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Exegesis or Eisegesis: Does Chiastic Analysis Help Us to Understand Leviticus 20?

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Abstract: Jonathan Burnside, "Exegesis or Eisegesis: Does Chiastic Analysis Help Us to Understand Leviticus 20?" argues that a chiastic structure not only governs Lev 20 but reveals several complexities in the text. "In fact, Lev. 20 is characterized by a high degree of internal structure, even by the standards of biblical law." The key to comprehending the chiastic structure of Lev 20 is to recognize the various penalties that are attached to proscribed acts, especially those of a sexual category. The penalties, introduced with various formulas, for example, "shall be put to death," "shall be cut off," plus others, are exacted by human agents (see vv. 2, 9–16, 27) or by God (see vv. 3–6, 17–21). The chiasm's center in Lev 20 consists of verses 10–16, which sets forth six complex "binary oppositions," such as adultery "outside family/inside family"; "heterosexual intercourse/homosexual intercourse"; and prohibited sex "man initiates/woman initiates." After explaining several purposes for the use of chiasmus in Lev 20, Burnside affirms that "all claims regarding the existence of chiasmus must overcome the charge that the argument is rather more a matter of eisegesis rather than exegesis."

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Exegesis or Eisegesis

Does Chiastic Analysis Help Us to Understand Leviticus 20?

Jonathan Burnside

Chiastic studies have been vulnerable, on occasion, over the past fifty years to the charge that their existence may be more a matter of eisegesis rather than exegesis. This paper contends that it is possible to have objective, textual grounds for the existence of a chiasmus which can, in turn, be key to exegesis. In particular, it proposes that chiastic analysis helps us to understand the complexities of Lev 20 and, furthermore, that this text should be held up as an example of a well-developed chiasmus in biblical law.[1] Towards the end of the paper I speculate on some of the particular functions this literary device may perform in the context of Lev 20. I also suggest some general criteria that may encourage us in developing rigorous and robust chiastic analyses, so that we have even more to celebrate over the next fifty years.

1. Why Leviticus 20?

The stimulus for my looking closely at Lev 20 was the fact—obvious to the most casual reader—that this chapter covers similar ground to that of Lev 18. Both chapters have sexual offenses and other customs in neighboring nations as their theme, and many of the paradigm cases are the same (e.g., 18:8/20:11; 18:9/20:17; 18:15/20:12; 18:17a/20:14; 18:19/20:18; 18:20/20:10). However, although the substantive content is similar, the cases are presented very differently. This led me to the presumption that the literary presentation of the texts must be highly significant in some way, since nothing in *Torah* is redundant. McClenney-Sadler had shown that Lev 18 has a distinct internal structure, so, given the parallels between this and chapter 20, it was reasonable to assume that chapter 20

should have a formal structure as well. Nevertheless, that presumption ran counter to most commentators who have tended to regard Lev 20 as a miscellaneous collection which lacks any kind of literary presentation.[2] Grabbe concedes that original authors or redactors "may have arranged the material according to a logical pattern"[3] but offers no suggestion as to what this might be.

Perhaps the most compelling reason to assume literary structure in Lev 20 is because of the broad hint towards the end of the chapter. At verse 25 we find the following exhortation: "You shall therefore make a distinction between the clean . . . and the unclean." This implies that the preceding material is itself structured around a series of distinctions, and since the division between clean and unclean is a binary opposition (see the discussion under 4, below), it is plausible to suggest that at least part of Lev 20 may be structured as a series of binary oppositions. This is not to say that we cannot tolerate some degree of miscellany in biblical law, or Leviticus. It is to suggest that miscellany is a less plausible explanation where the text includes such an exhortation as Lev 20:25.

In fact, Lev 20 is characterized by a high degree of internal structure, even by the standards of biblical law. One aspect of this internal structure is signaled straightaway by the fact that Lev 20 is patterned on the Decalogue. Verses 5–21 echo the sequence of taboos in the Decalogue (e.g., Exod 20:3–14), as follows:

"Serving other gods" (e.g., Exod 20:3–5)
→ "honouring father and mother" (e.g., Exod 20:12)
→ "adultery" (e.g., Exod 20:14)

"Molech worship" (vv. 2–5)
→ "cursing parents" (v. 9)
→ "sexual offences" (vv. 10–21)

I have discussed the significance of the Decalogue pattern in Lev 20 elsewhere, suggesting that it helps to explain why the chapter begins and ends with cases concerning necromancy.[4] This is because necromancy is closely tied to each of the main Decalogue headings in the chapter: (1) there is a close connection between necromancy and idolatry (vv. 2–6); (2) necromancy is seen as dishonoring to ancestors and is thus connected to the dishonoring of parents (v. 9); and (3) necromancy is also seen as being, in some sense, sexual since the form of necromantic divination described in verse 27 is thought to involve actual penetration of the ancestor spirit in the body of the practitioner.

