

MESSAGE 22
CIVIL LAWS RELATING TO SEX CRIMES
Leviticus 18:1-30

Introduction

The first MESSAGE in this section of the book deals with sex crimes. These laws are in addition to laws on the same subject found in Exodus 22:16-17,19. Careful emphasis was given to laws concerning sex, because Jehovah’s concepts of sex and sex crimes were so different from those of the nations around Israel. Both the people of Egypt, from which Israel fled, and the people of Canaan, to which Israel was going, worshiped sex as a god and saw it as the ultimate answer to the mystery of life. Israel needed to learn an entirely different concept of sex. They needed to understand that sex was a creation of Jehovah God, with a good and wholesome purpose that could be achieved only by strict conformity to the plan for which Jehovah had created it. Thus, Jehovah gave to Israel very explicit laws concerning sex, in order to prevent their falling prey to the evil practices that abounded in the nations around them.

This MESSAGE can be outlined as follows:

Pages

A.	Civil laws relating to sex crimes	1-9
	Introductory note (18:1).	1
	1. You must not practice the sex customs and laws of Egypt and Canaan (18:2-5)	1-2
	2. You must not commit incest (18:6-18)	2-5
	3. You must not have intercourse when your wife is unclean (18:19).	5-6
	4. You must not commit adultery (18:20)	6
	5. You must not give your seed to Molech (18:21)	6-7
	6. You must not practice homosexuality (18:22)	7
	7. You must not practice bestiality (18:23)	7-8
	8. Penalties for the nation’s and for an individual’s breaking these commands (18:24-30) . . .	8-9

Interpretation

CHAPTER 18

Introductory note (18:1)

Verse 1. **And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,**

Another MESSAGE of Jehovah to Moses from The Tabernacle is introduced with this verse.

1. You must not practice the sex customs and laws of Egypt and Canaan (18:2-5)

Verse 2. **Speak to the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them, I am Jehovah your God.**

This MESSAGE was to be relayed to all the Israelites, because it outlined a way of life to be practiced by all the people of the nation.

The commands in this MESSAGE were based on the authority of “Jehovah your God.” Israel had chosen to give allegiance to Jehovah and had entered into covenant relationship with Him, which meant they had accepted His authority. That authority now outlined for them the sex crimes He expected them to avoid.

Verse 3. **You must not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. And you must not walk according to their statutes.**

Jehovah warned the Israelites that they were not to follow the customs and laws of Egypt, from which they had fled, or of Canaan, to which they were going. “As they do” described the customs of those nations, and “according to their statutes” described their laws. The word translated “statutes” is the feminine form of the word that is used in its feminine form in Leviticus 3:17 and in its masculine form in Leviticus 6:18 (see comments on Lev. 3:17 in MESSAGE 1 and on Lev. 6:18 in MESSAGE 5). It referred to “inscriptions, that is, written laws. Though the word means laws in general, the remainder of the MESSAGE shows that in this MESSAGE Jehovah was particularly referring to the sex customs and laws of Egypt and Canaan. The sex practices of Egypt and Canaan were crimes in Israel.

Verses 4-5. **4 You must do My judgments, you must keep My statutes to walk in them. I am Jehovah your God.**

5 And you shall keep My statutes and My judgments. The man who does them shall live. I am Jehovah.

The word translated “judgments” is the same word that is found in Leviticus 5:10. It refers to judgments handed down by a judge (see comments on Lev. 5:10 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading according to the judgment). In this case, the Judge is Jehovah God. The word translated “statutes” is the same word used in verse 3. The morals of Israel were to be based on the God’s commandments, not on reasoning that appealed to the minds of people or on inspiration that appealed to their emotions. Because of fallen human nature, the Israelites and all people are not capable of understanding or feeling correctly about right and wrong, especially about sex. Therefore, Jehovah told them what was right and wrong, and they were expected to obey. Yet, what He commanded was not based on the whims of a fickle or capricious god. His teachings were based on the holy nature of an unchanging and righteous God and on eternal moral principles that

lead to life. Jehovah said that if the Israelites would keep or obey His commands, they would live. That statement implies that, if they followed the customs and laws of Egypt and Canaan, they would die.

