

Leviticus 19v26-37

Aaron Eime, Christ Church Jerusalem, 2022

The consumption of blood was and still remains a part of the spiritual traditions of many pagan and indigenous cultures. We have heard from the Lord through Moses that life is in the blood, and life belongs to God and once again we are given the prohibition from eating it. This strong exhortation against the eating of blood is carried through into the New Covenant with the inclusion of Gentiles into the commonwealth of Israel. Following the council in Jerusalem, Gentiles are included in the prohibition against the eating of blood.

This warning against blood is followed closely by the warning against seeking wisdom from the spiritual world, consulting mediums and diviners. The root word for *enchanter* is שִׁנְיָ (nhs) which is also the root for *serpent*, as in the serpent of the Garden of Eden! There is a demonic connection to the hidden realm. While we are also defended and protected by unseen angels, there exists also an enemy. The spirit world is real. We can contact those in it and they can contact us. And we are not to engage in seeking their wisdom or omens of the future.

Unfortunately, there can be an overreaction from the followers of Jesus to not engage the spiritual realm at all. Yet, spiritual gifts are given to the body of Messiah for the benefit, edification and mission of the community. Paul admonishes us in 1 Thessalonians 5vs20-22 to test the spirits, to ascertain which ones are true and which are false, and not to avoid the subject altogether. We should not be ignorant, though, of the strength of the enemy and his cunning, the power of the שִׁנְיָ in the Garden was not in military might but in lies and schemes. Avoid him at all costs but seek the Word of the Lord. We are called to distinguish the sacred from the profane in all things and this includes the spiritual realm.

God calls us to be a holy people. This call remains the same in both the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) and the Greek Bible (the New Testament). We are to look, behave, act, love and forgive differently than the world. Thus God directs the people of Israel to dress differently, eat differently and maintain boldly hygiene differently from the surrounding nations. The Israelite males of the community are commanded to refrain from tattoos and maintain some length of hair on the corners of the head and beard. Today this is noticeable on many Orthodox Jewish men who keep long *payot* (sidelocks) and untrimmed beards.

The call to holiness includes protecting female family members from sexual exploitation, something our current culture has failed to do. Am I my brother's and sister's keeper? Yes, absolutely you are! Immorality is linked to the Land itself, not only of the soul. Sin stains not just ourselves but also the very ground itself. The Sabbath and the Temple are presented once again as aspects of holy places and holy time. Holiness is altogether personal, communal, spacial and engages in time. If we seek to progress in holiness then one aspect of that holiness is to engage in holy time – again, something our 24/7 world refuses to do. The Enemy is crafty indeed.

Holiness includes respect for the elders of our community. Moses instructs the Israelites to stand before those with grey hair, giving honour to the mature amongst us. Yes, this is connected to honouring parents and standing before God, however, we are also to honour the maturity and experience that the elders can provide for our communities. Wisdom and experience are invaluable in the physical world and workplace and also in the spiritual realm of faith.

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God Himself, though timeless, is identified as the Ancient of Days. In our current world of low birth rates and ageing populations, we will be tasked to honour the elderly more and more. Holiness is also an action we undertake in relation to the stranger who is amongst us. The Israelites are commanded to treat the stranger גֵּר (*ger*) as they would a native-born Israelite. Why would the foreigner be in the Land of Israel in the first place? Perhaps he is conducting business or using the ports on the Mediterranean coast for transport, or perhaps he is attracted to monotheism and has been drawn to the light of the God of Israel. Abraham was called a גֵּר and Israel was also said to strangers in Egypt. גֵּר is a term often used to describe a convert to Judaism, although not exclusively. Also, Gentiles who convert are actually supposed to be called Jews and not reminded of their former Gentile status. Holiness is linked to the Exodus from Egypt and thus has a redemptive nature itself. Engaging and practising holiness (as we are learning in the holiness code of Leviticus) reflects and participates in the redemption we have and in the calling to be a holy people.

Finally, we are called to conduct holiness in our business practices. The Israelites are to use honest scales, weights, measures and quality when doing business, not only with each other but also the stranger! Just because these commands are given to Israel in the wilderness does not excuse present-day Gentiles from dishonest business dealings. In the New Covenant, the Torah is on our hearts and so these commands remain the call of the Lord. Interestingly, chapter 19 concludes with God reminding the people that He took them out of Egypt. The command to be holy, to distinguish between the sacred and profane, is always drawn from the context of redemptive history. Redemptive history is not relegated to the past but is present and ongoing. Our personal, communal and spiritual holiness should likewise be a present reality and an ongoing walk with the Lord.