

When the Law Seems Arbitrary

Leviticus 19: The Heart of Leviticus Part II

^{ESV} **Leviticus 19:19** You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind. You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material.

²⁰ "If a man lies sexually with a woman who is a slave, assigned to another man and not yet ransomed or given her freedom, a distinction shall be made. They shall not be put to death, because she was not free;

²¹ but he shall bring his compensation to the LORD, to the entrance of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering.

²² And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the LORD for his sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven for the sin that he has committed.

²³ "When you come into the land and plant any kind of tree for food, then you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden to you; it must not be eaten.

²⁴ And in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the LORD.

²⁵ But in the fifth year you may eat of its fruit, to increase its yield for you: I am the LORD your God.

²⁶ "You shall not eat any flesh with the blood in it. You shall not interpret omens or tell fortunes.

²⁷ You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard.

²⁸ You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the LORD.

²⁹ "Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, lest the land fall into prostitution and the land become full of depravity.

³⁰ You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.

³¹ "Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God.

³² "You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

³³ "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong.

³⁴ You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

³⁵ "You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity.

³⁶ You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

³⁷ And you shall observe all my statutes and all my rules, and do them: I am the LORD."

Leviticus 19 and Application and Structure

Last time we began our look at the **central chapter of Leviticus**: Leviticus 19. This amazing chapter is also quite **difficult to interpret**. It lists many different laws which, to **linear or chronological thinking minds** like ours, seem to make little cohesive sense. Why are they here? Can we just pick and choose whichever we want to believe applies today? In fact, this is precisely what most people end up doing when they come away from the chapter. Sometimes this is rooted in some acceptable hermeneutic; other times it is just a person's own personal choice.

We looked previously at **Leviticus 9:1-18**. This first half of the chapter is **much easier to see a kind of consistent application** of the Ten Commandments, which is what we said forms the nucleus of the whole list. It has several very specific commands that are almost verbatim laws from the Ten Commandments. Only a few of those laws seemed to have any real problem of application today. For example, there are the **laws about the peace offering (vv. 5-8)**. We know that peace offerings have found a fulfillment in the NT, not that they are totally eradicated, but that our new covenant peace offering is the offering of Christ, especially how we thank God for it in the Lord's Supper. This isn't a one-to-one application of an OT peace offering, but that's OK, because our circumstances have changed. The shadow has been replaced by the reality. Nevertheless, **the principle continues on into today**, that we are to be ritually and corporately thankful to God for the deliverance he gives us in Christ. This is among the many reasons we take the Lord's Supper often together.

The **second half of this chapter is much more difficult to interpret** and, especially, to **apply**. In terms of the Ten Commandments, scholars that have gone looking for them

have usually found eight or nine of the ten in the first half of the book, but only between 2-4 of the Ten in the second half.

Commandment	Wenham (1979)	Weinfeld (1985)	Hartley (1992)
1	4	—	—
2	4a	4a, 31	4b
3	12	12	12
4	3, 30	3b, 30a	3, 30
5	3	3a, 32	3
6	16	16	16
7	20–22, 29	19–25, 29	29
8	11, 13	11a	11a
9	15–16	11b	11b
10	17–18	35–36	17–18

Instead, this portion of the chapter seems much more chaotic and random. But it actually isn't. To see this, it helps to go looking for more than the 10 Commandments. We need to look at things like the **prologue** of the Ten as well as how the Ten were **structured** (for example into two paired tablets) as we look at this chapter. As it turns out, while the Ten Commandments begin with by saying, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (**Ex 20:2**), Leviticus 19 ends by saying, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (**Lev 19:36**). That puts the prologue of the Ten in the second half of the chapter, thus giving us a clue that we are still dealing in one way or another with the moral law of God. That in turn should help us in our interpretation.¹

¹ As for the structure, Kline breaks the full chapter into two parallel halves of five sets, thus paralleling the Ten Commandments, but this is too complicated to get into here. See **Moshe**

Analysis of Leviticus 19 by Moshe Kline					
Leviticus 19:1-18 Pairings					
	Religious/Private Duty	Vs.	Ethical/Social Duty	Vs.	
	Be Holy (2b)	2b	Steal Deal Falsely Lie Swear Falsely by name "I am the Lord"	11 12	
"Revere" "Keep my sabbaths"	Revere parents (3a) Keeps sabbaths (3b)	3a 3b	Oppress neighbor Rob him Pay him Curse the deaf Stumbling block blind Fear God "I am the LORD"	13 14	"Fear your God"
"Do not turn"	Idols of metal (4)	4	Justice in court Slander Life of neighbor I am the Lord	15 16	"not falsify" "fairly/honestly"
"It shall be eaten" (6) "person" (soul) (8) "edges of field" (9)	Peace offerings Harvesting and the Poor "I am the LORD your God"	5-8 9-10	Hate brother in heart Reason frankly with him Taking vengeance Love neighbor as self "I am the LORD your God"	17 18	"Love neighbor as yourself"

CENTER OF THE CHAPTER: VV 19-25 REPRODUCTION COMMANDS					
Mixing Types		Intercourse with Slave Woman		First Fruits	
Forbidden		Neither condoned nor fully punishable		Positive command	
"mate"		"intercourse"		"plant"	
"seeds"		Sewing		Harvesting	
Singular verbs				Plural verbs	
Directed to individual (one)		Directed to a couple (two)		Directed to the collective (many)	
19	Mate different cattle Sow different seed in field Weave different material in clothes	20 21-22	Carnal relations with slave woman Bring to entrance of Tent w/guilt offering He will be forgiven	23 24 25	Plant tree for food-3 yr. not eaten Fourth year fruit set aside to Lord Fifth year eat

