

October 21, 2018 - Lev. 19:23 – 20:27 - Sexual sins
Torah reading: Leviticus 19:23 – 20:27 - Sexual sins
Psalm 84
Haftarah: Isaiah 65:22 – 66:2, 4-5, 10-11

Uncircumcised Trees?

Leviticus 19:23-25 - "And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as uncircumcised: three years shall it be as uncircumcised unto you: it shall not be eaten of. But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the LORD withal. And in the fifth year shall ye eat of the fruit thereof, that it may yield unto you the increase thereof: I am the LORD your God."

Circumcision was what prepared an Israelite male for sex and reproduction as part of Israel. These trees were to be regarded as uncircumcised - not yet ready to reproduce.

"uncircumcised" = *arel* - exposed, projecting loosely, as the prepuce before circumcision.

"Uncircumcised lips" or an "uncircumcised heart" were considered "closed" as it were by a foreskin, therefore they were lips unable to speak distinctly or a heart unable to feel or understand God's precepts.

"Uncircumcised" trees were to remain unharvested for three years. The fourth year the owners could eat the fruits, but only in Jerusalem, as they did with the "second tithe." i.e. "in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the LORD withal." (Sifre Bemidbar 6) See **Deuteronomy 14:22–29** for a description of the "second tithe."

[Alternatively, in the Qumran scrolls as well as in Jubilees these fruits are said to be eaten by the priests alone rather than by the owner.]

See "The Law of Fourth-Year Fruit"

<https://thetorah.com/law-of-fourth-year-fruit-restraining-the-ancient-vintage-celebration/>

Both Trees and Vines?

This passage could also be referring also to the fruit of the vine, although it is not really a "tree." The word for "yield" in **Leviticus 19:25** is usually used of grapes and grain, not fruit trees like olives or figs.

Some scholars believe these passages were an attempt to restrict and tone down an already occurring wine harvest festival tradition that included dancing maidens, like that described as happening after Yom Kippur.

More on Trees

The olive and fig trees are mentioned as two of the "seven species" of Israel.

“For the Lord your God is bringing you to a good land, a land of brooks, springs, and fountains flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat, barley, grapevines, figs, and pomegranates, of olive oil and honey (**Deuteronomy 8:7-8**).”

Bearing fruit is how a fig tree creates seeds for reproduction. If the fig tree is not old enough to produce seeds, it will also not produce fruit. Under the right conditions, figs start to produce fruit when they are three to five years old.

(Full-sized OLIVE trees usually bear fruit at the fifth year and reach full fruit production in seven to eight years, depending on the care given the tree and whether it grew from seed or from cutting.)

The *figus sycomorus* - the kind of fig tree that Nicodemus climbed to see Jesus (**Luke 19:3**) - produced fruit, but only if carefully tended. In nature the fruit was pierced by the fig wasp. But in cultivation, humans had to prick or slice open the fruit to allow it to ripen. The prophet Amos was a cattle herder and a fig pricker.

Another name for figs found in the Bible is “summer fruit” or *kaytz*. This Hebrew word, *kaytz*, also means “summer” and shares the same root and sounds very similar to the Hebrew word for “the end” (*ketz*).

The sovereign LORD showed me this:

I saw a basket of summer fruit.

He said, “What do you see, Amos?”

I replied, “A basket of summer fruit (*kaytz*).”

Then the LORD said to me, “The end (*ketz*) has come for my people Israel!

I will no longer overlook their sins.” (**Amos 8:1-2**)

- **Mark 13:28-29** - "Learn this parable from the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also you, when you see these things happening, know that it is near, right at the door."

The New Year for Trees - “Rosh HaShanah La'Ilanot"

"And there are four new year dates: – The first of Nisan – new year for kings and festivals – The first of Elul – new year for animal tithes. Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon say: – The first of Tishrei– new year for calculation of the calendar, sabbatical years and jubilees, for planting and sowing.

