

פרשת

אֲחֵרֵי מוֹת וְקִדְשִׁים *Parshiyot Acharei Mot-Kedoshim*

*Vayikra / Leviticus 16:1-20:27, Ezekiel 22:1-19
John 7:1-52 / John 7:53-10:21*

The Torah is binding on all of Mankind?

This week is a double portion, Parshiyot Acharei Mot and Kedoshim (*Vayikra / Leviticus 16:1-20:27*). This week's Torah portion contains a large number of positive and negative commands. To live in Holiness, a duty to parents, observance of the Shabbat, against idolatry, peace offerings, the gleanings of the harvest left for the poor, no stealing or lying, swearing falsely, defrauding the hireling, laws on the deaf and the blind, respect of persons in judgment, tale-bearing, hatred and uncharitableness, revenge, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Parashat Acharei Mot continues speaking of sexual sin in relation to incest, mother, father, sister, brother, and cousins. The laws of *niddah* during menstruation, and to not be engaged in bestiality. We are told to not defile ourselves by these things because it is for this reason the nations were being cast out because they became defiled by them (*18:24*). It is interesting, based upon this text, the Lord states that the nations were cast out of the Promised Land, and the other nations are perishing because they too became defiled by all of these things. If we consider the context, The way this text is written suggests these commands were binding prior to the giving of the Torah at Sinai suggesting that all of mankind is obligated to obey these moral laws. In addition, Parashat Kedoshim speaks of the laws for harvest, to leave the corners

of the field for the gleanings, and to not steal or deal falsely with one another (19:11). Parashat Kedoshim also speaks of entering the land and planting kinds of trees and allowing three years before harvesting the fruit. The Scriptures go on to say, 19:9 *You are to keep My statutes. You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together. (NASB)*. We also read in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 22:9* a similar text which states, 22:9 *You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed, or all the produce of the seed which you have sown and the increase of the vineyard will become defiled. (NASB)* These verses seem strange and archaic with the idea of mixing threads and planting two kinds of seed in the vineyard. Why would the Lord command His people to not do these things? When we consider the rabbinic literature, according to Rambam's *Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3, 37:10*, the idea of mixing different kinds of plants in the grain fields was connected to an ancient occult practice by the nations. The occult practice involved witchcraft, sexual immorality, and the planting of trees, and is the way the nations are described in their unrighteousness. The Lord speaks to us saying, 20:22 *You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not spew you out. 20:23 Moreover, you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I will drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have abhorred them. (NASB)* These scriptures describe how the iniquity of the people is visited upon the land itself which is said to "Vomit" out her inhabitants. The Scriptures this week reveal to us the Torah was already established by God, it was previously in existence from since the beginning of time and hence the standard, prohibiting all the horrible crimes that are enumerated above. These things are binding upon all of God's creation (all of mankind). The Torah states that these laws were obligatory upon the Canaanites as well as the other nations, and were already in legal binding force before the Torah was given at Sinai. Let's discuss this further in this week's Torah portion.

This week's Torah portion we are looking at *Vayikra / Leviticus 20:22-27*.

Vayikra / Leviticus 20:22-27

20:22 'You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not spew you out. 20:23 'Moreover, you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I will drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have abhorred them. 20:24 'Hence I have said to you, 'You are to possess their land, and I Myself will give it to you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey.' I am the Lord your God, who has separated you from the peoples. 20:25 'You are therefore to make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; and you shall not make yourselves detestable by animal or by bird or by anything that creeps on the ground, which I have separated for you as unclean. 20:26 'Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine. 20:27 'Now a man or a woman who is a medium or a spiritist shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones, their bloodguiltiness is upon them.' (NASB)

כב ושמרתם את-כל-חקתי ואת-כל-משפטי ועשיתם אתם ולא-תקיא אתכם הארץ אשר אני מביא אתכם שמה לשבת בה: [שביעי] כג ולא תלכו בחקת הגוי אשר-אני משלח מפניכם כי את-פל-אלה עשו ואקץ בם: כד ואמר לכם אתם תירשו את-אדמתם ואני אתנגנה לכם לרשת אתה ארץ זבת חלב ודבש אני יהנה אלהיכם אשר-הבדלתי אתכם מן-העמים: [מפטיר] כה והבדלתם בין-הבהמה הטהרה לטמאה ובין-העוף הטמא לטהר ולא-תשקצו את-נפשתיכם בבהמה ובעוף ובכל אשר תרמש האדמה אשר-הבדלתי לכם לטמא: כו והייתם לי קדשים פי קדוש אני יהנה ואבדל אתכם מן-העמים להיות לי: כז ואיש או-אשה פי-יהנה בהם אוב או ידעני מות יומתו באבן ירגמו אתם דמיהם בם:

In this week's Torah portion the Lord speaks to us saying, *20:22 'You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not spew you out. 20:23 'Moreover, you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I will drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have abhorred them. (NASB)* These scriptures speak of the deep connection between the iniquity of the people and the land in which they live. Our righteous behavior has a direct influence upon the produce of the land (crops), the inhabitation, our neighbors, and our enemies. The Torah reveals to us the eternal nature of God's Word, past, present, and future which was already established by God even before creation itself. The Torah was previously in existence and hence the standard, prohibiting all the horrible crimes that are enumerated in these parshiyot and are binding upon all of God's creation (all of mankind). The reason being, man was made in the image of God and therefore His standard for living is binding upon His creation. This does not mean that the Lord has forced a covenant upon all peoples. The Torah states that these laws were obligatory upon the Canaanites as well as the other nations, and were already in legal binding force before the Torah was given at Sinai. The Lord God is Righteous, Holy, and Just, and He expects the same from His creation (all of mankind). If the ultimate outcome of life is to spend an eternity with the Lord God of Israel, the one who lives his life in wickedness has no place in the world to come with a righteous and holy God. This life is meant to prepare us for the world to come. This is the perspective we should have as we live our lives each day.

The rabbis have the following to say concerning the command to keep the statutes and ordinances according to *Vayikra / Leviticus 20:22*.

Chizkuni on Vayikra / Leviticus 20:22

Part 1

ושמרתם את כל חקתי, *"and you are to observe all My statutes."* *You must not violate any of the commandments involving sexual restrictions and incest. (Ibn Ezra)*

Part 2

ואת כל משפטי, *"and all My instructions concerning*

penalties for transgressing these laws,” by your judges seeing to this.

Part 3

ושמרתם את כל הקתי, “*the reason why the Torah has repeated this phrase once again, is to remind the people that G-d’s statutes apply in the Diaspora as well as in the Holy Land. In this verse only the statutes applicable in the Holy Land are meant.*”

It is important to note in part 1 of the commentary the emphasis on the moral commands. The interpretation on these Scriptures is based on the reason these verses are repeated (20:22 *‘You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not spew you out. NASB*) is because God’s statutes apply in the Diaspora as well as in the Holy Land. This is a very significant observation since I have heard the claim that the Torah was only for the Jews and only for the Promised Land (Israel). Based upon these Scriptures and the opinion of the rabbis, this is consistent with *Ecclesiastes 12:13* which states, *12:13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. (NIV)* We are all accountable before God and one day we will all be held accountable before God according to His Word.

The commentary Chizkuni goes on to say the following:

Chizkuni on Vayikra / Leviticus 20:23 Part 1

ולא תלכו בחקות הגוי, “*you must not adopt the statutes of gentile nations.*” *The reason why this too has been repeated here is so that you could not claim that these statutes are only the ones that apply to the Israelites as a community, but not to statutes that apply to them as individuals.*

The rabbis state that the interpretation on *ולא תלכו בחקות הגוי*, “*you must not adopt the statutes of gentile nations*” is repeated to indicate these statutes are not only for the community of Israel, but also for the individual person. This is an important observation in light of the To-

rah comments that these laws were obligatory upon the other nations, and were already in legal binding force before the Torah was given at Sinai.

The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 3:2 has the following to say:

Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 3:2

We do not act in the ways of the nations, and we do not emulate them--not in dress, nor in hair style, and the like--as it says, "And ye shall not walk in the customs of the nation" (Leviticus 20:23). And as it says, "Neither shall ye walk in their statutes" (Leviticus 18:3). And as it says, "Take heed to thyself that thou be not ensnared to follow them" (Deuteronomy 12:30). One must not dress in clothing unique to them for pride, i.e. clothing worn by officers. For example, it is stated in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 74a) that it is forbidden for a Jew to act like them, even regarding shoelaces. If they would tie [their shoes] in one way, and Jews would tie another way, or if their custom was to have red laces, and Jews would have black (for the color black is instructive in humility, lowliness, and modesty), it is forbidden for a Jew to differ. And from this every person should learn, according to his time and place, that the clothing that is made for arrogance and licentiousness--a Jew may not use it. Rather, his dress must be made in a way that is instructive of submissiveness and modesty. So it is said in the Sifri that you must not say, "Since they go out in purple, I too will go out in purple," or "Since they go out with kolasin, i.e. weapons, I too will go out with weapons." For these are matters of arrogance, and this is not the portion of Jacob. Rather, their [the children of Jacob] way is to be modest and humble, and not to turn toward conceit. And so too anything which they [the nations] do that can be suspected of containing an iota of foreign worship, a Jew may not do it. And so he may not shave his head or grown his hair like them. Rather, he must separate himself from them in dress and speech and in

