

LEVITICUS

Chapter 20

Punishment for Child Sacrifice

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Say to the people of Israel, Any one of the people of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. 3 I myself will set my face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, to make my sanctuary unclean and to profane my holy name. 4 And if the people of the land do at all close their eyes to that man when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, 5 then I will set my face against that man and against his clan and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in whoring after Molech. 6 “If a person turns to mediums and necromancers, whoring after them, I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people. 7 Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. 8 Keep my statutes and do them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you. 9 For anyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother; his blood is upon him.

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. He requires exclusive allegiance (see Ex 20:3). (CSB)

20:2–5 *stone him with stones.* Execution for acts of sacrilege. (TLSB)

20:3 *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 *whoring after Molech.* God considered idolatry spiritual whoring or spiritual prostitution. Cf Nu 15:39; Ezk 16:15 Ezk 16:15. (TLSB)

20:6 *mediums and necromancers.* 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.* 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 *sanctifies.* 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)

Punishments for Sexual Immorality

10 “If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. 11 If a man lies with his father’s wife, he has uncovered his father’s nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. 12 If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed perversion; their blood is upon them. 13 If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. 14 If a man takes a woman and her mother also, it is depravity; he and they shall be burned with fire, that there may be no depravity among you. 15 If a man lies with an animal, he shall surely be put to death, and you shall kill the animal. 16 If a woman approaches any animal and lies with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. 17 “If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace, and they shall be cut off in the sight of the children of their people. He has uncovered his sister’s nakedness, and he shall bear his iniquity. 18 If a man lies with a woman during her menstrual period and uncovers her nakedness, he has made naked her fountain, and she has uncovered the fountain of her blood. Both of them shall be cut off from among their people. 19 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother’s sister or of your father’s sister, for that is to make naked one’s relative; they shall bear their iniquity. 20 If a man lies with his uncle’s wife, he has uncovered his uncle’s nakedness; they shall bear their sin; they shall die childless. 21 If a man takes his brother’s wife, it is impurity. He has uncovered his brother’s nakedness; they shall be childless.

20:10 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)

20:14 *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)

20:20–21 *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)

20:10–21 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)

You Shall Be Holy

22 “You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. 23 And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them. 24 But I have said to you, ‘You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples. 25 You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. 26 You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine. 27 “A man or a woman who is a medium or a necromancer shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them.”

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. (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)