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ASPECTS OF HYGIENE IN THE PENTATEUCH

by

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for Ordination

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INTRODUCTION

The Hebrew Bible is a law book and not a medical or health manual. The hygienic sections of the Mosaic code have; however, received a good deal of attention by scholars. The Bible does not offer cures to specific diseases, but it does take the attitude that its teachings, if followed, will result in a good and healthy life. The Biblical writer, for example, did not give hygiene as a reason for circumcision. Circumcision was performed for theological and social reasons. Few scholars would deny that circumcision has hygienic value -- but that was not its purpose in the Hebrew Bible.

There is no evidence that the Biblical writer had any sophisticated medical knowledge. The dietary laws, for example, were a result of certain animal taboos. The pig was thought to be a repulsive animal, not only by the ancient Hebrews, but by other ancient societies as well.

The Bible was, in part, a health manual indicating which steps were to be taken if a particular condition developed. The priest was the professional most involved with the health care of his people. He was, in effect, the health warden and the Bible was his health manual. In the case of leprosy, the priest was given specific instructions as to the proper procedure when leprosy was suspected. The Bible describes sara'at (leprosy) in considerable detail. There is no information concern-

ing a specific cure for the disease; the priest is not portrayed as a physician of any sort. Whenever the disease was feared, either in a human being, or on the walls of a house, or on one's clothes the priest was called in to make a diagnosis. If he thought the condition was, in fact, sara'at, he then took the proper communal steps.

I believe there are three basic reasons for the enactment of the hygienic laws found in the Mosaic code. The first is superstition. The Hebrew Bible makes every attempt to deny that it reflects any fear or even notice of demons. Many centuries of Rabbinic influence have served to bury any evidence of a presence of "demons" in the Bible; however, my examination of other ancient near eastern texts indicates that this is not so. For example, circumcision has been linked to a non-Israelite rite in which a woman circumcises her husband in order to purge his body of the demons that possess him. Clearly the Hebrew Bible does not understand circumcision to be a hygienic measure; this is a much later explanation of the rite.

The second reason for the enactment of the health code is social concerns. Certain practices were forbidden for what appear to be hygienic reasons, but were in fact forbidden for social reasons. The laws of incest are a good example. There is no evidence in the Hebrew Bible that would indicate that there was any knowledge of the genetic mutations that can occur because of an incestuous union. However, the laws of incest do occupy a large

section of the Mosaic code. The reason for these laws was to guarantee proper inheritance and to protect the dignity of men. Certain marriages were forbidden so that the established system of handing down property from one generation to another would not be affected. The laws were also enacted to save a man from the shame of a wife or daughter who might offend him by involving herself in an incestuous relationship.

There is no biological reason to forbid a man from marrying the wife of his uncle. However, the Mosaic law considers such a union to be incestuous just as if a man married his mother's sister. The enactment of these laws was not because of a concern for genetic mutation, but rather to preserve the existence social structure.

The third reason for the enactment of the hygienic laws was religion. An important thrust of the Hebrew Bible is the denial of non-Israelite religions. If the Egyptians or Canaanites utilized a particular animal in a religious rite, it became taboo for the Israelites to use such an animal.

The pig, for example, does not have a significantly different way of fathering its food than do some other creatures which are acceptable according to Biblical law. However, since the pig was highly regarded in Egypt, it became taboo. This same rule applies to the laws of incest. Investigation into ancient Egyptian practices indicates that among Egyptian royalty, it was not uncommon for

brothers and sisters to marry. The Hebrew Bible begins the section on forbidden unions with the words, "After the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do," (Lev. 18:3). Clearly, the Bible wants to be certain that Israelites will not practice Egyptian customs. It was important for the Biblical writer to help establish this new Israelite religion and in order for this to occur, sharp lines had to develop between acceptable Israelite practice and the forbidden practices of the other nations.

Certainly no one reason can be given for the establishment of a particular hygienic law. Some were established for social, religious and superstitious reasons -- some for none of these reasons.

The methodology I used was to examine certain key verses in the Biblical text. The subjects I deal with are found primarily in the book of Leviticus. Often I compared the references in Leviticus with examples of other books of the Hebrew Bible.

In the case of the dietary laws, I attempted to identify certain medical conditions that could result from eating forbidden foods. I found no pattern, since many of the same or similar diseases could be contracted by eating acceptable foods.

I dealt with circumcision and the sabbath since they are often understood to be part of the hygienic code. Although unknown to the Biblical writer, both

have hygienic value. The great number of laws concerning sexual hygiene reflects the subject's importance in the ancient world. I devoted two chapters to this subject; the first deals only with incest and the second with sexual hygiene.

I included a chapter on leprosy because I believe that the disease was of great concern to the Israelites. It is also important to understand the public health system of that society.

As we look back to the period of the Bible, we cannot help but marvel at the apparent sophistication of the Biblical editor. It is sometimes difficult to understand how some hygienic laws developed with such limited medical knowledge. Ultimately it must be remembered that just as there are many medically sound and hygienically valuable laws, there are many for which there are absolutely no medical or scientific explanations.

CHAPTER ONE
CIRCUMCISION

Circumcision was primarily a religious rite with secondary hygienic benefits. As a religious rite it was a sign of maturity and it was considered as an initiation into the tribe. There is a great deal of debate concerning the origins of the procedure. Herodotus (484-424 B.C.E.) asserts that the Hebrews learned circumcision from the Egyptians.¹ Other scholars contend that there is not enough information to reach a conclusion and, that circumcision was practiced by the Hebrews before they came into contact with the Egyptians.² Preuss suggests that the procedure was done in many warm climates. The Mexicans perform circumcision - and they were not influenced by the Egyptians.

References to circumcision are in fact rare in ancient Egypt. In a stela taken from Naga ed-Der, in Middle Egypt, a man wishes to record the fact that he came successfully through the rite. The stela is dated from the early part of the First Intermediate Period (23rd century B.C.):

I was one beloved of his father, favored of his mother, whom his brothers and sisters loved. When I was circumcised, together with one hundred and twenty men, there was none thereof who hit out, there was none thereof who was hit, there was none thereof who scratched, there was none thereof who was scratched. I was a commoner of repute, who lived on his (own) property, plowed with (his own) span of oxen, and sailed in his (own) ship, and not through that which I had found in the possession of my father, the honored Uha.³

Circumcision seems to have been done as a public rite to young men approaching maturity. In a scene found at Sakkarah in the tomb of Ankh-ma-Hor, the circumcision is done by a "mortuary priest" using a flint knife.⁴ The scene depicts the young boy complaining of pain and being afraid. The priest then assures him, "I shall make it heal." The mortuary priest was therefore, responsible for the circumcision, as well as for its healing.

The first mention of circumcision in the Hebrew Bible is found in Genesis 17:10-14. All males were to be circumcised, including, "he that is born in your house and he that is bought with money." This indicates that even non-Israelite slaves were to be circumcised. In Leviticus 12:3, the male child was to be circumcised precisely eight days after birth.⁵ In the case of the Egyptian rite, the child was older as indicated by his ability to question the priest. In the Hebrew Bible, the procedure was done by the father or, in the case of slaves, by the head of the household.

In Exodus 4:24-26, there is an exception to this rule. Moses and his wife and son are returning to Egypt after he has been called by God to the aid of the Hebrew slaves. The narrative explains that while they, "tarried, God met them." At this point, Zipporah, Moses's wife, took a flint knife and cut off the foreskin of her son.

There is some similarity between this rite and

the Egyptian rite. In both cases a flint knife is used and in both cases the circumcision is performed at a time after the designated eight days after birth. It is somewhat unusual that the woman would perform the rite, and that the procedure would take place under such strange circumstances, that is, God wants to kill Moses.

This episode seems to indicate a different origin of circumcision than that stated in Genesis 17. It has been suggested that what in fact happened was that Zipporah, the Midianite, performed the circumcision to indicate that the practice came from the Midianites. In an earlier version of the story Zipporah circumcised Moses on their wedding night in order to purge him of the demon that possessed him. The verse, "surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me," indicates that now she could possess Moses. Inherent in this interpretation is the concept of a demon which has disappeared from the text. Those who reworked the story replaced the demon with the name Yahweh and had Zipporah circumcise her son instead of Moses, her husband.⁶

In Exodus 12:43-44, it is stated that circumcision is necessary for participation in the Passover offering. There is much debate concerning the circumcision of Hebrews while they were in Egypt. Some scholars suggest that only the Levites were circumcised, thus explaining Pharaoh's daughter's recognition of Moses as an Israelite.⁷ Others suggest that the Israelites

were circumcised just before they left Egypt. This does not seem very reasonable since the escape was relatively unexpected and unplanned.

