

Homosexuality in the Hebrew Scriptures

The Mosaic Code & the Hebrew word *To'ebah* (Often translated as "abomination")

The Mosaic code, and its applicability today:

The Torah is composed of the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). It contains numerous laws which make up the Mosaic code. Rabbi Simlai wrote in the Talmud (Jewish traditional commentary about the Hebrew Scriptures) that God gave 613 commandments to Moses. One list finds 3 commandments in Genesis, 111 in Exodus, 247 in Leviticus, 52 in Numbers and 200 in Deuteronomy. These included 365 prohibitions -- a number equal to the nominal number of days in the year. Also included are 248 positive commandments which Rabbi Simlai said corresponded "*to the number of organs and limbs in the human body.*" Hundreds of these dealt with animal sacrifices and other topics that are not currently practiced. That leaves about 300 commandments that can be practiced today.

The Holiness Code in the Torah permits:

- [slavery](#) (Leviticus 25:44)

The code requires:

- A child to be killed if he/she curses their parent (Leviticus 20:9)
- All persons guilty of adultery to be killed (20:10)
- The daughter of a priest who engages in prostitution to be burned alive until dead (21:9)
- The bride of a priest to be a virgin (21:13)
- Ritual killing of animals, using cattle, sheep and goats (22:19)
- Observation of 7 feasts: Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Firstfruits, Feast of Pentecost, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles (23)
- A person who takes the Lord's name in vain is to be killed (24:16)

The code prohibits:

- Heterosexual intercourse when a woman has her period (Leviticus 18:19),
- Harvesting the corners of a field (19:9),
- Eating fruit from a young tree (19:23),
- Cross-breeding livestock (19:19),
- Sowing a field with mixed seed (19:19),
- Shaving or getting a hair cut (19:27),
- Tattoos (19:28),
- Even a mildly disabled person from becoming a priest (21:18),
- Charging of interest on a loan (25:37),
- Collecting firewood on Saturday to prevent your family from freezing,
- Wearing of clothes made from a blend of textile materials; today this might be cotton and polyester, and
- Eating of non-kosher foods (e.g. shrimp). This prohibition has been satirized on the [God Hates Shrimp](#) website.

Of the 613 laws, most Christian denominations regard very few as binding on Christians today. Conservative Christians often accept:

- the [Ten Commandments](#) found in three places -- one of them being **Exodus 20:3-17**.
- [Leviticus 18:22](#) and [20:13](#) which relate to sexual behavior of two men.

They also accept laws which prohibit:

- Sexual contact between individuals who are too closely related,
- Bestiality: out-of-species sexual contact,
- Adultery, and
- Some laws regarding the execution of properly convicted murderers.

21st century Christians are free to wear have sexual relations during the wife's monthly period, wear tattoos, eat shrimp, lobster, pork or meat cooked rare, wear polyester-cotton blends, seed their lawns with a grass mixture, and get their hair cut. But most conservative Christians consider homosexual behavior -- and sometimes merely having a homosexual orientation -- as taboo. At first, we were unable to find any logical explanation that would justify conservative Christians concentrating so much on these two laws against homosexuality while abandoning most of the remaining 611 Mosaic laws.

But further examination found the reason. Using an Protestant English translation of the Bible, conservative Christians believe that the validity of the two anti-homosexual "clobber" passages in Leviticus has been verified by passages in Paul's Epistles. The NIV and KJV of the Bible clearly condemn homosexual behavior at [1 Corinthians 6:9](#) and [Romans 1:28](#) in the Christian Scriptures. These translations generally interpret the Greek words "*malakoi*" and "*arsenokoitai*" as referring to homosexuals.

We can be fairly certain that this is **not** the meaning that Paul wanted to convey. If he had, he would have used the Greek word "*paiderasste*." That was the standard term at the time for males who had sex with males. We can conclude that he probably meant something different from persons who engaged in male-male adult sexual behavior. Down through the years, Christians have interpreted these words as referring to people of lacking a high moral standing, or to masturbators, or to men who sexually abuse boys, or to boys who are the victims of sexual abuse. Interpreting these passages as referring to sexually active homosexuals appears to be simply the latest in a long series of attempts to make sense out of obscure words. The precise meaning is unknown; it was buried with Paul.

The meaning of *To'ebah* (often translated *abomination*)

The Hebrew word "*to'ebah*" (or a form of the word) appears over 100 times in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament)

It is often translated as "*abomination*" or "*detestable*" in English. It can refer to the breaking of either a moral or ritual law.

When "*to'ebah*" refers to the breaking of a ritual law it might be better translated "*ritually improper*," or "*involves foreign religious cult practice*." Some of the "*to'ebah*" passages are considered without significance to Christians today. Many activities which were "*to'ebah*" transgressions to the ancient Israelites simply do not apply to modern cultures.

Rabbi Gershon Caudill wrote that:

"Jews do not obligate any other religion to the observance of the Torah laws, which were given specifically to the Jewish people and their descendants, including converts. This is with the possible exception of the seven Noahide Laws, and there is dispute among the halakhic authorities as to which seven laws non-Jews need observe IF they are indeed required to observe any Torah laws at all."

References used:

The following information sources were used to prepare and update the above essay. The hyperlinks are not necessarily still active today.

1 Inge Anderson, "*What is an abomination to God?*" at: <http://glow.cc/isa/>

Rabbi Gershon Caudill, "*A Heterosexual Jewish Rebbe's View on the (Supposedly) Homosexual Texts in the Hebrew Bible*," at: <http://www.affirmation.org/>