONLY holy nation, with the ONLY holy people, is Israel. All others are by definition outside of a relationship with God, and therefore they are marked for eternal destruction. Excommunication means that a person is removed as a member of the holy group, and assigned as a member of the unholy (or common) group.

Here is a list of these very serious crimes along with they're assigned punishments:

1. A man cannot marry his natural sister, or both are kicked out of the community of Israel.
2. If a man has sex relations with a woman on her menstrual cycle, both are to be cut-off from their people. I need to point out that this is about a) an unmarried couple, and b) her cycle had already begun and both were aware of it.
3. If a man has sexual relations with his natural aunt, there is to be some type of unspecified punishment.
4. If a man has sexual relations with an aunt by marriage, the woman shall be cursed with barrenness.
5. If a man marries his brother's wife.....presumably due to bigamy or divorce.....they will be cursed with childlessness. This is in contrast to the laws of Levirate marriage by which a man is duty bound to marry his brother's widow IF she had not produced a male heir, and the goal is for the wife to be provided with a son by means of the brother in law. So **the motive** for a man marrying his brother's wife is at the heart of the matter.

RE-READ LEVITICUS 20:22 – end

The last few verses tell us something important: God is transferring control of the area known at that time as the Land of Canaan to the Israelites. And it is not an arbitrary decision. As is says in verse 23: "Do not live by the regulations of the nation which I am expelling ahead of you; because they did all these things, which is why I detested them".

What happens if Israel DOES emulate the Canaanites instead of being obedient to the ways of the Lord? Verse 22 says; "You are to observe all my regulations and rulings and act on them, so that the land (the Land of Canaan) to which I am bringing you will not vomit you out."

And within 500 years from the time of Moses that will be exactly what happens. Not the least reasons for it being the examples I showed to you about King Solomon bowing down to Molech at the same time he was bowing down to Yehoveh; and Kings Manasseh and Ammon demanding all Israelites were to bow down to Molech, and the constant flirtatious love affair so

many Hebrews and their leaders had with a significant number of false gods from among the community of foreigners that lived near them.

And then a really interesting statement is made, which explains without reservation exactly WHY God established the laws of clean and unclean as pertains to food, sacrifice, and other matters. It's not often we are told directly WHY on much of anything, which is WHY I tell you not to look for WHY. Look again at the end of verse 24, and then on into verse 25, it says this: ".....I am Adonai your God, who has set you apart from other peoples. THEREFORE, you are to distinguish between clean and unclean animals....."

This translation is OK, because it makes the connection between God setting "clean" Israel apart from the "unclean" world; and likewise Israel is to set "clean" things apart from "unclean" things. But the way this is often translated misses the STRONG statement being issued here. If I add back in a couple of key words in Hebrew it will help make my point. The original Hebrew says:

"I am Yehoveh your God who has BADAL you from other peoples; therefore you are to BADAL between clean and unclean animals....." The point is that the exact same Hebrew word is used denote the separating of Israel from the world as it is for the clean animals being separated from the unclean animals.

And we've been told all along that Israel had no special merit of its own in order for them to be called "clean", as opposed to everyone else being called "unclean". God simply chose. So, too, is the matter of clean and unclean animals; no animal merited of its own to be "clean" as opposed to all other animals being called "unclean". God simply chose.

As a result God looks with special favor upon Israel and without favor upon all other nations of peoples. Now, to emulate God, Israel is to look upon those animals that God has declared "clean" with special favor, and to look without favor on those God has declared "unclean".

Yehoveh divides, elects, and ***badal***.....separates. ***Badal*** has the sense of separating and making a distinction.

Let's move on to chapter 21.