In Joshua 5:5, it is reported that the Israelites who came out of Egypt were circumcised, but all of those who were born in the wilderness were uncircumcised. Joshua had them all circumcised before the celebration of Passover at Gilgal. As did Zipporah, Joshua used a "knife of flint" (zur), (Joshua 5:2-3). It seems likely that some sort of procedure had been established (i.e. the use of the flint knife).

It is important to note that some commentators suggest that Moses did not circumcise his son because he was traveling back to Egypt and he was afraid to perform the rite because of the rigors of the trip.⁸ It is possible that circumcision was not performed while the people were en-route.

In the case of Egyptian circumcision, the priest was more involved in the actual procedure. In the Hebrew Bible there is no indication that the priest was involved in the procedure, nor was he involved in any other aspect of the actual healing. His role was only to assure that the circumcision was performed so that the individual could participate in various religious rites.

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¹Preuss notes that Herodotus is not a faultless historian and, he in fact lived many centuries after the institution of circumcision. Julius Preuss, Biblical and Talmudic Medicine (New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1978), p. 240.

²This position is maintained by Richard Andree in his work, Arch. fur Anthropologie, Vol. 13, 1881, and by Julius Preuss in his book, Biblical and Talmudic Medicine.

³Ancient Near Eastern Texts, ed. James B. Pritchard, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 326.

⁴Ibid.

⁵The complete text of Lev. 12:3 is: "And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised."

⁶The Interpreters Bible, ed. George A. Buttrick, (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1952), p. Vol. I, p. 882.

⁷Preuss, Biblical and Talmudic Medicine, p. 241.

⁸"R. Jose said, God forbid that Moses should have been apathetic towards circumcision, but he reasoned thus: 'If I circumcise (my son) and (straightway) go forth (on my mission to Pharaoh) I will endanger his life.'" The Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 31b

CHAPTER TWO
SABBATH

The sabbath receives considerable attention in the Hebrew Bible. In all four decalogues, the sabbath figures prominently in Israel's established religion. The sabbath, like circumcision is referred to as, "an eternal covenant" and "an eternal sign". (Ezekial 21:12, Exodus 31:13, 16, 17; Genesis 17:7, 13). The same punishment for failing to circumcise one's son applies to one who fails to observe the sabbath.¹

In 1875 George Smith published The Assyrian Eponym Canon. In it he contended that the sabbath was observed by the Assyrians.² The first 28 days of every month were divided into four weeks of seven days each. The 7'th, 14'th, 21'st and 28'th days were sabbaths. Smith contended that there was a general prohibition of work on those days.

In 1878, Wellhausen published his Prolegomenon to the History of Israel.³ He stated that the sabbath was known in Babylonia and had been brought to Israel early in Israel's history. In 1883, Wilhelm Lotz claimed that the Babylonian sabattu was the source of the Biblical sabbath.⁴

Certain other scholars, specifically N.H. Tur-Sinai suggested that the sabbath was not imported from Babylonia, but rather was a unique Israelite development.⁵

The notion of shabbat in the Hebrew Bible was intimately involved with the worship of the Deity. It was a day which "belonged to God" (Ex. 16:25), a "sacred day to God" (Ex. 16:23), and, in fact in Ezekial and Isaiah it

is referred to as, "My sabbaths" (Ez. 20:12; 16:20; Is. 56:4).

The Bible gives little information concerning the actual observance of the day. Agricultural labor was definitely forbidden even during the plowing time and during the harvest (Ex. 34:21; Neh 13:15). From Amos it is clear that trading was prohibited (Amos 8:5) and from Isaiah (58:13), pursuing or talking about one's business was prohibited. Jeremiah stresses the prohibition against bearing burdens and bringing them in by the gates of Jerusalem, and carrying burdens out of houses, (Jer. 17:22-27).

Initially, the sabbath was probably a "day off" when all work stopped.⁶ As time went on, the day took on a unique cultic character. The observance of shabbat became much more involved with religious ritual and its initial reason for being became secondary in importance. Although it is most likely that over-work was a serious problem in the ancient world, there is no evidence that a sabbath was specifically devised to relieve this problem. Most likely the social and economic situation necessitated the institution of such a day. In some cultures one day a week was used as a market day in which farm produce was brought to the market. Often religious rites became a part of the day since it was a time in which groups gathered in one central location.

Perhaps the clearest understanding of the sabbath

and its relationship to social and psychological concerns comes in the Deuteronomy reference, (Dt. 5:14-15).⁷ This reference to the day of rest is without any cultic overlay. The commandment is seen as having serious humanitarian and social concerns. The mention of "your ox and your ass" indicates that the respite was for the beasts of burden as well. In fact, the entire household, Hebrew and non-Hebrew, was implored to rest.

To give the sabbath even greater validity, Exodus 20:9-11 justifies the day theologically. God, Himself, who created the world in six days, rested on the seventh day. Just as God rests -- so should Israel.

Scholars have attempted to prove that one day in seven is most adequately suited to the normal operating capacity of the human body.⁸ Although this seems to be true -- it is most difficult to prove scientifically. Other cultures have tried to change this ratio but have met with little success. Unless there is a respite from the normal work day routine, the human body will break down. The observance of a sabbath determines the physical and spiritual health of the individual and the Hebrew Bible seems to have been sensitive to this notion. The sabbath is a unique notion in the area of health preservation and there is no doubt of its necessity and worth.

As has been indicated the sabbath took on such a great theological and cultic character it tended to eclipse the hygienic value and importance of the day.

Unlike other hygienic measures, the observance of the sabbath was not as much controlled by the Priest as were others (such as ritual purity). The Priest was involved in the special sacrifices for the sabbath day. He was aware of Yahweh's involvement in all aspects of the life of the community and since the non-observance the sabbath would result in God's anger (Nu. 15:32-35), the priest had to guard against this.

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¹According to Genesis 17:14, "One who is not circumcised shall be cut off from his people." In Exodus 31:14 the text says, "You shall keep my sabbaths, therefore, for it is holy unto you; every one that profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whosoever does any work therein that person shall be cut off from among his people." There are many similarities between the sabbath and circumcision including the fact that they are both referred to as a, "sign between Me (God) and you."

²Mayer Gruber, The Source of the Biblical Sabbath, Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University, vol. 1, no. 2, (New York: Columbia University, 1969) p. 14.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 15.

⁶Niels-Erik A. Andeasen, The Old Testament Sabbath, (Montana: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972) p. 123.

⁷"... but the seventh day is a sabbath unto the Lord thy God, in it thou shalt not do any manner of work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy man-servant and thy maid'servant may rest as well as thou. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God brought thee out thence by a might hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day." Deuteronomy 5:14-15.

⁸Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1972 ed. "Sabbath", by Abram Kanof.

CHAPTER THREE

FOOD

In the Hebrew Bible, uncleanness resulted from contamination with physical, ritual or moral impurity. The biblical system developed from a fear of contact with those things that were displeasing to the gods -- things that belonged to the sphere of the demonic.¹

Since food was taken into the body, it was a potential source of uncleanness. Food taboos were an early source for purity legislation.

In ancient Egypt, certain animals were devoted to a specific use and were therefore forbidden for other purposes. In an Egyptian coffin text, of the Middle Kingdom, there is a mythological explanation of a taboo against eating pork. The text speaks of a conflict between Horus and Seth. They fought over the issue of heavenly rule. Horus's eyes, which were the two heavenly luminaries, were damaged. The mark of Horus's injury looked like a pig and as the text relates:

That is how the pig became an abomination to the Gods, as well as their followers, for Horus' sake.²

In other Egyptian references, King Sesostris I (c. 1972-1928 B.C.) chose an official to care for the king's farms and named him, "Over-seer of Swine."³ There are also pictures from tombs of the 18'th Dynasty (c. 1567-1320 B.C.) at Thebes, which show pigs being driven over fields of newly planted wheat, in order to stamp the seeds into the ground.⁴ King Amenophis III (c. 1417-1379 B.C.) gave one thousand pigs and one thousand hogs to

the Temple of Ptah at Memphis.⁵ All of this indicates the importance of pigs in Egyptian life.

