

### 3. Holiness Code and the Relevance of Lev 18

Outline of Leviticus 18; note wording of the second specific sin

- a. General call to holiness, 1-5
- b. Specific sins to avoid, 6-23
  - 1) Incest, 6-18
  - 2) Intimacy during menstrual uncleanness, 19
  - 3) Adultery, 20
  - 4) Child sacrifice, 21
  - 5) Homosexuality, 22
  - 6) Bestiality, 23
- c. Warning for disobedience, 24-30

The relevance of this code for today is questioned due to the inclusion of dietary laws, etc

Considerations in defense of relevance:

1. A distinction exists within the code that indicates universal applicability

Different from things like the dietary laws, the sexual practices of Lev 18 are identified as sins (punishable iniquities, sins, 18.25; LXX has unrighteousness) for which God judges those outside of Israel and for which He will judge Israel if she commits them. Therefore, these acts (6-23) are iniquities of people universally, outside of Israel's code. So, the fact that these actions are sinful governs our approach to v. 19: we have to find how it fits with the reality of these sins.

2. Paul's use of Lev 18 in 1 Cor 5.1

He says, **It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife** (5.1). The incest laws included the close affinity of a step mother: **You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife** (18.8). Maternal incest is mentioned in 18.7. In 18.8, the reference is to "your father's wife" not to "your mother." Thus, *a fortiori*, if pagans recognize the sin without Scripture and based on affinity without a blood tie, how much more ought Christians to recognize the sins of close blood ties defined by Scripture (Lev 18). So, Lev 18 cannot be reduced to merely temporary ritual laws (Murray, *Conduct*, 49-55). In view are sins, types of sexual immorality, that apply to all people throughout history and for which God punished the Canaanites.

3. Comparing sins then and now

Are there items on the list in 18.6-23 that clearly and unquestionably apply to us today as sins? If we omit homosexuality for sake of argument, surely we would identify incest, adultery, child sacrifice, and bestiality as sins. In this context, the argument from ritual to irrelevance to defend homosexuality depends solely on the prohibition of intimacy during menstrual uncleanness (18.19). However we understand 18.19 (as a ritual law that no longer applies and as something difficult to apply to the Gentiles of Canaan), clearly and unquestionably, it does not shield incest, adultery, child sacrifice, or bestiality from identification as sins punished by God. Why then should we take it as a shield for homosexuality? In context, are there good reasons to isolate homosexuality from these obvious sins? The answer seems to be a definite no, although we might think through some possible reasons. In context, are there good reasons to include homosexuality as a sin along with these obvious sins? Yes, the text deals with violations of the design of marital intimacy rooted in Genesis 1-2, as is clear throughout given that a man is to leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, Gen 2.24. This command is violated by incest that is maternal (18.7), that involves a stepmother (18.8), a sister (18.9) and so forth. The Genesis standard is also violated by adultery (18.20, by intimacy with a neighbor's wife), by child sacrifice and bestiality (that violate the design of intimacy to fill the earth with family, Gen 1.27-28 with 2.24-25 and Mal 2.15). Likewise, therefore, the creation command is violated by homosexuality that also runs counter to the design that a man leave his father and mother to cleave to his wife (male, female in an exclusive marital covenant of intimacy and companionship for life) to produce the human family (a godly seed filling the earth). There is no good reason to shield homosexuality from being a sin with the sins listed, and there is good reason to include it with them as a sin.

4. The prohibition of intimacy during menstrual uncleanness, Lev 18.19

It should be obvious to all that this law no longer applies today since a woman is no longer made *ritually unclean* on a monthly basis that requires special ceremonies. So, how can breaking the prohibition connected to menstrual uncleanness within Israel be included as an abominable sin that the Canaanites committed and for which they were punished?

