

The Importance of Blood (Leviticus 17)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Leviticus

I. Review and Introduction to This Lesson

- a. In **Leviticus 1-7**, we discussed the rules and regulations regarding five different types of sacrificial offerings that the priests would make.
- b. In **Leviticus 8-9**, we learned about the process of ordaining Aaron (the High Priest) and his four sons (the priests), the beginning of their ministry of service, and the consecration of the tabernacle. This culminated with the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle and fire from the Lord consuming the offerings.
- c. While we are no longer under the Levitical rules (which were abolished at the cross, with the death of Christ), all of these things still have significance for us, since they foreshadowed things that were yet to come.
 - i. The High Priest, Aaron, foreshadowed Jesus, as explained in **Hebrews 8-10**.
 - ii. His sons, the priests, foreshadowed us, the Christians. As Peter stated in **1 Peter 2:1-10**, we have become the new priesthood.
 - iii. In **Leviticus 17**, we will look at the significance of blood and specific laws regarding blood. This becomes important in the New Testament, since we are saved by the blood of Christ.
 1. **Hebrews 9-10** explains how the blood of animals sacrificed under the Law of Moses was inadequate to cleanse us of our sins. However, those blood sacrifices pointed forward to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
 2. Therefore, things we cover in this lesson are critical to appreciating important things in the New Testament book of **Hebrews**. That book is extremely important for two reasons:
 - a. For those who are already Christians:
 - i. **Hebrews** explains why it is so important to remain faithful to the end, to persevere in the faith.

- b. For those seeking the truth who are not yet following Christ:
 - i. **Hebrews** explains how the High Priest, the tabernacle/temple and the blood sacrifices established through Moses all foreshadowed what Christ would accomplish approximately 1400 years later.
- 3. Understanding the importance of the blood in the old sacrificial system of **Leviticus** and how it foreshadowing the blood of Christ, will also help us to better appreciate:
 - a. Several statements by Peter, Paul and John in their letters.
 - b. The Lord's supper.
 - c. The atonement of Jesus, for our sins.
 - d. The high cost that it took to redeem and cleanse us of our sins (and therefore one more reason we need to stay away from sin).
 - e. Why the Jews had such difficulty with some of things Jesus said in the gospel of **John**.
- d. We have seen many references to *blood* in association with the sacrifices of **Leviticus 1-16**, including:
 - i. Blood is to be poured out or sprinkled by (or onto) the altar in association with the animal sacrifices of **Leviticus 1-5**.
 - ii. Blood plays an important role in the ordination of the priests (**Leviticus 8:14-15, 8:22-24, 8:30, 9:8, and 9:18**).
 - iii. Blood is necessary for purification from leprosy (**Leviticus 14:1-7**).
 - iv. Blood also is involved in what the High Priest is required to do on the Day of Atonement (**Leviticus 16:14-19**).
- e. **Question:** Why is there so much emphasis on *blood* in **Leviticus**? What is the *spiritual significance* of blood?
- f. A question my wife Alison asked me earlier this week, while I was visiting her in the hospital, "What is this week's Bible lesson going to be on?"
 - i. When I answered, "It will be on **Leviticus 17**, on *blood*", she had a visceral negative reaction.

- ii. Earlier that day she had seen an unfortunate accident with the other patient in her room involving a blood transfusion that did not go well. My wife, therefore, found the whole subject revolting and did not want to hear any more about it!
- iii. This is a fairly normal reaction for many people. We tend to be *repulsed* by the sight (or even the thought) of *blood*.

II. Must Bring the Blood to the Tabernacle

- a. Read **Leviticus 17:1-9**.
- b. I assume, in context, the Lord is prohibiting here any sacrifice made to an idol. "They shall no more offer their sacrifices to worthless things, after whom they prostituted themselves."
 - i. I think of the golden calf incident, which took place a matter of months before the Law was given in **Leviticus**. Read **Exodus 32:1-6**.
 - ii. I also think of the first commandment. Read **Exodus 20:1-6**.

III. Do Not Eat Blood

- a. Read **Leviticus 17:10-16**.
- b. The regulations regarding killing an animal, in context, appear to be about animals killed for religious sacrifice.
- c. Points made in the text:
 - i. There is a strong prohibition against eating blood.
 - ii. "The life of all flesh is in the blood."
 - iii. "The blood is to make *atonement* for your souls."
 - 1. 'Atonement', an important word in this text, involves spiritual cleansing and reconciliation.
 - a. The Greek word in **Leviticus 17:11** (LXX) that is generally translated 'to make *atonement*' is the verb ἐξιλάσκομαι / exilaskomai.
 - b. That same word is used in **Genesis 32:20-21** (LXX), when Jacob is returning to meet Esau. Jacob sends successive waves of gifts ahead for his brother (who had been very angry with him). Jacob said his gifts were sent in advance in order to "appease" (= *atonement*, Greek: ἐξιλάσκομαι) Esau with the presents that were sent ahead.

