

Leviticus

Lesson 14

C. The Forbidden Relationships

1. When Israel Enters Canaan Land

And now we come to the forbidden relationships when Israel enters Canaan Land. The people of Egypt and Canaan are close enough cousins that many of their customs and practices are the same. Chapter 18, verse 1. *"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'I am the LORD your God. You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes. You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the LORD your God. So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD.'"* (18:1-5).

First, the LORD confirms the closeness of the Egyptian and Canaanite cousins when He says, *"You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt ... nor ... what is done in the land of Canaan...."* Egypt and Canaan live by the same standards and morals. Today, we would say the same absence of standards and morals, but our position is from a more complete knowledge of the desires of the LORD. For those of us who have been living under godly instruction all our lives, we find it quite hard to stomach the thoughts found in much of the rest of the book of Leviticus. We mostly see the incest regulations challenging to wade through in our yearly Bible reading. We must understand that until the Exodus days, the whole world lived by the same basic standards and morals that we find so offensive. As a child, I remember how horrible it was when I first heard that Adam and Eve's sons married the daughters of Adam and Eve. But being the first family on earth from which all other families would derive, where could a son find a girl to marry except his sister. No other humans lived at the time. I remember Abram and Sarah's issue when they went to Egypt and lied concerning their family relationship. They told the officials Sarah was Abram's sister instead of his wife. It was a partial truth because Sarah was Abram's half-sister. The two had the same father but different mothers. We can go on through the Scripture and mention many, such as Isaac marrying his cousin Rebekah and Jacob marrying two sisters. But all those incestual relationships which allowed the world to be populated are coming to an end with the Nation of Israel immediately. No other nation of people in the world will abide by these new standards and morals until the coming of the LORD and the Church's establishment.

Second, the LORD says, *"So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD."* Instead of living life in the world's way, the LORD warns Israel's people to live life in His way according to His statutes and judgments. We must remember, *statutes* mean *legal regulations*, and *judgments* mean *the penalty for breaking a legal regulation*.

And with all of that, we enter the statute and judgment section of the book of Leviticus. It is the last section of the book, which spans chapters 18 through 27. In general, it is nothing but a list of the LORD's legal instruction for Israel to follow despite what the people of the entire world are doing around them.

a) Abominations with Blood Relatives

The LORD begins the list of statutes with a warning about repulsive abominations with blood relatives. Verse 6. *"None of you shall approach any blood relative of his to uncover nakedness; I am the LORD."* (18:6).

What does the LORD mean when He says, *"uncover nakedness?"* Let us go back to Genesis 3:7 and the Adam and Eve story to understand these words' meaning. The two have eaten the forbidden fruit, and the following occurs. *"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings."* (Genesis 3:7). Thus, Adam and Eve saw

their nakedness and covered their naked loin parts. The Genesis verse uses the word *loin*, we call them sexual organs. The same meaning applies here in Leviticus.

Our translation uses the words “*blood relatives*.” However, the Hebrew should be translated *flesh of your flesh*. In Genesis 2:24, the LORD says, “*For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*” (Genesis 2:24). When a man marries a woman, and they join in a marital union in the process of intercourse, the flesh of the two become one flesh. Therefore, the husband and the wife are of one flesh, and all their parents, siblings, and offspring are of the same flesh. Basically, once a man marries a wife, the families of both become one flesh, and the families become off-limits to new sexual encounters. First, we see the statutes for the abominations with blood relatives.

(1) Your Father and Mother

The LORD begins these instructions with the closest relationships possible, that of a child to a father and mother. Verse 7. “*You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, that is, the nakedness of your mother. She is your mother; you are not to uncover her nakedness.*” (18:7).

A child is truly constructed from the flesh and blood of its biological father and mother. Without the union of the two, the child could not be born. Biologically it holds parts of each within its physical being. In these new guidelines, a child is never to mate with a father or mother. We can look back in the book of Genesis and see where this occurred with Lot and his two daughters; however, when the daughters mated with their father, the LORD’s law was not in place.

(2) Your Father and Step-Mother

Now we come to the relationship with a father and a step-mother. Verse 8. “*You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife; it is your father’s nakedness.*” (18:8).

Even though a child does not have a biological blood relationship with the step-mother, no sexual relationship can be had with her because she is in a sexual relationship with the biological father. As your father’s wife, she is now one flesh with your father.