As we have seen throughout Leviticus, some of the laws were directed to the priesthood, others to the people in general. Whereas Chapter 20 was talking to the whole congregation of Israel, chapters 21 and 22 return to instruction for the priests. As a reminder, the priests all came from the tribe of Levi; but not every Levite was a priest. Only certain families within the tribe of Levi could be priests. And, there were lesser priests, and greater priests, and one High Priest; each of these had to come from a specific family, or a specific group of families. For instance, the High Priest had to come from Aaron's line. And, each of these classes of priests had specific duties assigned, which amounted to lesser duties and greater duties. So only the greater priests could approach the altar and officiate the sacrifices; the lesser priests served in more menial ways, such as assembling and disassembling the Wilderness Tabernacle when it moved, or cleaning up the enormous volumes of blood and ashes that accumulated every day.

As we read chapter 21, notice that the first 9 verses speak to the ordinary priests, whereas the verses 10-15 concern only the High Priest. Because chapters 21 and 22 are a unit, they work together and probably should never have been divided in the first place. That said, we'll follow the usual form and study the two chapters separately as taken together it would be too long and too much to digest all at once.

READ LEVITICUS 21 all

The chapter begins by dealing with the most common reality of life: and that is, death. Within the Israelite population of 3 million, death likely occurred daily among the 12 tribes as they wandered in the Wilderness. The Levite population at this time was probably the smallest of all the tribes. In a census taken in the book of Numbers the male population of the Levites was about 22,000. But to attain even that number the Levites had their population counted differently than all the other tribes. All the other tribes were to count ONLY males who were 20 years of age and up; there was also an upper age limit, only those who were able to fight were to be counted. So for all the other tribes only men from 20 up to about 50 years old were counted, so there had to be thousands more males who were thus left out. The Levites, on the other hand, were to count ALL males one month old and up....with NO upper age limit. So the entire Levite population (men, women, children, everybody) was likely only 75,000 to 100,000 people.

Therefore death was still dealt with often among the priestly tribe of Levi, but certainly not as often as among the other tribes. Let's talk about death and decay of the body for a little while, since it has everything to do with God's plans.

Death is an abomination to God. Yet, apparently, death did not always exist. Before we talk specifically about the Levite rules concerning dealing with their own dead, and as a way of explaining God's hatred of death itself, let me remind you about where death came from.

Death is a result of sin says the Word of God; and apparently, according to Genesis, death entered our Universe...or at the least, entered mankind.....upon the first two humans, Adam and Eve, disobeying God and eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

What is death? Death means the end of existence. Physical death, the kind we're most familiar with, is the end of physical existence. But there is another kind of death as well, Spiritual death; Spiritual death is either the end of our personal Spiritual existence, OR it is our personal spiritual separation from God on a permanent basis, OR it may well be both. Good arguments can be made for either case.

Here's the thing as regards our physical death: it happens most often because our bodies begin to age, to decay. But regardless of the reason for our death once we are dead our bodies continue the disintegration process back to the basic elements of the universe, which God metaphorically calls "dust". In effect, however, this is the destiny of our **entire** Universe; everything in our Universe is getting old and decaying. But unlike the non-human components of the Universe.....from animals, to rocks, to mountains, to the stars and to the air we breathe

there is no spiritual attribute in the make-up of these things. That is a rock or a mountain doesn't have an eternal spirit. So the future of everything in our Universe including mankind is complete physical decay and death. The human being, though, has a type of spirit that lives on after our physical death.

That is apparently not the way the Universe was supposed to operate and equally apparent, eventually the Universe will cease to operate that way. Let me explain something to you that I think is helpful for understanding how the Lord made our Universe to operate: TIME is essentially the measurement of death and decay. Without decay time doesn't exist. Let me say that again: Time is how the process of death and decay is measured. Just as miles and feet, or kilometers and millimeters, are used to measure the three physical dimensions of objects (length, width, and height) time is used to measure the decay of physical objects. Things of the spiritual world cannot be measured in feet and inches, because they are not physical. Things of the spiritual world are also not subject to time because spiritual things do not decay; no decay, no time. In fact the most accurate clocks in the world use radioactive decay as their means of measuring time because it is the most sure and steady.