I mention this only to signal, at an early stage of the argument, that Lev 20 is a highly sophisticated literary unit. However, as befits the focus of this publication, the rest of this paper will address a different aspect of the literary presentation of Lev 20—namely, its chiastic structure. I will argue that the overall chapter (20:2–27) is arranged chiastically and can be broken down to three main sections (vv. 2–6; 9–16; 17–21). *We will also see that the first and third sections (vv. 2–6 and 17–21) are themselves arranged chiastically and that the middle section (effectively, verses 10–16) is presented as a series of binary oppositions.*

2. Chiastic Penalties in Leviticus 20

The key to unlocking the internal structure is to take seriously the fact that whereas Lev 20 states the penalties for each prohibited sexual act, Lev 18 does not. I argue that the penalties of Lev 20, in fact, hold the key to the entire structure. This can be seen in table 1 below. It summarizes the different offenses in Lev 20 and identifies who is responsible for meting out the particular punishment.

Table 1: Responsibility for Punishing Human Beings in Leviticus 20

Verse	Offense	Description of punishment	Punisher
20:2	Molech worship	"*shall be put to death*; the people of the land shall pelt him with stones"	Humanity
20:3	Molech worship	"I myself will *set my face against* that man and will *cut him off from among his people*"	God
20:4–5	Turning a blind eye	"I will *set my face against* that man and against his family, and will *cut them off from among their people,* him and all who follow him"	God
20:6	Mediums and wizards	"I will *set my face against* that person and will *cut him off from among his people*"	God
20:9	Cursing parents	"*shall be put to death*"	Humanity
20:10	Adultery	"*shall be put to death*"	Humanity
20:11	Relations with father's wife	"*shall be put to death*"	Humanity
20:12	Relations with daughter-in-law	"*shall be put to death*"	Humanity
20:13	Male homosexuality	"*shall be put to death*"	Humanity
20:14	Relations with wife and her mother	"*shall be burned with fire*"	Humanity

20:15	Bestiality (man)	"*shall be put to death*"	Humanity
20:16	Bestiality (woman)	"*shall be put to death*"	Humanity
20:17	Relations with sister	"shall be *cut off*"	God
20:18	Menstruant	"shall be *cut off from among their people*"	God
20:19	Relations with mother's sister/ father's sister	"they shall bear their guilt" (JPS)	God
20:20	Relations with uncle's wife	"they shall bear their guilt: they shall die childless" (JPS)	God
20:21	Relations with brother's wife	"they shall remain childless" (JPS)	God
20:27	Mediums and wizards	"*shall be put to death*; they shall be stoned with stones"	Humanity

It is clear from table 1, then, that Lev 20 has a complex internal structure based on who has responsibility for punishing the offender. This is arranged chiastically, as follows (see fig. 1 below):

Figure 1: The Overall Chiastic Structure of Leviticus 20

A	Humanity	(v. 2)
B	God	(vv. 3–6)
C [center]	Humanity	(vv. 9–16)
B′	God	(vv. 17–21)
A′	Humanity	(v. 27)

According to verse 2, *humanity* is responsible for meting out punishment ("[the offender] *shall be put to death*; the people of the land shall stone him with stones"). This contrasts with verses 3–6, where *God* is responsible ("I myself will *set my face against* that man, and will *cut him off from among his people*"). Short versions of these phrases ("shall be put to death" and "set my face against" and "cutting off from among their people") recur throughout the chapter. They signify punishment either by humanity or by God. This means that humanity is also responsible for "putting to death" in verses 9–13 and 15–16. Verse 14 refers to a burning, rather than to a simple stoning, and hence is phrased differently ("they shall be burned with fire"); however, the implication is that humanity is also responsible. Likewise, the repetition of cutting off seems to indicate that God is responsible for punishing in verses 17–18 because *karet* (cutting off) is a characteristically divine form of punishment.[5] Other

characteristically divine forms of punishment include bearing iniquity (v. 19), dying childless (v. 20), and being childless (v. 21).

It could be argued that if the cutting off in 20:17 and 20:18 were seen as human rather than divine punishments, table 1 would be a neater chiasm balanced by three divine punishments apiece. However, there are several reasons for rejecting this. First, it is contrary to the use of *karet* elsewhere in Lev 20 and to its typical use in the Hebrew Bible. Second, and this is an important methodological point in the context of this publication, a chiasm has validity because of its content and sequence and not because of the length or number of the units that comprise that sequence. Third, and perhaps most important, designating 20:17–21 as divine punishments produces an independent chiastic arrangement for 20:17–21 that balances the chiastic structure of 20:3–6 (see the discussion under 5, below).

