

Leviticus 18

Today, there are self help guides to help you with almost everything, how to be more assertive, how to be less assertive, how to sweet talk a shark... Well today we are going to look at chapter 18 and 19 of Leviticus which is really a how to guide on how to be Holy. Now that is a strange topic really, you don't see many self help guides on how to be a better holy person. In fact the idea of a Holy person may be a bit strange to us. When I googled images of Holy Man this is what came up, an old Movie by Eddie Murphy, this Indian Holy person and this guy in a hole. Ignoring the first and the third as slightly humorous, the middle one I think best sums up what the average person thinks a Holy man or woman is like. Its some out there person, a very goody too shoes person, who denies themselves a lot of things and probably lives far away from most other people in a monastery. And is able to say, Holy(speak in the English holy manner). Well today as we look at chapter 18 and 19 of Leviticus we are going to see that in fact denial and isolation are not what makes a Holy person.

We will first look at what chapter 18 and 19 said about holiness for the Israelites, then we look at why Israel was called to be holy in the first place and finally we look at what being holy means to us.

In the first 17 chapters of Leviticus one of the main things it sets up is a system to show the Israelites that God is Holy. It also taught the Israelites that everything is either Holy, Clean or Unclean. And anything that is Holy can not come into contact with things that are unclean. Given that God is Holy we saw last week that God developed a system for the Israelites to remove their uncleanness through the scape goat.

Chapters 18-27 shows how Israel can be a Holy people. A people that can come into relationship with their God. The chapters we are looking at today often are called the holiness code. Chapter 19:1-2 basically give a summary for this section and arguably the summary for the whole book. "The LORD said to Moses, ²"Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."

Lets have a look at what laws God gives. The majority of chapter 18 that we read focuses on sex or sexual relations with a focus on not having sexual relations with a close relative. Then chapter 19 gives a number of laws relating to a variety of areas, somewhat similar to the 10 commandments: respect your parents, verse 4 don't make idols, verse 11 Do not steal, do not lie, verse 15 do not pervert justice and finally chapter 20 describes the result of breaking some of the laws in chapter 18.

So these are the commands that help you be Holy. Do you notice a common theme running through most of these commands? I think it's well summed up in verse 17 and 18 of chapter 19. 17 "'Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. 18 "'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

These laws, this how to on holiness, is not about denial or isolation or doing some other mystical thing, the summary of how to be holy is Love your

neighbour as yourself! Be Holy as God is. Holy, Love as God loves. Holiness is not about isolation its about how you relate to people. Is loving people what you think of when you think of holiness? Or is it an angelic choir, with halo's?

You see for the Israelites there was no distinction between moral laws and ceremonial laws as we define them today, for them they were all commands that needed to be followed to be Holy. They were all commands given by God. That is also why you see the occasional ceremonial type law mingled in here. Holiness is obeying Gods will.

So why is sexual relationships so prominent here when talking about holiness? Well as we just saw being holy is how you relate to other people. And sex is a very special way to relate for an important relationship, marriage.

We have seen what God required of Israel to be Holy, lets now look at why God required them to be Holy? A number of reasons are given. Firstly, in verse 2 to 3 it says; "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the Lord your God. 3 You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices."

Israel was to be Holy because they are to be unique, to be different to the nation they have left, Egypt and the nation they are going to, Canaan. You see having the Lord your God as your God makes a difference. It makes a difference that you have a living God who acts and therefore, that should be reflected in how the Israelites lived. Having a different God should make a difference in the way they acted. And not just the way they acted in ceremonial religious times dealing with God, as these laws show it should affect their relationships with other people. These laws covered sex, business, friendships. The Israelites were to be different in their whole lives. I think that's what verse 4 and 5 are getting at in chapter 18. You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the Lord your God. Keep my decrees and laws, for the person who obeys them will **live by them**. I am the Lord.

The second reason given is so that the land would not vomit them out. You see God had said that the land they were going to in Canaan was going to be a Holy land and as we mentioned earlier Holy things cant come near unclean things, so the land would spit them out. Unfortunately for Israel as they broke these laws that is exactly what happened to them eventually as they were carried off in the exile.

The third reason Israel is called to be Holy is what we read in 19:1-2, "The LORD said to Moses, ²"Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.'" Israel was to be Holy because God is Holy. God has many characteristics that we know from the bible, one of the most important the bible tells us is God's sovereignty, the fact that he is all powerful, but one of the other important characteristics is that he is Holy. And unlike the first characteristic this is something we are to try and copy. TO be Holy is to be Godlike.