Therefore it is important for us to grasp that when the Bible speaks of eternity or of the eternal (both of these are spiritual terms) it is not trying to express the concept of a REALLY REALLY REALLY long time. Rather it means that there IS no time; it means that time has come to an end. And in order for there to be no time there must be no death and decay; and of course, that is exactly what we're told about Heaven and about the re-formulated Universe of the future (that there will be a new heaven and new earth after it has been melted down to its elements and reformed).

So the big question is, when did death and decay begin in our Universe? A good argument can be made that up to the moment Satan rebelled in Heaven sin and evil did not exist and therefore the entire Universe operated on a different principle than it does now; a Universe that had no time component to it because death and decay was not built into it at Creation. Another argument can be made that since Evil, which is sin, existed sometime before mankind was created (Lucifer, an angel in Heaven rebelled **before** Man was created, so sin predated man at least in the Spiritual world), that the Universe was decaying even before God formed Adam. In other words, it was Satan's fall that initiated the decay of the Universe, and man's fall that brought death and decay to men.

It is my position that the effect of Adam and Eve's fall was patterned after Satan's fall. Satan's fall apparently affected the whole universe by initiating decay.....a universe that at the moment of Satan's rebellion had no physical life in it. Adam and Eve's fall affected the living creatures that Yehoveh eventually created, consisting of humans and those kinds of animals that Yehoveh calls living beings. Adam and Eve's fall initiated the decay of all living creatures, humans included. Satan's fall could have occurred billions of years before Adam and Eve's fall. He could have lived on planet earth while it was still dark and void. The thing is, while I grant you this is how I see it, the Bible does NOT explicitly infer that death coming to mankind also infected the Universe in general BECAUSE of Adam's sin; this is kind of an open question to my mind.

The point is that God created a perfect Universe, and then He created a perfect environment for His living creatures to live in. Decay and death was NOT natural in the beginning. Death was an aberration brought into this infinite Universe of ours by sin. And absolutely nothing in our Universe is exempted from its effects. This is why death and decay is such an abomination to Yehoveh and why we should NEVER be comfortable with the concept of death. Oh we can be comfort-ED with the knowledge that our eternal spirits will survive and live with Our Lord provided we trust Him in the name of Yeshua. But never, ever, was it His intention for mankind to go through this awful process of aging, deterioration and then the end of our personal physical existence. Thank God for the grace He gives His people to endure it and the hope that lay beyond it.

Back to our Levites. Since God's mediators....those who served Him on Israel's behalf.....the priests.....were to be set-apart and given a divine status above even the whole congregation of the set-apart people, the tribes of Israel, then the Levite priests were to stay far away from death. Yet, in His mercy, God did give these priests some access to dealing with the death of close family members, and the rules pertaining to this is what we have read about in these first few verses.

Since death is an abomination to Yehoveh a dead body is therefore unclean; and as we have learned, to touch a corpse, even objects that have come into contact with a dead body, could transfer that impurity to other persons making them ritually unclean. So it is that verse 1 explains that a priest may in no way defile himself by contacting a dead person INCLUDING members of their own family. For the Levites, at this stage in their existence, that prohibition likely extended to their clan at the least.

There were exceptions: and those exceptions were a priest's natural mother, natural father, natural son or daughter, and his natural brother. In other words no in-laws and no stepfamily were among the exceptions. His natural sister was included ONLY if she had never been married and was still living at home because authority over her had no yet been transferred to another man.

Now to be clear this entire "don't touch a dead body" rule extended to beyond simple contact; it was equally about priests being excluded from burial ceremonies. So the idea here is that other than for the listed exceptions, a priest could not even participate in a funeral. Even more they could not participate in the usual mourning practices such as messing up your hair, or tossing dust or ashes over your head, or tearing your garments. Bottom line: priests were to have NOTHING to do with death except under carefully defined circumstances. The picture being painted is that death is not for God's servants; death should be treated as an abomination to God's servants because death is an abomination to God.

We'll start with verse 4 of chapter 21 next week.