

## Leviticus 18:1-5

Aaron Eime, Christ Church Jerusalem, 2022

This chapter is one of the Bible's most extensive and direct passages reflecting the Will of the Lord and God's desire regarding human sexuality. Leviticus, like all five books of Moses, is often called the Mosaic Law. This label can be misleading in that these are not the laws of Moses, they are the laws of God. According to the chiasmic structure of Leviticus, the climax of the book is in chapter 19. The chapters prior and after (18 and 20) concern themselves with the prohibitions of various sexual relationships and the punishments awarded should such activity be conducted by the Israelites. Chapter 18 describes things we should not do and chapter 20 describes what happens if we really do them. These rules to human sexuality stand in the midst of commandments that are uniquely directed towards Israel and Temple worship. Yet they still express the heart of God towards all human sexuality. Most of the instructions are to the men, or the father of the family, on how to treat and respect women in regard to intimate relationships. The later portion includes instructions for both males and females regarding homosexuality and bestiality. Interestingly the family cohesion and obedience are essential to the Land itself with the breakdown of the covenantal relationships within the family affecting the earth in a severely negative way.

The chapter begins with the Lord addressing Moses who will speak on His behalf to the Israelites. God begins with the phrase; I am the Lord your God. As Rashi comments; we accept His sovereignty now we accept His ordinances. As Jesus comments in Luke 6; why do you call me Lord and don't do what I say? The Israelites are instructed to 'not do as Egyptians do'. Which is where they had just come from, and to 'not do as the Canaanites do' which is where they are about to go. The references to Egypt and Canaan in this context are unique in Scripture. Why mention these nations in particular and not simply state the prohibitions of the Torah?

Jewish exegesis comments that the conduct of these two nations was the most abominable and depraved in the world at that time. Hence the place where Israel dwelt was the most depraved and the place where they were going was also the most depraved. Which begs the question why? Why does God send Israel into the lands of darkness? For it is in the darkness that the light shines all the brighter. The calling of Israel was, and is, to be a light to the nations. One of the differences between deeds of darkness and the deeds of light is that when you are in the darkness you can see what is happening in the light, however, when you are in the light you can't see what is happening in the darkness. The light is both a shield and a guide. Even during the period of slavery in Egypt, the Israelites were meant to be light to those living in darkness. Any way of looking at this issue is; if you continue to behave as the Egyptians do then why did I bother to bring you out of Egypt? And if you behave as the Canaanites do then why should I bother to remove them from before you? A spiritual application for us resonates like this; we are to be in the world but not of the world. We are to affect the world while not letting the world affect us. Seven times in Leviticus 18 the Israelites are commanded not to act like the other nations. Perhaps our churches should not 'try' to be 'relevant' to the world by being like the world.

The Lord concludes His introduction to these commandments with the injunction that whoever does them will live by them. Which life is being referred to here? What are the connections between doing and living by these instructions? Commentators throughout the ages are not agreed on the meaning of this verse. A man will naturally eventually die even if he follows the commandments of God. Some commentators use this verse to support their argument that

## Leviticus 18:1-5

Aaron Eime, Christ Church Jerusalem, 2022

keeping the law results in eternal life in the world to come. Which I think is reading too much into the text! We should note that God is addressing His people who are already in a relationship with Him. Following the commandments does not grant access to a relationship with God, the relationship already exists. Israel is not instructed to obey to become the people of God, rather because they are the people of God they will obey. Doing anything for the Lord is the correct response to what the Lord has done for us. It is difficult to show gratitude for something by doing absolutely nothing. Habakkuk 4vs2 likewise declares that the righteous, even though no one is righteous, no not one (cheeky grin), will live by his faithfulness. This is not living into a future reality but in the present which ultimately leads into the future! Obedience is not the method of obtaining God's grace, instead walking in His ways is the method of enjoying life in God's presence, both now and in the world to come.

As a final Hebraic note, in modern Jewish prayer life there is a series of prayers of repentance called the *Selichot*. They reflect the injunction to be holy before the Lord and to reflect His holiness before others, in the case of Leviticus 18 with human sexuality. סליחות Selichot penitential prayers are said on the High Holidays. They include this declaration: The soul is Yours and the body is Your work, have mercy upon Your labour. In commentary to *Selichot*, they note that I am the Lord your God reflects the Creators call: Your soul is Mine and your body is Mine, please do not corrupt the fruit of My labour.