

How did we get here and where are we headed?

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3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Bible Text: Leviticus 17-18
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Well, this evening as previously announced, it is time to commence Leviticus 18. I did have several of you share with me this evening that you did go home this morning and make sure that you read this. It's amazing how many of you were flush in the face when you confessed that just a while ago.

Before we get into Leviticus 18, allow me to remind us where this passage takes place in light of what we know as not only the book of Leviticus but in particular even what we know as the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, the books of Moses. Understand those that hold to a strict orthodox view of Judaism today, it is Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy that compose their entirety of Scripture. It was for many many ages that this was that which the Israelites and the Jewish people had to guide and direct them in all things and yet you see the book of Genesis, the beginning of all things, the initiation of all things, not only that from the hand of God but also the initiation at our hands of a simple state and condition, and you see the book of Deuteronomy as the beginning of new things as you see eventually the entrance into what we know as the Promised Land and a new beginning and a new creation and a new start.

But there in the middle is the book of Leviticus. The word "holiness" is really the theme of Leviticus. Eighty-seven times in this book of the Bible holiness is mentioned. We get our contemporary name Leviticus for the abstract from the Levites who would be those who would be so instrumental in making sure that these edicts and precepts from the Lord went forth. I don't think it is by accident that Leviticus is in the middle of the Torah or the Pentateuch. It is that base, it is that center point, that apex by which all of the law hinges its point because in the middle of Leviticus is what we know as this instruction or this celebration of the Day of Atonement, this opportunity for sins to be eradicated, to be forgiven, to be absolved, that which would foreshadow and be so prophetic to the ministry, the life, the death and the resurrection and eventual soon return of Jesus Christ.

But in the book of Leviticus on the front side of the Day of Atonement and then there's the back side. On the front side are all the sacrifices. That's that tedious reading that's had you bogged down for so many days as you look at all the details of the proper item at the proper time and in the proper manner. There in chapter 16 there is this explanation of the Day of Atonement, how is it that sin can be utilized as being removed from the camp and

removed from one's life and one can stand properly before God. Once you get to chapter 17 of the book of Leviticus, it really is a communication not only how they but is a picture to us, how we can have a proper standing with God; how can we be separated; how can we live a life of holiness. In chapter 17, it begins to share with us that you want to make sure that when your offering is made, it's not done improperly. Obviously there are what we know as the seven major feasts among the people of Israel and in the Jewish community, and if you're gonna be that few and far between and you're gonna travel that far with the proper items, you want to make sure that you do it right, and so therefore chapter 17 kind of leads out with when you gather at these events, when you gather at these special times, make sure everything is laid out properly in advance because if you offer it with an improper means and/or mode, it's not gonna turn out well.

Then we get to chapter 18 and for those of you who have read and we're gonna read portions of it in just a moment, chapter 18 almost sounds like a play-by-play of what was happening at the base of the mountain with the golden calf with Moses on top of Mount Sinai. Notice it says that they lived a life of revelry. There was the sounds from below. You read this passage of Scripture and you question yourself, why did the Lord go to such great lengths to give such great detail about all that is in here in chapter 18, and I believe the answer is multifaceted but I think the Lord always communicates that which we are, shall we say, guilty of and humanity has this real innate trait to say, "Well, I just didn't know." The Lord has made it very clear every imaginable way in which we could violate his desire for us, he gives all kinds of examples so that we stand, as Romans 1 says, without excuse. Why as we begin this second section of Leviticus, why an entire chapter on this subject matter? Because no matter how many years you've lived on earth, you do realize it is this subject matter that so often becomes the destructive force within a home, within a family, within relationships, and as we're gonna address tonight, even within a community and a culture.

Last but not least before we dive into Leviticus 18, I want you to hear my heart very clearly tonight. We're going to address a multitude of subject matters, we're gonna read passages about all types of decisions and behavior and outcomes therein, tonight is not a message in regards to any one individual's personal struggle with or temptation of one particular lifestyle or sin. I want you to hear me clearly: tonight is not about us as individuals who might be struggling with a temptation, or maybe someone who's battled something in the past or maybe is tempted to do something in the future. This isn't about individuals, in fact, I want you to look at verse 25. On the very back side of all that we're gonna read it says, "And the land is defiled." Leviticus 18, even though it deals with individuals, even though it deals with individual situations, behaviors and such, we're going to address the subject matter at hand tonight from a societal perspective, from a community perspective. How can we as a collective body when we allow, when we permit, when we endorse, and when, I dare say, when we celebrate what is written here in Leviticus 18, we discover that even though that oftentimes as individuals dealing with personal struggles that we want to be compassionate with and sensitive to and extend the grace and the mercy of God, that as a collective body verse 25 says, "The land is defiled." Tonight is a message about what happens to a group of people when we turn our eyes, when we turn our head and we say, "Do whatever is right in your own eyes."