On this basis, I propose that Lev 20:2–27 can be divided into three main sections. These are:

1. verses 3–6 (section B, above),
2. verses 9–16 (section C, above, which is the center of the chiasm), and
3. verses 17–21 (section B′, above).

This is a breakthrough in understanding both the structure and the content of this passage because when we look at each of these sections individually, we find that each section, in turn, has its own internal literary structure. If we look at verses 3–6 (section B above), we find that they have a chiastic structure. We also find that verses 17–21 (section B′ above) have a chiastic structure, while verses 10–16 (section C) are a series of binary oppositions (see further below). (The surrounding frame of verses 2 and 27 can be addressed separately, as indicated above.)[6] They are also connected by several hortatory passages (20:7–8, 22–26) that connect sections B and B′ to the Decalogue.

We will look at each section in turn, starting with section B (vv. 3–6).

3. Chiastic Structure of Leviticus 20:3–6: God's Punishment of the Offender and His Family

Starting with section B, we noted in table 1 and figure 1 above that Lev 20:3–6 is a single unit because God is responsible for punishing this group of offenses. I argue that this section has a chiastic literary structure because the object of the punishment moves from the individual

offender (in verse 3) to the "offender plus *mishpachah*" (in verse 5) and back to the individual offender again (in verse 6; see fig. 2 below).

Figure 2: The Chiastic Structure of Leviticus 20:3–6

D	Punishment of offender *alone*	"I myself will set my face against *that man*, and will cut *him* off from among his people" (20:3; *God speaking*)
E [center]	Punishment of offender *and his mishpachah* (i.e., group of families)	"I will set my face against *that man and against his family* [*mishpachah*], and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him" (20:5; *God speaking*)
D′	Punishment of offender *alone*	"I will set my face against *that person [lit. soul]*, and will cut *him* off from among his people." (20:6; *God speaking*)

The word *mishpachah* (here translated "kin") is usually thought to refer to a "suprahousehold social unit" or "protective association of families" and is "generally understood to be coterminous with the inhabitants of a village."[7] This means that the pivot of the chiasm is the punishment of "the man *and* his group of nuclear households" (*mishpachah*). Special emphasis is placed on the fact that the man's behavior has serious consequences not only for him but also for his *mishpachah* ("I will set my face against that man *and against his family*"). This observation is not unique to the structure of Lev 20. We will see, in the discussion under 4 below, that verse 9 (which prohibits cursing father and mother) is the overall heading for the sexual offenses described in verses 10–21. This determines how we read the sexual taboos themselves. Biblical law defines sexual offenses partly in terms of how they impact the offender's family.

The chiasm moves from the individual offender to the offender plus *mishpachah* and back to the individual offender. The chiastic structure would be perfect if the offender in 20:6 was described as a "man" (*'ish*) instead of a soul (*nefesh*). However, the use of a variant noun highlights the precise nature of the offence, namely the turning towards the *'obot* (familiar spirits) and *yidd'onim* (those who have familiar spirits). Also, the word *nefesh* has the advantage of not being gender-specific. This makes sense, given that the paradigm case of necromancy in 20:27 envisages either "a man or a woman." More intriguingly, the dual reference to man (*'ish*) and soul (*nefesh*) may reflect humankind's dual nature.[8] It may be that what is being punished is both the human and divine elements of Molech worship and wizardry. To put it another way, the use

of these words may highlight the physical and spiritual aspects of these offenses, that is, deeds done with the body and with the spirit. This may help to explain why both humankind and YHWH punish these offenses. The duality of human and divine in 20:3–6 may anticipate another significant duality that runs through the chapter as a whole—namely, rebellion against human and divine forms of authority. Molech worship and wizardry (20:3–6) constitute rebellion against divine authority whilst cursing parents (20:9) and various sexual offences (20:10–16) constitute rebellion against family authority.[9]

4. Structure of Leviticus 20:9–16: The Center of the Chiasm

Based on my argument, the center of the chiasm is Lev 20:9–16. This section is not set out chiastically. Instead, my argument is that the sexual offenses in verses 10–21 are developed through a series of paired binary oppositions. Each pair of oppositions is placed in an orderly fashion at a relative distance from the paradigm of heterosexual relations. Although this section is not itself structured chiastically, it supports the broader argument regarding the chiastic structure of Lev 20. First, the sequence of binary oppositions starts at verse 9 and ends at verse 16, which corresponds to the center of the chiasm. Second, the fact that these verses are intricately structured is consistent with the idea that special significance is given to the center of the chiasm. As a result, the center of the chiasm can be set out briefly.