This prohibition connects to the design of marriage to fill the earth with family *because it is oriented to the woman's natural reproductive cycle*. Therefore, it confirms the point that all the items of 18.6-23 are to be understood by the Gen 1-2 design for marital intimacy of male and female as husband and wife. Because it locks our thoughts into Gen 1-2, this odd item on the list confirms that homosexuality, *as a violation of marriage from the beginning*, is a sin just as incest, bestiality, and so forth are sins that violate God's standard for marital intimacy ordained at creation. Accordingly, the Canaanites violated God's design for marital intimacy in a fundamental way that the prohibition of 18.19 highlights. Consider the pieces of this puzzle.

1) The woman's ceremonial uncleanness pictures human sinfulness that prevents fellowship with God and incurs death: **lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst** (Lev 15.31). Life is in the blood and when discharged from the body, it is no longer life sustaining. The idea is intensified when the discharge is irregular, say, due to disease. Included in the law is the fact that **whoever touches her shall be unclean** (15.19). Marital intimacy during menstruation made the man unclean as well (15.24), but not as a violation of 18.19 (apparently unintentional at the beginning of menstruation, but it still pictured sinfulness and required washing).

2) Hence, there is need for cleansing by washings and ultimately by sacrifice: **she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons and bring them to the priest, to the entrance of the tent of meeting.**<sup>30</sup> **And the priest shall use one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her before the LORD for her unclean discharge.**<sup>31</sup> **Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst** (Lev 15.28-31). In other words, cleansing from sin required sacrifice: the sin offering pictured cleansing by death and the burnt offering pictured acceptance with God and fellowship with Him as His people.

3) The combination of blood discharge and the reproductive cycle lunges forward to the offspring to come who will bless all families of the earth by the sacrifice of His blood. Therefore, we have a marvelous summary in the encounter of Jesus with a woman who had a blood disease. Our Lord crossed the boundary from the perfectly clean to the unclean by touching her; He became unclean to restore her and the human family by His sacrificial death, and to bring the new Israel composed of all families of the earth to family feasting and fellowship in the eternal Sabbath.

How then might we state the sin of the Canaanites regarding the prohibition of intimacy during menstruation that has all of these theological implications in Israel?

1) First, the Canaanites no doubt crossed the boundaries of what this command prohibits, even if they did not have God's revelation of a distinct and theologically rich Holiness Code. They had sexual intimacy during menstruation; no doubt the men were selfishly inconsiderate.

2) Second, God identifies their conduct in this regard to be iniquity, punishable sin, along with the obvious sins of 6-23. Along with them, it is in the category of that which is unclean (**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**, 24) and abominable (**do none of these abominations**, 26).

3) Finally, the question thus boils down to this: without having God's explicit word regarding intimacy during menstruation (without the theology of menstrual uncleanness), why is their practice in this regard an abominable iniquity, even though it is a temporary law that is not universally binding for all time? Although difficult to find the right words, it seems that we are going in the right direction if we think of the menstruation prohibition as a symbol of the gospel that a restored family will emerge and the design of marriage will be accomplished by an offspring who will save the world by the sacrifice of His blood. Thus, even without knowing the symbol God gave in the Holiness Code, the nations violated the meaning of the symbol and the reality it tokened. In other words, the practice of intimacy during menstruation by the Canaanites *symbolized* their wholesale disobedience to God's design for marital intimacy by which they contradicted, rejected, ran rough shod over His creation given design. The breaking of this symbolic prohibition of 18.19 symbolized the fact that they ran rough shod over God's design for marital intimacy by the abominable sins of incest, adultery, child sacrifice, homosexuality, and bestiality. Breaking the prohibition of intimacy during menstrual uncleanness is called an abomination as a symbol of all the abominations on the list. It is symbolically an abomination, a symbolic abomination that highlights their rejection of God and the gospel by their rejection of God's design for marital intimacy established at the beginning of the world.

How may husbands (& wives) violate 18.19 today? by selfishness in marital intimacy & companionship it tokens for shared growth in knowing God by loving headship and submission.