Leviticus 19:26-37 Pairings					
	Religious/Private Duty	Vs.	Ethical/Social Duty	Vs.	
"You shall not eat" (26) Edges of hair/beard (27) "the dead (soul)" (28)	Eat blood Practice divination/soothsaying Round hair Destroy beard Cut for the dead Tattoos "I am the Lord"	26 27 28	Rise before the aged Defer to the old Fear your God "I am the Lord"	32	"fear your God"
"keep my sabbaths" "venerate/revere"	Daughter to harlot (land filled depravity) Keep sabbaths Venerate sanctuary "I am the Lord"	29 30	No wrong to stranger Stranger is like citizen Love neighbor as self You were strangers/Egypt "I the Lord am your God"	33 34	"Love him as yourself"
"Do not turn"	No ghosts No familiar spirits "I the Lord am your God"	31	False measures (35) Honest balances/weights (36) "I the Lord am your God" Who freed you from Egypt Faithfully observe all my laws I am the Lord	35 36 37	"not falsify" "honest" (x4)

The chapter is broken into **three main components**: vv. 1-18, vv. 26-37, and a center which is vv. 19-25. We know

Kline, "The Editor was Nodding: A Reading of Leviticus 19 In Memory of Mary Douglas." *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 8; Article 17 (2008): 1-59.
http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_94.pdf

this by the repetition of the last section from the first second. All three begin with **private religious duties** followed by **social ethical duties**.

Probably **the most difficult** to understand set of laws are found in **the middle section**. There are **three sets** here. Three laws deal with **mixing different kinds of things** together (**Lev 19:19**), followed by a law dealing with **intercourse** between a man and a spoken for slave girl (**20-22**), followed by a law about eating the **fruit of trees** you plant when you come into the Promised Land (**23-25**). These seem random and irrelevant to modern life. Who thinks we should follow a law saying that we can't weave two types of material into our clothing? This can then set them off in a trajectory that half of the rest of the laws that follow also do not apply, even though it seems obvious that at least some of them should.

Rather than dealing with **vv. 19-25** first, because this is such a confusing point, I want to **save this middle section for the end**. I believe it is much easier to see relevant application from most of the remaining laws that follow them. Therefore, we will begin looking this morning at **vs. 26**. First, I want to note **one more feature** of the structure in these verses.

Again, when we looked at the first 18 verses, they fell into two basic categories. **Vv. 2-10** seemed to be dealing

with **private religious duties**. **Vv. 11-19** then seemed to be **ethical public or social duties** that dealt with the stranger, the countrymen, the neighbor, and the brother, basically in that order. We could say this another way. Roughly speaking, **vv. 2-10** deals with the **First Table** of the Ten (our religious duties to God; the main exception is revering parents), while the second half dealt roughly with the **Second Table** of the Ten (our ethical duties to our fellow man). As the summary of these laws teaches us in the NT: **Love the LORD your God** with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and **love your neighbor** as yourself (which comes from **Lev 19:18**).

Generally speaking, **vv. 26-37** follow **this exact same pattern**. This means, perhaps they are not as “miscellaneous” as Wenham thought in his commentary. There are two main sections. **Vv. 26-31** deal with religious duties. They also seem concentrated on the individual. So, they are **private religious duties**. **Vv. 32-36** seem to be ethical duties. These deal with our neighbor and are thus **ethical public or social duties**.

Using the formula “I am the Lord” or “I am the Lord your God” which ends each mini-section, we can break these two larger units of private religious and public ethics down into three sets of pairs. **Vs. 26-28** pair with **vs. 32; 29-**

30 pair with 33-34; 31 pairs with 35-36. Vs. 37 is the conclusion verse of the chapter.

Religious/Private Duties (Lev 19:26-31)

Pagan Practices (Lev 19:26-28)

With this as background, we come to vv. 26-28. Wenham labels these as a set of laws dealing with “pagan practices.” Certainly, they do. More specifically, they may be related to mourning or funerary rites. There are four laws in these three verses.

- You shall not eat any flesh with the blood in it.
- You shall not interpret omens or tell fortunes.
- You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard.
- You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves.

As we get into this, let me point out that “eating” blood, “edges” of the beard, and the “dead” (soul) all parallel the language of the peace offering from vv. 5-10 where we had the eating of the correct food, by a “person” (soul), along with the law of the “edges” of the field being left for the poor and sojourner (see chart above).

Eating flesh with blood (Lev 19:26a) has various interpretations. It might be reiterating the ban on eating blood (see Gen 9:24; Lev 7:27; 17:10-14). It could somehow be dealing with eating blood offered before God on an altar (cf. 1Sa 14:33-34). But given the ritualistic context of this whole set and their relationship to the gods rather than to Yahweh, it is most likely that it refers to some kind of ritual eating of blood that was done in conjunction with a form of divination.² If that is true, I would hope you could see why doing this would still be forbidden today.

This fits very well with *interpreting omens and telling fortunes* (vs. 26b), which contains two commands. The verb for “interpreting omens” can be translated as divining, as in divination. It is the verbal form of *nachash* (the serpent in the garden). It probably comes from a word that means “sound softly, whisper.” It is a word closely related to *augury*—the interpretation of omens (hence the ESV’s translation).

