

## **A RELIGION OF BLOOD SACRIFICE**

### **Leviticus 17**

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This chapter is the beginning of a new section of the Book of Leviticus. So far we've looked at three major sections. Chapters 1–7, the law of sacrifices. Chapters 8–10, the law of the ordination of the priesthood. Chapter 11–16, the distinctions between things clean and unclean. That being topped off by the Day of Atonement where the people and the tabernacle are purified. From chapter 17 through the rest of the book pretty much you have rules, practical guidelines for holy living. Today the chapter divides into two basic segments—limitation, as to what sacrifices could be offered, and the second part beginning with verse 10 is limitation on the use of blood. “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all of the Israelites and say to them: “This is what the Lord has commanded. Any Israelite who sacrifices an ox, a lamb or a goat in the camp or outside of it instead of bringing it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting to present it as an offering to the LORD in front of the tabernacle of the LORD—that man shall be considered guilty of bloodshed; he has shed blood and must be cut off from his people. This is so the Israelites will bring to the LORD the sacrifices they are now making in the open fields. They must bring them to the priest, that is, to the LORD, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and sacrifice them as fellowship offerings. The priest is to sprinkle the blood against the altar of the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and burn the fat as aroma pleasing to the LORD. They must no longer offer any of their sacrifices to the goat idols to whom they prostitute themselves. This is to be a lasting ordinance for them and for the generations to come.” Say to them, “Any Israelite or any alien living among them who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice and does not bring it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to sacrifice it to the LORD—that man

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must be cut off from his people. Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood—I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. For the life of the creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Therefore I say to the Israelites, 'None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood.' Any Israelite or any alien living among you who hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth, because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, 'You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off.' Anyone, whether native-born or alien, who eats anything found dead or torn by wild animals must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean until evening; then he will be clean. But if he does not wash his clothes and bathe himself, he will be held responsible"" (NIV).

You could see as I read this that indeed the chapter does divide into the two major categories.

The location of sacrifice being important to God, verses 1–9. And then the importance of blood.

#### **I. Let's talk for a moment about verses 1–9.**

What this restriction required was any domesticated animal that was among the children of Israel could only be killed in one place. It had to be killed at the tent of meeting, at the altar. This provision was modified somewhat when the children of Israel came into the Promised Land and they were spread out and far a way from the temple. Deuteronomy 12 modifies this provision by saying that when they're in the Promised Land that they can only eat meat that has been sacrificed at designated altars or designated shrines, places of worship.

In the wilderness, though, penalty was imposed if this restriction was broken. It was a severe penalty. If a person killed a domesticated animal such as an ox or sheep or goat, an animal used

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for sacrifice, outside from the Tent of Meeting, somewhere else outside or inside the camp, if he killed it in nonappropriate spot, that person was to be cut off from his people. We don't know what exactly is meant by that, whether that meant capital punishment (the person is put to death), whether it meant in the age to come he would be isolated from God's people or when it meant that then it came time to be buried he would not be buried among God's people. That's not exactly certain how the penalty was imposed. But the penalty was there. A person who offered sacrifice in a nondesignated place was to be cut off.

This raises the question why so severe a penalty is given for what seems to us such a minor offense. We want to take a moment to look at that.

**A.** One thing that is important to God is that God wanted His people to be separate from the other religions of the Middle East and of Canaan. He wanted them to stay away from sacrificing at pagan altars. And indeed the text of Leviticus 7 even notes that some of them had already been sacrificing to goat demons. By limiting the place of sacrifice He was requiring His people to come in an authorized way to Him and lessening the temptation to be worshipping other gods. All the religions of that day involved animal sacrifice. The Lord was keeping Israel from temptation by limiting the place of sacrifice, and He was making sure that they would keep their identity as a people.

**B.** Another thing obviously that the Lord wanted to do is to make sure that His people would learn the lessons leading to the Messiah. All of the tremendous animal sacrifice that is throughout the Old Testament was meant to kind of be a primer textbook on how the Messiah would come as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. God therefore took special safeguards to protect the lessons so that His people would be schooled in what to expect when Messiah, the Lamb of God came.

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God was patterning His people. God had in mind to pattern His people in the wilderness, and all through their history so they would be ready for Messiah and understand Messiah's work. God by the way is still in the process today of being exclusive of His choice of a place of salvation. Our day has brought the line "It doesn't really matter what you believe as long as you believe it sincerely." It's interesting that the people who espouse that really don't believe it. If the humanists really believe that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe it sincerely they wouldn't care at all what we Christians think about the origins of life. Then belief really becomes important. When we want our beliefs to matter then there's a right and wrong category instituted. People who say, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe it sincerely," don't really practice that when it comes to a cherished value that they hold.

There are people who say you can find God on a golf course. Why go to church? I want to tell you as a real duffer that I have not met anyone yet who has found God on a golf course. Unless someone were witnessing to them on the golf course. You don't find God on the golf course. You find a lot of other things but not God.