Leviticus 18. The Lord comes to the Israelites and it is his desire in their lives and in ours to make sure that we don't go down this specific path. Beginning in verse 1 of chapter 18 it says,

1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the LORD your God. 3 After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. 4 Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God. 5 Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD. 6 None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover their nakedness: I am the LORD. 7 The nakedness of thy father, or the nakedness of thy mother, shalt thou not uncover: she is thy mother; thou shalt not uncover her nakedness. 8 The nakedness of thy father's wife shalt thou not uncover: it is thy father's nakedness.

Now for the sake of time and the blushing of all of our faces, I'm gonna skip the next several verses as there is detail after detail of the types of relationships and the means and the ways in which an illicit relationship between one person and another can take place. So I want to fast-forward to verse 20. It says,

20 Moreover thou shalt not lie carnally with thy neighbour's wife, to defile thyself with her. 21 And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD. 22 Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination. 23 Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it is confusion. 24 Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: 25 And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.

Woo, sounds like we read tomorrow morning's headlines from the national and international news, in fact, it seems oftentimes so many stories that we read and so many scenarios that we're aware of involve one or more of that which we have just read. So tonight, juts in brief, I want to lay out some things I think are important about not just this chapter but what it addressed, and the first one is this: I want us to see the point of origin of all that is listed here.

Look in verse 3, "After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances." Essentially what the Lord is saying is, "Don't do it the way the world is." If the world is promoting it, we ought to run very quickly away from

it. If Egypt and if Canaan and these who worship false gods and false idols and who promote all types of illicit behaviors, do not go the way that they're going.

In fact, it specifically mentions Egypt. I want to encourage you to turn over to the book of Joshua 24. Joshua 24:15 contains one of those famous, what I call, hallway Bible verses. You say, "What do you mean hallway Bible verses?" You know when you're walking through somebody's home, there are certain verses that you oftentimes will see on people's hallways framed very nicely in a set of calligraphy or maybe in a nice painting or poster or such, such verses as John 3:16, 1 Corinthians 13, the great love chapter. Another one that is found is Joshua 24:15, however it's always the last statement, which is a great one, that we put on the posters. Notice what it says at the very end of verse 15, "but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." That's a wonderful statement that I would encourage all of us to have as a part of our home whether we're single, whether we have a large family, whether we've adopted those and foster-cared those, it doesn't matter what our structure is, that should be the mantra that for our house, we will serve the Lord. But notice the first word that I read, "but." Every time you have that conjunction, it presupposes that something was communicated prior to that oftentimes is antithetical to. I want to read all of verse 15, "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." You back it up one more verse to verse 14, it says, "Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD." That famous verse that we adore rightly so, "but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD," in its proper context it says we will take the ideas, the ideologies, the promotions thereof of what Egypt and the world is promoting and we will put them away.

In fact, later on in Joshua 24, the people shout, "We will do it, we will do it, we will turn to the Lord." In Joshua in wonderful pastoral fashion, he says, "You cannot serve the Lord." You wonder why was he so harsh? Because they never said they would put away their false gods, they just said they wanted to serve the Lord. When you get back to Leviticus 18, all that is mentioned, all that is promoted has this point of origin of the gods in Egypt and the gods in Canaan, and in simplistic terms whatever the world at large is promoting.

The second thing I want to address about this passage is found in verse 6. Verse 6 it says, "None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him." When you deal with the specific things that are mentioned here in Leviticus 18, I think it's real easy at times to fall into the trap of, "Well, I don't do and I've never done and I would never participate in what they are doing." It's so easy to segment ourselves into "them" and to "they" and to "those people" versus "us" and "we," but notice verse 6, "None of you." There is this collective. As it begins to list all of the sordidness that is here in Leviticus 18, it begins with, "None of you." The Lord does not come at the very beginning and say, "Some of you are more prone than others. Some of you are struggling at a greater length than others." It just collectively says, "None of you." Why is that critical and why is that

important? Because in all that is listed here, I think we're so guilty of saying, "Well, this isn't as bad as that, and at least I've never participated in that endeavor." The Lord collectively says, "None of you shall participate in any of this."