2. You must not commit incest (18:6-18)

Verse 6. **A male must not approach any one of the same flesh to uncover nakedness. I am Jehovah.**

The term “uncover nakedness” is used here for the first time in the Bible, but it occurs fourteen times in this one chapter. It is universally understood to mean more than seeing a person’s naked body. Leviticus 20:11 says a man who “lies with his father’s wife has uncovered his father’s nakedness,” which shows that the term “uncover nakedness” is equivalent to “lies with.” Leviticus 20:17 speaks of “a man who takes his sister . . . and sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness,” which shows that “sees her nakedness” is equivalent to “taking.” Both the expression “lies with” and “takes” clearly mean sexual intercourse. In Ezekiel 16:36; 23:18, the term clearly refers to adultery. These uses of the term show that “uncover nakedness” is a euphemism for sexual intercourse.¹ In this chapter, the term always refers to forbidden sexual intercourse.

The words translated “of the same flesh” show the kind of sexual relationships that are the focus of this passage. That term is literally “flesh of his flesh,” using two different Hebrew words that mean “flesh.” The Hebrews used that term in the same way that we use the expression “my flesh and blood.” It means a close relative or a near kinsperson. Sex with a close relative was forbidden. The reference is to incest. This verse stresses that incest was forbidden by God and a crime in Israel.

Verse 7-18. **7 You must not uncover your father’s nakedness, even your mother’s nakedness. She is your mother. You must not uncover her nakedness.**

¹ KJV, NASB, RSV, ASV, LITV, and DV translate this phrase literally as “uncover nakedness.” CEV and MSG use “have sex.” CJB and NIV use “have sex relations”; HCSB and GNB use “have sexual intercourse”; SGV, “have intercourse”; and BBE, “have sex connection.”

8 You must not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife. It is your father's nakedness.

9 You must not uncover the nakedness of your sister, the daughter of your father or the daughter of your mother, whether born at home or born elsewhere.

10 You must not uncover the nakedness of your son's daughter or of your daughter's daughter. They are your nakedness.

11 You must not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife's daughter. She is your sister.

12 You must not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister. She is your father's flesh.

13 You must not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is your mother's flesh.

14 You must not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother. You must not approach his wife. She is your aunt.

15 You must not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law. She is your son's wife.

16 You must not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife. She is your brother's nakedness.

17 You must not uncover the nakedness of [your] wife and her daughter. You must not take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter to uncover her nakedness. They are your flesh. It is wickedness.

18 You must not take a wife and her sister to uncover her nakedness for spite against her during her lifetime.

The purpose of these verses is to define relationships that Jehovah considers to be incest. Jehovah listed specific examples of incest so the Israelites would understand clearly what family relationship He considered to be close relatives.

Some of the examples were persons related by birth. They were of the same flesh, or "flesh of his flesh" because they were born of the same ancestry or family.

Mother	v. 7
Half sister	v. 9
Granddaughter	v. 10
Aunt by birth	vs. 12-13
Two sisters	v. 18

Some other examples of close family relationships were persons related by marriage:

Step-mother	v. 8
Step-sister	v. 11
Aunt by marriage	v. 14
Daughter-in-law	v. 15
Sister-in-law	v. 16
Step-daughter	v. 17a
Step-granddaughter	v. 17b

Sex relations between persons related by marriage were equally offensive and forbidden as sex relations between persons related by birth. Those relationships also were considered to be of the same flesh, or "flesh of his flesh," because when people married they became "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Sex relations with a close relative by birth or by marriage were both considered to be incest and were forbidden by Jehovah.

"Your father's nakedness" in verse 8 does not refer to sex relations with one's own father. It refers to nakedness that belonged to one's father, because it was with a woman whose nakedness belonged to his father. The expression clearly has that meaning in verse 16. "Your father's nakedness" and "your mother's nakedness" both have the same meaning. Both prohibit sex relations between a man and his step-mother. The text does not clearly define whether the woman separated from her husband and then married his son or whether they committed adultery. Probably the vagueness is deliberate. The relationship was wrong in both cases. The point is, whether the couple got married or committed fornication, sexual relations with a close relative by marriage was wrong.

Verse 18 is another example that clearly refers to incest in a marriage relationship. It cites marriage to a second sister while the first sister is still alive. Though neither sister was related to the man by birth, they were related to each other by

birth. Marriage to a close relative of one's wife did not make sex relations with the second wife any more right than committing fornication with her. Thus, marriage to two sisters at the same time was incest. The reason why marriage to one's wife's sister was prohibited only during the wife's lifetime was that at marriage a woman became a member of her husband's family, but he did not become a member of his wife's family. Therefore, after his wife's death he could marry her sister without the family complications that would come from marriage to a close relative.