all his other actions, just as he separates himself from them in his knowledge and opinions. And so it is said, "And I have set you apart from the peoples" (Leviticus 20:26).

The Shulkhan Aruch speaks of not walking in the customs of the nations by not wearing our hair and clothing in the same manner they do. These things are believed to lead one to becoming ensnared to follow their ways by reason of pride. The point is not to dress in clothing that is unique to them, because this parallels to one acting like them in the example given in the Talmud about the officer. The point is to live a humble life where behaving in the manner of the nations leads to a sense of pride. The rabbis say *"anything which they [the nations] do that can be suspected of containing an iota of foreign worship, a Jew may not do it."* This emphasizes the kind of influence the idolatrous and occult practice played in the life of the gentile person. This also places some emphasis on the ease at which one may be deceived in the sense that the deception is subtle and possess the capacity to change a person very slowly. This is the danger of walking amongst the nations without carefully considering what we do so as not to be deceived. Consider this in light of what we see on television today that is full of witchcraft, foul language, and sexual immorality. The rabbis conclude saying, *"he must separate himself from them in dress and speech and in all his other actions, just as he separates himself from them in his knowledge and opinions. And so it is said, "And I have set you apart from the peoples" (Leviticus 20:26)."* This setting apart the Lord does is contained within these moral commands which again are binding upon all of mankind. The point is whether one will seek the Lord, His Messiah, and His ways, or choose to live according to what one sees is right in his own eyes.

Rambam provides us with a picture into the ways of the nations to emphasize the level of wickedness that was taking place amongst the nations.

Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3 37:10

Another belief which was very common in those days, and survived the Sabeans, is this: When a tree is graft-

ed into another in the time of a certain conjunction of sun and moon, and is fumigated with certain substances whilst a formula is uttered, that tree will produce a thing that will be found exceedingly useful. More general than anything mentioned by the heathen writers was the ceremony of grafting an olive branch upon a citron tree, as described in the beginning of the Nabatean Agriculture. I am of opinion that the book of medicines which Hezekiah put away (B: T. Pes. 56a) was undoubtedly of this kind. They also said that when one species is grafted upon another, the branch which is to be grafted must be in the hand of a beautiful damsel, whilst a male person has disgraceful and unnatural sexual intercourse with her; during that intercourse the woman grafts the branch into the tree. There is no doubt that this ceremony was general, and that nobody refused to perform it, especially as the pleasure of love was added to the (supposed) future results of the grafting. The Law, therefore, prohibits us to mix different species together, i.e., to graft one tree into another, because we, must keep away from the opinions of idolaters and the abominations of their unnatural sexual intercourse. In order to guard against the grafting of trees, we are forbidden to sow any two kinds of seed together or near each other. When you study the traditional explanation of this precept, you will find that the prohibition of grafting, the principal element in this commandment, holds good for all countries, and is punishable by forty stripes: but the sowing of seeds one near the other is only prohibited in Palestine. In the Nabatean Agriculture it is further distinctly stated that it was the custom of the people in those days to sow barley and stones of grapes together, in the belief that the vineyard could only prosper in this way. Therefore the Law prohibits us to use seed that has grown in a vineyard, and commands us to bum both the barley and the produce of the vineyard. For the practices of the heathen, which they considered as of

