

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Leviticus 18: 01-05

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We'll read Leviticus chapter 18, verses 1 to 5 today.

In Leviticus chapters 1 to 15, God reveals the five basic offerings, along with the ordinances for sacrifices and the establishment of the priestly system of service. He then instructs the people to remove impurity from their daily lives. Chapter 16 introduces the Day of Atonement ordinances, allowing the high priest to enter the Most Holy Place once a year to meet with God at the mercy seat. Chapter 17 reminds the people that sacrifices must be brought to the entrance of the Tabernacle, made only to the Lord God, and that the blood—the life price for atonement—is not to be consumed. Chapters 18 to 20 call the people to live a life of holiness.

This structure shows us that the first 16 chapters of Leviticus prepare a path to bring people before God. For New Testament believers, this path represents Christ. The remaining 11 chapters illustrate how to bring God into daily life, so every aspect and detail of life aligns with God's holy nature. In chapters 18 to 20, we find repeated the crucial phrase, "I am the Lord your God." God desires that His people not only exalt Him during sacrifices and worship but also remember and honor His holiness in every detail of their daily lives.

Verse 01-02: "Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'I am the Lord your God.'"

This passage on the sanctification of daily life begins with God instructing Moses to tell the Israelites, "I am the Lord your God." In Exodus chapter 3, God called Moses from the burning bush to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Initially, Moses hesitated and made multiple excuses. During their exchange, God revealed Himself to Moses.

In Exodus 3:13-15, it says: "Then Moses said to God, 'Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they say to me, "What is His name?" what shall I say to them?' And God said to Moses, 'I AM THAT I AM.' And He said, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you."' Moreover, God said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: "The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.'"

God personally declared to Moses that His name is "Yahweh" (or "Jehovah"), meaning "I AM THAT I AM." The term "I AM" is translated in the Chinese Union Version as "Self-Existing and Eternal." In Hebrew, I AM THAT I AM translates directly to English as "I Am that I Am," and in literal Chinese, "我是那我是." While this phrase can be difficult to comprehend directly, the Union Version captures the meaning as "Self-Existing and Eternal," emphasizing that God is the origin, the endpoint, and the One sovereign over all things in between.

God wanted the Israelites to remember that it was Yahweh who led them out of Egypt, freeing them from the bondage of slavery. It was Yahweh who provided for all their needs in the wilderness, walking with them each step of the way. And it was Yahweh who would lead them into the promised land of Canaan. In the following three chapters of Leviticus, God issued the moral statutes that the Israelites were to observe in their daily lives, continuously emphasizing, "I am the Lord your God." This repeated declaration underscores that these moral standards originate from God and reflect His holy nature. When people follow God and seek to emulate Him, they naturally begin to live a life that mirrors His holiness.

Verse 03: "According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances."

Egypt represented the world, a place God wanted the Israelites to leave to avoid being assimilated into its culture and eventually enslaved by it. This is why God led the Israelites out of Egypt. For New Testament believers, Egypt symbolizes the world: while we are in the world, we are not meant to belong to it. Before salvation, we lived in the world, following its patterns and enslaved by its influences, dead in our sins and trespasses. However, through the redemptive grace of Jesus Christ, we have been bought back and now belong to Christ. Consequently, we can no longer follow worldly patterns, behaviors, customs, or traditions.

Canaan, the promised land, was the place God designated for the Israelites to enter and inherit. However, God warned them not to adopt the behaviors or customs of the Canaanites. In Genesis, we see how Sodom and Gomorrah in Canaan were destroyed by God due to their overwhelming wickedness, illustrating the moral corruption prevalent in Canaanite society.

In Genesis 15, God promises Abraham that his descendants will return to Canaan after 400 years to inherit the land. Genesis 15:16 explains the wait: “for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” God gave the Amorites time to repent, but their sin eventually reached fullness by the time of Moses. Then, God led the Israelites back to Canaan, warning them to avoid the immoral practices of the Canaanites, whose iniquities were now complete.

Israel was cautioned to avoid the lifestyle of both Egypt and Canaan, reflecting their unique call to model God’s holiness. Similarly, for New Testament believers, Paul instructs in Ephesians 5:1-5, “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us...But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you...neither filthiness, nor foolish talking...but rather giving of thanks.” Paul's message to imitate God and reject impurity or greed mirrors God's call for Israel to reject worldly practices, focusing instead on living a life of holiness as God’s people.