In the Hebrew Bible, from the earliest references to food, man was permitted to eat any vegetation:

Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed -- to you it shall be for food." (Genesis 1:29-30)

Immediately following the flood, meat was permitted. The only restriction was in regard to eating blood, (Gen. 9:3-4, Lev. 17:14-15, Deut. 12:16).

There is a distinction made between clean and unclean animals prior to the revelation (Gen. 7:2, 8, 8:20) however, there is no indication that this differentiation had anything to do with consumption, since the eating of meat did not begin, according to the text, until after the flood.⁶

The most scientific of classification systems can be found in the Mosaic code. Whereas other cultures tended to adjust their diets according to the dictates of tradition, Israel had a clearly established system for determining whether certain foods were "clean" or "unclean."⁷

Some scholars suggest that this classification system evolved from a primitive system of taboos.⁸ In certain ancient cultures, various animals were used as part of their cultic system of worship. The Hebrews enactment of certain forbidden foods is possibly the result of a reaction to this foreign worship. It must

be remembered; however, that the Mosaic code is so systematic and explicit, that this explanation cannot completely cover all of the allowable or forbidden foods.

The most elementary rule stated in the Hebrew Bible is that only those animals which chewed their cud and parted the hoof were suitable. These animals were all strictly vegetarian, which seemed to be in keeping with the ideal, established by the Hebrew Bible in Genesis. The most desirable state for humans is vegetarianism, but after the Flood, meat was allowed, but only meat of those animals which were themselves vegetarian.

There could be no blood on the flesh of the animals that were eaten -- it had to be completely washed away. Also, any animal that died of natural causes could not be eaten. It had to have been slaughtered while in good health (Deut. 14:21).

Only fish with scales and fins were permitted. Crustaceans, which are scavengers, were forbidden.

Any predatory, aquatic or ravenous fowl were forbidden (Lev. 11:13-19) and any insects, except for locust, were also forbidden.

The Torah gives no reasons for these dietary laws. In regard to scholarly work, nothing of a definitive nature has emerged. Some scholars do, however, suggest that there is some definite hygienic value to the law, as well as a humanitarian concern.⁹

The eating of pork does not fall in the same cate-

gory as other Biblical forbidden meats. The earliest historical records of pork avoidance are somewhat unclear. Some scholars believe it was the Hebrews who initiated the ban on pork because of the animal's association with alien gods.¹⁰ Others indicated that the rejection dates back to the Babylonia captivity -- when the Babylonian masters sacrificed and ate pigs.¹¹

Generally there are three reasons cited for pork avoidance; they are:

1. the rapid decay of the meat because of high temperatures in the region,
2. the pig is a scavenger and eats all kinds of unclean food,
3. and fear of trichinosis.

The first reason is totally without support, since the temperatures in Israel are no higher than in other areas where pork is eaten. In other cultures, where this issue of temperature does create a problem, the animal is eaten completely, at one feast.

The second reason is also doubtful. Pigs are, in fact, scavengers, but so are chickens. Chickens are no more selective in their choice of food than pigs. Also, in regard to the cleanliness of the animal itself, water buffaloes are really no cleaner than pigs (since they wallow in mud) and yet they are not affected by the same Biblical injunction.

Many scholars (Preuss, R.K. Harrison) believe that it was the fear of contracting trichinosis which led the Israelites to ban pork. This probably is not correct, since no one knew about *Trichinella spiralis*, the micro-organism which causes trichinosis, until 1835.

Although it is likely that the editor of the Bible knew about the specific diseases caused by pork consumption, these diseases are known today. It is possible that certain symptoms might have been associated with pork consumption, yet the Hebrew Bible's ban on pork was most likely inspired by non-Israelites' use of the animal in cultic rites.

In recent years, it was found that the flesh of the pig can easily become the host for several parasitic organisms of differing degrees of severity. The organism, *Trichinella spiralis* survives in partially or improperly cooked pork. Once the organism reaches the human body, it settles and grows in the intestine. As the organism grows, it produces great numbers of larvae, which then travel to the muscles where they become encapsulated. The symptoms of the disease are: malaise, fever and edema (accumulation of fluid) of the face and legs.

It is certainly possible that these symptoms were recognized as having some relationship with each other; however, it is unlikely that the medical techniques of ancient Israel were so sophisticated that pigs and trichinosis were associated with each other. Generally the effect of trichinosis takes several days to develop -- and most likely, the pork was not recognized as the

cause. Also, trichinosis has the same symptoms as many other diseases. The only way to definitively determine whether one has been affected is through a blood test (to determine if there is an increase in the number of Eosinophiles) a procedure not available in the Ancient world. There are other reasons why the Hebrew Bible's ban on pork was probably not health related. The Bible forbids more than thirty other kinds of animals, many for which hygienic explanations are completely inapplicable. Also, the Bible does not say that one must simply not eat pork, but one must avoid it altogether. The Bible indicates that the pig itself has a defiling nature.

More common than trichinosis is the infestation of tapeworm. The pig becomes the intermediate host for a parasitic worm called *Taenia solium*, which can grow to ten feet in length. Man becomes the final host and the worm develops from *systicercus cellulosae*, which is a parasite found in raw and improperly cooked pork. The disease in its advanced stages causes nodules to form in the brain or the skeletal muscles which result in epileptic like symptoms. The pig is also the intermediate host for *Echinococcus granulosus*, a species of small tapeworm. If this tapeworm reaches man, it can cause tumors on the liver, lungs, and other organs.

Pigs, as well as rodents, can also convey toxoplasmosis, an infection in which micro-organisms invade human tissues and may seriously damage the

central nervous system. Animals get the disease through eating the flesh of other mammals with the disease. This disease is much more common among people who have had trichinosis. The micro-organism, toxoplasma, when it enters the body is found in the form of a cyst, known as the pseudocyst. This organism can be destroyed only by intense heat, so the uneven cooking of meat from animals with toxoplasma allows the disease to enter the human body. The action of gastric juices, which is able to destroy some bacteria has no affect on toxoplasma.

Although the Biblical text does not indicate how long a piece of acceptable meat should be cooked, it does make very clear that "blood" which is seen as being "life," is forbidden. In Leviticus 17:14, the text reads, "The life of all flesh is its blood." In Deuteronomy 12:23, the text reads, "the blood is the life; and you should not eat the life with the flesh." Although both verses clearly refer to the prohibition against eating something live, Genesis 9:4 is even more direct, "only flesh with life in it, which is its blood, shall you not eat." The Biblical writer could not see the various micro-organisms that could survive within the bodies of four legged creatures, however, the fear of eating anything live (i.e. with blood) most likely caused the Israelites to cook acceptable meats long enough to, in a sense, "cook the life out of them." Undercooking meat allows certain micro-organisms to survive.

Cattle can also be the intermediate host for the

tapeworm *Taenia saginata*, which affects man if he eats beef that has been under-cooked. The tapeworm that results can grow up to 20 feet in length.

Tularemia, a disease that is generally transmitted by *Chrysops discalis*, a small fly, can also be transmitted through contact with an animal which has been infected with the disease.

Carleton Coon, an anthropologist, suggests that the ban on pork has nothing to do with hygiene, but rather is a result of population increase and environmental deterioration.¹² He claims that at an early period the pig was an important part of the regional economy. As time went on, however, the acorns, beachnuts and truffles which had been the food-source for the animals were depleted. As the population of the region grew, the pigs could only survive by eating food that was intended for human consumption. As this upset the economy even more, pigs were finally displaced.

Other scholars suggest, that the pig is simply not suited for the pastoral way of life and therefore is sometimes associated with non-pastoral peoples. This leads to an association of the pig with a foreign nation, and ultimately to the complete rejection of the pig.¹³

Since there was no refrigeration in the ancient world, prophylactic considerations were basic to the Biblical law (Lev. 11:31-38). The Bible is ultimately aware of contamination through physical contact. In

Lev. 11:31, the text forbids even touching a dead reptile. The text even establishes a time period (until evening) during which the individual himself is considered unclean.

