LEVITICUS

Chapter 20

*Punishments for Sin*

**The Lord said to Moses, 2 “Say to the Israelites: ‘Any Israelite or any alien living in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech must be put to death. The people of the community are to stone him. 3 I will set my face against that man and I will cut him off from his people; for by giving his children to Molech, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. 4 If the people of the community close their eyes when that man gives one of his children to Molech and they fail to put him to death, 5 I will set my face against that man and his family and will cut off from their people both him and all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molech. 6 “ ‘I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people. 7 “ ‘Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the Lord your God. 8 Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the Lord, who makes you holy.9 “ ‘If anyone curses his father or mother, he must be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother, and his blood will be on his own head. 10 “ ‘If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death. 11 “ ‘If a man sleeps with his father’s wife, he has dishonored his father. Both the man and the woman must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads. 12 “ ‘If a man sleeps with his daughter-in-law, both of them must be put to death. What they have done is a perversion; their blood will be on their own heads. 13 “ ‘If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads. 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. 15 “ ‘If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he must be put to death, and you must kill the animal. 16 “ ‘If a woman approaches an animal to have sexual relations with it, kill both the woman and the animal. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads. 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 must be cut off before the eyes of their people. He has dishonored his sister and will be held responsible. 18 “ ‘If a man lies with a woman during her monthly period and has sexual relations with her, he has exposed the source of her flow, and she has also uncovered it. Both of them must be cut off from their people. 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. 20 “ ‘If a man sleeps with his aunt, he has dishonored his uncle. They will be held responsible; they will die childless. 21 “ ‘If a man marries his brother’s wife, it is an act of impurity; he has dishonored his brother. They will be childless. 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. 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. 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. 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 which I have set apart as unclean for you. 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. 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.’ ”**

**20:1–27** In ch. 20 many of the same sins listed in ch. 18 are mentioned again, but this time usually with the death penalty specified. Israel’s God is a jealous God and tolerates no rivals (see note on Ex 20:5). He requires exclusive allegiance (see Ex 20:3). See note on 18:1–20:27. (CSB)

**20:2–5** *Molech.* See note on 18:21. (CSB)

*stone him with stones*. Execution for acts of sacrilege. (TLSB)

**20:3** *cut off from his people.* See note on 7:20. (CSB)

*make My sanctuary unclean*. Sacrifice of children to Molech defiled God’s sanctuary. Stoning was done outside the camp to prevent defiling the congregation (cf 24:14). (TLSB)

*profane My holy name*. Show irreverence toward God and His sacred things. (TLSB)

**20:5** *prostituting themselves.* See v. 6; 17:7; see also note on Ex 34:15. (CSB)

God considered idolatry spiritual whoring or spiritual prostitution. Cf Nu 15:39; Ezk 16:15 Ezk 16:15. (TLSB)

**20:6** *mediums and spiritists.* Consulting a medium was no less a sin than being one (v. 27). See Dt 18:10–11. Only God was to be consulted—through either the priest or a prophet. (CSB)

**20:7** *be holy.* See note on 11:44. (CSB)

Cyprian: “We ask and entreat, that we who were sanctified in baptism may continue in that which we have begun to be. And this we daily pray for; for we have need of daily sanctification, that we who daily fall away may wash out our sins by continual sanctification” (*ANF* 5:450). (TLSB)

**20:8** *who makes … holy.* This phrase and the expression, “I am the Lord (your God),” are characteristic of chs. 18–26. (CSB)

Through ritual decrees, God made and kept His people holy. (TLSB)

**20:9** Cf. the penalty of a profligate son in Dt 21:20–21. (CSB)

This and preceding decrees were designed to preserve the family. (TLSB)

 **20:1–9** In response for all He has done, God commands the loyalty of His people. To protect those He loves from spiritual whoring, God decrees that those who follow false gods be dealt with decisively. God wants their influence eliminated, that others will not fall away and spend eternity apart from Him. Today, God’s Law continues to reveal us as sinners deserving death (Rm 3:9–20), but Jesus reveals that He came not to condemn but to save sinners (Jn 3:17–18). Through Baptism, He grants new life in His Word (Rm 6:1–11; 1Co 6:9–11). • Father, we thank You for setting us apart through the blessings of Holy Baptism. Amen. (TLSB)

**20:10** See 18:20. (CSB)

Penalty for adultery was death. (TLSB)

**20:11** *their blood is upon them*. Those punished bore their own guilt. God prevented revenge by the executed person’s kinsfolk. (TLSB)

**20:12** See 18:15. (CSB)

**20:13** *detestable.* See note on 7:21. (CSB)

**20:14** *burned with fire*. The worst kind of sexual depravity was incest with two women in the first degree of kinship. Cremation denied them burial in a family tomb and removed all traces of their existence. (TLSB)

**20:15–16** See 18:23. (CSB)

**20:18** See 18:19. (CSB)

**20:20–21** *bear their sin*. Offense leads to death. (TLSB)

*childless*. Sexual union between a man and his aunt or sister-in-law will not produce living children or will cause the children to abandon their parents. (TLSB)

**20:20** See 18:14. (CSB)

**20:21** See 18:16 and note. (CSB)

**20:10–21** Sexual immorality defiles individuals, making them unclean. Because these individuals are God’s holy people, their sexual conduct desecrates God’s name as well. Today, the closest thing we have to sacrificing children on Molech’s altar is the sin of abortion offered to the idol of personal convenience. God calls us to honor Him with our bodies (1Pt 1:14–15), to refrain from sexual immorality (Ac 15:29), and to offer our lives in humble service. Christians, too, are accountable to God for their behavior. Thank God, He protects and preserves families from Satan’s clutches and provides forgiveness for even the most destructive sins. • Lord God, You are a light in the darkness of this world. Forgive our sins. Send Your Holy Spirit to bless and keep us. In Christ we pray. Amen. (TLSB)

**20:22–26** God’s precepts and decrees about holiness were not new. He shared many of them with the patriarchs Abraham (Gn 12:7; 15:15–21; 17:4–8; 18:18–19; 22:17–18), Isaac (Gn 26:2–5), and Jacob (Gn 28:13–14; 35:11–12; 46:3). Here, God restated His precepts, which the Israelites may have forgotten during their Egyptian captivity. His holiness will separate them from the inhabitants of Canaan. If the Israelites remained holy before God, they would fulfill God’s promise to make them a blessing (Dt 4:1–8), the blessing ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

**20:24** *land flowing with milk and honey.* A common phrase in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy (see Ex 3:8 and note; see also Jos 5:6; Jer 11:5; 32:22; Eze 20:6, 15). (CSB)

**20:25** See ch. 11 and notes. (CSB)

**20:27** See note on v. 6. (CSB)

**20:22–27** In reading Lv, we might feel threatened by the Law. Do this! Don’t do that! Or we may become legalistic, thinking salvation hinges on our goodness. Recognize that God made His people holy by grace, and in the Law He guides them away from the self-destructive customs of the nations. In the Gospel of Jesus Christ, believers have freedom from their sins, freedom to please God as His beloved, chosen people. • Lord, You saw us as sinners, yet loved us still. By Your grace, You washed us in the water of Baptism and made us new creations. Sustain us with the life-giving body and blood of Your Son. Send Your Holy Spirit to make us pure. Keep us as Your ambassadors, living examples of Your love for all people. Amen. (TLSB)