All these relationships are mentioned from the point of view of a man, but sex relations of a woman to close relatives certainly were equally forbidden.

These verses are the first commandments forbidding marriage to a close relative. Such a commandment was contrary to the practice that had been allowed at least in the beginning of the human race. It seems obvious that Cain must have married one of his sisters, since no other people were in the world at that time (Gen. 4:17; 5:4). The same had to be true of the other children of Adam and Eve (Gen. 5:3-5). Abraham married his half-sister (Gen. 20: 11-12). Abraham's brother Nahor married his niece (Gen. 11:29). Abraham was careful to seek a relative to marry his son Isaac (Gen. 24:1-4), and the wife Abraham's servant obtained for Isaac was Isaac's second cousin once removed (Gen. 24:24). Isaac's son Jacob married two wives, Leah and Rachel. They were sisters, and both of them were his first cousins through his mother (Gen. 29:21-30:24) and his fourth cousins through his father (Gen 11:29; 21:21-22; 24:29). The text of Genesis gives no indication that Jehovah disapproved of any of those marriages. Evidently marriage between close relatives was a practice allowed in the early days of the human race to provide for propagation. In Abraham's family the major concern was to marry a person who believed in the same God, and few outside of Abraham's relatives believed in and worshiped Jehovah.. By the time of Moses, the need for marriage to a close relative no longer existed. Not only were many people available for marriage, but also many believers in Jehovah were available. The way was open for God to teach the

Israelites that marriage to a close relative was unwise and dangerous.

The prohibition against marriage to a close relative usually is explained in terms of heredity. It is argued that, as people continued to sin, more and more defects became implanted in people's genetic makeup. Marriage to a close relative tended to bring out those defects in their offspring, according to the laws of genetics. People of those times did not know the laws of genetics, but they could see the birth defects and the barrenness that often came from marriages between close relatives. Barrenness was a defect that ran through Abraham's family. It was seen in Sarah (Gen 15:2; 16:1-2), Rebekah (25:21), Rachel (Gen. 29:31), and Leah (Gen. 30:9). As the danger of birth defects grew, it is assumed that Jehovah found it necessary to institute the law against marriage to close relatives to decrease the number of defects passed on to offspring. Jehovah certainly knew the laws of genetics, even though the Israelites of that day did not; and He could have prohibited marriage to close relatives for that reason. If so, the reason was in sharp contrast to the ideas of other ancient peoples, who favored marriages between close relatives, especially in ruling families. They desired to marry close relatives to preserve what they considered to be their superior "blood line." It was a practice based on pride, and it often led to disaster.

Actually, an explanation of this prohibition that is much nearer to the thoughts of the MESSAGE itself is that Jehovah instituted this law to preserve harmony and prevent resentments and competition within families. Marriages between close relatives complicates relationships and magnifies resentments, which then spread damage to loving relationships throughout the whole larger family. Blood relationships certainly complicated Abraham's family (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-16), Esau's family (Gen. 28:6-9), and even more Jacob's family (Gen. 29:31-30:1-24; 31:17-55). The view that the prohibition against incest was given to protect family relationship is supported by the prohibition against sex relations between people who were related by marriage (vs. 14-18) as well as between blood relatives. Those unions could scarcely have been forbidden on the basis of genetics, but they

certainly would have been dangerous on the basis of family relationships.

This view is also strongly supported by the explanatory words “for spite against her” in verse 18. A second marriage done for spite certainly was destructive to the marriage.

An even more significant explanation of the reason for prohibiting sex relations between close relatives is that the prohibition is based on the declaration, “I am Jehovah.” Jehovah made these commands based on His authority and Lordship. Jehovah’s command was all that was needed to establish the prohibition as a law in Israel. Jehovah knew best, and His command was to be obeyed whether or not Israel understood His reason or reasons. Jehovah knew the reason, and, because He knew, it was not necessary for Israel to know. It only was necessary for them to trust Him and obey.