² There were numerous ways they did this and they include: lecanomancy (observing oil patterns on water – Gen 44:5-15?), libanomancy (analyzing incense patterns), augury (observing bird movements), dream incubation (1Kg 3:5-15), sortilege (throwing lots – Josh 18:8.10; 1Sam 14:42-43), belomancy (shooting arrows – 2Kg 13:14-19), rhabdomancy (releasing sticks – Hos 4:12), astrology (Is 47:13), necromancy (consulting spirits of the dead – 1Sam 28:9; Is 8:19; 19:3; 29:4) and extispicy (observing animals’ organs formation), with a special emphasis on hepatoscopy (analyzing animal’s liver – Ez 21:26). Israel’s unique method involved unidentifiable *teraphim* (Judg 17:5; 18:4; Hos 3:4; Ez 21:26; Zech 10:2). Bartłomiej Sokal, “Thou Shalt not Tattoo Yourself (cf. Lev 19:26-28),” 12, https://www.academia.edu/17124598/Thou_Shalt_not_Tattoo_Yourself_cf_Lev_19_26-28_.

Obviously, **telling a fortune** is a very similar practice to interpreting omens. These things crossover to the other-world to gain supernatural knowledge of future events. Sometimes people would use the entrails of an animal sacrifice to do these things,³ and we saw earlier in Leviticus that the priests had to burn up these last things, perhaps so that he would not be tempted to sin in this way.

Does it need to be said that Christians who have been **set free from the powers** and principalities of the air and darkness must not engage in these activities? Ephesians, the last book we did prior to Leviticus, is filled with Paul's supernatural language in a context of a city full of ritualistic magic and superstition. Paul repeatedly tells them that God is the immeasurably great Power. He uses words known by those converted from magic in Asia Minor to specifically target their temptations to return to the shadows.⁴ God and his word is sufficient.

The third (**vs. 27**) includes two laws related to the body. One forbids **rounding off the hair on your temples** (the vb. means "to circle" or "to surround"). One commentator gives a rather eerie interpretation which derives from various

³ Sokal, n. 48.

⁴ Clinton Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 72-73, 114, etc.

Jewish sources,⁵ “The most plausible explanation of this prohibition is forming a haircut of a perfect circle of hair, that is ‘equalizing the sides in back of the ear with the forehead.’” If you recall **Yul Brynner**’s Pharaoh in the Ten Commandments movie, it may be something like that. I say it is eerie, because Christian monks have, for centuries, been tonsuring their hair to make their heads look like halos. Clearly, both are religious practices. Matthew Henry says, “Those that worshipped the hosts of heaven, in honour of them, cut their hair so as that their heads might resemble the celestial globe; but, as the custom was foolish itself, so, being done with respect to their false gods, it was idolatrous.”⁶ (There may have been something here of hair being a symbol of the life force as well.⁷)



⁵ *Sipra Qedoshim* 6:3; *b. Mak* 20b; Josephus, *C. App* 1:173. In Sokal, 13.

⁶ **Matthew Henry**, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 174.

⁷ **Sokal** cites a German author. He does not seem to be aware of the work **Troy Martin**, “Paul’s Argument from Nature for the Veil in 1 Corinthians 11:13-15: A Testicle instead of a Head Cover,” *JBL* 123/1 (2004): 75-84. This shows the relationship between hair and fertility/life, albeit from a later Greek perspective.

Shaving the beard is perhaps harder to interpret. It may have something to do with mourning rituals mentioned in Ugaritic texts. That would fit the context. It might have something to do with Egypt, where priests, pharaohs, and slaves are almost always depicted as beardless in the ancient pictures (Pharaohs often had a lower goatee that may have been emulating a serpent). Shaving the beard could also be a sign of humiliation (2Sa 10:4). I would argue that whatever is going on, it is related to pagan customs, particularly in worship, perhaps in a funerary ritual.

The fourth gives two final laws. The first concerns *cutting your body for the dead*. This isn't a ban on all cutting of the body (such as surgery). Its intention is "for the dead" (*nepesh* = soul, but the context is probably the dead). Herodotus (*Lib 4*, likewise Plutarch of certain barbarians] says, it was the manner of the Scythians in the funerals of their kings to cut off their ears, launch their arms, and pierce their hands with arrows."⁸ This law may be related to the fortune telling, though it might be more general than that. Do you remember the story of Elijah and the prophets of

⁸ Andrew Willet, *Hexapla In Leviticum: A Six-Fold Commentary Upon the Third Book of Moses, Called Leviticus* (London, Aug. Matthews, 1631), 474.

Baal who “cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them” (1Kg 18:28). At Ugarit, they talk about the same practice as they mourned the death of Baal (CTA 5:VI:1-23). Matthew Henry said, “The heathen did so to pacify the infernal deities they dreamt of, and to render them propitious to their deceased friends. Christ by his sufferings has altered the property of death, and made it a true friend to every true Israelite; and now, as there needs nothing to make death propitious to us (for, if God be so, death is so of course), so we sorrow not as those that have no hope.”⁹

The final law describes “*tattoos*.” Where the ESV simply says “tattoos,” there are actually two words here which the NAS translates as “*tattoo* [*qa‘aqa’*] *marks* [*kethobeth*].” Neither word is found anywhere else in the Bible. *Ktb* meant “to chisel” or “to scratch,” and perhaps it recalls the Ten Commandments (Ex 24:12, etc.). The Golden Calf incident may further inform the meaning when it says God’s writing (*miktab*) was engraved (*harut*) on them. This word for writing usually refers to a document, decree, or edict (2Ch 21:12; 35:4; 36:22; Ezra 1:1; Is 38:9). The word for engraving signifies a seal or sign proving right to title or ownership.

⁹ Henry, 174.

The idea then is that you are not to signify ownership of another god upon your body.

