

Deuteronomy 5:18

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God prohibits Israel from committing adultery.

The Seventh Commandment

In [Leviticus 18](#), God instructs Israel to avoid repeating the sexual practices they observed in Egypt and will observe in Canaan. These practices included a full range of immoral sexual behavior ranging from incest of every sort imaginable to sex with animals. The fertility cults attached to the various forms of pagan religions embraced various forms of sexual immorality as an integral part of their idol worship. When Israel sinned by worshiping the golden calf, they “rose up to play” ([Exodus 32:6](#)) which probably meant they engaged in the sort of sexual immorality they had observed in Egypt.

It was also common practice in the ancient Near East for rulers to kill husbands and steal their wives, which is why Abraham asked his wife Sarah to identify herself as his sister as they journeyed through unfamiliar lands ([Genesis 12:13](#)). It was into this culture of sexual promiscuity and perversion that God stated the seventh commandment not to *commit adultery*.

The verb translated here as “to commit adultery” refers to a sexual intercourse of a man and a married woman, according to [Leviticus 20:10](#) and [Ezekiel 16:32](#). Just as God used the familiar and broadly applied Suzerain-vassal covenant format to make His covenant with Israel, He sometimes applied other familiar patterns. This particular command seems to mirror similar laws in the ancient Near East. For example, the code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian code of law that likely predated the Ten Commandments (being dated to about 1754 BC), stated, “If the wife of a man is caught lying with another man, they shall bind them and throw them into the water.” According to [Leviticus 20:10](#), if a married woman has sex with a man, both she as well as the man are to be put to death.

Jesus made clear that God intended for marriage to be the union of a male and female that would remain unbroken ([Matthew 19:3-9](#)); [Genesis 2:24](#)). However, Jesus also explained that God allowed for divorce as a departure from His original design because of the hardness of the hearts of men ([Matthew 19:7-9](#)). It appears that God made a similar exception to His original

design by allowing polygamy, which could be a reason this seventh commandment only refers to the woman as being married.

The prohibition against adultery continues in the New Testament era ([Matthew 5:27-28](#); [Romans 13:9](#); [Galatians 5:19](#); [Jas. 2:11](#)). Jesus himself expands this prohibition by saying that “everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” ([Matthew 5:28](#)). Thus, believers today are to exercise caution to avoid cultivating lust, which is the root of adultery. All sin is displeasing to God, but according to [1 Corinthians 6:18](#), sexual sin is especially harmful because it is a sin against our own bodies.

Biblical Text:

¹⁸ **You shall not commit adultery.**