God's choice of a place is Calvary. His choice of a person is Christ Jesus. Peter says "Salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). God in the Old Testament was designating an exclusive place of worship and in the New Testament He's designating an exclusive person to worship. Salvation in no one else. There is no other sacrifice than the sacrifice offered at Calvary that is sufficient for us. Somehow we're with Jesus on Calvary and that's a sacred place. He is the only person in whom we may find salvation. So the Old Testament truth has a New Testament application.

**II. The second major teaching of this passage has to do with blood.**

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If God was concerned about the place where the sacrifice was given He was also concerned about the blood and what we do with blood is important to God.

The prohibition in the Old Testament about eating blood goes back to Noah so it predates the Law of Moses. Noah was told “You must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it” (Genesis 9:4). In the Old Testament and under the Mosaic law, sacrificial animals, when they were given, the blood had to be properly drained. If an animal had been killed in a hunt its blood had to be properly drained. If someone found a dead animal and wanted to eat it, they could eat it but they had to remain unclean for the day because there was no certainty the blood had been properly disposed of. God wanted to protect the blood for two reasons.

**A.** He wanted to protect the blood because He wanted to teach reverence for life. There could be no taking of life, even animal life, unless there was a respectful treatment of the blood. That is, I think, why we as believers are still today so very conscious of the sanctity of life. It helps explain why we as Christians take positions as we do on abortion and similar issues. We have a deep reverence for life. God is teaching reverence for life in the Old Testament through the handling of blood.

**B.** The second reason for the prohibition on blood was because blood had an exclusive purpose. Blood was to be used for atonement. It was not to be eaten. It was used as a means of teaching His people that a transfer of life was involved. That an animal had given his life that a guilty person could go free. That there had been a transfer. The animal had borne the sin which the human should bear. All of this was a lesson that prepares us for the coming of Jesus in the world. When you look at uses of blood today we find that uses we know medically parallel very well with spiritual applications and spiritual realities of the blood of Christ to our lives.

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For one thing blood carries life to every part of our body. The Old Testament knew that long before modern medicine. The life of the flesh is in the blood.

A one-hundred-sixty-pound adult has about five quarts of blood in them. That blood is carried to every single part of the body through a network of blood vessels. If your blood vessels were laid end to end they would total a network of about one hundred thousand miles. Your blood vessels end to end would wrap the equator four times. An enormous system of circulation in the body is designed to carry oxygen and food to every part of our body that it might live.

Jesus says His blood gives us life. “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:54).

The life-giving blood of Jesus is as strong today as when it was shed on the cross. It matches every type, it avails for every need, it is free to all who will receive it into their heart by faith.

Blood brings life.

Blood also carries away waste products. Blood carries away the part of the material that the body uses that the good has been gotten out of and it strains it back into the bloodstream to be properly disposed of by the right bodily function.

The New Testament tells us that the spiritual application of the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all our sin, that the blood of the sacrificial Lamb of God is at work carrying away our sin and our waste products. “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus! What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!” The blood of Christ cleanses us from our sin and from our guilt.

Give Him glory, therefore, all ye people, for His blood can wash away each stain.

A third function of blood is that blood fights disease, on a physical level the reaching out for the atonement. There is healing in His name for our bodies. There is healing for our spirit. There is

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total healing for us in the atonement of Jesus Christ. He bears all our sins, all our iniquities, all of our sicknesses. He fights the disease, which is against us.

The basic Bible teaching is that the blood of Christ is shed as the penalty for sin. In teaching us to drink His blood, represented by communion, Christ is going beyond the Old Testament to tell us that blood involves the transfer of life and He has given His life for us. There is no meaning for Jesus' physical life apart from His death. He must die. Because "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin" (Hebrews 9:22).

Communion represents that He took my place. He died for me. There are many professing Christians who will have nothing to do with the blood of Jesus. This is reprehensible to God. The person who will have nothing to do with the blood of Jesus is cut off from God's people. The penalty for disobedience and disbelief is as severe in the New Testament as in the Old. God has presented Jesus according to Romans 3:25 as the sacrifice of atonement through faith in His blood.

This passage of Scripture, Leviticus 17, is saying there is only one place of worship that God accepts. That is at the place of sacrifice. There's only one purpose for blood and that is to make atonement. Jesus had come to give us life. We must come and worship Him and receive the benefits of the offering which He has made for us.

### **Closing Prayer**

Our Father, as we come now to this communion table we are conscious of the fact that You have called us to Yourself and Yourself alone. There is salvation in no one else. We pray, our Lord Jesus Christ, that as we are here today and we later will hold the bread and the cup in our hand, that we will again consider that we take these not as some means of competing with whatever else is available, or because we're covering all of the bases and we're trying a few other things as

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well to make sure that at least one of them will work. Instead, we realize that as we hold this bread and this cup that it represents the world's one Savior, our Lord. And that it represents the only way that we can be bought out of death unto life. Since it is only one of a kind we hold sacredly and we hold dearly You in our lives. Be present among us as we share together today, Lord. For persons who have built altars in other places or have trusted sufficiently in themselves and not trusted sufficiently in You we pray that today will be a day of renewal and birth as they come to You the only hope of our lives and the only hope in the world. We ask these things in Your name. Amen.