Verse 17 applies the word “wickedness” to marriage to a close relative. Jehovah used the word particularly with regard to marriage to a step-child or step-grandchild; however, He surely meant it to apply to all the marriages listed in this passage, since they were all in the same category. The Hebrew word translated “wickedness” is based on a root meaning “to plan” or “to devise.” It was applied especially to planning to do evil or to cause harm. It meant scheming to hurt another person. The statement can be translated into English accurately as “It [is] an evil scheme.” This statement strengthens the conclusion that the reason for forbidding these marriages was that they bring hurt and harm into the family.

One significant observation concerning this passage is that it does not categorically prohibit marriage to a second wife who was not a close relative. Bigamy and polygamy were nowhere expressly prohibited in the law given to Moses. That omission should not be taken to imply that Jehovah approved of a man’s having more than one wife. Such marriages were and are far less than the ideal Jehovah set for people from the beginning (Gen. 2:21-25). However, in the times of Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, having more than one wife was such an accepted custom that Israel was not ready to be warned against it. Jehovah always has had to

teach and lead people as they are able to understand and respond. He was patient with Abraham, Jacob, and David when they had more than one wife; but such marriages were never a part of His plan for people. All those who entered into such marriages suffered hurt by those relationships. Jehovah was patient with the Israelites on this point when he gave them laws that related to marriage. He regulated multiple marriages to prevent their most serious abuses, and led people gradually to a better understanding that all bigamous and polygamous marriages are less than God’s ideal and are dangerous.

3. You must not have intercourse when your wife is unclean (19)

Verse 19. **And you must not approach [your] wife to uncover her nakedness during the impurity of her uncleanness.**

This verse teaches that a man was not to have intercourse with his wife when she was ceremonially unclean. Though the word translated “wife” can mean either “woman” or “wife,” its meaning in this verse is surely “wife.” Intercourse within marriage is what was contemplated, because all adultery was forbidden. It would have been inappropriate to forbid adultery with an unclean woman and imply that adultery with a clean woman was legitimate.

Most translations assume that this statement prohibits intercourse during the wife’s menstrual period. However, a woman could become unclean from other conditions as well. A woman became unclean for seven days after giving birth to a boy (12:2), for fourteen days after giving birth to a girl (12:5), for whatever length of time she possessed an abnormal discharge of any kind (15:2), for seven days after the beginning of a normal menstrual period (15:19), and for whatever length of time she experienced an abnormally long discharge of menstrual blood (15:25). In Leviticus 20:18, the death penalty was prescribed for a man and his wife who engaged in intercourse during menstruation (see comments on Lev. 20:18 in MESSAGE 24). By comparing the two verses, interpreters usually assume that this verse also refers to menstruation. It is more likely that this verse forbade sexual

intercourse during any time that the wife was unclean for whatever cause.

Like the prohibition against all contact with an unclean person, animal, or object (Lev. 11:4-8,11,13,20,23,24-28,31-38,39-40,41-42; 13:45-46; 14:36,46-47;15:4-12,17-18,19-24,26-27), the reason for this warning was ceremonial. It would be inconsistent to prohibit intercourse during only one type of uncleanness and permit it during other types. Since uncleanness symbolized sin, this prohibition was to teach the Israelites the importance of separating themselves from sin. The symbol of uncleanness was especially significant during intercourse, because of the close intimate contact with one's wife at that time. This prohibition was a symbolic way of teaching God's people to avoid contact with sin at all cost and inconvenience.

4. You must not commit adultery (18:20)

Verse 20. **And with your associate's wife you must not give your laying of seed to become unclean with her.**

The expression "your laying of seed" is similar to the expression found in Leviticus 15:16, 18,32, except that those verses use the expression "seed-laying" (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 19). The expression referred to sexual intercourse. The word "associate" refers to anyone with whom a person has an association of any kind. It was equivalent to "anyone" (see comments on Lev. 6:2-3 in MESSAGE under the heading his associate). An Israelite was not free to pick and choose those with whom he could or could not commit adultery. It was forbidden in all cases. The Hebrew words "to become unclean with her" indicate that both the woman and the man became unclean by committing adultery. In this case, "unclean" means more than becoming a symbol for sin. It means actually becoming a sinner. It warned Israelites not to become sinners by committing adultery.