Beginning in verse 7 of this passage, there is what I'd like to call just a very simple perversion. You say, "Well, it's not real simple." Well, it is simple in the sense that perversion, that word simply means to take something that is right and to twist it to the point in which it is wrong. A perversion is to take that which God ordained and to use it for ourselves, our own pleasure, whatever that may be, so that it honors us rather than glorifying him. The activity of a husband and a wife and their personal relationship with each other was not only initiated by but is promoted by the Lord. Everything we see from verse 7 onward is activity that is contrary to, in addition to, or a twisting or a perversion of what God originally intended for humanity not only to celebrate but that would give honor and glory to him. It is a perversion. It is a twisting. It is a turning to make something which God originally formed and fashioned as holy, in our own eyes and our own means and manner very unholy.

Now one thing I do want to address just in the context here. When you read this passage, I know in our 21st century culture you think to yourself, and maybe I'm the only one here, but I'm gonna be honest, I've never had thoughts in my mind in regards to my mother-in-law or my aunt, and you read some of these and you say, "Woo, what's the...?" I want to give you a little context here and there's all kinds of relationships that are described, but one thing I think that we oftentimes miss out in our culture is how families were structured in these days, the age spans and the means thereof. So if you'll just allow me a little bit of time, I want you to understand why some of the things that are mentioned here would be an incredible temptation but yet still a very clear perversion of how God has orchestrated things.

The way in which a family was typically structured is that a young man on the final day of his 12th year would celebrate in what you and I know as a bar mitzvah. It would be a celebration of manhood and in today's context, it means an elaborate party and very lavish gifts, but in a biblical setting, when that young man was just hours away from turning 13 years of age, two very important things took place at that celebration. In the, shall we say, profession world, it would be that day of which he would receive his apprenticeship, in other words, his career, who he would learn from, who he would work for. It would be established on that day. As a side note, remember when Jesus walked by the sea of Galilee and he turned to Matthew and James and John and Peter and such and he said, "Come, follow me," and they were willing to drop everything? It was the rabbis of Jesus' day at a young man's bar mitzvah, these rabbis who were incredibly powerful, educated, wealthy movers and shakers, they would come to the young man's bar mitzvah and say, "Come, follow me." Those were the words that every young man wanted to hear in their life. They were willing to drop anything for it. So whether it was a carpenter, whether it was a fisherman, whatever the trade may be, a tax collector as Matthew, whatever it is, it would be established that day.

The second thing that happened at a young man's bar mitzvah, it would be that evening or the night before that he would be betrothed to his future wife. Now the arrangement was more economic based than it was romantic based, but it went a little something like this, that his parents would have arranged with another couple that either a young lady who had already been born or one that had already been conceived or one who had not yet been conceived, would be betrothed to him. In other words, you'd have a newlywed couple and there at the bar mitzvah, they would announce to a young man that their first daughter would become his bride. Now I'm not here to talk about Jewish marriage practices and all of the things that go on with all that, but in light of Leviticus 18, I want you to think in terms that a 13 year old young man is betrothed to a future daughter. He's 14 when she's born which means when they get married, she's 14 and he's 28. How old is his mother-in-law? 28. His mother-in-law would have been of same age and a lot of times when you read in Leviticus 18 thinking, "Oh my! What made them think about that?" These could have been classmates. These could've been young people that they grew up together in the same community, it's just now they have relationships that need specific boundaries by which the Lord said, "Do not go forth." So what we have is a simple perversion. They are taking relationships within the family, outside of the family, within the community, and they're making them something God never intended them to be.