"On the first of Shevat is the New Year for the tree; the fruit of a tree that was formed prior to that date belong to the previous tithe year and cannot be tithed together with fruit that was formed after that date; this ruling is in accordance with the statement of Beit Shammai. But Beit Hillel say: The New Year for trees is on the fifteenth of

Shevat." (Mishnah Tractate Rosh Hashana:2a)

The 15h of Shevat date eventually won out - it falls around February 1 - Fruit that ripened on a three-year-old tree before this date is considered "uncircumcised" and is forbidden to eat, while fruit ripening on or after that date of the tree's third year is permitted.

Prohibition of Magic and Divination

Leviticus 19:26 - "Ye shall not eat any thing with the blood: neither shall ye use enchantment, nor observe times."

These are grouped together because all had to do with pagan religious practices or magical beliefs.

"with the blood" - "upon, over or by" the blood - referring to pagan practices that saw blood as the food of demons, and thus used blood in sacrificial meals to commune with the spirit world.

"enchantment" = *nachash* - (from the word for serpent) to hiss, whisper or murmur a magic spell, observe and interpret signs, divination

"observe times" = *`anan* - to "gather clouds," i.e. augury by observing cloud formations, thus to act covertly, to use the hidden arts of sorcery; to divine the future from astrological signs. Taking note of astrologically auspicious or inauspicious days or hours. Also possibly to employ the "evil eye" to charm or deceive.

Authorities during the Second Temple period considered this to mean taking note of good or bad omens.

- **Ezekiel 33:35** - "Therefore tell them that this is what the Lord GOD says: 'You eat meat with the blood in it, lift up your eyes to your idols, and shed blood. Should you then possess the land?'"

Forbidden Customs of Grief

Leviticus 19:27-28 - "Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard. Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD."

These were all pagan mourning practices to express grief, made in honor of, or appealing to, their gods.

Rashi - This was the practice of the Amorites: to make cuts in their flesh when a person [related] to them died.

Prostitution

Leviticus 19:29 - "Do not prostitute thy daughter, to cause her to be a whore; lest the land fall to whoredom, and the land become full of wickedness."

Sacred or temple prostitution was a requirement for Baal worship.

Leviticus 19:30 - "Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD."

Rashi - One may not enter [the Temple Mount] with his [walking] staff, his shoes, with his money belt, or with the dust on his feet.[Yev. 6b] And although I warn you regarding the [holiness of the] Sanctuary, [says God,] nevertheless—"You shall observe My Sabbaths" - the construction of the Sanctuary does not supersede [the laws of the] Sabbath. — [Yev. 6a].

Leviticus 19:31 - "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God."

"them that have familiar spirits" = *owb* or *oboth* - from a word that means a water-skin container (**Job 32:19**); i.e. a person who is a container for another; a hollow sound, from the childlike prattling of the father's name - abba; a man or woman when a python (a soothsaying demon) is in them. The LXX translates this as ventriloquist.

"wizard" = *Yid'oni* - a "knower" - false prophet; diviner

Respect for the Aged

Leviticus 19:32 - "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD."

"old man" = *zaqen* - elder, old man

Rashi - One might think [that the commandment refers to rising before] an old person, [even though he may be] guilty [of transgression]. Scripture, therefore, says, יִקְרָא the term יִקְרָא exclusively refers to one who has acquired wisdom [see Num. 11:16, where the same term refers to great, wise men, and therefore not guilty of transgression]. [Since one is obligated to rise before the elderly only when the latter enters within one's four cubits,] one might think that he may close his eyes [when the elder approaches], as if he did not see him [and thus evade the obligation to rise before him]! Therefore Scripture adds here, "and you shall fear your God." - [Torath Kohanim 19:80; Kid. 32b]

Acceptance of Strangers

Leviticus 19:33-34 - "And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the

LORD your God."

Rashi - For instance,] do not say to him, "Only yesterday you were an idol worshipper, and now you come to learn Torah, which was given over by the Almighty God Himself! ".
— [Torath Kohanim 19:82]

"you shall love him as yourself" - A further explanation of what was said about love of neighbor in **Leviticus 19:18**. Repeated in **Exodus 23:9** and **Deuteronomy 10:19**. Also, there was to be one law for all, **Exodus 12:49**.

Just Judgment

Leviticus 19:35-36 - "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt."

i.e. just measures, whether of length, weight, or volume. The duty of judges in their deliberation of cases now falls on any who measure or judge anything.

The warning against unjust balances apply to us whenever we judge other people or evaluate opinions - our "balances" are always tilted toward our own self-interest and therefore skewed by our biases. So we should treat our own judgments with humility, not arrogance. God alone gives right discernment.

Leviticus 19:37 - "You must be sure to obey all my statutes and regulations. I am the LORD."

...just in case you think these are merely for your consideration and evaluation.

Leviticus 20:1-5 - Prohibitions - like Treason to God

This chapter is mostly about the punishments for the prohibitions already related in **Leviticus 18**. These are mostly death penalty offenses listed.

In other ancient Near Eastern law codes, only treasonous acts against a king or blasphemy against a god are punished automatically with death. In other crimes, murder for instance, the victim's family could either choose revenge - death or mutilation - or compensation. The typical remedy for lesser crimes or injury was monetary.

According to this list, worship of Molech, idolatry in general and all the other death-penalty offenses listed were considered as a kind of treason. In fact, all of these prohibitions should be seen not as simply ethical or moral guidelines, but as part of the covenant or "constitution" of Israel. To break them was the gravest threat to the whole people and a betrayal of God Himself.

In Shakespeare's play King Lear (c. 1600), when the King learns that his daughter

Regan has publicly dishonored him, he says "They could not, would not do 't; 'tis worse than murder": this was a conventional attitude at that time. In Dante's Inferno, the ninth and lowest circle of Hell is reserved for traitors.

Don't Give Your Seed to Molech

Leviticus 20:2-5 - "Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever he be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth any of his seed unto Molech; he shall surely be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones."

Also called Moloch, Milcom, and Malcham, was known in later times as "the abomination of the Ammonites" - **1 Kings 11:5**.

Targum: whoever "makes (or sacrifices) of his seed to Molech to be burnt in the fire"

See also **Leviticus 18:21, Deuteronomy 18:10**.

verse 3 - "Defile my sanctuary" - i. e. pollute the people, "my holy ones" as identified with their sanctuary, according to the Rabbis.

Spiritism

Leviticus 20:6 - "And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people."

Targum of Jonathan: "I will destroy him by the pestilence."

Repeated Call for Holiness

Leviticus 20:7-8 - "Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God. And ye shall keep my statutes, and do them: I am the LORD which sanctify you."

Cursing One's Parents

Leviticus 20:9 - "For every one that curseth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he hath cursed his father or his mother; his blood shall be upon him."

Rashi - it is like "his blood is upon his [own] head" (**Joshua 2:19**), i.e., no one is punished for his death but he himself, because he brought it upon himself to be killed.

The Talmud states that there never actually was a wayward son (see **Deuteronomy 18:21**) nor will there ever be one, and that the Torah mentions it merely so it should be studied.

Sexual Relationships

Leviticus 20:10 - "And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death."

Rashi - Wherever a death penalty is mentioned in the Torah without specification [as to the mode of death], it exclusively refers to strangulation. — [Torath Kohanim 20:106, Sanh. 52b]

Leviticus 20:11 - "And the man that lieth with his father's wife hath uncovered his father's nakedness: both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them."

Leviticus 20:12 - "And if a man lie with his daughter in law, both of them shall surely be put to death: they have wrought confusion; their blood shall be upon them."

Homosexual Acts

Leviticus 20:13 - "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them."