But we should say more by way of application. There are several other places in the Bible where the idea seems to come up (even if the same word is not used). God gives **Cain** a “mark” on his forehead (**Gen 4:15**). It appears to be a physical mark. This mark protects him from anyone seeking to take his life in revenge of Abel’s life after he is sent into exile. **Isaiah** (**44:6; 49:14-16**) talks about the faithful exhibiting their allegiance to God by writing on their hand “belonging to Yahweh” or, later, a symbol of the rebuilt Jerusalem. Curiously, the context is also exile. Similarly, anticipating Jerusalem’s destruction, **Ezekiel** sees six divinely appointed executioners who slaughter the guilty Judeans. One of them it told to make the foreheads of the righteous with a tav (X) who are spared from execution (**Ezek 9:4**).¹⁰ While none of these are viewed negatively, they also all have the context of exile, and a kind of slavery.

Into that, consider some **ancient context of tattooing**. In **Rome**, slaves were marked, often on the face, when they had committed crimes. In other words, you will never be

¹⁰ **Nili S. Fox**, “Jews & Tattoos: The Biblical Body as Canvas,” *Reform Judaism* (Summer 2014). <http://huc.edu/academics/learn/jews-tattoos-biblical-body-canvas>.

forgiven this. They also marked soldiers to prevent them from running from combat. In **Babylon**, tattooing was again the mark that someone was a slave.¹¹ This sounds quite similar

to the instances given everywhere except, probably, Leviticus 19.

Other reasons for tattooing come from the world of ancient medicine where tattoo marks were placed on **degenerate body parts** (like a knee for instance) where the mark (ink?) was believed to have the power to cure. This could be similar to acupuncture, but it seems to me it may also be a form of **magic**, especially as you could

not really differentiate medicine and magic and science back then like we do now.

Further, we know that in Egypt, they also tattooed. Curiously, almost all known tattooing was **done on women**,

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¹¹ On the history, see Sokal, 2-9.

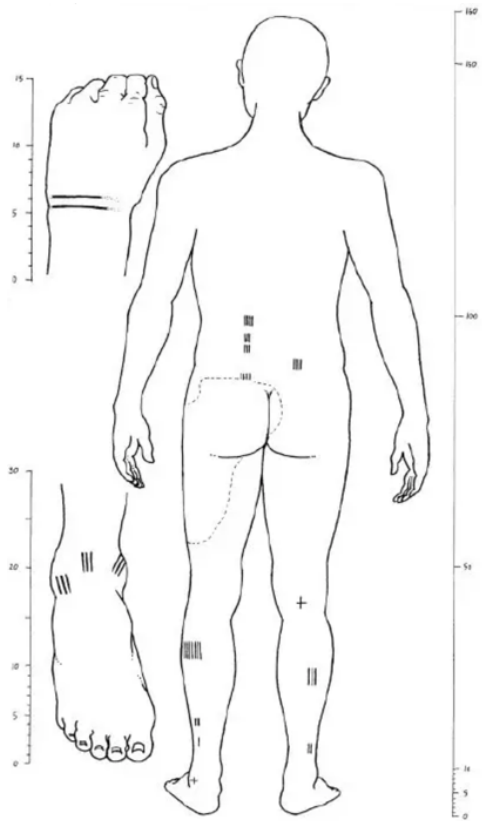


Figure 3: Tattoo-marks found on 'Ötzi'.³⁴

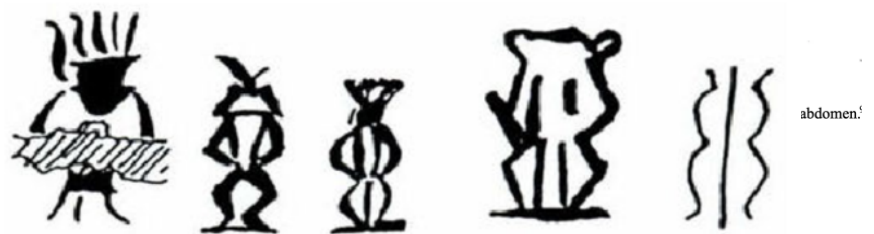
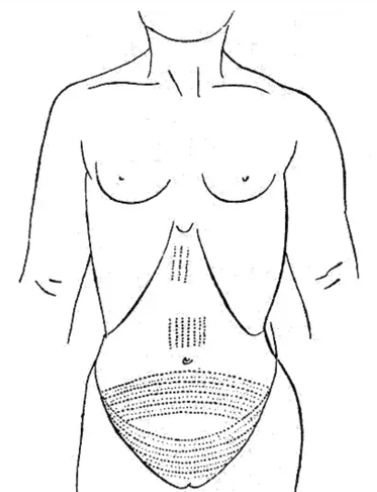


Figure 2: Selected Bes' depictions, employed as tattoos in New Kingdom period.

particularly near their genitals where pictures of gods/goddesses or dots placed around the abdomen, thighs, and loins all seemed to point to a kind of magical form of tattooing fertility rites. One author concludes historical survey by saying, “So far no decisive proof has been presented that tattoos in antiquity had had an aesthetic value.”¹² All of this ought to tell you something about the prohibition given here in Leviticus.

I’ll say a couple of things about tattooing as a kind of summary of this set of laws. First, we need to keep [the context](#) of them all in mind. Israel was not to worship God as the pagans worshiped the gods. Even though this should not be controversial, it sadly will be in much of today’s Christian world: We are not to worship the God like the pagans worship their gods any more today than 3,000 years ago. As it regards tattoos, something I think a lot of people do not think about in this regard in their rush to get one is how similar it is in terms of [it being a bloody event](#) like cutting yourself and eating blood. We’ve seen how throughout Leviticus, the life is in the blood. I really think Christians should do a better job thinking theologically about the sacredness of this fact prior to getting a tattoo “just for fun.”

