

TWENTY-THIRD MESSAGE:  
CIVIL LAWS RELATING TO MANY SUBJECTS  
Leviticus 19:1-37

Introduction

This message contains additional civil laws for Israel that were commanded by Jehovah. They deal with responsibilities to God and responsibilities to their fellowmen. The laws were not arranged in any logical order or groupings. A specific penalty was attached to only one (v. 8).

This message may be outlined as follows:

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Interpretation

## CHAPTER 19

## Introductory note (19:1)

Verse 1. **And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,**

This verse introduces another message of Jehovah to Moses from The Tabernacle.

- A. Basis of the laws: the holiness of Jehovah God (19:2)

Verse 2. **Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel. You shall say to them, You must be holy, for I Jehovah your God am holy.**

This message was for all the people of Israel, and Moses was to relay it to them. Jehovah began this message by stating the basis on which the laws of Israel were founded. They were based on the holiness of Jehovah their God. Since the Israelites were Jehovah's people, they were called to be like Him. Jehovah was holy, so they were to be holy. The laws were designed to teach the Israelites what it means to be holy. Jehovah is the standard by which right actions are measured, and the laws described what it means to be like Him.

- B. A man must fear his parents and keep My sabbaths (19:3)

Verse 3. **A man must fear his mother and his father, and you must keep My sabbaths. I am Jehovah your God.**

A man must fear his mother and his father, and you must keep My sabbaths. The first law given in this MESSAGE contained both a responsibility to people and a responsibility to God. This combination showed that both were important in Israel and that both were to be regulated by the civil authorities. The specific responsibilities mentioned were fearing (revering, respecting) parents and keeping Jehovah's sabbaths. The stability of the nation depended on parental authority, and the spirituality of the nation depended upon the proper observance of the sabbaths.

Obedience to parents was and is basic to all right actions toward one's fellowman, and observance of times of worship was and is basic to all right actions toward God. The civil authorities were responsible for seeing that both aspects of life were preserved in Israel.

keep My sabbaths. The word translated "keep" is the word used in Leviticus 18:30, where it is translated "watch." It means "to watch" or "to guard" the sabbaths from neglect and abuse. The sabbaths were days when the Israelites were to pause from their secular activities and worship God (see comments on Lev. 16:31 in MESSAGE 20 under the heading a sabbath of a sabbath it must be to you, and you shall afflict yourselves). Unless they guarded those times, they would become so wrapped up in worldly affairs that God would be left out of their lives. They would miss the most important aspect of life.

The use of the plural "sabbaths" refers to more than just the weekly sabbath. Eight different times were called "sabbaths" or "rest times" in the Pentateuch: the weekly sabbath day (Ex. 16:25,26,29; 20:8,10,11; 31:14,15,16; 35:3; Lev. 23:3; 24:8; Num. 15:32; 28:9,10; Deut. 5:12,14,15), the Day of Coverings, which was not called just "a sabbath," but "a sabbath of a sabbath" (Lev. 16:31), the first and seventh days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:7,8,11,15), the Feast of Noise-Making (Lev. 23:24), the first day of the Feast of Booths and the day following that feast (Lev. 23:39), and the sabbatical year (Lev. 25:2,6; 26:34,35,43). (See comments on each of those references in MESSAGES 20, 30, 31,32, 34, 35, 37.)

I am Jehovah your God. These responsibilities were established on the basis of the authority of Jehovah their God. This statement or a shortened form of it is made a total of fifteen times in this MESSAGE. Though the commandments in this MESSAGE were civil laws to be enforced by human authorities, they were first and foremost responsibilities to the God who had chosen them and made them His own.

C. You must not turn to false gods (19:4)

Verse 4. **You must not turn to the worthless ones, and you must not make for yourselves gods of molded metal. I am Jehovah your God.**

The second law dealt with a responsibility to God. The word translated “worthless ones” means “nothings.” It did not refer to images but to the false gods themselves. The word is very similar to the Hebrew word for “gods.” It was used as an alliterative way of saying that what the pagans called “gods” were really “nothings.” The words translated “gods of molded metal” did refer to the idols or statutes that represented the false gods. The Israelites were not to honor pagan gods, who were no gods; and they were not to build images of those nothing gods.

D. You must not eat a slaughter-offering after the second day (19:5-8).

Verses 5-8. **5 When you offer a slaughter-offering of peace-offerings to Jehovah, you must offer it so you will be accepted.**

Slaughter-offerings were actually a meal shared by the worshiper, the priests, and Jehovah (see comments on Lev. 3:1 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading a slaughter-offering of peace offerings). This law concerned the worshiper’s portion of the meal. Jehovah warned that the worshiper should eat his portion in such a way that he would be accepted by Jehovah. The words translated “so you will be accepted” are literally “for your acceptance.” In order for the worshiper and his offering to be accepted by Jehovah, it had to be offered in the prescribed way. Jehovah had taken great care to give detailed instructions concerning how fire-offerings were to be offered so the offerings would contain truth about Him and not be mixed with pagan ideas that would mislead the worshipers. Therefore, worshipers needed to take great care to follow Jehovah’s instructions exactly. If they did not, they showed that they did not truly trust Jehovah, and their offering would not be accepted by Him.

**6 It must be eaten in the day of your slaughter-offering or on the next day, and any that remains on the third day must be incinerated in fire.**

**7 If it is eaten on the third day, it is an abomination. It will not be accepted.**

The worshiper was to cook and eat his portion of the meat of the offering in the courtyard of The Tabernacle (see comments on Lev. 8:31 in MESSAGE 10). Cooking and eating the meat was a part of the ceremony of the offering, and it was to be observed in exact accordance with the instructions of Jehovah. Jehovah had given specific instructions that slaughter-offerings that were offered to express thanksgiving were to be eaten on the day the offering was presented (see comments on Lev. 7:15 in MESSAGE 7). However, slaughter-offerings that were offered to accompany a freewill gift or the fulfillment of a vow were to be eaten on the day of the offerings or on the next day (see comments on Lev. 7:16 in MESSAGE 7). If any of the meat was left over after the specified day, it was to be incinerated in fire in a clean place outside the camp (see comments on Lev. 7:17 in MESSAGE 7). This commandment covers both cases. Eating any of the meat on the third day would be a departure from both purposes for the offering.