(3) Your Sister or Step-Sister

The LORD addresses the sexual relationship with a sister or step-sister and forbids any acts between the two. Verse 9. “*The nakedness of your sister, either your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, whether born at home or born outside, their nakedness you shall not uncover.*” (18:9).

Your sister is of the same biological makeup as you with your father and mother; therefore, your sister cannot be taken into a sexual relationship. Neither can a half-sister be a sexual partner because she has half of your biological makeup. Many years after giving this law, David’s son, Amnon, sexually assaulted his half-sister, Tamar. Absalom brought justice for Amnon’s transgression by killing him for the sin. But this law was not in place when Amnon and Tamar mated.

The step-sister is also addressed here. Even though she is not biologically related in flesh and blood, her mother is one flesh with your father making your step-sister off limits to you as a sexual partner.

(4) Your Granddaughter

Next, we come to the sinful sexual relationship with a granddaughter. Verse 10. “*The nakedness of your son’s daughter or your daughter’s daughter, their nakedness you shall not uncover; for their nakedness is yours.*” (18:10).

You have now grown to be the father or mother, and the same stipulation applies to you as did with your father and mother. You cannot enter a sexual relationship with a granddaughter.

(5) Your Half-Sister

The half-sister comes next. Her flesh and blood will only match half of yours, but she is still forbidden. Verse 11. *“The nakedness of your father's wife's daughter, born to your father, she is your sister, you shall not uncover her nakedness.”* (18:11).

Simply having your father's flesh and blood within your half-sister is enough to restrict her from a relationship with you.

(6) Your Aunts and Uncles

Then the LORD addresses the aunts and uncles. Verse 12. *“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister; she is your father's blood relative. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is your mother's blood relative. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother; you shall not approach his wife, she is your aunt.”* (18:12-14).

The bloodlines of your aunts and uncles are the same as your fathers and mothers. Therefore, they cannot be included in any sexual relationships.

(7) Your Daughter-in-law

The wife of your son is your daughter-in-law. She is off-limits. Verse 15. *“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law; she is your son's wife, you shall not uncover her nakedness.”* (18:15).

Even though she is not related by flesh and blood, she is one flesh with your biological son, which makes her out of bounds for a sexual relationship with you.

(8) Your Sister-in-law

Your sister-in-law will be the wife of your brother or sister. Once again, she is not the flesh of your flesh and blood of your blood, but she is one flesh with your brother or sister. You cannot have a sexual relationship with her. Verse 16. *“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness.”* (18:16).

Your flesh and blood are the same as your brother's flesh and blood. Flesh and blood sexual relationships are strictly forbidden in the Nation of Israel.

b) Abominations with Neighbors

From the abomination with blood relatives, we come to the abominations with neighbors. The LORD begins with a woman and her daughter together.

(1) A Woman and Her Daughter Together

The LORD is no longer speaking of a wife or a mother; He has changed His words to *a woman* and her daughter. Verse 17a. *“You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and of her daughter...”* (18:17a).

First, a sin exists because a sexual relationship with a woman you are not married is strictly forbidden. Second, the statute exposes a different corruption, a sexual relationship with a woman and her daughter at the same time. Neither are blood relatives, neither are married to you. Both encounters are strictly forbidden.

(2) A Daughter-in-law and the Granddaughter

Because He has just addressed the problem of a man entering a sexual relationship with a woman and her daughter in an unmarried state, the LORD addresses a daughter-in-law and a granddaughter in an unholy state. Verse 17b. "...nor shall you take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness; they are blood relatives. It is lewdness." (18:17b).

The LORD uses the word "lewdness." The word means a *lustful indulgence*. When the word was first used in the English translations, it meant a *habitual lustful indulgence* indicating that the man would continually lust for a sexual encounter with a woman, daughter, daughter, and granddaughter.

(3) A Marriage to Two Sisters

Now we come to the prohibition of marrying two sisters. Verse 18. "You shall not marry a woman in addition to her sister as a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness." (18:18).

The classic example of this problem is found in the story of Jacob marrying Rachel and Leah. The book of Genesis makes it clear that the two were rivals in every way. This restriction means that a man cannot be married to two sisters at the same time. If he is married to one sister and she dies, then he can marry the second sister. This verse does not condone multiple wives in a marriage. It supports a monogamous marriage between one man and one woman.