¹² Sokal, 8, n. 26.

Second, people today like to think that we are well beyond any of that. Perhaps this is hinted at in this idea that people today only tattoo for **aesthetic value**. I'm willing to grant that this is true, though I'm also skeptical. However, the modern practice was very clearly imported essentially during WWII by soldiers who brought it back from the orient. Prior to this, Christianity in our land had almost always taught that tattooing was self-evidently something you shouldn't be engaging in. Henry Ainsworth speaks for our Christian tradition when he says, "From all these and other like heathenish rites, whereby they spared not, but unnaturally mangled their own bodies, God would keep his people, whose bodies should be the members of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Ghost (1Co 6:15, 19) who therefore should bear in their body, no other than the marks of the Lord Jesus (Gal 6:17)." ¹³

¹³ Henry Ainsworth, *Annotations upon the Third Book of Moses, Called Leviticus* (London, 1618), note on Lev 19:28. Andrew Willet gives four reasons (p. 475). "The reasons of this law here set down were these: 1. A civil reason was, because the Israelites were to avoid, as inward, so all outward uncleanness, such as was this imbruing, and defiling themselves with blood ... 2. A moral reason was, that they should not imitate the idolatrous heathen ... 3. A religious reason was, left by their excessive mourning for the dead, they might show they had small hope of the resurrection. 4. A natural reason: the Lawgiver having a care of comeliness, would not suffer them to abuse and disgrace their godly." In modern times, Wenham is similar. "This law conforms to other holiness rules which seek to uphold the natural order of creation and preserve it from corruption (cf. v. 19; 18:22–23; 21:17ff.). God created man in his image and pronounced all creation very good (Gen. 1). Man is not to disfigure the divine likeness implanted in him by scarring his body. The external appearance of the people should reflect their internal status as the chosen and holy people of God (Deut. 14:1–2). Paul uses a similar line of argument in 1

Sacred Prostitution, Sabbath, and Revering the Sanctuary (29-30)

A second grouping begins in **vs. 29**, which we know because vs. 28 ends, “**I am the LORD.**” This is the repeated phrase throughout the chapter ending each sub-unit, and also roots the laws in the covenant relationship Israel has with Yahweh. This second grouping of private religious laws deals with **profaning the temple**. The first law specifies **prostitution**. “**Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute**” (**Lev 19:29**).

The reason it gives makes it clear that it is not general prostitution in mind, but **cultic prostitution** at the temple

Cor. 6. The body of the believer belongs to Christ, therefore “glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:20). Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 272.

I should note that Paul spiritualizes his physical marks that he has received through beatings and whippings, calling them the “marks of Christ” (Gal 6:17). Clearly, he sees any kind of OT equivalent here as being contained not in tortures you give yourself for the sake of the god, but in the tortures you receive from others on behalf of Christ. It does appear in Revelation that “marks” are also spiritual, though this is contentious. Rev 14:1 refers to the 144,000 having the Father’s name written on their foreheads. As the 144,000 is a symbolic number, so also this does not appear to be an actual physical mark. It symbolizes God’s place as the head of the man. This is parallel in Rev 17:5 to the Harlot Babylon (who is not a physical woman) who has the opposite mark on her forehead (“Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.” These are clearly not physical tattoos. The reason this is controversial is because many believe that the mark of the beast) Rev 14:9; cf. 13:17; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4) is some kind of physical mark that people will get in the Tribulation. Perhaps it is; if so, it is viewed negatively. But the “forehead” and “hand” language should not necessitate this interpretation, because the other two ideas also contain the same language. The mark of the Christ is the “seal of the Holy Spirit” (Eph 1:13), and nothing, especially some chip in a forehead can take that away from us. This is why I believe the mark of the beast is the equivalent in the spiritual realm. They are marked out for other gods; Jesus is not their God.

(shrines). “... lest the land fall into prostitution and the land become full of depravity.” If you give your daughter to become a regular prostitute, then the land is *already* full of depravity. But this gives an order. If you do x , then y will occur. If you give your daughter to this form of prostitution, then the entire land will become filled with prostitution. What form of prostitution? It has to be temple prostitution, something almost all other pagan worship was filled with anywhere in the ancient world that you went. Truly, the gods are sexually perverted and depraved creatures. Imagine giving your daughter over to something like this? Imagine it now in the context of what we have just described!

You might think that **vs. 30's sabbath** and **sanctuary** laws are separate. But they are not. Our “**I am the LORD your God**” formula does not appear after **vs. 29**, but **vs. 30**. In other words, this prostitution is connected to keeping the sabbaths and reverencing the sanctuary. This makes sense if the prostitution in mind is *temple* prostitution. This now provides a context for why “**keeping sabbaths**” is being repeated from **vs. 3** and why the same verb of “**revering parents**” (in the Ten is was “honor your parents”) is now repeated in “**revering the sanctuary.**” It is interesting how in the first, it is the children who are to revere their parents,

and now here, the father is to revere God by not doing such a despicable act to his daughter!

That Israel was prone to stumbling in this way is perhaps illustrated in Numbers 25 when an Israelite man brings a Midianite woman to his family in the sight of all the people in front of the entrance of the **tent of meeting** (Num 25:6). The entire episode is prefaced with Israel whoring with the daughters of Moab (1), who then invited Israel to **sacrifice to their gods** and bow down to them (2), thus yoking themselves with the Baal of Peor (3). In one of the most gruesome events in the entire Bible, the grandson of Aaron, **Phinehas**, rose and took a spear (7), went into their tent, and pierced them both through at the same time, killing them in the act of sex (8). This stopped a massive plague from spreading and for it, God gave Phinehas the covenant of the priesthood (12).

