

ACHREI MOT-KEDOSHIM

FUSION
WITH RABBI JASON



with
Rabbi Jason Sobel

5785 - THE YEAR OF OPEN WINDOWS

TORAH PORTIONS
Parashat Achrei Mot-Kedoshim



THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTIONS

LEVITICUS 16:1-20:27

Parashat Achrei Mot-Kedoshim / פרשת אחרי מות-קדשים

In this weeks guide...

COMMENTARY..... 1

"Holy" can be a four-letter word in some circles. Awful experiences with legalistic, rules-dominant believers have distorted this concept for many people. In some circles, being holy meant not wearing makeup or staying away from movie theaters. While many traditions have moved beyond these errors, confusion often remains. We hope to sort some of that out this week.

NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN..... 2

Jesus has commanded His followers to be perfect. Period. How's that going so far? Well, maybe that's a verse best left alone. OR....maybe we explore the connections between the Sermon on the Mount and this week's *parashot* to discover a pathway to the life God always intended for us!

HEBREW WORD STUDY..... 3

We don't study Scripture merely to get smarter—we want to be transformed by the renewing of our minds! We believe that this week's study has the potential to bring that sort of renewal. Join us as we unpack a deceptively "simple" term and uncover the essence of biblical ethics.

This week features another double Torah portion: *Achrei Mot-Kedoshim*.

At the heart of the human dilemma sits the issue known as "sin." In our contemporary, "enlightened" Western society, sin is either dismissed as an irrelevant idea or an archaic notion used by moralists to control others. But Scripture insists that sin is real, and its wages is death. *Achrei Mot* is Hebrew for "after the death." *Kedoshim* literally means "holy." At first glance, we might be tempted to view these portions as the epitome of "Old Testament" theology or legalism. But a richer, more faithful reading of the text will reveal its essence: God's desire for His people to live together well, to love your neighbor as yourself (which appears in it!). The revered Jewish scholar Hillel the Elder noted the significance of *Kedoshim* when he said, "This is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary"—"Love your fellow as yourself."



Fusion Global

Weekly Torah Portions – *Parashat Achrei Mot-Kedoshim* / פרשת אחרי מות־קדשים | with **Rabbi Jason Sobel**

Staff Contributor

COMMENTARY

People often think of being holy as being concerned with things only pertaining to heaven and not being "wholly" (get it?) involved with things on earth. The Torah does not subscribe to such a description. This week deals with two *parashot*.¹ In our reading, we can see that Moses juxtaposed the holiest of holy activities (in the *Yom Kippur* ritual) in *Parashat Acharei Mot* with the very practical and relational, down-to-earth *Parashat Kedoshim*. God's idea of holiness is both a ministry to and closeness with Him as well as proper human relations.

Though God gave the Torah to the Children of Israel, some of its laws apply to all mankind, a code of holiness for humanity. The Children of Israel's observance of such universal expectations is what would ultimately keep them in the land of Canaan. For instance, the punishment for someone not keeping *Yom Kippur* is their excommunication from the people and destruction (Leviticus 23:29-30); however, negligence to maintain proper relationships leads to being vomited out of the land, just like God did to the seven nations preceding Israel's entry (see Leviticus 20:1-24).

Essentially, being holy is having proper relationships, be it with God or with people. In a sense, one cannot delineate between things of God and things of man: they are inextricably linked. Hence, *Yom Kippur* observance, honoring one's parents, and appropriate sexual relations are all included in these combined *parashot*, and it's intentional.

Would we consider someone genuinely "holy" if they strictly observed *Yom Kippur* yet dishonored their elders while being sexually immoral? Holiness must encompass our engagement vertically **and** horizontally. Of course, some think being a "good" person toward others sufficiently qualifies someone as "holy." This perspective is also insufficient. We cannot separate God from His creation. As Paul wrote, "[All was created through Him and for Him](#)" (Colossians 1:16b). Our love and devotion to God also must translate into loving those who bear His image. As we read, "[If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar. For the one who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen](#)" (1 John 4:20). **Holiness is everything we do.**

There is a trend today for Jews to attend services only on the high holidays and for Christians to attend services on Christmas and Easter (jokingly called "Chreasters"). While this rare participation may be better than none at all, it isn't the essence of holiness. Keep in mind that the Hebrew word for "dedication" (הקדשה/*hakdashah*) comes from the same root as "holy" (קדוש/*kadosh*), meaning our lives are not our own. We can't be committed to God a couple of days out of the year. To use a practical analogy, how can one be married yet only see their spouse a few times a year? It just won't work. And we shouldn't see this call to dedication as controlling. God loves us and deeply desires to be with us. As He fills us with His goodness and tenderness, we, in turn, pour that grace into others. This is holiness. Of course, *Yom Kippur* certainly is a special day, but each day, we know we have been "bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20); therefore, let us devote our lives fully to Him **and** others.