This law calls eating meat from a slaughter-offering on the third day an “abomination.” The word translated “abomination” is the word used in Leviticus 18:22 and is properly translated in that manner. Eating it on the third day was an abhorrent action to Jehovah because it was a departure from His specific instructions. Eating in an unauthorized manner showed lack of respect for Jehovah and His covenant. Therefore the offering would not be accepted by Jehovah.

**8 And the one eating it must bear his iniquity, because he has profaned a holiness of Jehovah, and that soul shall be cut off from his people.**

If an Israelite departed from the instructions and ate the offering on the third day, not only would his offering not be accepted but also he would “bear

his iniquity,” which means that he would face the penalty of his wrongdoing (see comments on Lev. 5:1 in MESSAGE 2). Jehovah had already said in Leviticus 7:18 that anyone who ate any remaining portion of the slaughter-offering on the third day would “bear his iniquity” (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 7 under the heading and the person who eats of it will bear his iniquity). However, in that MESSAGE Jehovah did not specify what that penalty was to be. In this passage, He makes it clear that the penalty was that the offender was to be “cut off from his people,” which means death (see comments on Lev. 7:20 in MESSAGE 7, on Lev. 20:2 in MESSAGE 24, and in Introduction to MESSAGE 24). His action had defiled a holy offering, showing that he rejected the covenant and thus did not really belong to the people of God. He was to be executed.

This commandment is the only law in this MESSAGE that contains a specific penalty. For all the others, penalties were to be assigned by the judges according to the circumstances of each case. Specifying the death penalty for this offense underscores its seriousness. At first sight, the penalty seems to be severe for a ceremonial deviation. However, the offerings Jehovah gave to Israel were a method of teaching truths about Jehovah and the way of life He expected of His followers. He designed them carefully because pagan religions of that day had offerings that they called by the same names. Jehovah wanted to protect His offerings from those pagan forms of the offerings and the ideas they contained. Therefore, if an Israelite did not follow the ceremonies exactly as Jehovah had defined them, he was showing disrespect for Jehovah and was subject to being led astray by false ideas. Such a disrespectful attitude toward Jehovah’s instructions showed he had not truly accepted the covenant and did not really belong among God’s people. He was to be excluded by being put to death.

- E. You must leave the corners and the gleanings of your field and of your vineyard for the poor and for the sojourners (19:9-10)

Verses 9-10. **9 And in reaping the harvest of your land, you must not finish to harvest the**

**corner of your field, and you must not gather the gleanings of your harvest.**

**10 And you must not gather every last grape from your vineyard, and you must not gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard, but you must leave them for the poor and for the sojourner. I am Jehovah your God.**

This law deals with a responsibility of the Israelites toward their fellowmen. When they would settle in their land, at harvest time they were to leave a portion of their crops in the field and allow the poor and sojourners to gather it. They were not to harvest the corners of their grain fields, and they were not to gather the grain stalks that were dropped in the field when the crop was harvested. They were also to leave on the vine the few bunches of grape that would ripen after the main harvest was gathered. In addition, they were not to pick up the grapes that fell from a bunch onto the ground. Gathering every last stalk of grain and every last grape was an expensive task with little profit. The farmer would lose very little by not gathering those small portions of his harvest, but allowing the needy to gather them would mean life and sustenance to the poor. The Israelites were to be a generous people, providing for the poor as a regular part of their way of life.

Sojourners were people of foreign birth who had accepted Jehovah as their God and who had been accepted by the Israelites as naturalized citizens (see comments on Lev. 16:29 in MESSAGE 20 under the heading [including] the native and the sojourner who sojourns among you and on Lev. 17:8-9 in MESSAGE 21), Jehovah mentioned them in this law because they would not receive an allotment of land unless they already had been accepted into one of the tribes at the time the Land would be divided out to tribes, clans, and families in Israel (Num. 34:13-35:8; Josh. 13:7-14:5). They probably would become employees of the Israelite farmers or have to find other employment. They might be needy, so Jehovah wanted the Israelites to care about them enough to allow them the privilege of gleaning in their fields for fresh produce.

F. You must not steal, cheat, or lie  
(19:11)

Verse 11. **You must not steal, and you must not cheat; and you must not lie, a man to his associate.**

Stealing and lying are two crimes naturally associated with each other; therefore they are mentioned together in this law. Stealing was not to be practiced by the people of Israel. Also they were not to cheat or deal deceptively with others. Taking from others by deceptive was as evil as outright stealing. Also one Israelite was forbidden to lie to any other person. "To his associate" means a person with whom an Israelite had any kind of association. It was equivalent to saying a man should not lie to anyone (see comments on Lev. 6:2-3 in MESSAGE 4 under the heading his associate and on Lev. 18:20 in MESSAGE 22).

G. You must not swear falsely by My name (19:12)

Verse 12. **And you must not swear by My name to a deception and profane the name of your God. I am Jehovah.**

Jehovah also forbade them to make a false oath. The swearing referred to here is giving a solemn oath before a judge or in a legal transaction. Such false swearing would profane Jehovah's name. The Israelites most commonly made oaths on Jehovah's name, rather than on the Bible, as is the custom today. Involving God's name in a falsehood dishonored the person who did it and also damaged the holiness of God.

The warning against false swearing by Jehovah's name was not intended to allow the Israelites freedom to swear falsely on some other basis. The Pharisees of Jesus' day applied this law to oaths in daily speech and tried to draw distinctions between times when such oaths were binding and when they were not. Jesus cut through their specious arguments by telling them not to swear at all. Jesus' words did not contradict this law that allowed swearing to a truth in a legal setting. Jesus was talking about swearing in daily conversations, while this law was talking about

swearing to solemn legal oaths. Oaths in daily conversation serve no purpose and reveal a tendency to lie on the part of the person who finds it necessary to use them. Legal oaths had a necessary place in ancient Israel, and they do today as well. Jehovah does not forbid making an oath in legal situations where important decisions are made on the basis of sworn statements. He does forbid making dishonest statements in such situations.