Mediums and Necromancers (31)

I bring this up as we turn to our third and final grouping of private religious laws dealing with “**mediums and necromancers**.” This is part of the pagan worship. It says you are not to seek them out, “**and so make yourselves unclean by them**” (31). What do these words refer to? The first word, **’ôb**, is related to a word (*’ôbērîm*) meaning “**those who cross**

over” and another word (*'ōbôt*) meaning “spirits of the dead.” Thus, it denotes the spirits of the dead crossing the border between the land of the living and the world of the dead.¹⁴ These could be ancestral spirits (from *'āb* “father, ancestor”) or more general spirits (from *'āba*, “return;” or *'ōb* “as ‘hostile,’ a derivation of the root *'yb* ‘to be an enemy’). These would include, for example, the dead Rephaim-demons.¹⁵ The way these spirits communicate is through certain people called **mediums**, those who are able to somehow be possessed by the spirit and/or act as a voice for them.

The second word, *yiddē'ōnî*, technically means a “**knowing one**.” It refers to a spirit that has some kind of other-knowledge, knowledge from the other world. If you’ve ever read a book or seen a movie on exorcism, it is common to hear how the creature knows things about you and also other things like long dead ancient languages that the person possessed could not possibly know. This word appears 11 times in the OT, always with the previous word. The ESV translates it as **necromancer**, which is **someone**

¹⁴ **Michael S. Heiser**, *Demons: What the Bible Really Says about the Powers of Darkness* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 15.

¹⁵ See also **J. Tropper**, “Spirit of the Dead,” ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 806–809.

who consults the dead, often to discern the future (remember our earlier laws?).

By the time of the LXX, these terms had come to be used exclusively of the medium or necromancer or wizards who would be the conduits that would get information for others.¹⁶ But in Leviticus, it can refer to both. Heiser demonstrates this in his translations of three verses, including our own, that have them:

- Do not turn to the spirits ['ôbôt], to the ones who have knowledge [yiddě 'ōnî]; do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am Yahweh your God. (Lev 19:31)
- If a person turns to the spirits ['ôbôt], to those who have knowledge [yiddě 'ōnî], whoring after them, I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people. (Lev 20:6)
- A man or a woman who has a spirit ['ôb] or knowing one [yiddě 'ōnî] in them shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them. (Lev 20:27)¹⁷

Don't miss the point. It is not just forbidding going to mediums and seances and spiritists (which Saul did in visiting the witch of Endor; 1Sam 28), which could be chalked off as

¹⁶ J. Tropper, "Wizard," ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 907.

¹⁷ Heiser, *Demons*, 17.

not really doing anything other than mocking God. These words refer to very real entities that are on the other side. They could be contacted, as Samuel was in that same story. Israel was not permitted to cross over, in part because this is a blurring of the realm of life with the realm of death, and thus an unholy mixture that we have seen throughout Leviticus. Second, these creatures were being worshiped by the nations and Israel was not to do this, hence the verbal parallel with Lev 19:4 and idols, “do not turn...” Finally, these creatures are not to be trusted and they do not know everything anyway. Furthermore, the mediums themselves are not to be trusted. No. Israel is God, hence it concludes, “I the Lord am your God.”

In this, I think it is important to remember something. Crossing over is not forbidden in every sense. No. The point of Leviticus is all about crossing over ... the right way. The priest alone mediates that space through the ordained means of the tabernacle and its laws. Jesus has now done this as the Great High Place, crossing over to the heavenly tent and offering all that we need. Today, if you want to cross over to the other side, there is a simple way you can do it: prayer through the Spirit of Christ. This is far more powerful than

any medium or dark sorcerer's magic, for it comes into direct contact with the living God who is All-Powerful.

Ethical/Social Duties (Lev 19:33-37)

Respect the Old (Lev 19:32)

Our **second set of three lists** now moves us into the realm of **ethics** and the Second Table of the law. It begins with a law about *honoring the aged*. “**You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man**” (Lev 19:32). This is similar to the command to respect your parents (3). It is interesting that the same word “**fear**” is found in that verse as well as this.

“**According to Isa 3:5 a society which fails to honor the old is on the brink of destruction.**”¹⁸ I've been reminded of how close our own civilization is getting to this edge as my mother-in-law was placed in the E.R. for strange symptoms that were causing her great anxiety, but she was not allowed to have anyone in the room there that she knew, supposedly because of Covid 19. A friend of mine has his elderly father in the hospital as we speak. He is only a ventilator for Covid, literally sick with the disease, and yet no one is allowed to see him. All this while tens of thousands of people walk

¹⁸ **Wenham**, *The Book of Leviticus*, , 273.

through our streets protesting only inches apart from one another and the government encourages and panders to it. My point here is to ask the question, **how is leaving an elderly person in the hospital with no family** allowed to see them showing any signs whatsoever of respecting this law? During these days, it is, quite bluntly, our elderly who are expendable, as entire groups of patients with Covid were returned in several state to nursing homes, rather than kept in the hospitals, where they infected virtually the entire building and scores of our most vulnerable died. I won't go any farther, lest I get into trouble. He who has an ear, let him here the dangerous road we are on.

