

Leviticus 20 (You Shall Be Holy)

Lev 20:1 The LORD said to Moses,

Lev 20:2 "Say to the Israelites: 'Any Israelite or any foreigner residing in Israel who sacrifices any of his children to Molek is to be put to death. The members of the community are to stone him.

Lev 20:3 I myself will set my face against him and will cut him off from his people; for by sacrificing his children to Molek, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name.

Lev 20:4 If the members of the community close their eyes when that man sacrifices one of his children to Molek and if they fail to put him to death,

Lev 20:5 I myself will set my face against him and his family and will cut them off from their people together with all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molek.

Lev 20:6 "'I will set my face against anyone who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute themselves by following them, and I will cut them off from their people.

Lev 20:7 "'Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God.

Lev 20:8 Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy.

Lev 20:9 "'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death. Because they have cursed their father or mother, their blood will be on their own head.

Lev 20:10 "'If a man commits adultery with another man's wife--with the wife of his neighbor--both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death.

Lev 20:11 "'If a man has sexual relations with his father's wife, he has dishonored his father. Both the man and the woman are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

Lev 20:12 "'If a man has sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, both of them are to be put to death. What they have done is a perversion; their blood will be on their own heads.

Lev 20:13 "'If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

Lev 20:14 "'If a man marries both a woman and her mother, it is wicked. Both he and they must be burned in the fire, so that no wickedness will be among you.

Lev 20:15 ""If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he is to be put to death, and you must kill the animal.

Lev 20:16 ""If a woman approaches an animal to have sexual relations with it, kill both the woman and the animal. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

Lev 20:17 ""If a man marries his sister, the daughter of either his father or his mother, and they have sexual relations, it is a disgrace. They are to be publicly removed from their people. He has dishonored his sister and will be held responsible.

Lev 20:18 ""If a man has sexual relations with a woman during her monthly period, he has exposed the source of her flow, and she has also uncovered it. Both of them are to be cut off from their people.

Lev 20:19 ""Do not have sexual relations with the sister of either your mother or your father, for that would dishonor a close relative; both of you would be held responsible.

Lev 20:20 ""If a man has sexual relations with his aunt, he has dishonored his uncle. They will be held responsible; they will die childless.

Lev 20:21 ""If a man marries his brother's wife, it is an act of impurity; he has dishonored his brother. They will be childless.

Lev 20:22 ""Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out.

Lev 20:23 You must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them.

Lev 20:24 But I said to you, "You will possess their land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am the LORD your God, who has set you apart from the nations.

Lev 20:25 ""You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean animals and between unclean and clean birds. Do not defile yourselves by any animal or bird or anything that moves along the ground--those that I have set apart as unclean for you.

Lev 20:26 You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.

Lev 20:27 ""A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.""

[Leviticus 20](#) is a chapter in the Old Testament that pairs moral, ceremonial, and civil laws with strict legal penalties to teach the

ancient Israelite community how to remain "holy" or separated from surrounding pagan nations.

Core Themes and Meaning

- **The Call to Holiness:** The central theme of the chapter is anchored in verses 7 and 8: *"Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God."* To be holy means to live a life deliberately set apart for God, rejecting the practices of surrounding cultures.
 - **Connection to Leviticus 18:** While Leviticus 18 outlines the moral and sexual boundaries for Israel, Leviticus 20 assigns the **penalties and punishments** for breaking those boundaries.
 - **Community Responsibility:** The laws were designed to keep the nation of Israel physically and spiritually pure, preventing the land from becoming "defiled" so it would not "vomit out" its inhabitants.
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- **Idolatry and Child Sacrifice:** Offering children to the false god Molech or participating in child sacrifice carried a penalty of death by stoning.
 - **Occult and Spiritual Practices:** Consulting mediums, necromancers, or practicing spiritism resulted in God "setting His face against" the person and cutting them off from the community.
 - **Sexual Immorality:** Capital punishment (death) was prescribed for major offenses including adultery, incest, male homosexual acts, bestiality, and marrying both a woman and her mother. Other specific familial violations carried the consequence of remaining childless.
 - **Family Disrespect:** Cursing one's parents (an active, severe revolt against family authority) was a capital crime.
 - **Ancient Covenant Law:** These rules functioned as civil and judicial law for a specific ancient theocracy (Israel around 1490 B.C.) during their journey and settlement in Canaan. They were meant to maintain national identity and prevent the adoption of violent or exploitative Canaanite religious rites.
 - **Christian Interpretation:** In Christian theology, the harsh penalties of the Old Testament law highlight the seriousness of sin and humanity's inability to save themselves. Jesus Christ fulfilled the demands of the law—