Whether through physical contact or ingestion, the Bible is clear about acceptable and forbidden foods. There were perhaps, some hygienic concerns, but for the most part, the Biblical prohibitions seem to reflect ancient taboos. By taking something into the body, or even coming into physical contact with it, the demons that exist in it can be transferred to the individual.

NOTES

CHAPTER THREE

¹George Arthus Buttrick, ed., The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 4 vols., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962) 1:645.

²Ancient Near Eastern Texts, ed. James B. Pritchard, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 10.

³Frederick J. Simoons, Eat Not This Flesh, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961) p. 15.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶"Every moving thing that liveth shall be for food for you; as the green herb have I given you all."
Genesis 9:3.

⁷The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 2:543.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Simoons, Eat Not This Flesh, p. 36.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid, p. 40.

¹³Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR
LEPROSY

Leprosy, which is a chronic infectious disease, found only in human beings, is produced by the leprosy bacillus, *Mycobacterium leprae*. The bacteria is most active in the skin, the mucous membrane of the nose, the lymph nodes, and the peripheral nerves. The pathological organisms were first discovered in 1868, by Gerhard Henrik Armauer Hansen. The disease is sometimes referred to as Hansen's disease.

Leprosy is relatively easy to identify because of its unique nature. In Ancient times, because the disease is so dramatic, it was identified in great detail.¹ Contemporary archeological investigation allows relatively simple identification of leprosy since the disease results in lesions in the bones.

Certain translations of the Ebers Papyrus indicate that leprosy was known in the 16th century B.C. Egypt.² Later work on the document reveals that this was probably not leprosy, but rather Uchedu and Chon's swelling. In the early 1900's, a Nubian mummy was found in Egypt. Some Archeologists contended that this mummy, which definitely showed signs of leprosy proved that leprosy existed in 16th century B.C. Egypt. Radiological examinations of mummies from the Twenty-first Dynasty to Roman times show no evidence of leprosy. The only proven cases of leprosy come from post-Biblical times.

The word "lepra" used in Greek, Roman and Byzantine times does not refer to the disease we now know as leprosy,

but rather the word used is the Greek elephas. In most translations of the Hebrew Bible, the Hebrew sara'at is rendered "leprosy." There has been some debate as to whether sara'at is really Hansen's disease or rather some other affliction of the skin.³

According to the Encyclopedia Judaica (Michman 1972), "the Hebrew biblical term for leprosy, sara'at, is not limited to true leprosy." Many other scholars contend that sara'at cannot be identified as modern leprosy.⁴

In 1938, Lie, a Norwegian leprologist examined the Biblical descriptions of the disease in detail. He concluded that there was no absolute proof that leprosy existed among the ancient Hebrews.⁵

In 1963, R.G. Cochrane, in his book, Biblical Leprosy: A Suggested Interpretation, indicated that the Biblical descriptions of the disease indicate that it cannot be leprosy.⁶ He contends that leprosy lesions are never white and that leprosy of the scalp never occurs; however, Leviticus 13:4 states that, "if the bright spot be white in the skin of his flesh . . . then the priest shall isolate him that has the plague for seven days." In Leviticus 13:29, the text reads, "and when a man or woman has a plague upon the head or upon the beard." Both references describe a disease that cannot be leprosy. There is, therefore, conclusive evidence that Biblical sara'at is not modern leprosy.

The text does not indicate that the disease is

fatal, but rather that it causes the individual to become "unclean." In Numbers 5:1-4, sara'at is given as one of the three reasons for keeping an individual away from the camp.⁷

The three clearest descriptions of the disease are found in Exodus 4:6, Numbers 12:10, and II Kings 5:27.⁸ These are the only references which give specific information as to the appearance of the disease. In each case, the disease appears as white as "snow." Most likely, the description refers to the flakiness of snow rather than its color. In many skin diseases the outer layer of the skin dies and is continually renewed. When there is some form of skin disease, this process occurs much more quickly and, in fact, the skin tends to flake off, thus giving the appearance of snow flakes. Often when the skin flakes fall off the body, they either fall to the ground or upon the clothes, thus giving the effect of snow falling.

The term sara'at is generally used as an all inclusive term.⁹ In fact, sometimes the term refers to a form of leprosy that does not even occur in humans. In Leviticus 13:47-59, it is stated that leprosy can occur in clothes, and in Leviticus 14:33-53, the disease is said to occur on the walls of houses. Some scholars suggest that the leprosy found on clothes implied a contamination of those clothes worn by the infected individual.¹⁰ The term however, does not really substantiate this, as it states, "when the plague of sara'at is in a garment,"

(Lev. 13:47) and, "if the plague spread into the garment the plague is a malignant leprosy," (Lev. 13:51). One would further expect that if the garment was defiled by contact that the text would say something to this effect, and it does not.

It has been suggested that the leprosy of the walls is nothing more than a nitrous crust that develops on newly plastered walls and that because sara'at was such a feared disease in individuals that even the appearance of such a disease was cause for concern.¹¹ This also, is not in keeping with the apparent intent of the text. The text clearly states that if the walls appear to be leprous than they shall be declared unclean by the priest. Most likely, the crust on the walls was probably a parasitic invasion of vegetable mold or the eggs of insects which appeared to be leprosy, but obviously could not be Hansen's disease.

The procedure for ridding the house of sara'at is a very good way to get rid of any dry rot or mold. First the priest was called to examine the house. If the walls were greenish and reddish, then the priest asked the occupants to empty the house of all their possessions, lest they become unclean. The priest closed up the house -- in a sense quarantined the house for seven days. If after seven days the house was inspected and found to be free of the plague, then the priest declared the house to be clean. If however, after seven days, the priest in-

spected the house and found that the green and red infection had spread then he had to order the infected stones be thrown away. If the plague persisted then there was a scraping of the walls. And finally, if the problem could not be eradicated, then the house had to be destroyed.

The leprosy of the clothing was only found in clothing made of wool, linen or any animal skin. This contagion of garments is described in much the same way as the sara'at in buildings. The garment was to be first washed, and if the spot lost some of its green and red color, then it could be cut out of the garment and the garment could be kept. If however, the infection spread or if it was not affected by the washing, then it had to be burned.

It is virtually impossible to determine what this leprous condition in clothes might really be. It is possible that it, like the condition on walls could be a result of dampness or perhaps even some form of mold that forms on clothing. Whatever it may have been, it is clearly not Hansen's disease.

The primary description of Biblical leprosy is a snow-like lesion with under-lying redness. Leviticus 13 gives the priest further clinical details so that each potential case can be correctly identified. Between seven and fourteen days is the test period established in order to determine whether or not the condition is in

fact sara'at. Sara'at was not a transient condition, so the seven to fourteen days prevented the priest from incorrectly identifying the disease as scarlet fever or some other acute skin condition that was not sara'at. The peeling of skin which follows scarlet fever, was not an uncommon affliction during ancient times, and after fourteen days the condition clears up.

Sara'at was a patchy condition (vv. 2, 10, 19, 24, 42). The text clearly states that if there was a condition that appeared to be sara'at but it completely covered the body, then it was not sara'at (vv. 12 and 13). So there were some checks to prevent an incorrect diagnosis.

Some scholars suggest that Biblical leprosy was leukoderma.¹² Leukoderma is a disfiguring condition in which normal patches of skin lose their pigment and become completely white. This diagnosis is probably incorrect. Sara'at is in fact described as a whiteness of the skin, however there is always some other description of the skin given, other than color.

In verse 38, this whiteness is described as being bohak, which is definitely not sara'at since the individual is declared clean, whereas whenever there is a positive diagnosis of sara'at the individual is found to be unclean. This disease is very common in tropical and subtropical climates and generally begins as a small depigmented spot. These spots tend to spread and then coalesce, and the hair of the skin may grow white. The

individual's overall health is generally not impaired, however, recovery from leukoderma is unlikely. The placement of this section on bohak, between two sections that deal primarily with baldness, suggest that this is possibly out of sequence, or it might even have originated in an entirely different set of rules.

Leukoderma is a highly noticable affliction, especially among dark pigmented people. This probably accounts for the individual being brought to the priest.