Love the Alien (Lev 19:33-34)

The **second set** returns to showing *love for the alien* among you. We saw how they were to be considered during harvest time with the crops. The first half of the chapter dealing with these things ended with the command to “**love your neighbor as yourself**” (Lev 19:18). We return to both these now put together. “**When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself**” (Lev 19:33-34).

There is no distinction here between legal and illegal alien. They had no distinctions like these. There is just a law to love him as yourself. **The Good Samaritan** parable comes right back into view. Obviously, our political situation is complicated by many factors, including very wicked people (usually not the immigrants themselves) who are increasingly using this for political purposes to keep borders easy to cross as they smuggle drugs and weapons and children in one of the great unspoken about crimes of our age. Nevertheless, the command is to the nation, not to an individual (plural verbs, not singular). Israel must find ways of doing them no wrong and treating them like the natives in their land. This shows **respect and dignity to the person**. As the text says, the heart of the Second Table is on the line here. It even gives another reason, “**for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.**”

Fair Trade (Lev 19:35-37)

The **final set** deals with *fair trade*. It reminds us of the **fairness in courts** that we saw earlier in the chapter. In fact, it uses the language “**do not falsify**” (35) and be “**honest**” (36), both of which are found in that earlier section (15). “**You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length**

or weight or quantity. You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin.” I’ve heard of **gas stations** pimping their pumps so that they charge a few extra cents per gallon being given out, but the person filling their car has no idea. This is what’s in mind. If you say you are selling something, sell that. Don’t short-change someone. Don’t overcharge them.

The prophets sing in unison in the OT about the importance of this (**Deut 25:13ff; Amos 8:5; Mic 6:10ff.**, etc.). “**All who act dishonestly are an abomination to the Lord**” (**Deut 25:16; Prov 20:10**). We are dealing here again with the command **not to lie**. The passage concludes with its tip of the hat to the introduction to the Ten Commandments (**26a**) and with a **final concluding word**, “**And you shall observe all my statutes and all my rules, and do them: I am the LORD**” (**Lev 19:37**).

Reproduction Commands: The Heart of the Chapter (Lev 19:19-25)

That is the end of the chapter, but **we have skipped its central verses**. I said we would do this because the laws we’ve now looked at are, for the most part, pretty easy to

see that we should not do them today. But it is another story with the middle verses. What in the world are three laws dealing with **mating different animals**, **mixing different seeds**, and **sowing different fabrics together**, followed by a law about **intercourse with a slave woman**, followed by a law about **eating fruit** from a tree doing in the middle of this chapter? The answer unlocks the entire chapter.

Can you think of anything they may have in common? They are all metaphors or actual examples of **reproduction**. Before getting to that, let me return your attention to Chapters 18 and 20. Recall that these are twin chapters that act like guardian cherubim over the ark of the covenant. The ark contains the law, and these cherubim chapters guard it. They both deal almost exclusively with biology, sexuality, and the family. In other words, getting those right safeguards the ability of a person and a nation to get what's in Ch. 19 right. If the sexual ethics go, everything else will soon follow. What's so interesting to me is how these central verses of Ch. 19, in their own way, return to this same topic of reproduction. We are in that way moving into Genesis 1-3 stuff again. The creating of kinds, the establishment of sacred sexual bonds, and the fruit of that union. In this way, it forms the following chiasm:

Ch. 18. Sexual law forbidden

19:1-10. Religious/Private Duties

19:11-18. Ethical/Social Duties

19:19-25. Laws about Reproduction

19:26-31. Religious/Private Duties

19:32-37. Ethical/Social Duties

Ch. 20. Sexual laws punished

The middle resembles the two ends, and in this way, I believe reinforces just how important they are.

As we look at them, what we will discover is that three metaphors for reproduction will be: **mating**, **intercourse**, and **planting**. These take us from **seeds** to **sewing**, to **harvesting**. We move from **singular** verbs to **plural** verbs, from laws directed to the **individual** to laws directed to the **whole nation**. They go from the **forbidden** to the **neither condoned nor fully punishable** to the **positively commanded** (for all these, see the full-page chart earlier in the sermon). Someone has put it in the form of an **analogy** of a person walking into the holy place (remember, this section of Leviticus emulates the holy place), where he walked through the curtain, goes to the veil of the Most Holy Place, hears from God what he is supposed to do, and then turns around

and retraces his steps back out to the courtyard where he then tells the community what God has told them all.¹⁹

Mixing Types (Lev 19:19)

First we have three laws dealing with mixing of types”:

- You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind.
- You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed,
- nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material

These laws remind us of Genesis where God made everything **according to its kind**. To mix the kind is to sabotage his good creation. It is a deeply unholy thing to do, not speaking morally necessarily, but ritually. Leviticus is about purity of kind, holiness of space and things.

These things symbolized something special for Israel, however. Israel was unique among the nations. Only they were called by him. He gave them birth. They belonged to him. **This is why they were not to mix with the nations**. That would be a mixing of kinds, of gods. It would be spiritual

¹⁹ This is the last page of Kline’s article, following Mary Douglas’ ring theory and structure of Leviticus as emulating the tabernacle.

adultery and idolatry.²⁰ Do we keep these laws today? No, but not because the principle is irrelevant. Rather, the principle of separation of the nations has been fulfilled in Christ. In him, all the nations are taken into his one body in the church. We must remember that we are not capable of bringing together two different kinds and making them pure and holy. Just look at our crumbling society in this regard! But God, in Christ, is. “God’s Church includes men of every nation and tongue and it is no longer necessary, therefore, to preserve those laws which typified the uniqueness and purity of Israel.”²¹ This is the reason why these specific laws are no longer followed. The principle of separate kinds no longer applies. Our situation is different from theirs. In Christ there is no male or female, Jew or Gentile, slave or free, black or white. Knowing this law right here would end all race wars in our culture if people turned to God in Christ and actually believed what Scripture teaches about it.