New Testament Tie-In

In His most famous sermon, *Yeshua* made two statements very close together, both of which are connected to this week's readings. In Matthew 5:43-44 the Lord declared, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." And just a few lines down He continued, "Therefore be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (v 48).

That call to "be perfect" harkens back to Leviticus 19:2, which reads, "You shall be *kedoshim*, for I, *ADONAI* your God, am holy." It is interesting that having more or less quoted Leviticus 19:18 about loving your neighbor, *Yeshua* went back to the beginning of that chapter. But while the Torah calls God's people to be "holy" (*kedosh* in Hebrew), the Lord says we must be "perfect" (*teleios* in Greek). Is there a discrepancy? If so, why? And honestly, is this command even realistic?

In Leviticus ("the Law"), we see a call to be holy and love one's neighbor, but in *Yeshua*, we see One greater than the Law. He alone has the authority to "go beyond" the Law and call for the love of not just neighbors, but enemies. Leviticus 19 (rightly, of course!) forbids immoral things: idolatry, theft, deception, and hating your brother in your heart. In other words: don't do sinful things. *Yeshua*, however, did not merely forbid hating our enemies—He insisted we *love* them. This message has no air of prohibition. It is a call to recalibrated and revolutionary relationships.

One could argue that in His Sermon on the Mount, the Lord essentially turned Leviticus 19 on its head. That Torah text begins with a call to holiness that looks like love of neighbor. In His most famous sermon, the Lord starts with the love of enemies and says this leads to our perfection. Perhaps there is something to learn from this contrast. Maybe the Lord is saying that there are new possibilities before us. The Law's required holiness that insisted on loving neighbors has given way to a radically expanded horizon in which loving enemies restores our *teleios*.

It's crucial that we understand this Greek word for "perfect." *Teleios* does not refer to being free of mistakes as much as it does to realizing one's original intention or purpose for being. In this section of *Yeshua's* sermon, *teleios* speaks to living consistently with why God created human beings in the first place: relationship. The Lord is saying that in His Kingdom, we don't wrestle against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:10-12). There are no "enemies" in this sense. There are no "Abels" threatening our value and worth.

That's right, *Yeshua* came to bring us where the Law couldn't: *Eden*. In His Kingdom, Cain doesn't kill his enemy-brother Abel, he "keeps" him because that is his *teleios*, his original purpose. As citizens of His Kingdom, we can love neighbors and enemies alike. We were created for connection, to love as though everyone were a neighbor. This may be why *Ya'akov* (James the brother of *Yeshua*) spoke of the "*perfect (teleios) Torah*" as being "fulfilled" (*teleios*) when you "*love your neighbor as yourself*" (James 1:25; 2:8).

Hebrew Word Study

shamar [שמר] / “to keep”

In Leviticus 19:37, we read, “You must observe all My statutes and all My ordinances—do them. I am *ADONAI*.” One should place this statement in its immediate literary context—more than two chapters brimming with detailed commandments and prohibitions. The laws in those chapters range from well-known (honor your parents, keep the Sabbath, etc.) to unexpected (necromancers and mixed fabrics are strictly *verboten*).

But notice that right in the middle of these two chapters, *ADONAI* insisted (directly!) that the Israelites **must** observe **all** of these statutes. In other words, compliance was not optional, and it was to be exhaustive. So, we should probably take a closer look at the word sandwiched between “must” and “all”: “observe.” This act is what God was expecting of every Israelite, all of the time.