It's the next thing that I want to address particularly in verse 20 through 24 that I think is so telling about this passage. We read the passages about the families and the neighbors and such, but I want to re-read verses 20 through 24 not so that we necessarily hear these words again but I want you to think in terms of a progressive nature. It says, "Moreover thou shalt not lie carnally with thy neighbour's wife, to defile thyself with her. And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD. Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination. Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it is confusion." Now the reason I say it is progressive, I want you to look at verse 20. When an individual or a series of individuals go outside the bounds of marriage, by the way, the biblical word for that is simply fornication, to have a relationship with somebody else that is not endorsed by God. It says that when they are with their neighbor's wife, when they are with somebody who is in a relationship with somebody else, it says that they defile themselves with them. What's interesting is this chapter began by saying that you should not be near of kin and it begins to list all kinds of relationships within the family structure that should not be participated in, it moves from – hear this – it moves from within one's family structure to outside of one's home, that not only should these twisted relationships not happen within the family, it should not happen among neighbors, among friends, among coworkers or with those that you socialize with.

Do you find it ironic that verse 21 immediately following verse 20 talks about not offering children through the fire of Molech? For those of you who are unfamiliar what this is, the fire of Molech is where individuals would offer and sacrifice their children to their false gods. In fact, those of you who have made the trip to what we know as the Holy Land, on the northern side of modern day Israel there's an area known as Caesarea-Philippi. I've teased that Caesarea-Philippi is kind of the co-exist conference center of the

Middle Eastern world. That's where all of the competing faiths of the world would gather together and they would be celebrating individually and yet at the same time, and there's a place there, in fact, when you go up to it, it just sends chills down your spine, there's a place where people in biblical days would take their newborn babies, they would throw it in the pit as an offering to their false gods. It's just bone-chilling to be there.

Have we not become that culture 50, 60 million-fold? Let me ask you a question: in today's context when there is a child that we're willing to dispense of because we no longer want the consequences of our lives, how many times does verse 21 happen because of verse 20? Think about that for a moment. When we go outside the bounds of marriage, when we're with people we have no business being with, at times doing things we have no business doing, and the results are that which we don't like, verse 21 naturally occurs in our culture. Let us eradicate ourselves of the consequences. You see, if verse 20 doesn't happen, then verse 21 becomes the exception not the rule. And yet in recent days, even our culture has been in a great battle for how do we treat the unborn, or in some cases how do we treat the recently born, how do we treat those who ample means of technology share with us that there are already heartbeats, there are formations, there's the ability to feel and to respond and to react and we as a culture have decided we need to celebrate, we need to champion, in fact, we need to march for the right to kill our babies.

Then it just makes sense that verse 22 would follow, does it not? If we're willing to kill our children, then why don't we really stretch the limits, let's engage in activity that ultimately meant the demise of what we know as Sodom and Gomorrah. I don't find it ironic that Roe v Wade was passed before the modern sexual revolution gained steam. Why? Because it's progressive. In other words, what we see taking place in Leviticus 18 is if we're willing to cross one barrier, let us beware the next barrier is coming. If we're willing to accept one set of behavior and endorse and celebrate it, the next thing is coming. In fact, verse 22 has now become the issue by which we are judged whether or not we are tolerant or not. Here's the problem: 20 years ago it was verse 21 that determined whether or not we were tolerant, and 50 years ago it was verse 20. You see, in the middle of the last century, we were considered archaic and prudish if we somehow spoke against the revolution of intimacy that involved anyone at all times, anytime. Then we became prudish if we did not celebrate the "rights" to choose. Today we are archaic, narrow-minded and prudish if we claim that verse 22 is not only of God but should be heeded.

Do you know what the problem is? Read verse 23. You see, verse 23 is what lies around the corner. And I know what you're thinking, "Nope! Never happen!" That's what we said about verse 22. We said, "That'll never happen!" That's what we said about verse 21. Do you think that four and five generations ago our culture ever dreamed that we would celebrate the killing of our children? Do you think four and five generations ago we ever thought we would celebrate what verse 22 is describing? And lest you think verse 23 is not gonna overtake our land, a few weeks ago there was an act that can only be described as verse 23. In our community, there was a young lady who participated in the descriptions of verse 23 and then she decided, some of you won't know what this is, she AirDropped it to everybody she knew. An entire community of young people got a video

of verse 23 taking place in our community. Now we were disgusted. We were ashamed. How dare we? Isn't that how we responded to verse 22 just several decades ago and now we're saying, "Well, how dare we judge?"

You see, the problem with sin is it always takes us further than we want to go, it always keeps us longer than we want to stay, and it always costs us more than we ever want to pay. So what we see in the book of Leviticus here is that when it comes to the nature of this behavior and these sins, it is always progressive and when you get to verse 23, that which you and I read today and say, "There is no way," let us look back just several decades ago and we never thought we'd be celebrating what we're celebrating today. We never thought we'd be championing what we are today.