a magic and talismanic character, even if not containing any idolatrous element, are prohibited, as we have stated above (p. 334) in reference to the dictum of our Sages, "We must not hang upon a tree the fœtus of an animal belonging to the Sanctuary." The Law prohibits all heathen customs, called by our Sages "the ways of the Amorite," because they are connected with idolatry. On considering the customs of the heathen in their worship, you will find that in certain kinds of worship they turn toward stars, in others to the two great luminaries; frequently they choose the rise of signs in the Zodiac for sowing and fumigating; and as to the circuits made by those who plant or sow, some complete five circles, corresponding to the five planets, with the exclusion of the two luminaries: others go seven times round, according to the number of the planets, when including sun and moon. They believe that all these practices are magic charms of great efficiency in agriculture. Thus those practices lead to the worship of stars: and therefore all practices of those nations have been prohibited, in the words, "Ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation which I cast out before you" (Lev. 20:23). Those practices which were more general and common, or were distinctly connected with idolatry, are particularly pointed out as prohibited; e.g., eating the fruit of a tree during the first three years, intermixing of species and the mixed species sown in a vineyard. I am surprised at the dictum of Rabbi Joshiyah, which has been adopted as legally binding, in reference to the mixed seed in a vineyard, viz., that the law is only transgressed when wheat, barley, and the stone of a grape are sown simultaneously. He must undoubtedly have seen the source of that kind of the ways of the Amorite. It must now be clear to you, and no room can be left for any doubt, that the prohibition of wearing garments of wool and linen, of using the fruit of a tree in the first three years, and of mixing divers species, are directed against idolatry, and

that the prohibition against adopting heathen manners serves to remove anything which leads to idolatry, as has been shown by us.

Notice how Rambam uses the example of grafting a branch into a tree that is coupled to one developing a potion and a incantation that is to be performed at a particular time corresponding to the sun and the moon, and to unnatural sexual intercourse while the woman grafts the branch into the tree. If this may be taken as what was actually occurring amongst the nations, there is a very good reason the Lord commanded, *“The Law prohibiting us from mixing different species together.”* In order to avoid grafting two branches together, we are given the command to not sow two kinds of seed together in a field. Rambam says that this is a command that is good for all countries (including the diaspora). Rambam also says the nations would sow two types of seed together as a formula believing only then would the crops prosper. The idea of developing a formula to effect the growth of the plant was coupled to an occult practice which is in violation of God’s holy ways on many levels. The different cultures (e.g. Amorite) also connected these things to idolatrous worship. The nations believed all of these practices were magic charms which greatly helped in their agricultural growth which led them to worship the inanimate object, the stars, etc. Rambam concludes saying, *“It must now be clear to you, and no room can be left for any doubt, that the prohibition of wearing garments of wool and linen, of using the fruit of a tree in the first three years, and of mixing divers species, are directed against idolatry, and that the prohibition against adopting heathen manners serves to remove anything which leads to idolatry, as has been shown by us.”* Rambam provides us with a graphic picture of how the nations functioned in their idolatrous and occult practices. These things explain to us the problem of going through the motions like the nations do which the rabbis say are connected to the way one dresses, indicating what we put on the outside to see. This reminds us of Israel asking Samuel for a king to be like the nations. (*1 Samuel 8*) This kind of reminds us of what Paul wrote that we are to (*1 Thessalonians 5:22*) *Abstain from all appearance of evil. (KJV)*

In this week’s Torah portion, the Lord gives us a very important

command that is coupled to a warning saying the following, *Vayikra / Leviticus 20:22 'You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not spew you out. 20:23 'Moreover, you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I will drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have abhorred them. (NASB)* These scriptures speak of the deep connection between how we live our lives, our relationship with God, our iniquity (sin), and the land in which we live. Our righteous behavior has a direct influence upon our lives and the lives of others. The Torah reveals to us the eternal nature of God's Word as being relevant in the past, present, and future, God's Word was established by the Lord Himself even before creation itself. The Torah was in existence prior to it having been given at Sinai and hence is the standard, prohibiting all the horrible crimes that are enumerated in this week's Torah portion. These Scriptures indicate how God's Word is binding upon all of God's creation (all of mankind) and stand as a warning for us today to not behave immorally in sin. Man was made in the image of God and therefore His standard for living is binding upon His creation. The Torah states that these laws were obligatory upon the Canaanites as well as the other nations, and were already in legal binding force before the Torah was given at Sinai. The Lord God is Righteous, Holy, and Just, and He expects the same from His creation (all of mankind). Fortunately the Lord did not leave us alone to keep these commands. Based upon the Apostolic Writings, by faith in the Messiah Yeshua, the Lord sends His Holy Spirit into our lives to guide and empower us enabling us to walk according to the Spirit in the way that He chooses, according to His commands. The Lord changes us from the inside out such that we will have a desire to walk in righteousness and holiness and truth. Freedom, Deliverance, Redemption, a change of heart, the desire to serve the Lord and others, a deep love and respect for the Lord God of Israel, all of this comes by faith in His Messiah Yeshua!

