

# Leviticus 18:1-4

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/lev/lev-18/leviticus-181-4/>

*God tells the Israelites through Moses that His ways are in their best interest. The ways of the Egyptians and the Canaanites, which are the ways of their sinful flesh, are not in their best interest. Those ways lead to death while His ways lead to life and peace.*

Leviticus 18 begins with *God* telling *Moses*, to speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, “*I am the LORD your God.*” From Exodus through Deuteronomy *God* speaks to the sons of Israel through *Moses* His prophet. At Mount Sinai in Exodus 19 *God* speaks the Ten Commandments directly to the sons of Israel. But being afraid of the One speaking, and of what was commanded, they tell *Moses*, “*Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die*” (Exodus 20:19).

Here *God* says, “*I am the LORD your God*” or more literally “*I am Yahweh your mighty One.*” Often the Israelites needed a reminder of who *God* is (“*Yahweh*” which means eternal existence) and His role in their lives (*God*, “*elohim*” which means mighty One).

The Israelites had seen how mighty *God* was when He delivered them from *Egypt*. But *God* knows humanity’s fallen nature (Psalm 103:14) and realizes that though He has taken the people out of *Egypt*, He will need to take *Egypt* out of the people. *Egypt* is a picture of sin throughout the Bible and the Israelite deliverance from *Egypt* has been paralleled with unbelievers who come to faith in Jesus, who delivers them first from the penalty of sin, and then gives them power and capacity to overcome sin. However, it remains the choice for any of *God*’s people whether to be delivered from the power of sin. That was true with Israel, and it is true for *God*’s people today.

*Israel* was delivered from *Egypt* by the hand of *God* because they were His people. But *God* left them with a choice of whether to follow Him, or to revert to the ways of *Egypt*. He entered into a covenant with them, to make clear the consequences of their choices. *God* says to the Israelites, “*You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes.*” That *God* is commanding *Israel* to not do what is done in the land of *Canaan* makes clear that they have the option to choose to do what is done in the land of *Canaan* which would essentially be choosing to go back into slavery, this time a slave to their evil desires.

The Egyptians, the Canaanites, as well as most Gentile cultures were steeped in sexual immorality, often incorporating it into their pagan worship. According to Jewish tradition, the Israelites developed a slang term for the Canaanites, calling them “*dogs*” due to their practice of having sexual intercourse in public without shame, as dogs do. The Canaanites also sacrificed their children to the pagan god Molech and had many other practices that aimed at self-indulgence. Their practices also included exploitation of others.

These admonitions given to *Israel* were also written for our example (1 Corinthians 10:11). As believers, we are delivered from slavery to sin by the hand of God, by His grace (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:14-16). This is a gift that can neither be earned nor lost. But just like *Israel*, it requires obedience to walk in God's ways in order to gain the full blessing available to us. *God* provided deliverance from *Israel*'s enemies, but only if they walked in obedience (Joshua 23:8-10).

Similarly, *God* provides for the New Testament believer deliverance (salvation) from the penalty of sin unconditionally through faith (John 3:14-16) just as *Israel* was delivered from *Egypt* by the hand of God. God also delivers (saves) the New Testament believer from the power of sin (to effect negative consequences upon us) but that requires obedience to His ways in order for His people to receive that benefit. In this respect, *Israel* and New Testament believers are similar, in that each is made God's people by His grace, but then left to choose whether to follow His ways and be blessed, or follow the ways of the world and fall again into slavery to sin (Romans 6:15-19).

As believers, we are not to *live* as the world does, as we used to behave before we were enlightened with God's Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:1-3, 1 Peter 4:3-4). We have been grafted into God's chosen people and are set apart from the world for good works (Ephesians 2:10,19). Though *God* delivers us from the penalty of sin and gives us His Spirit when we believe, He does not remove our sinful nature or require that we completely separate ourselves from the world, but He saves us from the power of sin when we call upon Him and walk in obedience to the Spirit (John 3:14, Romans 8:4;10:13). God often will lead us to be lights in the darkness of the world (as *Israel* was in the land of *Canaan*). But we are not to adopt the world's ways if we are to receive His fullest blessings.

Leviticus 18 can be summarized as *God* forbidding the *Israelites* from living an exploitative lifestyle, seeking to exploit *God* and fellow humans to satisfy their appetites, impulses, and pleasures. Leviticus 19 (and the rest of the Bible) shows God's way, which is to *live* a life of service to *God* and others, sacrificing our appetites, impulses, and pleasures for the good of others. This second way to *live*, to love others as we love ourselves, is what is in our true best interest (Leviticus 19:18).

*God* wants the best for His people. That is why He says, "*you are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the LORD your God.* When *God* speaks His covenant name, LORD (Hebrew "Yahweh" "The Existent One"), He emphasizes that He has at heart the best interest of His people, for whom He has promised to seek benefit. It should be obvious that a society where everyone loves one another and seeks each other's mutual benefit, as *God* has commanded, will be a great place to *live*. Whereas a society where the strong exploit the weak, as in *Egypt* and *Canaan*, will be a miserable place to *live*.

### **Biblical Text**

**1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'I am the LORD your God. 3 You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you**

**shall not walk in their statutes. 4 You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the LORD your God.**