- taking the penalty of death upon himself on the cross to offer grace and redemption instead.
- [Leviticus 20](#) forms a foundational part of the Old Testament's "Holiness Code" (Leviticus 17–26), establishing moral and ritual boundaries for ancient Israel. For the New Testament, its significance is viewed through the lens of moral continuity, the transition from civil/ceremonial law to spiritual transformation, and the fulfillment of justice through Christ.
- **1. The Direct Call to Holiness**
- **The Core Command:** Leviticus 20:7 commands, *"Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God,"* and verse 26 reinforces that God set Israel apart from the nations to be His own.
- **New Testament Echo:** The Apostle Peter directly quotes this mandate in **1 Peter 1:15–16**: *"But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"*
- **Shift in Application:** While Leviticus 20 applied this separation through physical and national boundaries (shunning pagan practices, dietary and civil codes), the New Testament applies it to the internal character, lifestyle, and mental renewal of believers through the power of the Holy Spirit (**Romans 12:1–2**; **Galatians 5:16–25**).

Rom 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God--this is your true and proper worship.

Rom 12:2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Gal 5:16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Gal 5:17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

Gal 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Gal 5:19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;

Gal 5:20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of

rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions

Gal 5:21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Gal 5:23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Gal 5:24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Gal 5:25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

- **2. Moral Standards and Sexual Ethics**
- **The List of Offenses:** Leviticus 20 details severe prohibitions and penalties regarding sexual immorality (adultery, incest, bestiality, and same-sex relations) alongside idolatry like Molech worship.
- **New Testament Continuity:** New Testament authors (such as Paul in **Romans 1**, **1 Corinthians 6:9–10**, and **1 Thessalonians 4:3–7**) maintain the core moral prohibitions against sexual immorality and idolatry found in chapters like Leviticus 18 and 20, framing them as inconsistent with the new life in Christ.

Rom 1:18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

Rom 1:19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

Rom 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Rom 1:21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Rom 1:22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools

Rom 1:23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Rom 1:24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

Rom 1:25 They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen.

Rom 1:26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.

Rom 1:27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Rom 1:28 Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

Rom 1:29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,

Rom 1:30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;

Rom 1:31 they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.

Rom 1:32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

1Co 6:8 Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters.

1Co 6:9 Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men

1Co 6:10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

1Co 6:11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

1Th 4:3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality;

1Th 4:4 that each of you should learn to control your own body in a

way that is holy and honorable,

1Th 4:5 not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God;

1Th 4:6 and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before.

1Th 4:7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

- **3. Transition from Civil Penalties to Christ's Atonement**
- **The Demand for Death:** Leviticus 20 repeatedly mandates capital punishment (stoning or burning) or community exclusion ("being cut off") to purge sin and maintain purity in the earthly nation of Israel.
- **The Gospel Shift:** Under the New Covenant, Christians understand that the physical civil/judicial punishments of ancient Israel are no longer executed by a theocratic state or church courts in the same manner. Instead, Christian **Jesus Christ bore the penalty of sin** on the cross. Where Leviticus pronounces death as the consequence of breaking God's law, the New Testament gospel offers redemption, grace, and spiritual rebirth so believers "shall surely live" through Christ (**Romans 6:23**).

Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Molech is directly mentioned in two key sections: **Leviticus 18:21** and **Leviticus 20:2–5**. Understanding Molech's presence in Leviticus requires looking at the historical practices, the strict legal penalties imposed, and the spiritual reasons for the prohibition.

1. The Practice: "Passing Through the Fire"

The worship of Molech—traditionally understood as a pagan deity of the Ammonites or Canaanites—was fundamentally characterized by **child sacrifice**.

- **The Ritual:** The biblical text repeatedly describes the ritual as letting one's offspring "*pass through the fire to Molech*". Ancient accounts and historical commentary (such as the writings of Rashi) describe a bronze or metal idol heated by fire until it was scorching hot; children were then placed into or passed across the idol's outstretched hands.
- **The Motivation:** In the ancient Near East, families participated

- in this gruesome ritual as the ultimate transaction for self-preservation, financial prosperity, and securing future blessings for the family from the gods.

2. The Strict Laws in Leviticus

God preemptively issued strict laws against this cult before Israel even entered Canaan, warning them not to copy the native inhabitants.

- **The Prohibition (Leviticus 18:21):** *"You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord."* This initial command focuses on the spiritual betrayal, placing child sacrifice in the same category of defilement as incest and adultery.
- **The Legal Penalties (Leviticus 20:2–5):** This chapter transitions from the moral boundary to the civic enforcement:
 - **Capital Punishment:** Any Israelite or resident foreigner who gives a child to Molech **must be stoned to death** by the community.
 - **Divine Judgement:** God promises to personally "set His face against" the offender and cut them off from the community.
 - **Community Accountability:** If the local community "shuts their eyes" to someone practicing Molech worship and refuses to execute them, God warns that He will judge *that entire family* and anyone else who followed them.