I have argued elsewhere that verses 10–16 cannot be regarded as a self-contained group of sexual offenses.[10] Verse 9 (which prohibits adultery) is part of the Decalogue pattern in Lev 20 and forms the heading for verses 10–21.[11] This is confirmed by the fact that, in purely drafting terms, 20:10–21 is a continuation of 20:9. Verse 9 begins with *ki-ish 'ish 'asher* ("If anyone"; JPS), and each of the verses in 10–21 follow with either *weish 'asher* ("If a man"; JPS) or *weishshah 'asher* ("If a woman"; JPS). The sole exception is verse 19, which is singled out as a "hard case" (see fig. 3 below). It is thus impossible to formally exclude verse 9 from an understanding of verses 10–21 because it is the first verse in a series. The fact that verse 9 (which prohibits cursing father and mother) is the heading for verses 10–21 determines how we read the sexual taboos themselves.

The key question now is: how are the sexual offenses in verses 10–21 organized, and what is the relationship between adultery in verse 9 and the various forms of it in verses 10–21? The answer is that they are developed through an extended series of binary oppositions. A binary

opposition is "a pair of terms conventionally regarded as opposites" (e.g., hot/cold; on/off).[12] Binary oppositions are frequently used as a means of structuring biblical thought. They are also frequently used in biblical law.[13] By structuring thought through related oppositions, binary oppositions allow us to establish categories, construct sense, and create order.

Lev 20:10–16 contains a set of binary oppositions that is based around the identity of the sexual parties (see table 2 below). There are a total of six in all, and each column presents a different pair of oppositions.

Table 2: Binary Oppositions Regarding Identity of Sexual Partner(s) in Leviticus 20:10–16[14]

Verse	Verse content	# 1	# 2	# 3	# 4	# 5	# 6
20:10	"If a man *commits adultery* with another *man's* wife, if he *commits adultery* with his neighbour's wife"	Outside family (non-kin)	—	♂♀	No marriage	♂♀	♂ initiates
20:11	"The man who *lies* with his *father's* wife"	Inside family (kin)	Father	♂♀	No marriage	♂♀	♂ initiates
20:12	"If a man *lies* with his *daughter-in-law*"		Son	♂♀	No marriage	♂♀	♂ initiates
20:13	"If a man *lies* with a *male* as with a woman"			♂♂	No marriage	♂♂	♂ initiates
20:14	"If a man *takes* a *wife and her mother* also"				Marriage	♂♀♀	♂ initiates
20:15	"If a man *lies* with a *beast*"					♂ 	♂ initiates
20:16	"If a woman *approaches* any *beast* and lies with it"						♀ initiates

The biblical paradigm of normal sexual relations is that of marriage between a man and a woman (assuming they are not prohibited to each other for any reason). Adultery—which is the general heading for this section (v. 10)—is the archetypal sexual offense in the Bible because it is the paradigm case of sexual relations outside marriage. Each pair of

oppositions in this sequence (vv. 10–16) is placed, in order, at relative distance from the paradigm of normal sexual relations. Each represents a further deviation from the norm of heterosexual marriage. Lev 20:10–16 is thus a sophisticated play on a series of binary oppositions, as follows:

1. Outside family/inside family
2. Father/son
3. Heterosexual intercourse/homosexual intercourse
4. Nonmarriage/marriage
5. Sex between human beings/sex between human beings and animals (bestiality)
6. Man initiates/woman initiates

We can unpack this further, as follows:

→ Lev 20:10 is opposed to the narrative typification of normal sexual relations because it concerns relations between one man and one woman who is already married to another man.

→ Lev 20:11 is further opposed to the paradigm because the woman in question is *a family member,* as opposed to the wife of a neighbor (column 1).

→ Lev 20:12 offers a further variation on the "same family" complication; *going "down" to the next generation* instead of "up" to the previous one (column 2).

→ Lev 20:13 is even further opposed to the narrative typification of normal sexual relations because it is no longer one man and one woman but *one man and another man* (column 3).

→ Lev 20:14 is yet further opposed to the narrative typification because it is no longer one man and one sexual partner but *one man and two sexual partners,* specifically a marriage between two partners who have the closest possible blood tie (column 4). Anthropologists note that this sexual encounter is widely abhorred. From a structural perspective, the reason for this may be, not that mother and daughter come into sexual contact with the same man but that they come into contact with each other through the same man.[15]

→ Lev 20:15 is still further opposed to the normal narrative typification because it concerns relations between *a man and an animal* (column 5).