Verse 24 and 25 says, "Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: And the land is defiled." You see, that's the conclusion of the matter. That's the problematic outcome here. It's not just about the individual that is struggling, it's not just about the person who's been taken advantage of, it is about a culture and a society and, yes, even those who would claim to be a church that are celebrating some if not all of these behaviors. The land is defiled.

You know, there's an old adage I'm sure many of you are familiar with at some level: the one thing that men do not learn from history is to learn from history. If we do not learn from history, then we are doomed to repeat its mistakes. For the sake of time and on a subject matter such as this, I think we've spoken well enough. All we have to do is look back at some of the great societies and cultures of the world whether it be the Greeks, the Romans or others, and you see that the demise of those entities was not because some exterior force landed on their coast and overtook them with great military power. The reason that these cultures that brought us such education, such advances in medicine and engineering and all kinds of entrepreneurial inventions and such, these that today we still study their thinkers and say they had incredible ideas and incredible inventions, both of those two great cultures did not crumble because of exterior invasion, they crumbled because of the interior rottenness of behavior, and to be quite honest with you, because they allowed Leviticus 18 to be a part of their lives. It started with just going across the street, then it progressed to other matters, and eventually you had this illicitness that according to verse 25 defiles the land.

Now tonight is one of those messages that to be quite honest with you, in a moment I do not expect a rush of people to come and make a decision. In fact, Leviticus 18 is probably not only the least preached but it may be the least responded to passage in all of the Scripture, and so allow me to offer you a challenge whether it require a public decision tonight or one just of which you leave. Would you be willing to make the declaration tonight that even though it is not popular, even though it is not, shall we say, fashionable, that as for you and your house, you will serve the Lord? Would you be willing to make the declaration that I tease with even my own children, "Not in my house and not under my roof." You see, I know we've dealt with cultural and societal issues but the last time I checked, our culture and our society is made up of individual homes and individual families and individuals and entities, and I'm just convinced that in a world that looks

more and more like "Egypt," there is a land of Goshen, there is that place that did not experience the plagues, there is that place that did not experience the wrath of God because they were separated, they were distinct, and they were different.

You and I have really just one option, we either go along with the world or we defy it, we walk the path of Egypt, or we dwell in the land of Goshen. To do so means to be in the statistical minority and most likely to be disparaged in a multiplicity of fashions, whether verbally, physically, and/or such. What we read in Leviticus 18 is going to become more and more pronounced and progressive in our culture. Ephesians 6 challenges us to bear the belt of truth, the wear the breastplate of righteousness, to don the helmet of salvation, to bear the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, to have our feet covered and shod with the preparation of the Gospel peace, and I love the conclusion of that passage when it says when you've done all that you can do, stand. In other words, in the words of Martin Luther, "Here I stand. I can do no other."

The challenge for most of us tonight, most of us, is not whether or not we're gonna participate in or not of these activities we read, it's are we going to go the way of promotion and celebration and endorsement, or are we going to stand for the truth of God's word in the light of a world that is quickly headed the opposite direction.

Let's pray.

Tonight as we come to our time of response, as always we have the privilege, we have the opportunity to make as John alluded to earlier, that decision for Christ Jesus he made just shy of nine years of age, where we come to the cross repenting of our sins asking Jesus to save us. And tonight maybe that decision for you or maybe like last Sunday night where the Lord's impressed upon you that this is your church family, this is the body of believers that you're supposed to be a part of, then we would gladly celebrate that tonight. Or maybe you're like one of the nine people this morning who publicly professed faith through baptism, and maybe you're already a believer but you need to take that next step, we want to celebrate that with you. Whether you need to step out and step forward, that's between you and the Lord, but I think all of us tonight need to step out of here more committed to the truth of God's word and standing there upon.

Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, thank you that in spite of all that we've seen, all that we've heard, and all that we know about, some of it very near to our lives, some of it great distances away, that you're a God of mercy and you're a God of grace, and Lord, we recognize tonight that every activity that we read, every behavior that was addressed tonight you are beyond capable of forgiving, you can redirect, you can restore, you can make us new creatures and new creations. So helps us, O God, to trust you more than the world. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm gonna ask you to stand with me as John leads us. Whatever decision, I'll be right here at the front.