3. Theological Significance: Why was it singled out?

While the Old Testament forbids all forms of idolatry, Molech worship is treated with a unique level of severity in Leviticus for two major reasons:

- **Defiling the Sanctuary and Name:** Leviticus 20:3 explicitly states that sacrificing a child to Molech *"defiled My sanctuary and profaned My holy name."* Because God is the author and sustainer of life, destroying an innocent child in the name of a false god was the ultimate mockery of God's character.
- **A Distortion of Devotion:** Molech demanded that parents destroy their children for the parents' own benefit. This stood in direct opposition to the God of Israel, who positioned Himself as a protector of the vulnerable and later provided His *own* sacrifice for humanity rather than demanding human destruction.

Despite the severe warnings in Leviticus, later biblical history shows that Israel failed to heed them. Centuries later, apostate kings like

Ahaz and Manasseh famously built high places for child sacrifice in the Valley of Hinnom just outside Jerusalem, a tragic rebellion that ultimately led to the Babylonian exile.

[Leviticus 20](#) relates directly to [Jesus Christ](#) through the concepts of covenant fulfillment, substitutionary atonement, and the source of true holiness. While Leviticus 20 is a chapter known for listing grave sins and demanding the death penalty, the New Testament frames Jesus as the answer to the crisis of judgment presented in this text.

The relationship between Jesus and Leviticus 20 can be understood through four main theological frameworks:

1. Jesus Absorbed the "Blood Guilt" and Death Penalties

The defining phrase of Leviticus 20, repeated multiple times, is that certain offenders *"shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them"* (e.g., [Leviticus 20:13](#)).

- **The Dilemma:** Leviticus 20 establishes that the ultimate wages of spiritual and moral rebellion is physical and eternal death.
- **Jesus's Relation:** According to New Testament theology, **Jesus took this exact curse and penalty upon Himself**. Galatians 3:13 states, *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us."* Where Leviticus 20 demands the sinner's blood for their own cleansing, the Gospel states that **Jesus's blood was shed as a substitutionary sacrifice to absorb that judgment.**

2. Jesus is the Yahweh who Consecrates

In [Leviticus 20:8](#), God declares: *"Keep my statutes and do them; **I am the Lord who sanctifies you**"* (or Yahweh M'Kaddesh).

- **The Failure of the Law:** The Old Testament proved that humanity could not achieve the perfect holiness required by Leviticus through sheer willpower or rule-following.
- **Jesus's Relation:** The New Testament identifies Jesus as the embodiment of this sanctifying Lord. **Heb. 10:10 notes that "we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."** Jesus does not just hand down the rules of Leviticus 20; He provides the internal transformation—via the Holy Spirit—needed to actually live a set-apart life.

3. The Grace-First Pattern of Redemption

Leviticus 20 is often misread as a checklist to earn God's favor, but its position in the Bible reveals a pattern that points directly to Jesus's ministry:

- **The Pattern:** God did not wait for Israel to keep the laws of Leviticus 20 before saving them from Egypt. He rescued them first, and *then* gave them the law to teach them how to live as His redeemed people.
- **Jesus's Relation:** This mirrors the Gospel. Jesus does not command people to become holy so that He can save them. Rather, **Jesus saves sinners while they are still broken**, and His grace motivates them to pursue the pure ethics outlined in the moral law. As the old adage goes, "Jesus catches the fish first, then He cleans them".

4. A Famous Example: Jesus and the Adulterous Woman

A narrative intersection of Leviticus 20 and Jesus's earthly life occurs in **John 8:1–11** (the woman caught in adultery).

Joh 8:1 *but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.*

Joh 8:2 *At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.*

Joh 8:3 *The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group*

Joh 8:4 *and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.*

Joh 8:5 *In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"*

Joh 8:6 *They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.*

Joh 8:7 *When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."*

Joh 8:8 *Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.*

Joh 8:9 *At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.*

Joh 8:10 *Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*

Joh 8:11 *"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."*

- According to [Leviticus 20:10](#), both the adulterer and the adulteress were to be put to death. The religious leaders brought the woman to Jesus to trap Him, asking if she should be stoned.

- Instead of abolishing the law, Jesus challenged the executors (*"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone"*), highlighting that everyone in the crowd was equally subject to the law's condemnation. When they left, Jesus—the only one capable of perfectly fulfilling Leviticus—offered her grace: *"Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."* He upheld the moral standard of Leviticus but diverted the penalty to Himself.