
SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE SEXUAL BOUNDARY ACCORDING TO LEVITICUS 18 & 20

- St. Andrew's UMC Reconciling Committee

December 2022

HOW ONE INTERPRETS THE BIBLE:

For many Christians, homosexuality and other human sexual orientations present thorny problems for the faith journey. The unfortunate part of this issue is general lack of knowledge of the scriptural content, and uncritical use of the texts of the Bible. Many listen to the preachers and take their words whole, and parrot whatever has been heard.



This is not how we should base our understanding of the scriptures. If we read carefully the Leviticus chapter 18, the purpose of listing all the "don'ts" has been clearly expressed: Do not follow "their" practices:

18 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the LORD your God. 3 You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. 4 You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God. 5 Keep my decrees and laws, for the person who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD (LEV. 18:1-5).

And in Ch. 20, against the Canaanite religion that worshiped Molek:

20 The LORD said to Moses, 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. 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. 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, 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.

THE CONTEXT OF THESE CHAPTERS:

It is clear the contexts of the commandments in both chapters, 18 & 20, condemn the Egyptian and Canaanite sexual and religious practices. Upon cursory examination of the texts of both chapters, 18 and 20, the reader will find that the Lord is speaking to the head of the household, who, in the ancient times, had almost absolute authority over his wives, children, relatives, slaves, and cattle. The head of the household is conspicuously missing from the list of those who are targeted, as in: "Do not have sexual relations with the neighbor's husband." Therefore, it is most likely that the missing identity of the addressee, "you," is the head of the household. The texts delineate the sexual boundary that the householder must maintain within his household, and with his neighbors.

The Ch. 18's injunction begins with the establishment of the boundary in v. 6. Close relatives are off limits:

6 "No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the LORD."

Out of 16 sexually related injunctions, 14 pertain to the man's sexual relationship with a woman, 1 pertains to animal, and 1 pertains to the male, homosexual relationship.

The Ch. 20 establishes in the verse 7 the purpose of the commandments as keeping oneself consecrated:

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."

Out of 12 sexually established injunctions, 9 pertain to the man's sexual relationship with a woman, 2 pertain to animal, and 1 pertains to the male, homosexual relationship.

THE FOCUS OF THE COMMANDMENTS:

In both Chapters, the absolute majority of injunctions falls upon the male head of the household. The preponderant part of the injunction is focused on the heterosexual

relationship, not the homosexual. There is also no mention of woman-to-woman sexual relationship.

These documents address the male householder, specifically. Since he has the near-absolute power over his women, children, slaves, and animals, he could do as he pleased. The scripture tries to reign in his behavior through these commandments.

THE COMMANDMENTS PROTECT THE POWER MINORITIES:

The other side of these commandments is to protect women, children, slaves, and animals from the sexual violence of the head of the house, who wields almost absolute power. The Lord is concerned with the spiritual, physical, and emotional welfare of those who have little recourse to protect themselves from the unwanted sexual advances and assaults.

The chapters, 18 & 20, list the sexual activities within one's household in various contexts, and within the community, in order to draw a clear line of distinction from the Egyptian and the Canaanite religious and cultural practices. And at the same time, the commandments seek to protect the powerless members within the household, and in the community, from the sexual predators.

CONCLUSION:

It is a bad reading of the Bible to focus only on the homosexual relationship, disregarding the preponderance of the heterosexual offenses listed. If we really want to stick to the scripture, we should note that the Bible is silent upon the lesbian relationship. God is only focused on men in power who damage their immediate families, their extended families, and their communities through sexual indiscretion and predation, whether heterosexual, homosexual, or bestial, in nature.

+++ +++ +++

For further reference on the contexts of the Leviticus chapters, 18 and 20, please visit:
<https://www.gaychristian101.com/>