One way to better understand a word’s meaning in the original language is to research how various translators have rendered it. Teams have translated Leviticus 19:37a as,

■ “You must keep all My statutes” (CSB)

■ “Obey all of my rules and laws” (NIRV)

■ “Remember all my laws and rules” (NCV)

Most English translations have opted for either “observe” or “keep” as the best rendering of the Hebrew word, *shamar* (שמר), conjugated here as *shemartem* (שמרתם). As is common in Hebrew, *shamar* has a “triconsonantal root” (comprised of three consonants):

- *Shin* / ש (300)
- *Mem* / מ (40)
- *Raysh* / ר (200)

The LORD made it clear: the only appropriate Israelite response to His commands was *shamar*. That said, English translations of the Hebrew often struggle to convey its depth of meaning. For example, we (hopefully) “observe” the speed limit, meaning that our driving complies with the traffic laws. Yet if we imposed this sense of the word onto *shamar*, we would fall short of God’s desire. Why? Because people can attain *mere compliance* without a fully surrendered heart (e.g., we can drive 55 mph begrudgingly). God was looking for more than intellectual assent to His statutes, but He was also looking for *more* than their technical execution.

Yeshua’s quotation of Isaiah brings this issue into focus. He said, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors Me with their lips but their **heart** is far from Me’” (Mark 7:6 *emphasis added*). The Lord wasn’t suggesting that there’s no value in honoring God observably, but that doing so when our hearts aren’t “in it” is futile. In other words, God expects His people to physically, literally, and observably live out His commands, but to do so as an expression of their surrendered hearts. While some might be tempted to dismiss this week’s Torah portion as “legalistic,” *shamar* reveals that **God’s concern has always involved our hearts**. Hence His promise:

■ “Moreover I will give you a **new heart**. I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the stony heart from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My *Ruach* within you. Then I will cause you to walk in My laws, so you will keep My rulings and do them.” (Ezekiel 36:26-27 *emphasis added*)

FUSION

Rabbi Jason & Fusion Global present
HEBREW WORD STUDY
שמר

שמר / shamar: VB. to keep, preserve; to watch, guard; to obey.

This verb is the second most common way to denote obeying. Whereas שמע (*shama*, “to hear”) derives its meaning from hearing, *shamar* is conceptually based on seeing. Its fundamental meaning is “to watch,” as reflected in uses related to a city watchman (literally, “watcher”; Isa 21:11–12), watching for someone (1 Sam 19:11), or observing nature (Eccl 11:4)...When *shamar* is used of an inferior, it enters the semantic range of obedience: Israel is to **keep** the festivals (Exod 23:15) and Sabbath (Deut 5:12), **obey** commands (Jer 35:18; Ezek 20:19), **observe** love and justice (Hos 12:6), and **follow** the way of righteousness (Prov 2:20). In Deuteronomy “to keep (*shamar*) and do (עשה, *asah*)” God’s commandments is a common refrain (e.g., Deut 4:6), and throughout the OT various words for “commandment” or “law” are the most common objects of *shamar*. In this sense, *shamar* is “to observe closely and act accordingly,” or “to obey.”

taken from the *Lexham Theological Wordbook*

fusionglobal.org

THOUGHTS for REFLECTION

Take some time this week to prayerfully consider and discuss with friends:

- In this week’s Commentary, we read, “Essentially, being holy is having proper relationships, be it with God or with people.” Few aspects of the human experience are as challenging as relationships. How has the Lord used your relationships to develop holiness in you? Is there a relationship in your life that is a source of pain or anxiety? Ask the Lord how He would use that for your good.
- In our efforts to be diligent and faithful in the spiritual life, we can easily fall into the trap of “going through the motions.” As we learned in our Hebrew Word Study, keeping God’s Law is not something we can do on religious autopilot. God is after our hearts (and always has been!). Invite the Holy Spirit to not only examine your heart, but soften it so that you may walk with the Lord in “spirit and truth.”

GLOBAL

NEXT WEEK'S READINGS: *Parashat Emor* / פרשת אמור

TORAH

Sunday / Leviticus 21:1-15

Monday / Leviticus 21:16-22:16

Tuesday / Leviticus 22:17-33

Wednesday / Leviticus 23:1-22

Thursday / Leviticus 23:23-32

Friday / Leviticus 23:33-44

Saturday / Leviticus 24:1-23

Prophetic Reading (*Haftarah*):

Ezekiel 44:15-31

New Covenant Reading:

Matthew 26:59-66

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the Tree of Life Version.

¹ Since the Jewish calendar has 54 annual readings and the secular year only has 52 weeks, we occasionally read two *parashot* in a given week.