5 You must not give your seed to Molech (18:21)

Verse 21. **And you must not give of your seed to pass over to Molech, and you must not profane the name of your God. I am Jehovah.**

Molech was a false god (Amos 5:26; Acts 7:43) associated especially with the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:7). The Israelites had left Egypt one year and nineteen days before receiving this MESSAGE (Ex. 40:1-2; see comments under Theme in Introduction to Leviticus and Chronology of Events and MESSAGES in Leviticus at the end of this commentary). They had not yet had any contact with the Ammonites, but they had every reason to be familiar with them, because the Ammonites were descended from Abraham's nephew Lot (Gen. 19:36-38). They Israelites had been familiar for many years with the false gods of Egypt, had seen the Egyptians worshiping them, and perhaps had participated in that worship themselves. Therefore, at Sinai before the Israelites arrived in the land that God promised them, Jehovah wanted them to be alerted to the dangers of being attracted to the false gods of the land to which they were going, especially the gods of nations kindred to them, as the nation of Ammon was. He commanded them specifically to avoid worshiping Molech, though the warning was applicable equally to other false gods of the land to which they were going.

Though not a great deal is known about the worship of Molech, it was noted for the practice of human sacrifice of children (2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 32:35; Amos 5:26) and to fertility worship (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5). All translators and interpreters known to this writer assume that the expression "give your seed to pass over to Molech" found in this verse had the same meaning as the expression "make your son or daughter to pass through the fire to Molech," which in addition to the verse cited above is found in Deuteronomy 18:10 and 2 Kings 16:3. The references "Give your seed to pass through the fire" to a false god refers to human sacrifice of one's children. However, the expression in this verse has two distinct differences from the expressions used to refer to human sacrifice of children: (1) The word "fire" is not found in this verse or other verses referring to "give

your seed to pass over to.” Most English translations add the word “fire” and change the word “seed” to “offspring” or “children,” because they are convinced the statement has the same meaning as the expressions that refer to the sacrifice of children. In so doing, they are interpreting, not translating. (2) This verse does not say “son or daughter” but “seed.” The word “seed” was used in Hebrew to mean “offspring,” but it had just been used in verse 20 to mean “semen.” Likely it has that meaning here. Since this verse is in the middle of a chapter devoted entirely to warning against evil sex practices, it should be expected that this verse is related to the same subject. Human sacrifice was one of the most horrible abominations of the pagans, but mentioning it here is out of place for a MESSAGE on sex abuses.

In addition to the Biblical references cited above, a few references to Molech in ancient secular writings indicate that Molech worship practiced sacred prostitution as well as child sacrifice. “Give of your seed to pass over to Molech” should be understood as referring to participating in sex rites in honor of Molech. It probably means that the worshiper of Molech practiced sexual intercourse with a temple prostitute and that the act was considered to be giving his seed or semen to Molech. The thought of such a practice is abominable to people who are trained in Christian truth, but it has a strange attraction to the fleshly mind. It can be made to sound honorable when explained as donating one’s life-giving powers to one’s god to help activate the world of nature to reproduce. To Jehovah, such a practice was abhorrent and contrary to His plans for mankind. The practice is strictly and utterly forbidden to Jehovah worshipers. For an Israelite, it was the equivalent of desecrating the name of Jehovah.

6. You must not practice homosexuality (18:22)

Verse 22. **And you must not lie with a male like lying with a woman. It is an abomination.**

This verse forbade the practice of male homosexuality. Homosexuality also was a common practice among the Egyptians and Canaanites. It

was abhorrent to Jehovah and forbidden to men in Israel. Though the command is given specifically to men, lesbian relationships between women must be understood to be equally forbidden by Jehovah.

The word translated “abomination” occurs here for the first time in Leviticus. It is a totally different word for the words translated the same way in King James Version in Leviticus 7:18 and in Leviticus 11:10 (see comments on those verse in MESSAGES 7 and 14). Of the three words, this one is most accurately translated “abomination.” It was used previously in Genesis 43:32; 46:34; Exodus 8:26, where it referred to practices that were “abominable” to the Egyptians because they were contrary to the Egyptian religion and way of life. Here the word is used to refer to a practice that is contrary to Jehovah and therefore, contrary to the religion and way of life of Jehovah’s people. Its later use always referred to pagan practices that were abhorrent to Jehovah and forbidden to Jehovah’s people. To Jehovah, homosexuality is an abomination, an abhorrent practice, a vile corruption of His holy plan for sex.