H. You must not oppress your neighbor or your employee (19:13)

Verse 13. **You must not oppress your neighbor, and you must not rob [him]. The wages of an employee must not remain with you until morning.**

They were forbidden to oppress or take advantage of other people in any way. Jehovah specifically mentioned two ways of oppressing others. One way was by outright robbery. The other was by failing to pay a worker the wages due to him. Both were oppression, and both were forbidden. At that time, the custom was that every day was pay day. To fail to pay a man for his day's work at the end of the day was to withhold his wages on pay day. Jehovah indicated that doing so was equal to robbery.

In Jesus' day, the Pharisees split hairs over commandments like this one by quibbling over who was a person's neighbor. Jesus brushed aside their useless interpretations and told the story of The Good Samaritan. By that story Jesus taught that even a person from a different area or a person of a hated group is one's neighbor. Jesus' explanation places this verse in its proper perspective. An Israelite was not to take advantage of anyone. The same principle holds for everyone today.

I. You must not mock the deaf or the blind (19:14)

Verse 14. **You must not curse the deaf, and you must not put a stumbling block at the face of the blind, but you shall fear your God. I [am] Jehovah.**

Jehovah also forbade making a mockery of the deaf and the blind. The Israelites were not to curse a deaf man, because he could not hear to defend himself. They were not to put a block in front of a blind man to cause him to stumble, because he could not see to avoid it. They were to avoid mistreating the handicapped out of reverence and respect for Jehovah. Jehovah loved the helpless, and those who respected Him also were expected to respect those in need of help. Taking advantage of the handicapped was a crime in Israel.

J. You must not show favoritism in rendering judgments (19:15)

Verse 15. **You must not do an injustice in [rendering] a judgment. You must not give preference to the poor, and you must not polish the face of the great. You must pass judgment on your fellowman in righteousness.**

This law applied to judges as they made decisions about disputes that were before them. They were not to do an injustice to anyone when they made their decisions. They were not to favor a person because he was poor, and they were not to honor a person because he was powerful. They were to make judgments according to the evidence and according to what was right. This verse does not contradict Jesus' instruction when He said "Judge not." Jesus was talking about making snap judgments based on lack of knowledge, which is something we should never do. This verse is talking about making legal judgments based on evidence and correct information. Making decisions in a law court is a necessary part of life. Those decisions should not be based on sympathy for a person's poverty or on deference to a person's power. They should be based on truth and justice. It is also necessary to form opinions or judgments in daily life about whether another person is to be trusted or not. Jesus did not forbid making such

judgments if they were based on solid evidence. He did warn against making judgments based on gossip or suspicion. Those judgments are damaging and evil.

The word translated "fellowman" in this verse is not the word translated "associate" in verse 12, and it is not the word translated "neighbor" in verse 13. It means one's "fellow" or "fellowman." It was used previously in Leviticus 6:2 and Leviticus 18:20 (see comments on Lev. 6:2 in MESSAGE 4 under the heading his associate and on Lev. 18:20 in MESSAGE 22.<sup>1</sup> The use of this word implies that a judge was not to consider those who appeared before him for judgment to be inferior to him. They were his fellow human beings, his peers. He was to treat everyone with respect and judge them fairly.

K. You must not be a gossiper or a false witness (19:16)

Verse 16. **You must not go about as a gossiper among your people. You must not take a stand against your neighbor's blood. I am Jehovah.**

The word translated "gossiper" may be understood to mean "slanderer" or "tale bearer." Slander is spreading a tale that the bearer knows is false. Gossip is spreading a tale that the bearer has only heard. He does not know if it is true or not. Gossip is as damaging as slander. In America slander is a crime. In Israel Jehovah declared both to be crimes.

"Take a stand against your neighbor's blood" means giving information that could lead to a person's death. That information could be shared in a law court, but a tale told throughout the community can have the same effect. When someone gives information that could endanger a person's life, he needs to be doubly sure that the information is accurate. Even if true, spreading the information is not helpful. It is best to let officials investigate and determine the truth.

<sup>1</sup> KJV, RSV, NASB, HCSB, ASV, BBE, CJB, and LITV all translate this word in this verse as "neighbor." CEV, GNB, and MSG omit it in their translations.

The word translated “neighbor” in this verse is the word used in verse 13. In the strictest sense, it means a person who lives nearby, but God used it to include everyone. Christians should be even more careful than the Israelites to think of it in that manner. Our neighborhood is the world, and in a literal sense that statement is becoming more of a reality every day. This commandment teaches that a person should not spread dangerous information about anyone, even about someone he does not like. Unfortunately, most of what is reported in newspapers, on television, and in conversations today is information about evil deeds, and it is reported long before the deeds are investigated and found to be true or false. God would want us to know that more harm than good is done by spreading unsubstantiated information that can do great harm to another person’s life.

- L. You must not hate your brother, but correct him (19:17)

**Verse 17. You must not hate your brother in your heart. You must correct your fellowman, but you must not press sin on him.**

Hate crime is a controversial subject in American today. God made, not an act done out of hate, but hate itself to be a crime in Israel. Instead of hating another person who had done wrong, the Israelites were admonished to rebuke that person, with a view to turning him away from his sin. Correcting him could help him turn away from his sin, but hating him would make the sin press even harder upon him. Sin would even harden him in his sin or arouse guilt that would make his sin an even heavier burden for him to bear.

This verse uses the word “brother,” which had been used in verses 13 and 16, and then parallels it with the word “fellowman,” which had been used in verse 15. It is best not to quibble over the difference in meaning among the words “neighbor,” “associate,” and “brother.” All of them should be understood to mean “anyone.” God wants us to be fair, honest, and helpful to everyone. We should not try to confine our being kind and thoughtful to any one group, large or small.

- M. You must not seek revenge, but love others as you love yourself (19:18)

**Verse 18. You must not take revenge, and you must not hold [something] against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am Jehovah.**

Jehovah commanded the Israelites not to seek revenge against someone who had wronged them. They were not even to hold resentment in their hearts. Instead, they were to love the one who had wronged them. Love would make them seek to reconcile with the person who had wronged them, not to try to get back at that person. How much better off Israel would have been if they had obeyed this commandment! How much better off America and the world would be if we all would just obey it.