It has definitely been established that Biblical sara'at is not leprosy. There are, however, a number of diseases it could be. They are psoriasis, seborrhoeic dermatitis, fungus infections of the skin particularly favus, patchy eczema and pityriasis rosea.

The most viable possibilities are psoriasis and favus. According to modern medical descriptions of psoriasis, it could easily be called sara'at,¹³ The seriousness of the disease can vary from one patient to another. The overall health of the individual is really not affected by the disease, which can come and go quite frequently. It is also possible that the disease may never clear up, thus according to the Biblical law, leading to a lifetime of isolation. The Biblical fear of contamination from sara'a' would be unwarranted, if in fact the disease is psoriasis. Psoriasis is in no way infectious and the community need not worry about catching the disease. The rules declaring those afflicted

with the disease would therefore be totally unnecessary from a medical point of view.

Studies conducted indicate that inhabitants of warm climates are less likely to get the disease than inhabitants of temperate climates. Also, people with pigmented skin, that is darker skinned people, tend to have less incidences of the disease.¹⁴

In a study done in 1947, it was shown that Jews from Europe (Ashkenazim) have higher rates of psoriasis per capita than do Sephardim (Oriental Jews).¹⁵ The same study also indicated that some Jews who moved from Europe to Israel, and who were suffering from psoriasis tended to have less symptoms in Israel. This would tend to lend support to the case that sara'at was psoriasis since generally less than 2% of the population suffers from the disease, and in a warm climate even less. Therefore, the need to isolate those who suffered from the disease would tend not to have much of an effect on the community.

Psoriasis is not a particularly difficult disease to recognize and most likely priests who were trained, although not medically, would not have too much trouble diagnosing the disease.

J.T. Ingram in an article in the "British Journal of Dermatology" described psoriasis in this way: "to leave a trail of silver scale about the house and blood-stains on the sheets and to fear public gaze--this is a cruel

fate." 16

It is certainly not difficult to understand why the Hebrew Bible felt it necessary to isolate the sufferer of sara'at. The regulations concerning cleanliness and uncleanness really have nothing to do with physical cleanliness, but rather with cultic cleanliness. They might have had a secondary purpose of preventing the spreading of infectious diseases; however, they were really instituted for the protection of the cult. After the destruction of the second Temple these regulations were discontinued, so it is most likely that they had no real health value. The regulations relating to cultic cleanliness might have had a purpose based on aesthetics. Generally any kind of bodily discharges were regarded as offensive and since there can be an oozing of the skin with sara'at, and a loss of dead white skin, this too is viewed as a discharge, thus rendering the patient ritually unclean.

Netek, the disease of the head and scalp is described in Lev. 13: 29-37, 40-46. There is no mention of whiteness and the hair is specifically said to be yellow in color. This is probably favus. Favus is an infectious disease which, unlike psoriasis, can be transmitted from one person to another. This disease is most commonly found in the hairy parts of the body and in fact, tends to turn the hair a yellowish color, which causes the hair to look like hay. Favus tends to

affect a deeper level of the skin, which is in fact what is stated in Lev. 13:30; "if its appearance is deeper than the skin, and there is a yellow thin hair in it then the priest shall pronounce him unclean, it is a dry scale (an eruption of the skin) it is leprosy of the head or of the beard." The disease also tends to damage the hair follicles and therefore causes a thinning of the hair. The Bible differentiates between netek and sara'at. In Lev 14:54, netek is referred to as an almost completely separate entity. The text reads, "this is the law for all manner of plagues of leprosy (sara'at) and for favus (netek).". This is an indication that Biblical leprosy (sara'at) could possibly have been seen as a general category, with netek being a sub-category.

As indicated earlier, the Bible is not a medical text book. Chapter thirteen of Leviticus is certainly no exception to this rule. It is rather a chapter of the general Mosaic health code, giving the people and the priests instructions in handling this unique skin condition. The major emphasis of the chapter is the recognition of the condition and distinguishing it from other maladies.

Leviticus 13 is predominately a directive to the priests indicating how they should handle the disease. Ultimately he must make the final decision as to the diagnosis of the disease. The priest was in no way involved with healing, but rather with preserving the health of the non-infected populus. If the disease was suspected,

but the priest could not be sure, he would order a seven day quarantine (Lev. 13:4). At the end of this period, the priest would examine the individual again, and if the disease did not worsen, then the priest would isolate him for seven more days. After this second week, if the disease began to go away, the person was pronounced healed. The priest would not intervene on behalf of the patient. God alone was responsible for healing, the priest simply acted as His health warden.

The priest was called to examine the patient, or his house or clothes whenever the disease was suspected. A somewhat detailed description can be found in Lev. 13. Leviticus 14 deals with the procedure once the leper has been cured. The text does not indicate in any way a treatment or cure for sara'at. The Hebrew bible is simply a guide for the health warden, that is, the priest.

The procedure for the cleansing ceremony of the healed leper can be divided into two parts. The first part is the seven day seclusion or quarantine. The second part is quite extensive. This is the part where the healed leper must shave all of his hair from his head, "and his beard and his eyebrow, even all his hair shall he shave off, and he shall wash his clothes and he shall bathe his flesh in water and he shall be clean" (Lev. 14:9). After this, the leper may return to his camp, but not to his tent. He was also brought (he did not go on his own) to the priest.

This cleansing and shaving procedure was not seen as a cure for leprosy -- but rather more of a ritual purification. There is however, one seeming exception to this. In II Kings 5:10, Elisha the prophet urges a Syrian general, afflicted with leprosy, to wash himself seven times in the Jordan river. He says that after this, "your flesh will come back to you and you will be clean." This was probably not intended to imply that this was a cure for leprosy in a physical sense, since it is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible.

The elaborate ritual for the healed leper involves a series of offerings to the Temple. This ritual involves sheep, oil, or if the leper is poor, a bird and oil. This procedure is probably based on the ancient Near Eastern custom of banishment of evil by carriers.¹⁷ In Lev. 14:6-7, the healed leper is told to take two living birds, kill one of them and, "as for the living bird, he shall take it and the cedar wood, and the scarlet and the hyssop and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water. And he shall sprinkle upon them that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times and shall pronounce him clean." The process of this ritual is to exorcise the demonic disease, "and banish it to a place of no return, e.g. the desert or the open country."¹⁸ This Levitical procedure is most likely based on the purification rites of other Near Eastern cultures.

Even after being restored to the community and his household, the leper must be purified before God. This ritual which is on the eighth day involves sacrifices at the Temple. There is a purification offering, which cleanses the leper himself. There is then a whole offering and a meal offering which the leper offers up for the sin he might have committed, which could have caused the leprosy in the first place. It is important to note that no where in the Bible is leprosy referred to as a sin. The leper was in fact, ceremonially unclean, but not necessarily sinful. The healing of the leper requires an elaborate ceremonial procedure since this healing occurs because of Yahweh's grace.

NOTES

CHAPTER FOUR

¹E.V. Hulse, "The Nature of Biblical 'Leprosy' and the Use of Alternative Medical Terms in Modern Translations of the Bible," Palestinian Exploration Quarterly, 107 (75) p. 87.

²Ibid., p. 88.

³Ibid., p. 80.

⁴Ibid., p. 91.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷The other two reasons for keeping a person out of the camp according to Deuteronomy 5:1-4 are, "everyone having a discharge and everyone that is unclean through contact with the dead."

⁸Exodus 4:6, "Again, the Lord said to him, 'Put your hand into your bosom.' And he put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, as white as snow."

Numbers 12:10, "and when the cloud removed from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. And Aaron turned towards Miriam, and behold, she was leprous."

II Kings 5:27, "'Therefore the leprosy of Na'aman shall cleave to you and to your descendants for ever.' So he went out from his presence a leper, as white as snow."

⁹Hulse, "The Nature of Biblical 'Leprosy' and the Use of Alternative Medical Terms in Modern Translations of the Bible," p. 94.

¹⁰G.R. Driver, "Leprosy," Dictionary of the Bible, 2nd edition, ed. F.C. Grant and H.H. Rowley (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1963), p. 576.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Hulse, "The Nature of Biblical 'Leprosy' and the Use of Alternative Medical Terms in Modern Translations of the Bible," p. 95.