7. You must not practice bestiality (18:23)

Verse 23. **And you must not lie with any livestock and become unclean with it, and a woman must not take a stand for a beast, to spread out for it. It is perversion.**

And you must not lie with any livestock. Having sexual relations with an animal also was a practice of the Egyptians and Canaanites that was abhorrent to Jehovah and forbidden to His people. The word translated “livestock” is the word used in Leviticus 1:2. It refers to domestic animals (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 1 under the heading from the livestock). The word is appropriate here, because tame animals are the only ones with which a person could attempt such actions. The word translated “lie” in this verse is the same word used in Leviticus 15:16, 18, 32; 18:20, 22, where “a laying of seed,” means a discharge of semen (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 19). Even though the word “seed” is absent here, it still has the same meaning and refers to sex relations.

and become unclean with it. “Unclean” again means more than ceremonial uncleanness. It means committing sin.

and a woman must not take a stand for an animal. Other evil sex practices in this chapter are described from the point of view of a man. This verse specifically applies the sin to women also, perhaps because the practice is so atrocious that Jehovah wanted to leave no doubt that it applied to women as well as to men. The word translated “take a stand” refers to more than standing up. It means positioning oneself for a purpose.

to spread out for it. The word translated “spread out” was used to describe a person or an animal stretched out under the weight of a heavy burden or for rest. In Leviticus 19:19 and 20:16, it is used to describe sex relations between or with animals (see comments on those verses in MESSAGES 19 and 20). It is painfully descriptive of a woman’s positioning herself for sex with an animal.

It is perversion. The word translated “perversion” occurs only here and in Leviticus 20:12. It is a noun based on a root that means “to mix,” like mixing ingredients for a cake. Here the noun is used for a mixture that is not compatible and does not naturally combine. The related verb is used in Genesis 11:7,9 to describe “mixing up” or “confusing” the tongues of the people at Babel. The meaning here is that bestiality is a sexual mixture that has no congeniality. It is an inappropriate conglomeration, an incongruity, a tragic confusion, a perversion of what is natural.² Such a mixing is completely contrary to God’s plan.

8. Penalties for a nation and for an individual who breaks these commands (18:24-30)

Verses 24-25. **24 You must not make yourselves unclean by any of these, for by all**

² KJV, ASV, RSV translate this word in this verse as “confusion”; NASB, HCSB, CJB, GNB, as “perversion”; MSG, as “perverse”; BBE, as “unnatural act”; and LITV, as “[shameful] mixing.”

these the nations that I am casting out from your faces are unclean.

25 And the land is unclean, and I will visit its iniquity upon it, and the land will vomit out its inhabitants.

The words translated “make unclean” and “are unclean” are the familiar words that describe ceremonial uncleanness. In this verse, the expression is not used in a ceremonial sense, but in a moral sense. It refers to moral uncleanness, which ceremonial uncleanness symbolized. It means that any of the actions described in this MESSAGE made a person or a nation sinful. Jehovah obligated the Israelites not to make themselves sinners by these actions as the people inhabiting the land at that time had done.

Jehovah listed four consequences that the Canaanite inhabitants of the land were experiencing because of their evil sex practices. He plainly implied that the same consequences would come to the Israelites if they practiced the same evils: The four consequences were: (1) Jehovah was casting the Canaanites out of the land. (2) The land had become unclean or polluted with sin. (3) Jehovah was going to visit the iniquity of the land upon it, that is, punish it. (4) The land was going to vomit out the people who lived on it. The Canaanites were to lose the land on which they lived, because they had brought shame and sin into the land through their evil deeds. By these statements, Jehovah demonstrated that He had authority over all nations, not just over Israel. He held all nations responsible for the same moral standards that He was revealing to Israel. He was going to punish, not only Israel, but any nation that departed from those standards.

Verse 26. **And you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, and you must not do any of these abominations, neither the native nor the sojourner who is sojourning in your midst.**

And you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, and you must not do any of these abominations. The word translated “statutes” is the word used in verse 3. It means prescriptions, or written instructions (see comments on v. 3 above and on Lev. 3:17 in MESSAGE 1 and on Lev. 6:18

in MESSAGE 5). The word translated “judgments” is the word used in verse 4 above. It means decisions rendered by a judge (see comments on v. 4 above and on Lev. 5:10 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading according to the judgment). In this case, the Judge was Jehovah. The word translated “abominations” is the word used in verse 22 above. It means actions that are abhorrent, shocking, and repulsive to God (see comments on v. 22 above). Together these words form an extremely strong statement that the practices listed in this MESSAGE were illegal in Israel because they were loathsome to Jehovah.