“Love your neighbor as yourself” assumes that we should and will love ourselves. Unfortunately, many do not love even themselves. They may think that they love themselves, but their actions bring harm to themselves. Real love means that we do what is best for the person we love. Loving ourselves means we live and act in ways that produce good for ourselves. Loving actions keep us physically alive, mentally wise, and spiritually alert. When we learn to truly love ourselves, then we are able to love others in the same way.

This verse makes the words “the sons of your people” and “neighbor” parallel to each other. “Neighbor” is the word used in verse 13. In the strictest sense, “the sons of your people” meant another Israelite. But, if “neighbor” is understood to include everyone, then “the sons of our people” should include everyone. No one should be considered to be a foreigner or an outsider when it comes to loving him. “Your people” includes everyone. Jehovah has now used four words that should be understood to include everyone: “associate,” “neighbor,” “fellowman,” and “your people.” He was commanding ways of acting that we should practice toward every person we meet.

Jesus said the latter part of this verse was the second greatest of all the commandments (Matt. 22:39; Mark 12:31). On another occasion, an expert

teacher in the Jewish law made the same statement to Jesus (Luke 10:27). His statement indicates that Jesus was not the only person to recognize the importance of this verse. Jesus put His stamp of approval on the insight that loving our neighbor is the second greatest of the commandments, and we also should place the same importance on it. We can do so, not just by acknowledging its importance, but by practicing it.

N. You must not mix uncongenial animals, seeds, or threads (19:19)

Verse 19. **You must keep My statutes. You must not cause your livestock of two distinct kinds to spread [themselves] out. You must not plant your field with two distinct kinds [of seeds], and a piece of clothing [that is] a mixture of two distinct kinds [of thread] must not come on you.**

You must keep My statutes. The word translated “statutes” is the word found in Leviticus 6:18 (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 5 under the heading [It is] a statute [for] an age through your generations). It means a written instruction. The instructions in this commandment seem strange to us. They may have seemed equally strange to the Israelites. Perhaps their strangeness is the reason Jehovah began them with the command to keep his statutes. His written instructions were to be strictly followed, even if the Israelites found them to be strange. God has a good reason for every commandment He gives.

This commandment forbade the Israelites to try to combine unnatural mixtures of animals, crops and threads. Jehovah made different animals and plants with distinctly different natures. Each is good in its own way and place, but many are so different that they will not mix congenially. The Israelites were commanded not to try to combine animals or plants that did not mix naturally.

But why should Jehovah make such a point about not mixing uncongenial animals and plants? Like so many other teachings in Leviticus, it likely was given to teach a moral and spiritual lesson. Symbolically it taught that some actions are morally evil, and some are morally good. Good deeds and evil deeds should never be mixed together in the

same life. Likewise, some beliefs are spiritually true and helpful, but some are false and destructive. They should never be mixed together in the same religion or belief system.

Understood in that light, the commandment is easy to understand. However, its specific wording is difficult to discern because it contains rare Hebrew words. It is even more difficult to translate into English because those words do not have exact English equivalents. Therefore, each clause requires special attention.

You must not cause your livestock of two distinct kinds to spread [themselves] out. The word translated “of two distinct kinds” is found in the Scriptures only here and in Deuteronomy 22:9, where the same commandment is repeated. It is a noun based on a root meaning “to shut up”, “to confine,” or “to restrict.” It is related to another noun that means “confinement,” so that a prison was called a “house of confinement.” The word in this verse seems to mean “a restriction.” It refers to boundaries that could not or should not be crossed. However, in this verse it is used with a dual ending, which means that it refers to two different kinds of restrictions or boundaries. It refers, therefore, to objects that are “enclosed” or “shut up,” each to its own nature and ways. It refers to two objects whose natures are so different that it is unnatural to try to mix them. This word is an entirely different word from the word translated “kind” in Genesis 1:11,12,21,24,25; 6:20; 7:14, though the idea is much the same. The Israelites were forbidden to attempt such mixtures, because it was contrary to the natures God put in them. The first example of such a forbidden mixture in this verse is animals from different species.

The word translated “to spread out” is the word found in Leviticus 12:23. It means to position them for copulation (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 22 under the heading to spread out for it). The Israelites were not to try to interbreed animals of completely different natures. In this verse, the word occurs in the causative state (Hiphil) and means “to cause to spread out.” This wording is appropriate because animals with different natures will not attempt to copulate with each other. It can happen only when perverse men



seek to force it on them. The reference is to men trying to crossbreed animals with two entirely different natures.

The word translated “livestock” is the word used in Leviticus 1:2. It means “a domestic animal” or “livestock” (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 1 under the heading from the livestock). That word was appropriate because only animals that could be handled by men could be used for such experimentation.

Commentators have pondered over how this law applied to the existence in Israel of mules, since a mule is a mixture of a horse and a donkey (2 Sam. 13:29; 18:9; 1 Kings 1:33,38,44; 10:25; 18:5; 2 Kings 5:17; 1 Chr. 12:40; 2 Chr. 9:24; Ezra 2:66; Neh. 7:68; Ps. 32:9; Is. 66:20; Eze. 27:14; Zech. 14:15). The answer is that this law did not apply to mules, because horses and donkeys are of the same species and nature, even though they are from quite distinct branches of the same species. The law applied to animals from completely different species and with completely different natures that will not naturally breed together and that cannot reproduce together.

On a deeper level, this law taught that followers of Jehovah and followers of other gods should not try to mix together in the same family, the same partnership, or the same social circles.