Rashi - [i.e.,] if he inserts [his membrum] as an applicator [is inserted] into a tube [of eye shadow]. — [B.M. 91a]

A Wife and Her Mother

Leviticus 20:14 - "And if a man take a wife and her mother, it is wickedness: they shall be burnt with fire, both he and they; that there be no wickedness among you."

Probably death was first inflicted by stoning, and the body afterwards consumed by fire (**Joshua 7:15**).

Bestiality

Leviticus 20:15-16 - "And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death: and ye shall slay the beast. And if a woman approach unto any beast, and lie down thereto, thou shalt kill the woman, and the beast: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them."

"and ye shall slay the beast" - Targum of Jonathan: "with clubs"

But why, when the animal was only a victim? The reasons given in the Mishnah (Sanhedrin, c. 7. sect. 4.) why the beast was to be slain are because ruin came to the man by means of it, and that it might not be said, as it passed along the streets, that is

the beast for which such a one was stoned. Aben Ezra says it was so that it might not cause others to sin; and to cover the reproach.

Note that even sacred trees used in idolatry were to be burned (Deuteronomy 12:3) so there could be no repetition of the sin.

Rashi - If [in the case of] trees, which do not see and do not hear, when a falling comes [upon a man] through them, the Torah says, Destroy them! Burn them! Annihilate them!- how much more culpable is a human who leads his fellow astray from the path of life to the paths of death! - [Torath Kohanim 20:115]

More Sexual Relationships

Leviticus 20:17 - "And if a man shall take his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter, and see her nakedness, and she see his nakedness; it is a wicked thing; and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people: he hath uncovered his sister's nakedness; he shall bear his iniquity."

"see her nakedness" - Not just "seeing" but the same as to "uncover" her nakedness, which means sexual intercourse.

Rashi - If you [object and] say, "But Cain married his sister!" [the answer is:] the Omnipresent [in permitting this marriage,] performed an act of kindness (טָדָן), to build His world through him, as it is said: "the world is built on kindness (טָדָן)" (Ps. 89:3). - [Torath Kohanim 20:116]

Prohibition of Sex with a Menstruous Woman

Leviticus 20:18 - "And if a man shall lie with a woman having her sickness, and shall uncover her nakedness; he hath discovered her fountain, and she hath uncovered the fountain of her blood: and both of them shall be cut off from among their people."

Rashi - Now, regarding this הַעֲרָה, "uncovering" [in the context of illicit relations], our Rabbis differed [with respect to what constitutes "uncovering"]. Some say that it is the [mere] contact of the membrum, while others say that it is the insertion of the tip of the membrum. — [Yev. 55b]

Even *More* Forbidden Sexual Relationships

Leviticus 20:19 - "And thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy mother's sister, nor of thy father's sister: for he uncovereth his near kin: they shall bear their iniquity."

Leviticus 20:20 - "And if a man shall lie with his uncle's wife, he hath uncovered his uncle's nakedness: they shall bear their sin; they shall die childless."

Rashi - Scripture varied the expression in these two verses: (a) they shall die without children (our verse), and (b) they shall be childless (next verse)-"they shall die

childless" [means that] if he has children at the time of the sin, he will not have any when he dies, because he will bury them in his lifetime; and "they will be childless" [means that] if he has no children at the time of the sin, he will remain all his life as he is now. — [See Torath Kohanim 20:120; Yev. 55a]

Leviticus 20:21 - "And if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless."

Summing Up

Leviticus 20:22-23 - "Ye shall therefore keep all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: that the land, whither I bring you to dwell therein, spew you not out. And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them."

Leviticus 20:24 - "But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people."

Leviticus 20:25 - "Ye shall therefore put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean: and ye shall not make your souls abominable by beast, or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that creepeth on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean."

Leviticus 20:26 - "And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine."

One Last Thing...

Leviticus 20:27 - "A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them."