→ Finally, Lev 20:16 is further opposed to the narrative typification of normal sexual relations because it concerns relations between a human and an animal in which *the woman takes the initiative,* and the male submits (column 6). In verse 15, the man has sexual relations with a beast. However, he is still behaving "like a man" in terms of his sexual role. By contrast, in verse 16, the woman "approaches" the beast and behaves "like a man." Although she performs the role of a man, she also performs the role of a woman by being the submissive partner. She, too, behaves like a beast. The beast, on the other hand, behaves like a beast, but it also behaves "like a man." That is why it is the last in the series. It is the most extreme case of confusion imaginable—so much so that it is impossible to differentiate between the woman and the beast.

5. Chiastic Structure of Leviticus 20:17–21: Cases of Uncovering Nakedness

Finally, we turn to verses 17–21 (section B′ in fig. 1, above). Verses 17–21 consist of six cases, all of which refer to uncovering nakedness, *viz.,* sexual intercourse. Sections B and B′ are parallel units because, in both sections, God is responsible for meting out punishments for these offenses (see table 1 above). Section B′ is also similar to section B because it, too, has a chiastic structure. This chiasm moves from taking and lying in the first two cases (vv. 17–18) to a pair of cases that contain no reference to either taking or lying (v. 19) and then to two final cases that refer to lying and taking (vv. 20–21; see fig. 3, below).

Figure 3: The Chiastic Structure of Leviticus 20:17–21

F		[♂ and ♀]	♂ said to uncover nakedness of ♀	*takes* (v. 17)
	G	[♂ and ♀]	♂ said to uncover nakedness of ♀	*lies* (v. 18)
	H [center]	[♂ and ♀]	♂ said to uncover nakedness of ♀	(*neither takes nor lies*) (v. 19)
		[♂ and ♀]	♂ said to uncover nakedness of ♀	(*neither takes nor lies*) (v. 19)
	G′	[♂ and ♀]	♂ said to uncover nakedness of ♂	*lies* (v. 20)
F′		[♂ and ♀]	♂ said to uncover nakedness of ♂	*takes* (v. 21)

According to this, the center of the chiasm is 20:19. This concerns two cases: the mother's sister and the father's sister. Although the English language does not discriminate between these identities, subsuming both under the term "aunt," many cultures do distinguish between the two, including biblical Israel.[16] These cases receive special emphasis because they are "hard cases." They are also the only cases in the whole of verses 19–21—and the entire chapter—not to have a designated punishment. This is explained by the motive clause in verse 19: "for that is to make naked one's near kin." The reference to "near kin" indicates that they are hard cases because they are right on the boundary of what constitutes near kin or family in early Israel, as far as sexual ethics is concerned. Family units must have a boundary, and there must come a point when that boundary is reached. The cases in Lev 20:19 are therefore at the limit of what is classified as wrongdoing. This means that it is hard to find the right punishment, and so none is given. Even so, the behavior is not recommended ("they shall bear their iniquity"). As in verses 3–6, above (where the offender's behavior was said to impact his *mishpachah*), ideas about the family help to structure the biblical understanding of sexual offenses.

6. Purpose of the Chiasm

Is this overall chiastic structure a purely literary device (art for art's sake)? Or is it an aid to transmitting and retaining information (art for memory's sake)? Or does it have some other purpose? Several motives may be suggested, although these are necessarily speculative. I do not wish to be dogmatic. I offer these in the hope they may connect with other ideas raised in this publication.

a. Its Perfection Is Appropriate to Describe Divine Intervention

The use of a chiasm to structure a short list of divine punishments in Lev 20:3–6 may be significant. This is because the basic form of a chiasm is ABA and can be as simple as the phrase *'ayin tachat ayin* ("an eye for an eye"; Exod 21:24). It is a perfectly symmetrical literary form. In that sense, the use of a chiasm is characteristically divine.[17] This may be the reason why a chiasm is used to structure direct divine intervention. This is not, of course, to say that this is the only occasion in which a chiasm may be used. Nonetheless, there is a sense that this literary form is a particularly appropriate means of structuring offenses for which YHWH is the punishing agent.

b. It Brings Out the Unity of a Double-Sided Event

Wenham claims that "chiasmus brings out the unity of a double-sided event"[18] (e.g., Lev 15:1–33 where the chiasmus demonstrates the unity of male and female as one gender made in God's image). In Lev 20 there are two sides to punishment (YHWH and humankind). The chiasmus serves to bring out the unity of these events, namely that there is a divine-human partnership in punishment. This divine-human partnership is, in fact, underlined at the beginning and end of the text. The first offense (Molech worship) is punished by both humankind (Lev 20:2) and YHWH (20:3) in different ways. Likewise, the second offense (turning to mediums and wizards) is punished by both YHWH (20:6) and humankind (20:27).