You must not plant your field with two distinct kinds [of seeds]. The same principle applied to planting crops. Crops that grow in entirely different ways and that strangle each other out were not to be planted in the same field. In Deuteronomy 22:9, the example is given of planting grain seeds in a vineyard. Wheat and other grains will not grow compatibly with grape vines. The natures of the two plants are so different that each will destroy the other. This law is practical and logical. The lesson is that sin and righteous cannot thrive together in the same life, as faith in Jehovah cannot coexist with pagan beliefs.

and a piece of clothing [made] of two distinct kinds [of thread] with stamped in ways must not come on you. This principle also applied to weaving together two different kinds of thread that have such different characteristics that they will not

blend together into one piece of cloth. The word translated “with stamped in ways” occurs only here and in Deuteronomy 22:11, which repeats and expands on this commandment. Its strict meaning seems to be “a stamped thing.” It is related to a noun that means “stamping” like the stamping of horses’ hooves (Jer. 47:3). This word seems to refer to characteristics “stamped” into the thread that cannot be changed. Threads stamped with two different natures were not to be woven together to make cloth. In King James Version, this word is translated “of linen and woolen.” The word definitely does not have that meaning. The King James Version translation does not come from the meaning of the word but from the example given in Deuteronomy 22:11.

In Deuteronomy 22:11, Moses gave an example of two different kinds of thread that cannot be woven together successfully. The example is mixing wool thread with linen thread. Wool is course and soft, while linen is slick and hard. The two are so different they will not bind together to make a usable piece of cloth. Material made from that mixture of threads will not last.

Some have thought that this command creates a problem with the clothing of the high priest, on which a design made of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet cochineal yarn was embroidered (Ex. 28:5-8,15). Their concern is unnecessary. The mixture in the clothing of the high priest was of different colors, not different types of yarn. All the yarn was linen yarn, but it was linen dyed with different colors. Even if different types of thread had been used in making the high priest’s clothing, it still would not have been contrary to this commandment unless the natures of the threads were such that they were incompatible for weaving together into one piece of cloth. The spiritual lesson taught by this prohibition is that truth and error will not mix. They will destroy each other. Pagan values just cannot be successfully combined with values revealed by Jehovah God.

The principle that certain animals and plants possessed such diverse natures that they were not to be mixed together was stressed to the Israelites to teach them that the same principle holds in the spiritual realm. Some deeds possess a nature that

absolutely will not mix with deeds of another nature. Attempting to mix them together brings disaster. Evil will not mix with goodness. Wrong will not mix with right. Injustice will not mix with justice. Unrighteousness will not mix with righteousness. The Israelites were not to attempt to mix evil deeds into the holy life to which Jehovah had called them. Also they were not to mix truth with error or honesty with lies. Attempting to do so would destroy them. The same principle holds for Christians today.

O. You must not commit adultery with an engaged female slave (19:20-22)

Verses 20-22. **20 If a man lies [for] a laying of seed [with] a woman and she [is] a slave committed to another man and she has not been redeemed or freedom has not been given to her, a punishment must be given. They may not be put to death because she was not free.**

If a man lies [for] a laying of seed. This expression means to have sexual intercourse (see comments on Lev. 18:20,21,23 in MESSAGE 22).

[with] a woman and she [is] a slave committed to another man. This law forbade sexual intercourse in the specific case of a man's having sex with a female slave who was engaged to be married to another man. To us, it is strange that Jehovah did not forbid sex with a female slave under any circumstances. In fact, it is equally strange to us that He did not command that slavery be abolished entirely in Israel. Sadly, concepts about slavery were sorely different in that day from what they are today. Slavery, like bigamy (see comments on Lev. 18:18 in MESSAGE 22), was a social custom so widely accepted in that day that the Israelites were not prepared to accept its total abolishment, even at God's command. Likewise, it was so totally accepted then that a man's slave was his property and that he could do with his human property anything he chose that they would not have been able to comprehend a command that a man could never under any circumstances have sex with his female slave. Examples of how difficult it would have been for them to understand such ideas are that Abraham had sex with his wife's slave Hagar (Gen. 16:1-6) in order to conceive a child for

his wife Sarah, and Jacob had sex with his wives' slaves Bilhah (Gen. 30:1-8) and Zilpah (Gen. 30:9-12) for the same purpose. God had to deal with the Israelites as they were, and commanded the best laws that it were possible at the time. He regulated the practices of bigamy and slavery and made them as tolerable as possible for those times. He demanded that the Israelites respect the rights of slaves and treat them fairly. God led the Israelites along as they were able to receive His moral teachings, an approach that he still follows today. A man coming out of a pagan background in other lands today may have several wives. When He accepts Jesus, He must gradually be taught to put away his secondary wives. He should not be told he must put away his secondary wives before he can accept Jesus. He first needs to have his heart changed, and then the Lord can teach him to change his family relationships. God dealt with Israel in the same way as he gradually lifted their moral standards. If these statements seem too shocking to accept, remember that it was only about 150 years ago, 1,850 years after Jesus was on the earth that Americans learned to accept slavery as an evil to be abolished. Just as Americans were not ready to write into our constitution when our nation was founded that freedom means liberation of all slaves, Israel would not have been ready to understand abolishing slavery in Moses' day even if it had been written into the law at Sinai.

While Moses was in the mountain right after Israel allegedly had accepted the covenant, He gave to Moses a list of laws that Israel was to observe. Among them were laws governing how Israelites were to treat their Israelite slaves (Ex. 21:2-11). Since the Israelites were not ready to understand abolishing slavery, Jehovah regulated it to control its most serious abuses. Then he gradually taught Israel and the world higher standards. That principle applies to the law in this verse. The commandment did not make sex with a female slave a crime, but it did make sex with a female slave engaged to another man a crime.

In the times of Moses, women were considered to be the property of their husbands. The crime that is forbidden in this law was more an abuse of another man's property than a sexual offense. Nevertheless, God did teach by this law

that a man was not free to treat his female slaves in any way he wished. The standards God set in Israelite law were vastly superior to those of the nations around them, in which a man was accountable to no one as to how he treated his slaves because they were his property.

However, both bigamy and slavery were far short of the original ideas that God had for mankind at the creation, and He did not put His approval on those evils at any time. Jesus stated that same principle when he said Jehovah taught Moses to regulate divorce “because of the hardness of your hearts,” though from the beginning divorce had never been a part of God’s plan for people (Matt. 19:7-9). We still have not learned to accept divorce as an evil to be avoided at all cost. God is tolerant with Christians on that point today, but His ideal that marriage is a union between one man and one woman for life has not changed.

