



## Leviticus - Chapter Seventeen

### Summary of Chapter Seventeen

This chapter deals with the handling of animals, beginning with a reminder that the blood of slain animals should be brought to the sanctuary. As the chapter progresses, deeper rationales for the instructions are gradually revealed: they are intended to prevent ongoing idolatry, and the blood of a sacrificial animal is the 'life' that takes the place of the offerer's death. Animal blood is not to be used by Israel indiscriminately as it was used among the pagans of the time.

### **VI. Leviticus 17:1-16 - The Handling and Meaning of Blood**

**Refer to the chapter summary above.**

#### **VI.a Leviticus 17:1-9 - The Slaughtering of Animals**

If a person slaughters an animal either in the camp or outside the camp (v.3) and does not bring the blood to the sanctuary (v.4), that act is tantamount to human murder, although not identical to it. The immediate purpose for the prohibition is to prevent the people's idolatry in worshipping the goat demons (v.7). Anyone who violates the prohibition is to be cut off from his people (v.9).

<sup>1</sup> The Lord spoke to Moses: <sup>2</sup> Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the people of Israel and say to them: This is what the Lord has commanded. <sup>3</sup> If anyone of the house of Israel slaughters an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or slaughters it outside the camp, <sup>4</sup> and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, to present it as an offering to the Lord before the tabernacle of the Lord, he shall be held guilty of bloodshed; he has shed blood, and he shall be cut off from the people.

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Does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting. In the pagan world at that time, it was customary to offer sacrifice wherever one pleased. Altars were customarily built on high hills, in forested areas, or at other special places.

He shall be held guilty of bloodshed. This looser attitude towards the place of sacrifice may have been fine for the time of the patriarchs: <<*Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar*>> (Genesis 8:20), <<*Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.'* So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him>> (Genesis 12:7), <<*Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, and there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel, because it was there that God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother*>> (Genesis 36:6-7), and even Moses before the law was given: <<*And Moses built an altar and called it, The Lord is my banner*>> (Exodus 17:15). Yet now with a centralised place of worship, the Israelites were not allowed to offer sacrifice any way they pleased, they had to come to the tabernacle and have their sacrifice administered by the priests. If they disobeyed, they would be cut off from the people, i.e. exiled from their community.

This command runs completely contrary to the way most people come to God in today's culture. The modern world is characterised by an entirely individualistic way of coming to God, where each person makes up their own rules about dealing with God as they see him.

<sup>5</sup> This is in order that the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices that they offer in the open field, that they may bring them to the Lord, to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and offer them as sacrifices of well-being to the Lord. <sup>6</sup> The priest shall dash the blood against the altar of the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and turn the fat into smoke as a pleasing odour to the Lord, <sup>7</sup> so that they may no longer offer their sacrifices for goat-demons, to whom they prostitute themselves. This shall be a statute for ever to them throughout their generations. <sup>8</sup> And say to them further: Anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among them who offers a burnt-offering or sacrifice, <sup>9</sup> and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, to sacrifice it to the Lord, shall be cut off from the people.

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So that they may no longer offer their sacrifices for goat-demons, to whom they prostitute themselves. There was a spiritual reality behind the pagan gods, but the reality was really demonic. In sacrificing to Baal, Ashtoreth, and others, they really worshipped demons. Paul says essentially the same thing: *<<No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons>>* (1 Corinthians 10:20-21). There is a sense in which all worship that is not directed to God is directed to the devil and his demons.

Anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among them shall be cut off from the people. The demonic background to sacrifice justified this severe punishment of open idolatry.

## VI.b Leviticus 17:10-16 - Eating Blood Prohibited

These verses provide key insight into the understanding of sacrifice and atonement by explaining the meaning and significance of animal blood. It specifically prohibits the eating of blood products or of meat containing blood, where the animal has not been slaughtered correctly.

<sup>10</sup> If anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut that person off from the people. <sup>11</sup> For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement. <sup>12</sup> Therefore I have said to the people of Israel: No person among you shall eat blood, nor shall any alien who resides among you eat blood.

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If anyone eats any blood. This probably refers to eating meat that still has the blood in it: *<<Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood>>* (Genesis 9:4), *<<Only be sure that you do not eat the blood; for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the meat>>* (Deuteronomy 12:23), and: *<<For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell>>* (Acts 15:28-29).

I will set my face against that person who eats blood. This was a strict command, but the reason was simple: For the life of the flesh is in the blood. The idea was that all life belonged to God, and since blood is an emblem of life, it specially belonged to God. The blood is here described as the life of the animal. The Hebrew reads literally: 'And I, I have given it.' This underscores the action of the Lord himself in granting the means of making atonement; it is his gracious gift.

Jehovah's Witnesses have misinterpreted texts like these and abstain from blood transfusions during operations that could potentially save a life. In the case of consenting adults this practice is permitted but the courts in many countries have intervened where parents have refused such treatment for their young children.

Many pagan rituals celebrated the drinking of blood, and God also wanted a separation from these pagan practices. Thus, as a matter of practice, all animals that were butchered in Israel were drained of blood as much as possible. Not all nations did this. It appears from history that those nations who lived most on blood were very fierce, savage, and barbarous, such as the Scythians, Tartars, Arabs of the desert, the Scandinavians, and so forth, some of whom drank the blood of their enemies, making cups of their skulls!

Making atonement for your lives on the altar, that is, by means of the life of the animal, which ransoms the life of the offerer from the deserved judgement of the Lord.

Therefore. Because the Lord has set aside the blood for the unique role of atonement, the Israelites and all sojourners are prohibited from partaking of it.

<sup>13</sup> And anyone of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside among them, who hunts down an animal or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. <sup>14</sup> For the life of every creature – its blood is its life; therefore I have said to the people of Israel: You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off. <sup>15</sup> All persons, citizens or aliens, who eat what dies of itself or what has been torn by wild animals, shall wash their clothes, and bathe themselves in water, and be unclean until the evening; then they shall be clean. <sup>16</sup> But if they do not wash themselves or bathe their body, they shall bear their guilt.

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Pour out its blood and cover it with earth. These verses describe how to handle the blood of animals killed in the hunt, with v.14 emphasising the prohibition

against consuming blood, as confirmed by vv.10-12. Pouring out the blood on the ground like this did not profane the earth but honoured the blood of the animal, and was also hygienic.

This respect for blood of animals should make a Christian consider how they regard the blood of Jesus. If, under the Old Covenant, the blood of animals was to be respected, what of the precious blood of Jesus that makes a New Covenant. The author of Hebrews states: <<*How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?*>> (Hebrews 10:29).

All persons, citizens or aliens, who eat what dies of itself or what has been torn by wild animals. If a person came upon an animal that had died naturally, or was something like modern road kill, they could eat it, because good meat should not go to waste. However, a person who eats from these animals is unclean, probably because the animals that have died in these ways have not had their blood drained properly. Therefore, one who eats them becomes unclean and must be purified.