Levine is puzzled by the repetition of mediums and wizards at the end of the chapter, but the *inclusio* gives the chapter its overall chiastic structure (see table 1).[19] The outer edge of the large chiasm (20:2, 27), where humankind punishes for Molech worship and wizardry, parallels the outer edge of the smaller chiasm (20:3, 6), where YHWH punishes for Molech worship and wizardry. Normally, when a particular party is given responsibility for punishing an offense, it is assumed that this is on the basis of jurisdiction. Lev 20, however, is interesting because it shows that the purpose of assigning responsibility is not to parcel up jurisdiction but to emphasize collaboration.[20]

c. It Emphasizes Humankind's Duty to Punish

One function of a chiasm is to draw attention to its center. The fulcrum of Lev 20 is verses 20:9–16, which focus on humankind's responsibility to punish. Why is the responsibility of humankind stressed? It may be because, although God and humankind *together* punish serious offences (see section b above), humankind has a tendency to shirk its responsibilities. The chiasm emphasizes humankind's responsibility because, of the two parties, humankind is apt to avoid meting out punishment, especially for idolatry, family, and sexual offenses. This is expressly anticipated by Lev 20:4, which describes the "people of the land" hiding their eyes from offenses committed in their midst. This problem is compounded when we reflect that the offenses listed in Lev 20 (and especially 20:9–16) would most likely have taken place either at home or close to home. Thus, the people most likely to know whether these offenses took place will be the offender's own family. Verse 9 refers to parents, and so it is possible that they are the ones who, for all practical

purposes, are expected to initiate proceedings. Leviticus 20 is not unique in emphasizing this responsibility. Biblical law is familiar with the problem of reluctance to prosecute for capital offenses, especially among family members (see, e.g., Deuteronomy 13:6–11).

d. It Emphasizes the Relational Consequences of the Offenses

We saw in 2 above that the center of the chiasm in Lev 20:3–6 is the offender plus their *mishpachah*. The emphasis on penalties for the *mishpachah* is important for several reasons. First, it provides a powerful motive for overcoming any reluctance to initiate proceedings against an offender (see section c above). If humankind fails to punish, YHWH will punish anyway, but punishment will fall not only on the offender but also on the *mishpachah*. The offender has a primary responsibility not to lead his *mishpachah* into idolatry, and the *mishpachah* has a secondary responsibility not to follow him. Their responsibility is to resist the offender and to root him out. This confirms the suggestion, above, that the offenses listed in 20:3–6 are likely to take place close to home. Certainly, it is highly likely that an offense involving the offender's children (Lev 20:2) will be known within the wider group of families to which he belongs.[21] Failure to act has consequences not only for the offender but also for this social unit. The midturn of this chiasm thus corresponds to the midturn of the chiasm for the chapter as a whole (i.e., humankind's responsibility to act). It also corresponds to the fulcrum of the chapter as a whole. It emphasizes the danger an individual may present not only to himself but also to the wider family structure. We have seen that the list of offenses in 20:9–16 form a single unit and that the juxtaposition of 20:9 with 20:10–16 implies that these are not sexual offenses but family offenses. All this means that there is a community aspect to sexual ethics in the Bible. What people do with each other sexually is not a matter for themselves only; it has implications for their families, other families, and society as a whole. This is why the midturn of 20:3–6 is important. It corresponds to the fulcrum of the chapter as a whole.

A third function of this small chiasm is to correspond not only to the midturn of the chapter but also to the midturn of the chiasm in Lev 20:17–21. The center of that chiasm indicates that the boundaries of permitted and prohibited sexual intercourse correspond to the boundary of the *mishpachah.* For these reasons, the chiasm in Lev 20:3–6 plays an important role by emphasizing the significance of the offender's acts for

his *mishpachah,* namely that God will set his face against the offender's *mishpachah* and "cut them off from among their people" (v. 5).

e. It Alludes to Well-Known Texts

Weinfeld claims that a chiasm may be used when the author or redactor wishes to quote from or allude to well-known established texts.[22] It is a means of drawing attention to the source. In Lev 20:2–6, the chiastic structure is closely connected to the Decalogue. There we find the ban on having other gods besides YHWH (Exod 20:3) and the ban on making and worshipping an idol (Exod 20:4). These prohibitions recur in Lev 20:2–6, which prohibit the prostitution of following Molech (20:2–5) and "mediums and spiritists" (20:6). An important verbal parallel is the repetition of the phrase: "I am the Lord your God" (Exod 20:2). This key phrase opens the Decalogue and is repeated in the motivation clause (Lev 20:7) that follows the first chiasm (Lev 20:2–5).[23] It underlines the link between the chiasm and the Decalogue and makes it explicit.[24] The chiasm in Lev 20:2–6 invests the content with the specific and unique authority of God's direct voice to the people (Exod 20:1, 18–19). Lev 20 gains immeasurably in coherence when it is viewed as a literary reworking of themes from the Decalogue. This is not unusual. Jackson has made exactly the same claim in respect of the chiasm in Lev 24,[25] whilst Hartley has shown the close linguistic similarities between the Decalogue and Lev 19.[26]

The internal structure of Lev 20:2–6 is also closely connected to the Covenant Code. Exod 22:18–20 lists a small group of self-contained cases concerning witchcraft, bestiality, and idolatry, which the Israelites appeared to associate with the practices of foreign peoples. Idolatry and witchcraft are the subject of the first chiasm (Lev 20:3–6), whilst bestiality appears as the climax of the middle section (Lev 20:9–16). Allusions to the Covenant Code occur elsewhere in *Leviticus.* Jackson notes that the chiastic structure of Lev 24 is closely connected, thematically, to the first section of the Covenant Code.[27]

7. Concluding Comments

All claims regarding the existence of chiasmus must overcome the charge that the argument is more a matter of eisegesis rather than exegesis. This is a recurring challenge in the literature. For example, Douglas claimed to find a (chiastic) ring structure in *Leviticus*[28]; however, Kiuchi found this unpersuasive, claiming Douglas's "seemingly arbitrary characterization

of the chapters is doubtful."[29] More specifically, in regard to Lev 20, Milgrom's meticulous study followed Hildenbrand in finding the following chiasm in Lev 20:2–27[30]:

Figure 4: Proposed structure of Leviticus 20 by Milgrom (following Hildenbrand)

A Worship of chthonic deities (Molech and necromancy) (20:1–6)
  B Sanctification (20:7)
    C Exhortation to obedience (20:8)
      X Penalties for violation (20:9–21)
    C′ Exhortation to obedience (20:22–25)
  B′ Sanctification (20:26)
A′ Worship of chthonic deities (necromancy) (20:27)

I find Milgrom's analysis unpersuasive for two reasons. First, categorizing A and A′ as worshipping chthonic deities is rather loose. This abstraction is, in reality, a means of getting around the fact there is no corresponding mention of Molech in A′. The absence of Molech is a problem for Milgrom. It is not a very convincing chiasm if Molech is heavily emphasized four times at the start but there is no reference at all to Molech in the concluding section. The second problem is that Milgrom locates the fulcrum of the chiasm in verses 9–21, which are categorized as penalties for violation. But there are penalties for violation throughout the unit, not just in verses 9–21. In fact, the penalties start in verses 2–6 and continue to verse 27. Thus, I conclude that Milgrom and Hildenbrand's proposal is not persuasive.

Determining whether a chiastic analysis is valid must, in the end, be subject to the threefold test we apply to any persuasive theory:

1. Does it gather in all the available data?
2. Does it do so with simplicity and economy?
3. Does it shed light on cognate areas?

I am hopeful that my proposed chiastic account succeeds on all three fronts. I have argued that the chiastic structure exactly maps those features of the text that commentators find awkward and try to avoid. The chiasm I submit holds together the key themes of the chapter with simplicity and elegance whilst also shedding light on themes prevalent elsewhere in biblical law (though for the latter I must refer the reader elsewhere).[31] I further suggest that my proposal argues for an internal structure for Lev 20 that is more detailed and less abstract than

Milgrom's proposed structure (avoiding my first criticism of Milgrom's study) whilst also covering the entirety of the text (avoiding my second criticism). As for its reception, time will tell.

Finally, the value and significance of using chiasmus as an interpretive tool is that it enables us to break the chapter down to its component parts and to appreciate the care with which it is assembled. Chiasmus also helps us to understand how form mirrors content. The orderliness of Lev 20 is clearly intended to reflect the claim of the text—that it presents a picture of relational and sexual order. The chiastic arrangement of Lev 20 is thus a key way in which the chapter sets out its vision of a society characterized by well-ordered sexual relationships.

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Notes

1. In doing so, I draw upon arguments developed in several previous articles including Jonathan Burnside, "The Medium and the Message: Necromancy and the Literary Context of Leviticus 20," in *Text, Time, and Temple: Literary, Historical, and Ritual Studies in Leviticus* (ed. Francis Landy, Leigh M. Trevaskis, and Bryan D. Bibb; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 41–62; J. P. Burnside, "Rethinking 'Sexual' Offenses in Biblical Law: The Literary Structure of Leviticus 20," in *Jewish Law Association Studies XVI: The Boston 2004 Conference Volume* (ed. E. Dorff; Binghampton: Global Academic, 2007), 37–55; Jonathan P. Burnside, "Strange Flesh: Sex, Semiotics and the Construction of Deviancy in Biblical Law," *JSOT* 30, no. 4 (2006): 387–420. These can be downloaded from https://bristol.academia.edu/JonathanBurnside. For a summary of some of the key issues, see Jonathan Burnside, "Sexual Offences," in *God, Justice, and Society: Aspects of Law and Legality in the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 247–387.