Some have argued on the basis of verses such as this one that God did not look with disfavor on premarital sex relations. They have argued that God disapproved of premarital sex only when the girl was promised to another man. Such a position is based on a failure to study all of the laws that Jehovah revealed to Israel concerning sex practices. The law recorded in Exodus 22:16-17 provided punishment for a man who had sex with a virgin. The penalty was less than the penalty for adultery on the part of married persons, which was death (see comments on Lev. 20:10 in MESSAGE 24), but the act definitely was forbidden. Jehovah clearly taught that premarital sex was not in keeping with the high ideals He set for marriage in the beginning and that it was out of character for people who were committed to following Him.

and she has not been redeemed. This statement is the first reference in Leviticus to redeeming a person, animal, or object, though the practice had been mentioned in Exodus 13:13-15; 34:20. It is explained in Leviticus 25:24-46,48-49 and in Leviticus 27:13-31 (see comments on those verses in MESSAGES 37 and 38). Redeeming meant to pay a price to release a person, animal, or object from an obligation. A person might redeem himself, or be redeemed by another person. Redeeming was the special responsibility of a

person’s nearest of kin. In this verse, “has not been redeemed” means no one had bought the female slave to set her free.

or freedom has not been given to her. A slave could also be set free by his or her owner. Jehovah had given laws regulating such occasions in Exodus 21:5-11. In this case, the female slave also had not been set free by her owner.

a punishment must be given. If a man broke this commandment and had sex with a female slave who had been promised to another man, punishment was required. No specific punishment was stated for this offense. The case was to be presented to a judge and a punishment prescribed according to the conditions of the case. The law taught that a man was not free to use an engaged woman for sex just because she was a slave.

They may not be put to death because she was not free. Jehovah did state that the death penalty was not to be prescribed for this crime. The reason was that the woman was not a free woman. If she had been a free woman, the required penalty would have been death for both the man and the woman (see comments on Lev. 20:10 in MESSAGE 24). We find it sad that a lower penalty was required if the woman was a slave than if she was free. However, we should remember that the death penalty is not required today for adultery in any case. Are our standards higher or lower than those God commanded for Israel?

**21. But he shall bring an offense-offering for himself to Jehovah to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, a ram for an offense-offering.**

When the man paid his penalty, he was to present an offense-offering at The Tabernacle. An offense-offering was a fire-offering that showed repentance for a sin but that also required the payment of restitution for the wrong done (see comments on Lev. 6:1-7 in MESSAGE 4). The requirement for an offense-offering reveals two truths: (1) The offender needed to repent and receive forgiveness from God. His offense was against God, as well as the woman’s fiancé. (2) He needed to make restitution to the man for his

offense. The offense was against God and man, and the man needed to be reconciled to both.

An offense-offering was always to consist of a ram (see comments on Lev. 5:15 in MESSAGE 3 under the heading [with] a pristine ram from the flock and on Lev. 6:6-7 in MESSAGE 4). The amount of the restitution payment probably was to be set by the judge who decided the case.

**22 And the priest shall cover over him with the ram of the offense-offering before Jehovah for his sin that he sinned, and his sin that he sinned shall be forgiven him.**

If the man truly repented when he presented his offense-offering, he was covered or protected from the effects of his sin and his sin was forgiven. The ceremonies performed by the priest in connection with the offense-offering symbolized the offender's covering and forgiveness (see comments on Lev. 1:4 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading to cover over him and on Lev. 6:6-7 in MESSAGE 4).

P. You must not eat fruit from your trees until after the fruit of the fourth year has been given to Jehovah (19:23-25)

Verses 23-25. **23 When you come into the Land and you shall plant every food tree, you shall consider their fruit uncircumcised [for] thee years. It must be uncircumcised to you. It must not be eaten.**

**24 And in the fourth year, all its fruit must be holy, praises to Jehovah.**

**25 And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit to add to you its product.**

When the Israelites would be settled in their land and would plant trees that would produce fruit to eat, they were to recognize that all the fruit of their trees was a gift from God. They were to show their appreciation for the produce of their trees by giving their first full fruit crop from each tree to Jehovah to support His work and His servants. A tree could not be expected to bear a full crop until its fourth year, so the Israelites were not to eat the fruit of their fruit trees during the first three years. They were to consider their trees during the first three years to be uncircumcised, that is, not yet

dedicated to God. As long as the fruit was not dedicated to Jehovah, they were not to eat it. The fourth year, the crop was to be given to Jehovah to praise Him for the gift of fruit to eat. In the fifth and following years the crops would belong to the Israelite owner.

The fruit of the fourth year was a kind of first-fruits offering (see comments on Lev. 2:12 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading [Concerning] an offering of first-fruits, you must offer them to Jehovah and on Lev. 2:14 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading And if you offer an homage-offering of your early produce to Jehovah). Though fruit of the fourth year is not called "first-fruits" in this verse, in Nehemiah 10:35,37 the Israelites swore to an oath "to follow the law of God given through God's servant Moses." In that oath they swore to bring "the first-fruits of our land and of every fruit tree to Jehovah's house." Their oath shows that they recognized fruit of the fourth year to be a first-fruits offering. The first-fruit offering of grain, oil, and grape (Num. 18:12-13) was the first portion of the crop to ripen each year (Num. 18:12-13). The first fruit offering of their fruit trees was the whole crop of the fourth year. This commandment made first-fruit offerings of their trees to be a civil law to help provide support for Jehovah's servants the priests. It was to be enforced by judicial authorities.

Q. You must not eat blood (19:26a)

Verse 26a. **You must not eat blood,**

Jehovah had given this commandment twice previously (see comments on Lev. 7:26-27 in MESSAGE 8 and on Lev. 17:10-16 in MESSAGE 21). In the first passage, the commandment it was given in connection with slaughter-offerings to command the Israelites to show respect for the covering for sins that was symbolized by splattering the blood of fire-offerings around the altar. That passage said that a person who ate blood was to be cut off from his people, that is, put to death. In the second passage, the command was clarified by adding three details: (1) The prohibition included eating animals killed in hunting if their blood was not spilled on the ground. It also included animals killed by another animal and, therefore, not bled. (2) A second reason was given for the command, which

was that life was in the blood and people were to show respect for the marvel of life. (3) If the authorities did not cut off a person who ate blood, God would. On the other hand, if a person ate an animal killed by another animal, he was to be considered unclean. His cleansing required bathing, washing his clothes, and waiting until the evening. In this verse, the commandment was simply repeated in brief to clarify that it was a civil law to be enforced by judicial authorities.