neither the native nor the sojourner who is sojourning in your midst. The practices listed in this MESSAGE were forbidden not only to native-born Israelites, but also to sojourners. Sojourners were people from other nations who had accepted Jehovah as their God and who had been accepted as naturalized citizens in Israel (see comments on Lev. 16:29b in MESSAGE 20 under the heading [including] the native and the sojourner who sojourns among you and on Lev. 17:8 in MESSAGE 21). Sojourners were to be governed by the same laws as those who were born descendants of Israel (Jacob). Jehovah gives the same requirements and blessings to everyone who believes in Him, irrespective of their origin. God accepted and blessed the Israelites, not for their blood line from Abraham, but for their commitment to Him. He will do the same for every person and every nation that believes in Him and obeys Him. Commitment to Him means following the commandments He has given for all people. He has only one set of moral standards. They are the same for all people, regardless of their origin.

27 Because the men of the land who are at your faces do all of these abominations, and the land has become unclean.

28 And the land will not vomit you out by your making it unclean, as it is vomiting out the nation that [is] at your faces.

The Canaanites were going to be cast out of the land because they practiced the evil acts listed in this MESSAGE. If the Israelites avoided those acts, they would not be cast out. The clear implication is that, if the Israelites did practice those acts, they

would receive the same punishment as the Canaanites. They too would be cast out of the land. If the whole nation disobeyed His laws, Jehovah would apply that penalty Himself. Such a penalty could not be enforced by the legal system of Israel. God Himself would execute it on the nation when it was needed. The inference that Israel would receive the same punishment as the Canaanites if they adopted Canaanite ways was intended to be a constant warning to them to keep away from the evil customs named in this MESSAGE. Unfortunately, the warning did not always accomplish its purpose. Twice in future years, Israel turned against Jehovah so thoroughly that Jehovah had to cast them out of the Land, once through the Babylonian captivity (2 Kings 25:1-11) and again through the Roman conquest.

29 Because everyone who will do any of these abominations, then the souls who are doing them shall be cut off from the midst of their people.

If the whole nation did not accept and practice the acts forbidden in this MESSAGE but an individual did practice them, that individual was to be “cut off from the midst of their people.” In other words, he was to be executed. The penalty for such deeds was death. Any person who practiced such deeds was in defiance of God’s commands. He had rejected the covenant and did not really belong to the people of God. He was to die (see comments on Lev. 7:20 in MESSAGE 7, comments on Lev. 17:8 in MESSAGE 21, Introduction to MESSAGE 24, and comments on Lev. 20:2 in MESSAGE 24). The penalty prescribed for an individual who practiced those abominations was to be a constant reminder to every individual Israelite to diligently avoid those practices.

30 So you shall watch My watch to never depart from any of the statutes concerning the abominations that are done before your faces, and you must not make yourselves unclean by them. I am Jehovah your God.

The expression “watch the watch of Jehovah” was used in Leviticus 8:35 to describe Aaron and his sons’ remaining near the entrance of The Tent of Meeting for seven days of prayer and

study as a part of the hallowing ceremonies that set them aside to the priesthood (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 10). Israel was to be just as vigilant in guarding its actions so as never to depart from or break any of Jehovah's statutes concerning the abominations they saw the Canaanites practicing.

The basis on which those abominations were forbidden was that they were given by Jehovah,

Israel's God. Jehovah was pure and holy. The abominations listed were contrary to His holy nature. His people were to be like Him in avoiding those unclean and unholy acts, so they could be like Him in holiness.

Application.

No other nation has ever been chosen as Israel was chosen and is chosen to be a nation committed to Jehovah's service. No other nation has ever committed itself so completely to be a nation of Jehovah worshipers only, and no other nation has ever had its civil laws revealed directly by God. So, some differences were necessary for the civil laws of Israel from the laws of other nations.