2. For example, W. H. Bellinger Jr., *Leviticus and Numbers* (New International Bible Commentary; Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 124; Philip J. Budd, *Leviticus* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 289.

3. Lester L. Grabbe, *Leviticus* (Old Testament Guides; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 80.

4. See Burnside, "Medium and the Message."

5. Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 405–8.

6. For details see Burnside, "Medium and the Message."

7. Carol Myers, "The Family in Early Israel," in *Families in Ancient Israel* (Leo G. Perdue et al.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 13, 37.

8. Compare Gen 2:7 "then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being [*chayyah lenefesh*]."

9. Family authority itself being divinely-appointed (for example, Exod 20:12).

10. Burnside, "Strange Flesh."

11. Contra Martin Noth, *Leviticus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 149, who claims that verse 9 "does not fit on to what follows."

12. Bernard S. Jackson, *Making Sense in Law: Linguistic, Psychological, and Semiotic Perspectives* (Liverpool: Deborah Charles Publications, 1995), 510.

13. For example, Jonathan P. Burnside, *The Signs of Sin: Seriousness of Offense in Biblical Law* (JSOTSup 364; London: Continuum International, 2003), 222–23; Bernard S. Jackson, *Wisdom-Laws: A Study of the* Mishpatim *of Exodus 21:1–22:16* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 80–85.

14. Burnside, "Strange Flesh," 414.

15. Françoise Héritier, *Two Sisters and Their Mother* (trans. Jeanine Herman; New York: Zone Books, 1999).

16. See Madeline Gay McClenney-Sadler, "A Synopsis of Key Findings in Re-covering the Daughter's Nakedness: A Formal Analysis of Israelite Kinship Terminology and the Internal Logic of Leviticus 18" (paper presented to Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, 2002).

17. I owe this point to Bernard Jackson.

18. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 217.

19. Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 140.

20. Examples of divine-human partnership in punishment are found elsewhere in the Pentateuch. A classic example is found in Gen 9:5–6: "For your lifeblood I [God speaking] will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image." Here, Gen 9:5 states that God will punish whilst Gen 9:6 states that man is to punish (unless "by man" means "in exchange for that man"). However, these verses are not necessarily incompatible. Human institutions are a remedy, but if they fail, then God punishes directly. There is a divine-human partnership in punishment, as there is in adjudication generally (cf. Deut 1:17; 2 Chr 19:6). This is borne out by narrative and legal accounts of homicide, which demonstrate that both God and humankind have an interest in prosecuting and adjudicating upon homicide (e.g., Gen 4:9–15 and Num 35:22–24, respectively). Human institutions do not exclude direct divine involvement. Even the motive clause in Gen 9:6 ("for God made man in his own image") preserves the ambiguity and stresses the interplay between God and humankind.

21. The paradigm case may indeed envisage the offender as an individual who has particular cultic responsibility within his *mishpachah.*

22. Quoted by Bernard Jackson, "Talion and Purity: Some Glosses on Mary Douglas," in *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas* (ed. John F. A. Sawyer, JSOTSup 227; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 120.

23. It also reappears in a motivation clause (Lev 20:24) following the second chiasmus (Lev 20:17–21).

24. There are further verbal parallels in the chapter as a whole. The Decalogue makes a link between honouring father and mother with long life in the land (Exod 20:12). Similarly, Lev 20 makes a link between punishment for cursing father and mother (20:9) and punishment for sexual offenses, which are seen as prototypical of cursing parents (20:10–16 and 20:17–21). Applying the penalties is thus linked with retaining the land (20:22).

25. Jackson, "Talion and Purity," 120–21.

26. J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 309–11.

27. Jackson, "Talion and Purity," 119–23.

28. Mary Douglas, "Sacred Contagion," in *Reading Leviticus,* 86–106.

29. Desmond T. Alexander and David W. Baker, eds., "Leviticus, Book of," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 524. Instead, Kiuchi identifies a chiastic arrangement across three large blocks of material (Lev 12–16; 18–22; 23–26); see "Leviticus, Book of," 524–25.

30. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22* (Anchor Bible Commentary 3A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1728.

31. See Burnside, "Sexual Offences," 247–387.