R. You must not practice hydromancy or divination by clouds (19:26b)

Verse 26b. **You must not practice hydromancy, and you must not practice divination by clouds.**

This verse refers to two different kinds of divination or fortune telling. The word translated “practice hydromancy” is used in Genesis 44:5 to describe divination that Joseph practiced by using a silver cup, which seems to indicate that the word refers to divination by studying liquids or dregs in a cup. This form of divination is called “hydromancy.” The word translated “practice divination by clouds” is related to the Hebrew word for “cloud,” which likely indicates that it refers to divination by studying movement of clouds of smoke or incense. However, the word is also similar to the Hebrew word for “eye,” which makes some believe that it referred to “the evil eye,” the power to cast spells by staring with the eyes. Probably neither of the words should be taken in this verse in its narrowest sense. Like words of today that apply to different types of divination, the Hebrew words probably were often interchangeable in everyday practice. Thus, this law probably intended to prohibit the practice of any and all forms of divination. Divination was believed in and practiced by the pagan religions of that day. It was based on the concept that some people can tell fortunes or cast spells through a variety of practices. If such a power exists, it comes from the devil or demons and not from God. It has no place in the life of a Jehovah worshiper. The Israelites were forbidden to become diviners or fortune tellers of any kind.

S. You must not cut your hair or beard in a round shape (19:27)

Verse 27. **And you must not round off the side on your head, and you must not damage the side of your beard.**

Cutting the hair and beard in a round shape seems to have been a practice of one or more of the pagan cults of that day. Its significance to them is not known today, but it was a sign of belief in a false religion. The Israelites were not to practice anything that symbolized false beliefs. This commandment probably was not meant to prevent Israelite men from trimming their hair or beard but to keep them from cutting them in a way that was used in some pagan religions of that time.

T. You must not mark your skin with cuts or tattoos (19:28)

Verse 28. **And you must not put cuttings in your body for the soul, and you must not put tattoo writing on you. I am Jehovah.**

Marking the skin by cutting it to form scars or by tattooing it also were practices of pagan cults of that day. We do not know their precise reasons for doing so, but the words “for the soul” show that some “spirit” significance attached to it. The Israelites were to totally disassociate themselves from such practices to avoid all forms of false belief.

U. You must not cause your daughter to commit fornication (19:29)

Verse 29. **And you must not profane your daughter to cause her to commit fornication so that the Land will not commit fornication and the Land become full of wickedness.**

Almost all English translations make this verse refer to a man’s causing his daughter to become a prostitute, especially a temple prostitute.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> ASV, NASB, and RSV translate “make her a harlot”; HCSB, CJB and LITV, “make her a prostitute”; KJV and MSG, “make her a whore”; CEV, “let your daughter serve as a temple prostitute”; GNB, “making them temple prostitutes.” However, BBE uses “by letting her become a loose woman”

The word actually means “to commit fornication.” Likely the meaning was that a man should not encourage his daughter to participate in sexual rites in a temple or shrine of a fertility cult. She would not have to become a prostitute to participate in such rites. Canaanite cults were notorious for sex rites that were supposed to encourage reproduction of people, animals, and crops. If the Israelites allowed or encouraged their daughters to participate in those fertility rites, soon the land would be filled with people committing fornication simply for lust, and wickedness would abound. This warning is a flat contradiction of the mischievous arguments of ungodly men who say that licensed prostitution would protect society by giving men a sexual outlet, which they would otherwise seek to find in innocent or helpless women and girls. Prostitution does not control sex abuse. It spreads it.

- V. You must protect My sabbaths, and respect My Tabernacle (19:30)

**Verse 30. You must keep My Sabbaths, and you must fear My Holiness. I am Jehovah.**

Israelites were to respect the time and place set aside to worship Jehovah. “Sabbaths” referred to more than just the weekly sabbath. It included all the days set aside for ceasing secular activities to worship God. Observing Jehovah’s sabbaths had been commanded in verse 3 above in connection with respecting parents (see comments on that verse above under the heading My sabbaths). Here it is commanded in connection with respecting The Tabernacle. Respecting times for worship has a vital connection with both. The word translated “Holiness” is a variation of the word used to refer to The Tabernacle in Leviticus 12:4 (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 15 under the heading The Holiness). It describes The Tabernacle as a holy place set aside for Jehovah’s worship. Fearing The Holiness did not mean to stand in terror of it but to stand in awe of it to be sure it was honored and respected. Respect for the sabbaths and for The Tabernacle was to be enforced by civil authority.

- W. You must not consult a practitioner of necromancy or ESP (19:31)

**Verse 31. You must not turn aside to a the necromancers or the practitioners of ESP. You must not seek to become unclean by them. I am Jehovah your God.**

Two other forms of fortune telling are mentioned in this verse. The use of the first term in 1 Sam. 28:7 indicates that it referred to divination by contact with the spirits of the dead, which is called “necromancy.” The second term is related to the word “to know,” indicating that it refers to divination through special intuitive powers or through “extra-sensory perception.” If any information that is received from a practitioner of the occult is true or real, it is received through contact with demons. It does not come from spirits of dead humans or from some mysterious mental telepathy. Information obtained from demons, even if true or partially true, can serve no good purpose. Such practices have no place in the life of Jehovah worshipers. Like the words in verse 26b, these words for divination probably should not be understood in their narrowest possible meaning. They were probably intended to prohibit visiting any type of practitioner in fortune telling or divination. All forms of fortune telling are demonic and dangerous.

The difference in emphasis in this verse from that of verse 26b is that there the Israelites were forbidden to become fortune tellers, whereas in this verse they were forbidden to visit or patronize fortune tellers.