One basically important difference was that it is most inappropriate for any other nation to pass laws requiring its citizens to accept a certain god or to practice a certain religious ritual or liturgy. Some nations today are still trying to establish the religion and faith of their people by legislative acts, but they do not have God's authority for doing so. The principle instituted by Jesus is that "God's nation" is now made up of men and women from all races, families, tongues, and lands. Men join that "nation" voluntarily and practice its laws out of faith in their hearts, while living in the midst of a society composed of men of all kinds of beliefs and no belief. God's nation today is not located in a geographical boundary but in a spiritual boundary. Therefore, no political nation today should attempt to imitate the pattern of Israel as a nation devoted to Jehovah by law. That practice should be rejected even by modern Israel, because the law instituted at Sinai was nailed to the cross of Jesus and died. It did not arise from the dead with Him. However, the inclusion of all believers in all places as citizens of God's nation does not mean that God no longer has a special plan for Israel. He has promised that He will never forsake His call to them or His plan for them (Jer. 33:19-26; Rom. 11:1-36). God has a separate plan for every person and every nation that accepts Him. His plan for Israel is unique, and God is going to persevere until His plan for Israel is accomplished. As firm as God's plan for Israel is, it does not take away the great plan Jesus makes available to all people to be saved through faith in Him and to become one united people through accepting Him as the head of us all (Eph. 3:11-22). God has not replaced Israel, as some say; but He has expanded our understanding of the covenant to include all people who accept Him as their God. Within God's overall plan for all nations, God calls on Israel to fulfill His plan for them, as He calls on all other nations to fulfill His plans for them. The basic point is that God's governmental plan for Israel in the Book of Leviticus was unique in time and place and should not be followed exactly by any nation today.

Another important difference between ancient Israel and modern nations is that civil nations today receive their laws from men, rather than directly from God. However, when a nation today forms its laws, it should recognize that the moral principles of Jehovah never change. He still holds all people responsible for keeping the morals He instituted in the beginning and revealed over thousands of years. He will punish those who do not accept and obey those moral principles. If a nation does not base its laws on the moral principles taught by Jehovah, that nation is doomed to dismal defeat. Laws based on human reason, as appealing as they are to human men and women, are doomed to fail in the end. Therefore, the prohibitions contained in this chapter should provide a guide for the laws of all nations. The nation that permits the evil practices forbidden in this chapter dirties its land. Eventually it will lose the land that it received as a gift from Jehovah. It will be excluded from the future world of peace, harmony, and love.

Christian concepts of morality so strongly influenced Europe and America during past centuries that the abhorrent practices mentioned in this MESSAGE became almost unthinkable. It seemed to most that it was beyond belief that any nation could ever have permitted them. Unfortunately, in recent years attitudes in Europe and America have radically changed. The influence of Christianity on the nations of Europe and America has weakened, and these evil deeds have come forth again with a vengeance. Such practices are attractive to the fleshly mind. They flourish wherever the influence of Jehovah God is not dominant. Thus, the evils listed in this MESSAGE are beginning to flourish again in modern western society. Some advocate that marriage to close relatives be allowed and approved. Many approve and practice “free” sex with anyone, as long as it does not do physical harm to one or the other of the participants. Homosexuals demand that their deeds be given recognition as a normal and approved way of life. Pornographic literature that describes, pictures, and advocates every kind of sexual deviation known to man, including bestiality, is sold by millions, perhaps billions of copies and made freely available on the internet to anyone seeking it. Amazingly, some even try to defend some of these practices in the name of Christianity, and some supposedly Christian leaders openly practice some of these forbidden deeds. Excruciating efforts have been made to twist the Bible in such a way as to claim that it approves of fornication, homosexuality, and pornography. America has not yet begun to practice fertility cults. However, interest in witchcraft, astrology, and devil worship is growing. Can the practice of fertility cults be far behind?

The acceptance and growth of sexual sins in America and in the western world gives cause to fear for our civilization and for our nation. Individuals who practice these abominations are subject to God’s punishment, even if they attend church on Sundays. A nation that accepts these practices is in danger of losing its power and influence in the world. If it persists in those practices, it eventually will even lose control of its own land. Perhaps, that process has already begun in American and is the explanation for the sudden breakdown in our economy and in our world-wide influence. No matter how people of today may rationalize accepting these evil actions, whether in the name of freedom, nature, psychology, philosophy, science, or even religion, they are still abhorrent to Jehovah God and forbidden to the people of all nations. All the authority that is needed to prove the danger of these practices is the command of Jehovah, the only true God and sovereign Lord of the whole universe. The nation that ignores Jehovah’s commands will not live. When Israel ignored God’s commands concerning these evils, it was destroyed as a nation. America is not exempt from that same punishment. Europe and America must experience a revival of true Christianity that will restore us to pure living, or doom awaits.