¹³G.R. Driver, "Leprosy," p. 576.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Hulse, "The Nature of Biblical 'Leprosy and the Use of Alternative Medical Terms in Modern Translations of the Bible," p. 100.

CHAPTER FIVE

INCEST

The laws of incest are given a great deal of attention in the Hebrew Bible. There does not seem to be any awareness of the genetic mutations that can result from an incestuous relationship; however, because they fall under the rubric of hygienic concerns, I shall deal with them here.

The ancient Hebrews saw the family as the most basic unit of society. God created the first man and woman and all people descended from them. In Genesis, the names used for the first man and his grandson are Adam and Enosh, respectively. Each word means "man."

The typical Biblical family consisted of a male head, his wife or wives, his sons and their wives and children, and his unmarried daughters. This sort of family structure is referred to as an "extended family." In an extended family the choice of a wife for the sons was an extremely important function of the "head." In the earlier books of the Hebrew Bible this process of choosing an appropriate wife is given considerably more attention than are laws concerning sexual behaviour.

Most every cultural group has had a set of rules prohibiting incest; however, determining what constitutes incest differs from one group to another.¹ The laws are generally vigorously enforced, often with the death penalty.

The ancient Hebrews believed the maternal relationship was natural, while the paternal relationship was legal. A mother is a mother simply by having a baby;

the father however, must be legally bound to the mother in order for the child to be considered his. The maternal relationship therefore, was considered to be closer than the paternal relationship. This is also supported by the fact that polygamy among ancient Hebrews was permitted and so it was not uncommon for a man with many wives to have many sets of children. The children were bound by their respective mothers rather than their mutual father.

Biblical families were basically endogamous; that is, where ever possible they attempted to marry close relatives. The laws of forbidden marriages are found primarily in chapter 18 of the book of Leviticus. The list begins, "After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein you lived, you shall not do." The specific list continues with the following prohibitions:

- a. the wife of one's father, whether it is the real mother or the stepmother; whether the father's marriage is still in existence, or after the death of the father or dissolution of matrimony by divorce;
- b. one's sister, whether a full sister or a half sister,
- c. one's granddaughter,
- d. the sister of one's father or mother (aunt),
- e. one's brother's wife
- f. one's daughter-in-law,
- g. one's mother-in-law as well as the stepmother of one's wife.

The Bible says nothing specifically about first order blood relatives. Perhaps this was seen as being unnecessary, given the environment in which the laws were established.² Mentioning the prohibition against relations with one's daughter would have been superfluous.

According to some scholars, blood ties were secondary to tribal concepts of kinship in the earlier days.³ However in the Levitical code, "flesh kinship" (she'er basar) is said to be the primary reason for the laws against incest. In Leviticus 18:6, the text begins, "None of you shall approach any one near of kin to him to uncover nakedness. I am the Lord." The chapter continues to list all of the forbidden relationships. In Leviticus 18:9, this prohibition is restated and the expression, "whether born at home or abroad" is added. This most likely refers to a half sister who might be part of another family unit or a child who is born out of wedlock. The principle of "flesh-kinship" extends the line of permitted relationships to people outside of the immediate family.

According to the narratives in Genesis endogamy was essential. Following Adam, and again after Noah, marriage between siblings and first cousins was essential. Following Adam, and again after Noah, marriage between siblings and first cousins was essential. In ancient Egypt, according to some sources, Pharaohs married their sister and half-sisters.⁴ Abraham and his wife

Sarah were half-siblings. Both had the same father, but two different mothers, (Gen. 20:2).⁵ Even to the time of King David, it appears that half-sibling marriages might still have been practiced.⁶ In the episode about Amnon and Tamar, Amnon cornered his sister in her room. When Tamar realized her half-brother's intentions, she urged him to wait, "No, my brother do not force me . . . do not do this wanton deed . . . speak to the King, for he will not withhold me from you," (II Samuel 13:12-13). Amnon disregards Tamar's plea, and rapes his sister.

In Leviticus 20:17, marriage between half-siblings is strictly forbidden. The law is clear, as it states, "If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother and sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness, it is a shameful thing, and they shall be cut off . . . he has uncovered his sister's nakedness, he shall bear iniquity."

And again, Leviticus 18:9 clearly states, "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, the daughter of your father or the daughter of your mother, whether born at home or abroad."

In the Code of Hammurabi (c. 1728-1686 B.C.), the punishment is not quite as severe. The Code states, "If a seignior has had intercourse with his daughter, they shall make the seignior leave the city."

There is no evidence in the Hebrew Bible of

marriage between father and daughter. There is however, one case of sexual relations between a father and his daughters.⁸ After the destruction of Sodom, Lot's daughters, thinking they were the last of mankind, cohabited with their father in order to continue the human race. There is no indication of disapproval in the text, in fact the products of this relationship became the ancestors of the people of Moab and Ammon.

According to the Code of Hammurabi, "if a seignior has lain in the bosom of his mother after (the death of) his father, they shall burn both of them."⁹ Leviticus 18:7 reflects this same thrust. It states, "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father which is the nakedness of your mother, she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness."

Clearly, at some point, marriage between first degree relatives was permitted but as time progressed, it fell into disuse and in fact, became a serious offense.¹⁰

Marriage between cousins was quite acceptable and, in fact, in Genesis this practice was encouraged. The Patriarchal family of Abraham and his descendants were involved in marriages between uncle and niece, between nephew and aunt and, of course, between cousins. Abraham's brother, Nahor, married the daughter of a third brother, Haran (Genesis 11:27, 29). Isaac, Abraham's son, married his father's brother's son's daughter (Genesis 22:23, 24:47). Isaac's son, Jacob, married his mother's brother's two daughters, Leah and Rachel (Genesis 29), who were

also related on his father's side.

Cousin marriage was probably preferred because of the inheritance customs.¹¹ In the case of Zelophehad in the book of Numbers, he had only five daughter. If a man did not have a male heir, which Zelophehad did not, the property was inherited by his lateral relatives. The daughters asked Moses to, "Give us a possession among the brethren of our father," (Numbers 27:4). God, through Moses, said that the land could be inherited by the daughters, however, they must marry members "of the family of the tribe of their father," (Num. 36:6,8). This way the land could not pass on to a son-in-law who was of another tribe, and ultimately pass out of the tribe. According to the text all five daughters eventually married sons of their father's brothers.

Most incestuous relationships are punishable by the death penalty. In Leviticus 20, capital punishment is decreed against marriage with a stepmother (v. 11), a daughter-in-law (v. 12) and with a woman whose daughter has already been taken by the man as his wife (v. 11). The method of punishment was probably stoning.¹² In Leviticus 20:17, the penalty for marriage with a half sister was excommunication. In other cases, such as marriage with an aunt, an uncle's wife and a sister-in-law, the punishment was "childlessness," (Lev. 20:21).

Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible are there reasons given for prohibitions of certain unions. There are many theories for the origins of the laws against incest.

Some scholars suggest that the laws came down from a pre-historic past where there existed an instinctive aversion against sex between persons closely related.¹³ In the Hebrew Bible as well as other ancient legislative documents, the intent of the laws is more to protect the institution of marriage, rather than as a guard against abnormal prodgeny.

One reason for the laws against incest is to separate and distinguish the Israelites from their neighbors. According to Preuss, "Egypt was a highly civilized country and yet sister marriages were the order of the day."¹⁴

Another reason was to protect the source (i.e. the male) from impurities and pollution. In chapter 18 and 20 of Leviticus, incest is dealt with, as well as paederasty and bestiality. There is legislation against these practices in both the Mosaic code and the Hittite law.¹⁵ In the Hittite law, the king could pardon anyone convicted of incest, paederasty or bestiality. In the Hebrew Bible, however, anyone caught engaging in these perversities was to be killed. The strict nature of the Mosaic code was most likely a reaction to the laxness of other codes, such as the Hittite law. The male could be protected from the impurities and pollution that non-Israelites faced because of the stricture of the Israelite law.