Verse 04: “You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the Lord your God.”

“Statutes” and “judgments”, as translated in ASV, form part of God’s law, but they differ slightly in scope from the Ten Commandments. When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, He provided Israel with the foundational moral principles of His covenant. These ten commandments summarize two main commands: the first four instruct on loving God, and the last six on loving others. They encapsulate God’s will for a holy life, guiding both relationships with God and fellow humans.

The statutes then expand on these principles, clarifying how they apply across various life situations. For instance, the commandment “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14) is a broad moral law. Leviticus 18:6-18 further specifies what constitutes unlawful relations, detailing prohibited relationships to guard sexual purity.

When Israel failed to uphold these statutes, judgments provided procedures for addressing transgressions, including penalties. In Leviticus 20:10-21, for example, punishments for adultery range from capital punishment to expulsion from the community, reinforcing the holiness of the community and the seriousness of sin.

The subtle distinctions between “statutes” and “judgments” emphasize both the guidance for daily living and the just responses to violations of that guidance. Ultimately, God’s statutes and judgments reflect His holiness, as seen in His reminder to Israel: “I am the LORD your God.” Their purpose is not solely punitive; they are rooted in reverence for God, underscoring that God’s people should strive to live according to His holy nature.

Verse 05: “You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.”

In this verse, the importance of following God’s statutes and judgments is reiterated, underscoring that by doing so, people may “live.” In any society, boundaries in human relationships are essential for harmony. These guidelines allow people to coexist peacefully and sustain societal order, preventing society

from descending into chaos where only the strongest survive. Without these laws, human society would be indistinguishable from the animal kingdom.

Around 3,500 years ago, God delivered these statutes and judgments through Moses to guide Israel's conduct. These laws, especially those governing interpersonal relationships, became foundational to modern legal systems, underpinning civilized human interactions and contributing to the ongoing survival and order of society. In following them, people were promised life, symbolizing both physical survival and spiritual well-being. God reinforces this promise by declaring, "I am the LORD."

The phrase "I am the LORD" is more than a title; it reminds us of God's eternal, self-sufficient nature. As Exodus 3:14 describes, "I Am That I Am"—God is ever-present, without beginning or end, existing always as "I Am." This name signifies that God meets our needs precisely where we fall short. He knows we lack the strength to obey His statutes fully, but He is our "I Am."

When we face temptation and feel weak, He is our strength; in times of uncertainty, He is our light; in challenges that feel insurmountable, He enables us to overcome. Whatever we lack, turning to Him brings the exact provision needed. This promise is embedded in His assurance, "I am the LORD your God"—our all-sufficient source of life and guidance.

Indeed, the Old Testament law appears to prepare us for the New Testament gospel. In the Old Testament, life was promised through obedience to God's law. However, humans simply lack the strength to uphold the law perfectly. As Paul says in Romans 10:5, "For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, 'The man who does those things shall live by them'", quoting from Leviticus 18:5. If someone falls short of this standard, God, who declares, "I am the LORD," seems to beckon us to seek Him directly.

This understanding is completed in the New Testament, where Paul declares, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). Christ is the fulfillment—the very culmination—of the law. When we reach the end of the law by recognizing our own inability to meet its demands, we come

to Christ, who makes righteousness accessible by faith. This message of salvation through faith in Christ alone is the gospel: through His sacrifice, Jesus fulfilled the law's requirements and bore the penalty of our failures. Believing in Him, we are counted as righteous in the sight of God.

When we study the statutes and judgments of the Old Testament, we remember that God declared Himself as "I am the LORD your God" repeatedly, signaling His enduring presence and provision. He knew our need and prepared salvation through Jesus Christ, inviting us to turn to Him.

Let us pray together: Dear Heavenly Father, You are a God of abundant mercy and love. You call us to live holy lives, yet You know our inability to fully keep Your law. You prepared the way of salvation long ago, sacrificing Your beloved Son so that those who believe in Jesus and come before You can be counted as righteous. As we study the law's commands and judgments, help us to recognize our sins and humbly admit our limitations. Let us confidently come to Your throne for grace and mercy through Jesus, who is our help in every need. Bless my life, that in all trials and challenges, I may quickly draw upon Christ's grace to live a life that pleases You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen!