

Going Vertical with Love Thy Neighbor:
Exegetical Use of Scripture in Leviticus 19:18b

Gary Edward Schnittjer

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Abstract

When focusing on the scriptures themselves, the horizontal context of a given text refers to the *surrounding* verses, paragraphs, chapters, and book. Vertical context refers to an exegetical allusion to an earlier scriptural tradition *within* the text itself. In spite of intense, ongoing study of Leviticus 19:8b within its horizontal contexts, the vertical context within this verse has been ignored. The present study defines vertical context and how it functions as a basis to interpret Leviticus 19:18b. After investigating how vertical context bears on Leviticus 19:18b, the passage is explained in relation to the intersection of its vertical and horizontal contexts.

Introduction and Thesis Statement

The sense of the command to love thy neighbor pivots on its context.¹ Context bears on every part of the command and on its sense as a whole. This study focuses on an ignored part its context.

Horizontal context begins *around* a passage and moves outward versus vertical context that starts *within* the passage itself and can move upward or downward. Horizontal context refers to the surrounding verses, paragraphs, chapter, chapters, scroll, and serial narrative. Vertical context refers to the exegetical allusion within love thy neighbor to the command to love the residing foreigner (19:33–34) and the still deeper vertical context of the blended interpretive allusion within 19:33–34 to the law of passover participation (Exod 12:48) and the prohibition against mistreating residing foreigners (22:21[20]). Figure A depicts the horizontal and vertical contexts of love thy neighbor.

Thesis: The evaluation of the deep vertical context of love thy neighbor demonstrates that a series of exegetical advances within Torah culminates in this commandment.²

¹ In this study love thy neighbor is shorthand for: וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am Yahweh” (Lev 19:18b). Unless stated otherwise all translations of *Biblia Hebraica* are mine. See *Biblia Hebraica Quinta: Leviticus*, ed. Innocent Himbaza (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2021); *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, eds. Karl Elliger, Wilhelm Rudolph, et al., 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997); *Biblia Hebraica*, ed. R. Kittel (Stuttgart: Bibelanstalt, 1951). Hereafter cited as *BHQ*, *BHS*, and *BHK*.

² Some parts of this argument have been presented in brief elsewhere, see Gary Edward Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 42–44. For a version packaged for more general readership see idem, “Surprises of Old Testament Use of Old Testament: Part 5,” *Credo Magazine Blog* (2020): <https://credomag.com/2020/07/surprises-of-old-testament-use-of-old-testament-part-5/>.