²⁰ Heiser (Leviticus Commentary) spends a good amount of time on how plowing with two animals is a euphemism for sex (Jdg 14:18). This has obvious implications for how I’m interpreting the passage, but I won’t get into this more here. His comments on the clothing refer to a kind of mixing of the laity with the priest and his holy garments. In the case of clothing, the high priest had the most “mixed” clothing of anyone. This is interesting, because the priest was also able to “mix” with the heavenly and earthly realms, something we’ve seen is forbidden through any non-commanded means like a priest and a tabernacle.

²¹ Wenham, *Leviticus*, , 274.

Intercourse with a Slave Woman (Lev 19:20-22)

The *second set* deals with a strange law about a *man who sleeps with a slave girl* assigned to another man, but not yet given her freedom. It is a complicated law full of unique words. Typically, sexual intercourse with a girl betrothed to someone else was regarded as adultery, and both would receive the death penalty (**Dt 22:23-24**). This law is an exception because she had not been “**given her freedom**” (**Lev 19:20**). In other words, she is a slave of some kind belonging to another man and slaves couldn’t not be engaged/betrothed.

Because she is someone else’s and is not free, the punishment of death would not fit, because the owner would not be properly compensated. Therefore, this apparently one-off event is not punished by death. It was, however, *still a sin* (**22**). As such, to have atonement, he had to bring his compensation to the LORD, just as in previous laws. When he did, he would be forgiven.

Importantly, this law becomes the hinge upon which the entire chapter on Holiness turns (see chart, which curiously makes an “H”). And what is that hinge? **Forgiveness!** This is the only place in the entire

Be Holy (2b)	2b			Steal	11
"I the LORD your God"				Deal Falsely	
Revere parents (3a)	3a			Lie	12
Keeps sabbaths (3b)	3b			Swear Falsely by name	
"I am the LORD your God"				"I am the Lord"	
Idols of metal (4)	4			Oppress neighbor	13
"I am the LORD your God"				Rob him	
Peace offerings	5-8			Pay him	14
Harvesting and the Poor	9-10			Curse the deaf	
"I am the LORD your God"				Stumbling block blind	
Mate different cattle	19	Sex with slave	20	Fear God	
Sow different seed in field		Entrance to tent	21-22	"I am the LORD"	
Weave different material in clothes		Forgiveness		Justice in court	15
Eat blood	26			Slander	16
Practice divination/soothsaying				Life of neighbor	
Round hair				I am the Lord	
Destroy beard	27			Hate brother in heart	17
Cut for the dead				Reason frankly with him	
Tattoos	28			Taking vengeance	18
"I am the Lord"				Love neighbor as self	
Daughter to harlot (land filled depravity)	29			"I am the LORD your God"	
Keep sabbaths	30			Plant tree for food-3 yr. not eaten	23
Venerate sanctuary				Fourth year fruit set aside to Lord	24
"I am the Lord"				Fifth year eat	25
No ghosts	31			Rise before the aged	32
No familiar spirits				Defer to the old	
"I the Lord am your God"				Fear your God	
				"I am the Lord"	
				No wrong to stranger	33
				Stranger is like citizen	34
				Love neighbor as self	
				You were strangers/Egypt	
				"I the Lord am your God"	
				False measures (35)	35
				Honest balances/weights (36)	36
				"I the Lord am your God"	
				Who freed you from Egypt	
				Faithfully observe all my laws	37
				I am the Lord	

chapter that speaks about it. Yet, here it is right in the middle of the chapter in the only law that doesn't fit the pattern of

the rest. You can't tell me that God isn't an otherworld genius or a loving and gracious God. For he knows that even in the midst of something like a sexual sin, the very thing that guards our chapter and that finds its way to the center of it, **there is forgiveness** if one turns to the Lord by faith. If this is true of this sin, how much more of all the others?

First Fruits (Lev 19:23-25)

What is left? It is a strange law about the *firstfruits* of your produce in the new land that God is giving you. Firstfruits in the NT symbolize **resurrection (1Co 15:20)**. It is divided into **three periods of time**. You enter the land and plant any kind of tree for food. For **three years** you cannot eat it (**Lev 19:23**). The fruit must be left alone. In the **fourth year**, the fruit becomes a praise offering to the LORD. In the **fifth year** and all the years thereafter, you may eat of its fruit and enjoy the bounty. It is for you. God's gift. **"I am the LORD."**

This is in some ways a return to Eden. But better, it takes us into the NT. The Promised Land comes after forgiveness. Here, you learn that all things belong to God. Here you learn to give the firstfruits of your bounty back to the One who gave it. This is **the beginning of an obedient life**, a life

of new life, born from the seed and the union, the fruit of the new birth.

But once here, oh the **delights** that God gives. It is so delightful, the Bible ends on this theme. “**Through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations**” (**Rev 22:2**). The nations are the peoples of the body of Christ, his church. The kinds are eliminated. Forgiveness has been extended. New life has been granted. Now, to all who see the glories of this Holy God and his law, including the forgiveness that he grants when it is violated, these people shall know no end to the bounties of life in the world to come. He who hungers, let him eat. He who thirsts, let him drink from the water of life without cost. Come to Christ, receive forgiveness, follow him and sup with him in the new land he has won through his victory over sin, death, and the devil. It is a glorious and righteous kingdom he is bringing, full of the Holiness of the Holy God.

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