(4) A Menstruating Woman

Every woman has a time each month when the sexual organs clean themselves. The LORD addresses this prohibition. Verse 19. "Also you shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness during her menstrual impurity." (18:19).

This is the second time the LORD has given this instruction. We found it in the instruction for the discharge from a woman's body in chapter 15. This statute, in this verse, applies to any woman to whom you are married or not.

(5) A Neighbor's Wife

A neighbor's wife is also forbidden. Verse 20. "You shall not have intercourse with your neighbor's wife, to be defiled with her." (18:20).

Interestingly, the word *intercourse* is used in this verse. The Hebrew word is *shekobeth*, and it means to *lie carnally*. The word *intercourse* was first used in the 1500s to explain a conversation between different parties. It meant to communicate to and fro. It was not used to mean a sexual relationship until the late 1770s. For that reason, the older English translations and versions use the words *lie carnally*. They both mean the same thing. The word *carnal* means *a sensual immoral passion and appetite of the flesh*. A Jewish man is forbidden from having a sexual relationship with a woman he has not married.

(6) A Child Sacrifice to Molech

Child sacrifice to Molech is strictly forbidden. Verse 21. "You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the LORD." (18:21).

Molech is the name of the Canaanite fire deity over children. Molech is the ancient Ammonite name. Remember, Ammon was the son born to Lot after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is interesting that Moabites, Ammon's brother, also worshipped this deity but called him Chemosh. These are the Moabite and Ammonite names for this single deity. We do not know the name used for this deity in the Canaanite or the Egyptian language. However, in Mesopotamia, he is

called *Nergal*, in Syria, *Shamash*, in Ebia, *Kamish*. They are all the names of the same deity. The Smith Bible Dictionary says the following about Molech.

*Fire-gods appear to have been common to all the Canaanite, Syrian, and Arab tribes, who worshipped the destructive element under an outward symbol, with the most inhuman rites. According to Jewish tradition, the image of Molech was of brass, hollow within, and was situated without Jerusalem. "His face was (that) of a calf, and his hands stretched forth like a man who opens his hands to receive (something) of his neighbor. And they kindled it with fire, and the priests took the babe and put it into the hands of Molech, and the babe gave up the ghost."*¹⁹

(7) A Male with a Male

A man having a sexual relationship with a man is forbidden. Verse 22. "*You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.*" (18:22). Here we come to the abomination of a man having a sexual relationship with another man. The LORD's statute forbids it. The word used to describe this today is homosexuality. The word *abomination* means *fifth*.

(8) A Human with an Animal

A sexual relationship with an animal is forbidden. Verse 23. "*Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion.*" (18:23).

For the word *intercourse*, see the notes on verse 18:20. Today, to lie carnally with an animal is called bestiality. The word *perversion* means *the alteration of something from its original course*. It is strictly forbidden in Israel.

2. When Israel Sees Canaan Land

a) The Punishment of the Canaanites

The LORD ends this section of the forbidden relationships by explaining that when Israel sees Canaan Land, she will see the LORD's punishment of the Canaanites for their ways. Verses 24. "*Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants.*" (18:24-25).

The LORD saw the evil of the Canaanites and their rejection of Him long before He delivered these laws to the Nation of Israel. Six hundred and twenty years before giving this law, the LORD promised to give Abram's descendants Canaan's Land. At that time, all the Canaanite tribes had long past offended the LORD, and he planned to destroy the Canaanites. The Canaanites were guilty of all the forbidden relationships listed in this chapter.

b) The Pattern of the Canaanites

From the punishment of the Canaanites, we come to the pattern of the Canaanites. The LORD warns Israel to abstain from copying the pattern of the ways of Canaan when they take possession of the land. Verse 24. "*But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled); so that the land will not spew you out, should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you. For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do so shall be cut off from among their people. Thus you are to keep My charge, that*

¹⁹ Smith, W. (1986). In *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the LORD your God.” (18:24-30).

The LORD took the land away from the Canaanites. If Israel follows the Canaanite's practices, the LORD will take the land away from Israel too. Sadly, we know the end of the story. The Israelites did fall into the ways of the Canaanites, and the LORD took the land away from Israel when He sent them into exile eight hundred and eighty years after He gave them this law.

Now we come to the law of the ways of life in the Promised Land in the next lesson.