

We Have Been Called to a Greater Level of Holiness and Obedience

¹Adonai said to Moses: ²“Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: I am Adonai your God. ³You are *not to act as they do in the land of Egypt, where you used to live. Nor are you to act as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, nor are you to walk in their customs.* ⁴You are to obey My ordinances and keep My statutes and walk in them – I am Adonai your God. ⁵So you are to keep My statutes and My ordinances. The one who does them will live by them. I am Adonai (Lev. 18:1-5)

Out of curiosity I checked the meaning and origin of the expression: “*When in Rome, do as the Romans do.*” I was surprised to find that it is attributed to Augustine (Letter 54 to Januarius, circa 390 A.D.), which states: “*When I go to Rome, I fast on Saturday, but here [in Milan] I do not. You also do follow the custom of whatever church you attend, if you do not want to give or receive scandal.*” In Google the meaning given is: “*It is polite, and possibly also advantageous, to abide by the customs of a society when one is a visitor.*” While it might be *polite and advantageous* to follow the customs of the society you are living in it is not profitable to follow the customs of the fallen world and society we find ourselves in. So “*when in Rome, do not do as the Romans do.*”

Look at the captions on the TLV Bible for Lev. 18: *Incest Forbidden and Other Forbidden Relations*. Yes, Virginia, the Bible does detail certain human relationships that are abominations to Adonai. I am sure I do not have to remind us that incestuous relations are forbidden even in our permissible society. But, have we forgotten that there are 'Other Forbidden Relations': “¹⁹*You are not to approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in the impurity of her niddah* ²⁰*You are not to lie sexually with your neighbor’s wife and defile yourself with her.* ²¹*You are not to give any of your children in sacrifice to Molech, and defile the Name of your God. I am Adonai.* ²²*You are not to lie with a man, as with a woman – that is an abomination.* ²³*You are not to lie with any animal to defile yourself with it, nor is any woman to give herself to an animal, to lie down with it – that is a perversion.* ²⁴*Do not defile yourselves in any of these things, for in all of these ways the nations which I am casting out before you were defiled.* ²⁵*The land has become defiled, so I will punish its iniquity, and the land will vomit out its inhabitants.* ²⁶*You, however, are to keep My statutes and My ordinances, and do none of these abominations, neither the native-born, nor the outsider dwelling among you.* ²⁷*For all these abominations were done by the men of the land who were before you, and the land became defiled.* ²⁸*If you defile it, the land will vomit you out as it vomited out the nation that was before you.* ²⁹*For whoever does any of these detestable things, the souls that do them are to be cut off from the midst of their people.* ³⁰*Therefore you are to keep My charge, so that you do not practice any of these detestable customs that were practiced before you, so that you do not defile yourselves by them. I am Adonai your God” (Lev. 18:19-30)*

The *Torah* tells us things a person should not do, warning that anyone who does them would be *cut off* from among his people. The term *cut off from the midst of their people* refers to *death, expulsion from the community/excommunication*. Whatever the case, this is serious! There are personal as well as national consequences to such disobedience – it is all sin! As I read through this list I thought *our country is in trouble!* In the *Torah* we see the nation of Israel (God’s Chosen People) getting ready to possess a land that Adonai was going bring them into: a prosperous land, a spacious land where they would benefit from someone else’s efforts and live in houses they did not have to build. Was this a judgment on those nations? Yes, because they practiced all those the things He was warning Israel not to do. That really speaks to me because it implies that the US and for that matter nearly every country on earth including Modern Israel is ripe for judgment.

How far have we (our society) fallen from the morality of Adonai? Verily He would have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah if He does not judge us (Matt. 10:15; Romans 9:29; 2 Peter 2:6, Jude 1:7). There is disagreement in the Believing Community as to whether COVID-19 was from Satan or from God. Regardless, in His Sovereignty, Adonai has allowed it (See Job 1:6-12) and He has His Righteous reasons why this is so. Are we being judged? Are we experiencing the birth pangs of the Messiah’s Return? What is our response?

