“Why Doesn’t the Bible Specifically Condemn Father-Daughter Incest?”

In “How Can a Just God Order the Slaughter of Men, Women and Children?” your author quoted the Bible as saying incest with someone’s daughter was forbidden. I have Revised Standard Edition of the Bible, and I have noticed that in this version, at least, it says “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son’s daughter or your daughter’s daughter, for their nakedness is your nakedness.”

Out of this whole long list of people (relatives) one is not supposed to have sexual relations with, in Leviticus 18, only the daughter is omitted. I have always wondered about this. You could say, well, it’s inferred that someone should not commit incest with one’s daughter. But why list all the other relatives one by one, and leave out the daughter??? It seems very suspect that the author of Leviticus would make a very detailed, explicit list, and yet still leave out the daughter.

As an incest survivor, this bothers me greatly that even one version of the Bible would have this translation.

My heart hurts for you. I am so sorry to hear about your sexual abuse. Did you know that the Hebrew word for incest is “confusion”? Appropriate, isn’t it?

You’re right, there isn’t a specific prohibition against father-daughter incest in the Bible, although I do believe it is covered under Lev. 18:6, “None of you shall approach any blood relative of his to uncover nakedness; I am the LORD.”

I found this interesting statement on a website (www.arlev.clara.net/lev038.htm):

> ***Father and Daughter***
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> *It needs to be noted that sexual relations between a father and his daughter aren't mentioned as being forbidden in either this passage or chapter 20 which follows. This is a tricky problem but it seems best to follow Wenham's explanation on this in seeing this prohibition as already in existence amongst the Israelites and so not repeated here.*
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> *The implication of Genesis 19:30-38 appears to be that such a union was unacceptable in the eyes of the natural culture of the tribes and didn't warrant a comment forbidding what was already accepted as illicit.*
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> *Wenham notes (page 254) that:*
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> *It is expressly forbidden both in the laws of Hammurabi . . . and in the Hittite laws . . . In other words these regulations extend the prohibitions on incest already accepted in other parts of the ancient Near East*

Since even the Gentiles knew that incest with one's daughter was unthinkable, perhaps that's why the umbrella prohibition of Lev. 18:6 was understood to include one's own daughter.

I also checked with a great friend of Probe, Dr. Reg Grant (professor at Dallas Theological Seminary), who also added this:

> *I went to the NET Bible and found this little note on 18:6 (which is the place I would have taken her as well):*
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> *Heb "Man, man shall not draw near to any flesh of his body/flesh." The repetition of the word man is distributive, meaning "any" [or, "every"] man (GKC 123.c; cf. Lev 15:2). The two words for flesh are combined to emphasize the physical familial relatedness (see Hartley, Leviticus [WBC], 282 and Levine, Leviticus [JPSTC], 119).*

It’s interesting to me to see the emphasis of the Hebrew in Lev. 18:6: first, literally, “no man, man,” indicating that this is across the board for EVERYONE, and secondly, the repetition of both Hebrew words for “flesh” (literally, “flesh of flesh to him”) to cover *every* family relationship.

I hope the fact that the unspeakable horror of father-child incest is not specifically forbidden in Scripture does not make you feel that it is any less heart-breaking to God than it is. There are no words for the depth of my compassion for anyone who has to live with the soul-wounds of this horrible sin and trauma. Again, I am so sorry.

Sue Bohlin

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P.S. A reader sent an email responding to this article, suggesting that the prohibition in Lev. 18:17 (“You shall not uncover the nakedness **of a woman and her daughter**; you shall not take [in marriage] her son’s daughter or her daughter’s daughter, to uncover her nakedness they are close relatives, it is evil counsel”) also works to include daughters and step-daughters.