It is very unlikely that the potentially harmful influence of incest on the descendants was known in Biblical times. In Leviticus 20:20, the text states

that, "if a man lies with his uncle's wife . . . they shall bear their sin, they shall die childless." This compares to Leviticus 20:21, which states that, "if a man takes his brother's wife . . . they shall be childless." Verse 20 seems to imply that the union between a man and his uncle's wife could produce children, but they would die young. Verse 21 indicates that there could never be any children. Verse 20 is medically sound, when it implies that the products of incestuous relationships do have shorter life expectancies; however, in a later verse in the Bible, descendants of the 10th generation of illegal marriages are forbidden from entering into a legal marriage. The fact that a 10th generation is even mentioned implies that the Biblical writer was not aware of a shorter life expectancy for products of incestuous relationships. The laws against incest are not based upon fears of genetic problems.

The prohibition seems to be social in nature. First cousins are not forbidden, whereas relatives (wives of uncles, step-mothers) are. The laws seem to exist in order to prevent competition between related men for the same woman. In almost every case the woman is mentioned only in terms of the man whose rights to her would be violated by an act of incest.

The laws of family purity are based upon social concerns and religious sensitivities. Incest taboos developed out of a need to protect the tribe and to assure

proper and legitimate inheritance. The religious concerns were based upon a rejection of pagan practices. Incest was practiced among the Egyptian royalty and, the penalties in the Hittite law code were certainly not as stringent as those laws in the Hebrew Bible. In order to completely separate the Israelites from their neighbors, stringent incest laws were established.

NOTES

CHAPTER FIVE

¹Louis Epstein, Marriage Laws in the Bible and the Talmud, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1942), p. 220.

²Julius Preuss, Biblical and Talmudic Medicine, (New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1978), p. 465.

³Epstein, Marriage Laws in the Bible and the Talmud, p. 233.

⁴Raphael Patai, Sex and Family in the Bible, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1959), p. 24.

⁵It is possible that here Abraham simply lied to Abimelech and that Sarah was, in fact, not his sister. It is possible that Abraham's motivation was simply to save his own life.

⁶Patai, Sex and Family in the Bible, p. 24.

⁷"The Code of Hammurabi" in Ancient Near Eastern Texts, ed. James B. Pritchard, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 172.

⁸Genesis 19:32-34,

"Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father." And they made their father drink wine that night. And the first-born went in, and lay with her father; and he knew not when she lay down, nor when she arose. And it came to pass on the morrow, that the first-born said unto the young: "Behold, I lay yesterday night with my father. Let us make him drink wine this night also; and go thou in, and lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father."

⁹James B. Pritchard, ed. Ancient Near Eastern Texts, p. 172.

¹⁰W. P. Paterson brings this out with great clarity in his "Marriage" entry in A Dictionary of the Bible, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901):

The older custom, which confined marriage within the limits of the family group, had its natural counterpart in lax views as to the bars arising

from consanguinity and affinity. Unions tolerated among other nations were indeed regarded as incestuous viz. with daughter, or with a uterine sister, but at least as regards relatives on the paternal side, the utmost latitude was allowed. Thus, Abraham is represented as marrying a half-sister, the daughter of his father (Gen. 20:12), and the words of Tamar imply that this was recognized as lawful down to the time of the Monarchy (2 S 13:13). As late as the age of Ezekial, marriage with a stepmother must still have been common (22:10). Moses himself seems to have been the offspring of a marriage between a nephew and his paternal aunt (Nu. 26:59, cf. v. 57). Of these cases the more obnoxious were prohibited in Dt., viz. marriage with a stepmother (27:20), a half-sister (v. 22), and a mother-in-law (v. 23).

¹¹Patai, Sex and Family in the Bible, p. 27.

¹²Julius Preuss, Biblical and Talmudic Medicine, p. 466.

¹³E. Neufeld, Ancient Hebrew Marriage Laws, (New York: Longmans Green and Co., 1944), p. 211.

¹⁴Julius Preuss, Biblical and Talmudic Medicine, p. 467.

¹⁵Ancient Near Eastern Texts, ed. James B. Pritchard, p. 196.

CHAPTER SIX
SEXUAL HYGIENE

The Hebrew Bible is primarily a code of laws. It is a characteristic of all law books to legislate behaviour in all walks of life.¹ The Bible is therefore very clear in deliniating acceptable and unacceptable sexual behaviour. Sex is seen as being a sacred duty and therefore must be performed according to legal specifications. The fact that there is such a detailed code concerning sex, is an indication of the Biblical writer's discomfort with the subject.

In Genesis 6:1-3, there is a reference to the "sons of God", who begin to consort with human women. A review of Canaanite literature indicates that "sons of God" is the term used by pagans to refer to the members of the pantheon.² The verse reflects a belief in the notion that when gods have sexual intercourse with humans, the qualities of one can be transferred to another. Therefore gods could become mortal, or humans could become like God. Yahweh dealt with this possibility by limiting the life-span of humans to a maximum of 120 years.

A Hittite myth discovered at Boghazkoy reflects this same belief.³ A man named Hupasiyas is asked by a goddess to fight a dragon, but first, he insists that the goddess sleep with him. After he fights the dragon, the goddess secludes him in a spot away from his wife and children. The goddess knows that if he were to return to earth he would spread to others, the immortality he acquired from her.

The belief that intercourse had supernatural powers was not uncommon in the ancient near east. Individual qualities could be transferred from one partner to another through sexual intercourse.

The Bible views the act of sexual intercourse as being an extremely important function of life.⁴ Genesis 1:28 urges man to be, "fruitful and multiply." Cohabitation therefore, is not considered in any way to be immoral -- as long as it serves the purpose of procreation, and falls within legal parameters.

Throughout the Bible there are no examples of celibacy. Celibacy could not exist because of the earlier decree of Genesis 1:28. Sexual intercourse was to be enjoyed at regular intervals. Sex was a basic right of husband and wife, and even concubines.

Given the nature of ancient society, men had more rights than women; however, the Mosaic law provided basic rights and protections for women. Adultery was considered to be a serious sin for both men and women. It was not merely a crime against other men, but against God as well. Primarily adultery was viewed as a violation of the husband's property rights.

In Ezekial the punishment for an adulterous woman is described in great detail. She could either be killed by her husband, without benefit of public trial, or he could decide to humiliate his wife by stripping her of her clothes and her jewelry, cutting off her hair and

sending her into an angry mob to be taunted and jeered.⁵

Biblical, and even later middle eastern laws reflect the notion that sexual intercourse, or for that matter, any sexual function, results in ritual uncleanness.⁶ According to Leviticus 15:18, a man and a woman who have had intercourse must bathe themselves in water, and they are considered to be ritually unclean until the evening.⁷

Sexual intercourse is described in Genesis 2:24 as a man and a woman becoming "one flesh." The sexual union establishes a tie between a man and a woman similar to that which exists between first degree relatives. A man is forbidden from having a relationship with his father's wife, even if there is no blood between them. Because she has married his father, the union renders her a first degree relative.

Interestingly enough, with the serious attitude the Hebrew Bible takes toward sex, there is no sexual terminology found in the Bible.⁸ References to sexual activities are always hidden behind euphemistic language. The male genitalia, for example, are referred to as flesh (basar).⁹ Female genitals are referred to in the same way.¹⁰ Sexual intercourse is referred to in the Bible as nakedness (erwah). This term generally has a pejorative sense as to, "uncover one's nakedness." This terminology is used to describe incestuous and other forbidden relationships. Sometimes the male and female

sexual organs are referred to as "feet."¹¹ Other terminology for the male genitalia are skokhah (outflow),¹² and m'bhushim, literally "shames."¹³ To have sexual intercourse is expressed through the verb "to approach"¹⁴ or to "lie with"¹⁵ or "to go into"¹⁶ or "to know."¹⁷

Illicit sex is considered to be a sacred duty and progeny an ultimate achievement of men and women; illicit sex is viewed as the gravest of crimes. In the ancient Near East, violating a sex taboo was believed to be an offense against the gods of fertility. The gods of fertility were seen as having power over the entire food supply (crops, flocks, etc.) so illicit sex was a community concern.

Death was the penalty for any breach of the approved sexual morality. That is, sexuality was encouraged within the confines of marriage. In Isaiah 3:16, the evil women of Zion, who are compared to prostitutes, are described as, "walking with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go and making a tinkling with their feet." However, in the Song of Songs 1:10, women are described as having, "cheeks that are comely with circlets." In both cases a woman's sensuality is being described; however, in the first verse cited, the women are not married and in the second they are. The Hebrew Bible seems to condone sexuality within marriage and strenuously object to it outside of marriage.