Figure A: Horizontal and Vertical Contexts of Love Thy Neighbor

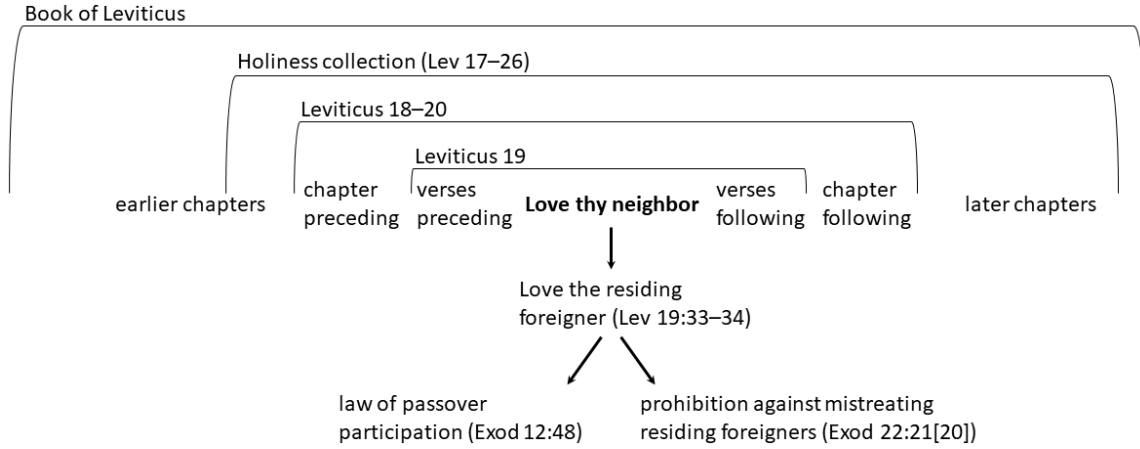


Table B: Structure of Leviticus 19:11-18

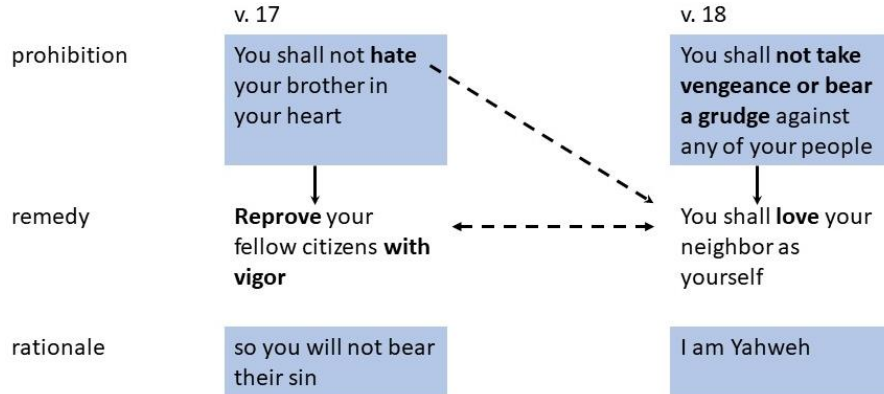
vv. 11-12	prohibitions 4x (אָל + 2mp impf)	+ rationale 1x	“I am Yahweh”
vv. 13-14	prohibitions 5x (אָל + 2ms impf)	+ admonition 1x	“I am Yahweh”
vv. 15-16	prohibitions 5x (אָל + 2mp/2ms impf)	--	“I am Yahweh”
vv. 17-18	prohibitions 3x (אָל + 2ms impf)	+ rationale (with אָל) 1x and admonitions 2x	“I am Yahweh”

Table C: Synonyms for Fellow in Leviticus 19:11-18^a

vv. 11-12	fellow citizen			“I am Yahweh”	
vv. 13-14	neighbor			“I am Yahweh”	
vv. 15-16	fellow citizen	people	neighbor	“I am Yahweh”	
vv. 17-18	brother	fellow citizen	people	neighbor	“I am Yahweh”

^a Table adapted from Wenham, *Leviticus*, 267.

Figure D: Leviticus 19:17–18 in Two Panels^a



^a Figure adapted and modified from Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1402–3, 1646. Specifically, translation mine and arrows added to show how love thy neighbor interrelates to each of the commands that precede it.

Emphases signify verbal parallels in Hebrew and broken underlining signifies unconventional syntax:

The residing foreigner residing with you shall be treated like your own citizens. **You shall love them** (וְאָהַבְתָּ לָוִי) **as yourself** for you were residing foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh your God. (Lev 19:34)

You shall love your neighbor (וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ) **as yourself**. I am Yahweh. (19:18b)

You shall love the residing foreigner (וְאָהַבְתֶּם אֶת־הַגֵּר) for you were residing foreigners in the land of Egypt. (Deut 10:19)

Bold and italics signify verbal parallels in Hebrew:

When residing foreigners reside with you and want to celebrate passover to Yahweh, all of their males shall be circumcised. Then they may come near and celebrate it **like any citizen** of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. (Exod 12:48)

You shall not mistreat or oppress the residing foreigner, for you were residing foreigners in the land of Egypt. (Exod 22:21[20])

When residing foreigners reside with you in your land, you shall not mistreat them. Residing foreigners residing with you shall be treated **like your own citizens**. You shall love them as yourself, for you were residing foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh your God. (Lev 19:33–34)

Underlining marks verbal parallels in Hebrew and bold marks the explanatory gloss:

You shall not mistreat or oppress the residing foreigner, for you were residing foreigners in the land of Egypt. (Exod 22:21[20])

You shall not oppress the residing foreigner, **because you yourselves know the longing of the residing foreigner**, for you were residing foreigners in the land of Egypt. (Exod 23:9)

Compare a different expression with a similar sense in the explanation of why Israel did not listen to Moses.

So Moses spoke accordingly to Israel, but they did not listen *because of shortness of breath* [מִקְצֵר רוּחַ] and because of harsh slavery. (6:9 ultra-literally, emphasis added) [or] ... *because of being dispirited* (6:9b less literally)

Six days you may do your work, but on the seventh day you must rest, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and because the slave born in your household and *the residing foreigner need to catch their breath* [וַיִּנְפְּשׁ ... הַגֵּר]. (23:12 ultra-literally, emphasis mine) [or] ... *need to be refreshed* (23:12b less literally)

Summary Conclusion

The vertical context snaps together with the horizontal context in Leviticus 19:18b with the term love. The structure and selection of the verb in love thy neighbor causes it to be read in light of each of the preceding four verbs and their clauses in 19:17–18a (see Figure D above).

Do not hate in your heart rather love in your heart	mental activity	brother
Reprove with vigor because of love	verbal activity	fellow citizen
Do not take vengeance rather do acts of love	actions	your people
Do not bear a grudge rather bear goodwill	mental attitude	"

The horizontal context that bears on the command to love thy neighbor loads a multiplex of connotations upon it. The verb in love thy neighbor applies to thought, word, deed, and attitude. That is what it means to love thy neighbor in its immediate context. And the object of love is key.

And, the loaded term love in love thy neighbor retrojects those connotations vertically downward onto love the residing foreigner in Leviticus 19:33–34.