Some of the things happening these days are not very happy. There has been an explosion of porn and sexual addiction and while many of us have suffered by the loss of wages and income, the porn industry is raking in unprecedented profits. In many states, abortion has continued undeterred and there are no signs of

anyone in our society attributing any of the distress we are suffering to our society's abhorrent behavior. In contrast, we have been given explicit instructions about living in a greater level of holiness and obedience: "*You shall be kedoshim (holy), for I, Adonai your God, am holy*" (Lev. 19:1).

The holiness of Israel had to stand in contrast to the lifestyle of the idolatrous nations that surrounded them: "*Each one of you is to respect his mother and his father, and keep My Shabbatot. I am Adonai your God. Do not turn to idols, or make molten gods for yourselves. I am Adonai your God*" (Lev. 19:3-4). Beginning with the command to be holy and through the end of Chapter 19, we see another exposition of the Ten Commandments. J. H. Hertz (the writer of a famous *Chumash*) affirms this when he states that the Ten Commandments are in essence repeated in these verses. In particular, verses 26-31 give specific instructions about certain Canaanite practices. Mentioned are prohibitions against bodily mutilation (verses 27, 28), harlotry (verse 29), the worship of false gods, and the participation in demonic activity (verses 26, 31). The TLV accurately chooses to use the word *tattoo marks* in verse 28 and our society must consider the validity of this practice. There are many Believers who have tattoos, some in the Messianic Movement. There may be some who perhaps had this done in ignorance to Scripture. But what happens if it were done in direct disobedience? In all cases there is forgiveness in *Yeshua* to all who have asked Him for it. Any act of disobedience is sin and we do not impute to this particular act the label of being the "*unpardonable sin*." We all need to move on in *Yeshua's* compassion in any and all cases (remember Mary Magdalene and her multiple adulteries). However, I would like to caution all, and especially our young people to consider what Leviticus 19:28 says before embarking in any such practice. My intent is to speak to the heart of a person and let the Holy Spirit do His job. I am a redeemed sinner, I do not practice the things I did prior to my salvation experience, but neither am I exempt from its consequences. Violating the Almighty's Word is a bad idea, no matter in what area of anyone's life. Verse 30 is enlightening because we know from history that other religions from the ancient Near East also had sacred days, even so-called *Sabbaths*. The Almighty wanted Israel to observe only His holy days, not the *Sabbaths* of the Canaanites.

Another area where we are given instruction that is contrary to our society is the treatment of the elderly. Verse 32 stresses the importance of giving the elderly in the community proper honor and respect. One way this is demonstrated is by rising when an elderly person comes into our presence, but this is not the only way to do so. We should be creative in demonstrating such honor and respect.

The *Torah* speaks frequently about a certain group of people called in Hebrew, *gerim*, (sojourners). Here in verses 33-34 the *Torah* shares excellent information about them. Who are the sojourners? There is sharp difference of opinion between Jewish and non-Jewish commentators. Almost across the board, the rabbis consider *gerim* as proselytes, or Gentile converts to Judaism. This is even reflected in many Bible translations (e.g., *ArtScroll Chumash*). The problem with this understanding is that it seems to misrepresent the way the *Torah* used the word *ger*. According to verse 34, *Adonai* used the same word, *ger*, to describe both the identity of the children of Israel when they lived in Egypt, and the Gentile (non-Jew) who lives in the land of Israel. When the Children of Israel lived in Egypt, they were most surely not converts or proselytes to the Egyptian religion. They were simply Hebrews in a land in which they were not natives. We must, therefore, understand the outsider/alien/sojourner in this passage the same way. A Gentile who resides in the land of Israel is a sojourner, not a proselyte, just as Israel lived in the land of Egypt.

Sojourners are a typology of Gentile Believers. *Adonai* permitted them! He allowed/permitted any Gentile that desired so to live in the land of Israel (it is not this way in modern Israeli law, practice, and attitudes). He made it clear that they must treat sojourners with goodness, kindness, and love. In fact they are to love sojourners the same way they loved the native-born. There is a flip side to this relationship in that the *Torah* also specifically instructed sojourners that when they choose to live in the land of Israel, they also must abide by the same *Torah* as the native-born. *Torah* teaches justice and fairness for all. *Torah* was to be THE Law of the Land of Israel (both native born and sojourners). It should be so in a Messianic Congregation. Shabbat Shalom!