The final reason Israel is called to be Holy is because God said they were to be. That may sound strange, but God had redeemed Israel, he had brought out of

slavery in Egypt, Israel was his people, God was their Lord, he was their King. Israel was not given the reason to follow these laws because they were morale laws or because not eating animals like pigs would be good for your health, the reason these laws were to be obeyed was because God was their Lord.

So we have seen what God commands God had for Israel for it to be Holy and reasons that they should be Holy. But what does this mean for us here in the 21st century. Do these laws still relate to us? Are we called to be Holy? And if are called to be Holy, why do we need to be Holy?

Well lets go through the same points I just went through but with an emphasis on us here as Christians in the 21st Century. Though I am going to mix up the order a little

Firstly are we called to be Holy, Second why do we have to be Holy and thirdly how do we be Holy?

So are we called to be Holy today? The answer is a resounding Yes. In most of the letters Paul writes he mentions that the churches he is writing to are to be Holy people. To quote just one reference in the New Testament. 1 Thes 4:7 says "For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life."

And why are we to be Holy? Well the Israelites were to be holy because they were to be different because they had a different God to those around them, so that they wouldn't be vomited out of the holy land, because it reflected Gods character and finally because God was their Lord and King. I think these apply to us today.

If we have Jesus as our King and God as our lord, shouldn't that reflect in how we live. Shouldn't we be different in how we act if we belong to God? When people look at you do they say wow you can see she is a career women she would do anything for her career, or do they say he is a family man, that he always makes sure that family is first, do you show that Money, or family is the God of your life or are you showing that you are someone who follows Jesus. Can people see that in the way you act? We are to be a light to the world to show we are different by how we live.

The second idea of the holy land vomiting them out, I think needs to be looked at carefully. On one hand we know from the book of Romans that following laws don't save us. Romans 3:20 says, Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. However it does remind us that we should still be different be Holy. I wonder if the book of Revelation has this in mind when it talks of the Laodicean church in chapter 3:15-16 where Jesus says, I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot, I wish you were one or the other! So because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You see the Laodicean church were not being different to those around them, they were not standing out they were lukewarm and were going to be spit out. If we want to be just like everyone else and don't live with God as our King then we are asking God to spit us out.

The third point definitely still applies, God is unchanging and he is still as Holy today as he was during Israel's time and just like them we are called to reflect his character.

The final point is also relevant. We should live for Jesus as he has redeemed us, not from Egypt but from Sin. He should be our Lord. As Gal 2:20 says I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. What better way to reflect the Lordship of Christ than the things we do or don't do.

Finally, then how do we be Holy, today in the 21st century. Well in some senses it's in the same way as the Israelites. As Jesus summed up in Matt 22:37-40 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." [c] 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' [d] 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." For us to be Holy we need to love God and love our neighbour.

Just before I conclude, if you are wondering whether some of the specific laws we have read out or other laws in the OT are still applicable to us today a good general rule of thumb is, if it is mentioned in the NT it probably is something we should be trying to follow, if it is not, then it probably was something specific for the Israelites before Christ came. That is of course the real difference between back in Israel's time and now. Don't make the mistake and thinking that the reason we don't follow these laws is that they belong to a primitive world and we live in a modern world. No, it's only because of the amazing thing that Jesus has done fulfilling these laws, that they are no longer applicable to us.

With regards the long list of laws relating to sexual acts, this is definitely one of the topics that is mentioned in the New Testament. Expanding the 1 Thess passage I read earlier it says; 1 Thess 4:3-8 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control your own body [a] in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. [b] The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. 7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. 8 Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

In fact Jesus lifts the bar from the OT. Matthew 5:27-28 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' [a] 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

I also want to specifically mention the law against Homosexuality as it is very topical at the moment. Romans 1 clearly says that homosexuality is wrong Romans 1:26-27 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another.

So coming back to my question at the beginning What do you think of when you think of Holiness? If you look at chapter 18-19 it covers everyday life in community with people. It doesn't involve going into Monk like isolation, it

relates to everyday activities. It involves loving God and our neighbours. Some people may say this is legalism, but there is a difference between legalism and holiness. Legalism is obeying laws, Holiness is obeying God. Holiness is personal. Holiness is loving your neighbour as yourself. I think our idea of being holy as set apart sometimes is a bit misleading. By being holy we are set apart we are different, but to be Holy is to obey God, to love him and to Love our neighbor.

I want to finish by reading Luke 10:30-37, which is Jesus commentary on Loving your neighbour. As I read it, I want you to think about who is your neighbour? Whether its at work, school, your actual neighbour, think how you can love them as Jesus describes.

27 He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'[c]; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[d]"

28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii[e] and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."