The expression “to be made unclean” uses the word “unclean” in a moral sense. The word usually refers to ceremonial uncleanness; however, ceremonial uncleanness symbolized sin. Therefore, the word easily carried over to refer to sin itself (see comments on Lev. 1e8:24-25 in MESSAGE 22). It is used in that sense in this verse. The uncleanness that resulted from visiting a fortune teller was moral and spiritual uncleanness, of which ceremonial uncleanness was a symbol. Visiting a fortune teller is a sin because it is associating with or conferring with demons. In Israel it was a crime.

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and Douay Version, “make your daughter a common strumpet.”

X. You must respect the aged (19:32)

Verse 32. **You must rise up at the face of a gray head, and you shall honor the face of an aged one, and you shall fear your God. I am Jehovah.**

Respect of the elderly was required of the Israelites by law. The wisdom and experience of the elderly was to be honored and followed. Jehovah did not think that age made people out of date and ignorant. Instead He taught that their years of experience gave them wisdom that was to be honored by all. In like manner, Israelites were to fear God in the sense of honoring and reverencing Him. Respecting the wisdom that comes from years of experience is akin to honoring God.

Y. You must love a sojourner among you as yourself (19:33-34)

Verses 33-34. **33 And when a sojourner sojourns with you in your land, you must not mistreat him.**

**34 The sojourner who sojourns with you shall be to you as a native, and you shall love him as yourself, because [you were] sojourners. I am Jehovah your God.**

Sojourners were people of other nations who had accepted Jehovah and who had become naturalized citizens of Israel (see comments on Lev. 16:29 MESSAGE 20, on Lev. 17:8 in MESSAGE 21; and on Lev. 19:10 above). The Israelites were not to oppress or mistreat such people. Instead, they were to love them as themselves. They were to have the same feelings toward them that they had toward people who were born Israelites. The main element the Israelites had in common was not blood line but faith in Jehovah. So a person who was born of another nation but who accepted Jehovah as His God had the quality that made him one of them.

Jehovah reminded the Israelites that they had been sojourners in Egypt. They knew how it felt to be rejected because of having a different national origin, and they were not to treat their naturalized citizens as they had been treated in Egypt.

Z. You must not use unjust measurements (19:35-36a)

Verses 35-36a. **35 You must not do wrong in judgment, in measurement, in weight, or in quantity.**

**36a You must have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin.**

When Israelites engaged in buying and selling, they were to be honest in measuring the goods they sold and the money they paid. "Judgment" referred to goods sold by estimating the amounts sold or bought. "Weight" and "quantity" referred to the weight and the amount of the goods sold or bought. "Balances" referred to the scales used in weighing both the goods sold and the money paid. In Moses' day, coins were not used, and gold or silver used in payment were weighed on balance scales. "Weights" referred to the discs placed on one side of a balance scale to determine the weight of goods placed on the other side of the scale. "Ephah" referred to a container used to measure the quantity of dry goods sold or bought (see Lev. 5:11 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading But if his hand does not extend to . . . the tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a sin-offering and on Lev. 6:20 in MESSAGE 6 under the heading the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour for a homage-offering. "Hin" referred to a container used to measure the quantity of liquids sold or bought (see comments on Lev. 6:20 in MESSAGE 6 under the heading But if his hand does not extend to . . . the tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a sin-offering and on Lev. 23:1`3 in MESSAGE 31). The Israelites were to use accurate measurements of all kinds in making transactions. Even when amounts were determined by estimation, they were to be honest in their estimates. Dishonest gain in business had no place among Jehovah's people. Dishonesty in business deals was a crime.

AA. The authority behind these laws  
(19:36b-37)

Verses 36b-37. **36b I am Jehovah your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.**

**37 You shall observe all My statutes and all My judgments, and you shall do them. I am Jehovah.**

All the laws set forth in this message were based on the authority of Jehovah their God, who

had brought them out of Egypt. He had the right to ask them to obey because of what He had done for them. He also expected them to obey because He had verbally revealed their civil laws to them. They were to respect and obey those laws because they respected the commands and authority of their God. The words translated “statutes” and “judgments” are the same two words used in 18:4,5 (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 22).

### Application

In New Testament times, Jehovah’s people are not a nation in the same sense that Israel was. We are a called-out people from all nations, ethnic groups, and languages. The way of life outlined for us by Jehovah is not enforced by governmental authority, though governments should base their laws on the principles taught by Jehovah. However, Christians still need an authority to correct them when they go astray. That responsibility belongs to the church. According to the New Testament, churches should exercise some authority in influencing their members to obey the life taught by the Lord. That authority is not one of force but one of moral persuasion and isolation. When directed toward believers, persuasion and isolation have great power and influence. Churches that fail to exert that influence are unfair to their members and unfaithful to God. When members fail to obey God’s laws and churches fail to enforce them, Jehovah makes a judgment and sends a punishment, often both on the offender and on the church. His punishment comes to the disobedient can come in many ways. We are wise if we recognize His hand of punishment and correct our ways.

The principles outlined in this message are valid for people of New Testament times, as well as for the people of ancient Israel. Not all of the laws are appropriate in their exact wording, because they were made to fit the circumstances of that day. However, the moral and spiritual principles involved in all of these laws can and should be applied to our lives today. Even the laws concerning ceremonial observances in verses 5-8; 23-25 have lessons for believers today. The moral and spiritual principles involved in those laws need to be understood and followed by all of us. How those principles apply to Christians has been discussed in connection with most of the laws given in this MESSAGE. Actually the New Testament challenges Christians to follow higher moral standards than Jehovah expected of the Israelites. God’s moral principles are the same in all ages, but Christians have greater understanding of those standards through revelations that came through Jesus. We should follow them more closely than the ancient Israelites did.

Some question whether Christians today are expected to obey literally the command in verse 26a not to eat blood. The New Testament indicates that we are obligated to obey that command, because we are expected to respect life, especially human life, as much or more than the Israelites were (see Lev. 7:26-27 in MESSAGE 8 and Application of that MESSAGE). That obligation for Christians is stated most clearly and directly in Acts 15:28-29.