Menstruation is given considerable attention

in the Hebrew Bible. Menstruation is referred to as, "derech ha'nashim," the custom or manner of women.¹⁸ The Biblical laws concerning menstruation are as follows:

And if a woman have an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be in her impurity seven days; and whosoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening. And every thing that she lies upon in her impurity shall be unclean; every thing also that she sits upon shall be unclean. And whosoever touches her bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water and be unclean until evening. And whosoever touches anything that she sits upon shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water and be unclean until evening. And if he be on the bed, or on any thing where she sits when he touches it, he shall be unclean until the evening. And if any man lie with her, he shall be unclean seven days; and every bed whereon he lies shall be unclean. (Leviticus 15:19-24)

The length of the impurity which results from menstruation is always seven days, even if the actual bleeding is less than seven days. The Levitical law of menstrual impurity is rather severe. In Leviticus 20:18, it is stated that if a man has intercourse with a woman during her period, both the man and woman shall be, "cut off from among their people."¹⁹

Menstruation was understood to be very much like an infectious disease. Not only was the menstruating woman infected, but also anyone with whom she came into physical contact.

The probable reason for this prohibition is that cohabitation with a menstruating woman was practiced by

non-Israelites. Leviticus 18:3 indicates that the Israelites must refrain from the "doings of the land of Egypt." Included in these prohibitions are incest, cohabitation with a menstruating woman, and other sexual activities. The Bible gives no other reason for this prohibition.

In addition to her monthly cycle, a woman is considered to be unclean after the birth of a child.

Leviticus 12:1-8 outlines these laws:

And the Lord spoke unto Moses saying: Speak unto the children of Israel saying: If a woman be delivered, and bear a man-child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of the impurity of her sickness shall she be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. And she shall continue in the blood of purification three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purification be fulfilled. But if she bear a girl-child, then she shall be unclean for two weeks, as in her impurity; and she shall continue in the blood of purification three-score and six days. And when the days of her purification are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt-offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtle-dove, for a sin-offering, unto the door of the tent of meeting, unto the priest. And he shall offer it before the Lord, and make atonement for her; and she shall be cleansed from the fountain of her blood. This is the law for her that bears whether a male or a female. And if her means suffice not for a lamb, then she shall take two turtle-doves or two young pigeons: the one for a burnt-offering, and the other for a sin-offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.

The state of impurity that results from childbirth and menstruation is incompatible with certain religious

acts which, because of their nature, require ritual purity. In Exodus 19:15, when the Israelites encamped around Mount Sinai and were about to receive the law, they were told by Moses, "Come not near a woman." Men who were involved in battle were expected to be in a state of ritual purity and this could only be if they abstained from intercourse.²⁰

Menstruation was considered to be unclean, just as any other form of bodily discharge. A period of seven days was necessary following menstruation and the birth of a male child for a woman to be considered clean again.²¹ Menstruation and birth render a woman unclean just as if she had come into contact with a corpse. If a woman has a female child she is rendered unclean for 14 days. This is the same quarantine period for anyone who is suspected of having leprosy.

In Genesis 38:8 there is the case of Onan who intentionally "spilled (his seed) on the ground." Onan did not want Tamar, his dead brother's widow, to become pregnant. The Bible is clear in its attitude about this. The Bible continues, "and the thing which he did was evil in the sight of the Lord; and He slew him."

Onanism, as this practice has come to be called, could have been either masturbation or coitus interruptus. In either case, the Bible clearly denounces this practice.

In Leviticus 18, the same chapter that forbids incestuous unions and intercourse with a menstruant, the following is commanded:

You shall not lie with mankind as with
with womankind; it is an abomination.
(Leviticus 18:22)

The punishment for such behaviour is that both
participants were put to death and, "their blood shall be
upon them," (Lev. 20:13).

In Deuteronomy there is a similar law. The
text reads:

A woman shall not wear that which per-
tains to a man, neither shall a man
put on a woman's garment; for all that
do so are an abomination unto the Lord
thy God.

(Deut. 22:5)

This prohibition seems to also refer to homosexual-
ity. In some cases of homosexuality, males desiring and
imagining themselves to be females, and females imagining
themselves to be males create the illusion by wearing
the clothes of the opposite sex.²²

It is interesting to note that in the Levitical
code, no direct reference is made to female homosexuality.
Women were prohibited from wearing men's clothes, but they
were not directly mentioned in the Levitical sections. It
is more than likely that female homosexuality did exist
in the ancient Near East, but given the position of women,
it was probably considered to be of little consequence.

In both Genesis and Judges there are references to
sodomy. The text in Genesis 19:5 states that Sodom is to
be destroyed and messengers are sent from God to warn Lot
and his family. A mob forms outside of Lot's tent demand-
ing that the visitors be sent out for the purpose of copu-

lation. The story in Judges 19 is very similar, in fact, a repeat of the Sodom episode. In both cases a daughter is offered to the mob. In the case of Sodom, the mob is stricken with blindness. In the Judges narrative, a woman is given to the mob and she later dies. In both cases the mob's desire to copulate with men is viewed by the Bible as being a reflection of great moral perversity. This is probably a result of the notion of kadesh and kadeshah, sacred prostitution.

It was not uncommon in some ancient cultures for sodomy to be part of cultic worship.²³ Male sacred prostitutes would minister to the men. This practice did make its way into Judea at the time of the early kings. During the reign of Rehoboam idolatry was common and according to I Kings 14:24, "also Sodomites were in the land." Sodomy made its way into the cult and was not eradicated until the time of Josiah. This brought the the Deuteronomic law, "Thou shalt be no kadeshah among the daughters of Israel nor shall there be any Kadesh among the sons of Israel," (Deuteronomy 23:18). This prohibition differed from the Levitical prohibition in two ways. First, it did not stress sodomy as being a sexual crime, but rather a form of idolatry. Second, it was not viewed as a capital crime, but rather it was on the same level as prostitution. The Levitical law went much further, and apparently it was more effective in eradicating sodomy in Israelite society.

Bestiality was not uncommon in the ancient Near East.²⁴ The Hittite law requires the death penalty for anyone who engages in sex with an animal, although the king can pardon the offender. The Hebrew Bible is more strict and requires death for the offender, without exception.²⁵ The text is very clear in indicating that the reason for these laws was to prevent Israelites from following the practices of the other nations.

Ugaritic mythology speaks of the god Baal having intercourse with a heifer. In the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic, Enkidu was enticed away from having relations with animals by a sacred prostitute. The Bible wants to clearly state that relations with animals is practiced by pagans -- not by Israelites.

NOTES

CHAPTER SIX

¹Raphael Patai, Sex and Family in the Bible, (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc. 1959), p. 158.

²Theodore H. Gaster, Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament, (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 79.

³Ibid.

⁴The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, 1963 ed., s.v. "Sex."

⁵Louis M. Epstein, Sex Laws and Customs in Judaism, (New York: Katav Publishing House, Inc. 1967), p. 195.

⁶Patai, Sex and Family in the Bible, p. 152.

⁷"The women also with whom a man shall lie carnally, they shall both bathe themselves in water, and be unclean until evening," (Lev. 15:18).

⁸Patai, Sex and the Family in the Bible, p. 157.

⁹Leviticus 15:2-3.

¹⁰Leviticus 15:19.

¹¹Deuteronomy 28:57,
Judges 3:24,
I Samuel 24:4,
Isaiah 7:20.

¹²Deuteronomy 23:2.

¹³Deuteronomy 25:11.

¹⁴Leviticus 18:14, 19.

¹⁵Leviticus 18:22.

¹⁶Genesis 29:23, 30.

¹⁷Genesis 4:1.

¹⁸Genesis 18:11.

¹⁹Leviticus 20:18.

²⁰II Samuel 11:11-13.

²¹The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, 1962 ed.,
s.v. "Clean and Unclean."

²²Epstein, Sex Laws and Customs in Judaism, p. 64.

²³Ibid., 135.

²⁴Patai, Sex and Family in the Bible, p. 177.

²⁵Exodus 22:18,
Leviticus 18:23,
Leviticus 20:15-16.

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