- i. From this example, we can see that the term is used regarding something that can bring about reconciliation between those who had been estranged from each other.
- iv. Drain out the blood first, before eating, and cover it with dirt.
- v. Eating an animal found dead (blood in it) will make you unclean.
 - 1. No eating the equivalent of 'roadkill' (= *animals found already dead*)!
- d. Other significant Old Testament passages featuring *blood* include:
 - i. **Genesis 4:** The Lord told Cain that the blood of his murdered brother Abel "cries out to Me from the ground" (**Genesis 4:10**).
 - ii. **Genesis 9:** The prohibition against eating blood was maintained in the instructions that were given immediately after the Flood.
 - 1. Recall that in the beginning, before the Flood, it appears that men were vegetarians. (**Genesis 1:29**)
 - 2. Read **Genesis 8:15-9:7**.
 - a. Following the Flood, men were allowed to eat meat but were *still prohibited from eating or drinking the animal's blood*.
 - b. This specific prohibition on blood preceded the Law of Moses. It was an ancient ordinance, going back to the very beginning.
 - iii. **Genesis 49:** The deathbed blessing Jacob gave to his fourth son, Judah
 - 1. Read **Genesis 49:8-11**.
 - a. This contains the statement, "...he will wash his garments in wine, and his clothes in *the blood of grapes*." (**Genesis 49:11**)
 - 2. There are many prophetic elements of this prophecy that pointed to the Christ, Jesus:
 - a. A great ruler will come from the lineage of Judah.
 - b. This ruler will defeat his enemies.

- c. His brothers will bow down before him (pointing to the divinity of Christ, the Son of God, who would be worshiped by men).
 - d. He would be the “lion of Judah”.
 - e. He would *sleep* (a metaphor for death) and then be *roused from* that sleep (a metaphor for resurrection).
 - f. The nations (Gentiles) would look to him.
 - g. Shadows of the final entry into Jerusalem (donkey and colt mentioned).
 - h. “He will wash his garments in wine, and his clothes in *the blood of grapes*.” (Consider what Justin Martyr said regarding this phrase, in the quote below.)
3. From early Christian writer Justin Martyr, writing c. 160 AD:
- a. “And that expression which was committed to writing by Moses, and prophesied by the patriarch Jacob, namely, ‘He shall wash His garments with wine, and His vesture with the blood of the grape,’ (**Genesis 49:11**) signified that He would wash those that believe in Him with His own blood. For the Holy Spirit called those who receive remission of sins through Him, His garments; amongst whom He is always present in power, but will be manifestly present at His second coming.
 - b. “That the Scripture mentions the blood of the grape has been evidently designed, because Christ derives blood not from the seed of man, but from the power of God. For as God, and not man, has produced the blood of the vine, so also [the Scripture] has predicted that the blood of Christ would be not of the seed of man, but of the power of God. But this prophecy, sirs, which I repeated, proves that Christ is not man of men, begotten in the ordinary course of humanity.”
 - i. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 54; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 222)
 - ii. The points Justin makes here include:

1. The idea of the one to come having blood, yet not of human origin, pointed to the humanity and divinity of Christ.
 2. The robe refers to us, the Christians who follow Him. Therefore, that robe being *dipped in 'blood'* refers to the Christians being washed from sin by the blood of Christ.
- iv. **Exodus 4:** One of the three signs that the Lord gave to Moses in the beginning was the ability to turn water into blood. (**Exodus 4:9**)
- v. **Exodus 7:** The first of the Ten Plagues visited upon the Egyptians by Moses involved turning the water in the Nile River to blood. (**Exodus 7:17-21**)
- vi. **Exodus 12:** At the Passover, the blood of the lamb sacrificed was to be placed on the doorframe of the houses to protect the Jews inside from death. Read **Exodus 12:1-14**.
1. The Lord said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over the house."
- vii. **Joshua 2:** Similar to the blood over the doorposts at Passover, several early Christians saw the *scarlet cord* which protected the household of Rahab from destruction (**Joshua 2:17-21**) as foreshadowing the blood of Christ that would protect the righteous on the Day of Judgment.
1. See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 111; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 254.
 2. See Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, chapter 12; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 8.
 3. See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 4, chapter 20; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 492,
- viii. **Deuteronomy 12:** Under the Law of Moses, Jews were forbidden to eat blood, or to eat flesh with the blood still in it.
1. Read **Deuteronomy 12:16-27**.
- ix. **1 Samuel 14:** The famished Israelite soldiers eat meat with the blood still in it, and thereby sin against the Lord.
1. Read **1 Samuel 14:31-35**.

IV. Significance of Blood in the New Testament

a. Read **John 6:43-69**.

- i. "Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man *and drink His blood*, you have no life in you.'" (**John 6:53**, NKJV)

1. In view of the strong prohibitions against eating the blood of any animals throughout the Old Testament, it is understandable why His disciples had *such a hard time* with this teaching.
2. Jesus did not apologize or say He did not really mean what they thought. Instead, He asked if they wanted to leave also!
3. Jesus sifted the crowd with this extremely offensive teaching to the Jews.

- ii. Jesus said His blood is *real drink*.

b. At the Last Supper, Jesus calls His disciples to drink from the cup of wine, which He refers to as His blood.

- i. "Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.'" (**Matthew 26:27-28**, NKJV)
- ii. "Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.'" (**Luke 22:20**, NKJV)

c. The apostle Paul refers to this in his instructions to the Corinthians regarding their observance of the Lord's Supper.

- i. "You cannot *drink the cup of the Lord* and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons." (**1 Corinthians 10:21**, NKJV)

ii. Read **1 Corinthians 11:20-34**.

1. "In the same manner He [*Jesus*] also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'" (**1 Corinthians 11:25**, NKJV)
2. From the beginning, Christians have held that the body and blood of Christ are somehow present in the Lord's Supper when we eat the bread and drink from the fruit of the vine.

- a. For more on this, see *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, article on 'Eucharist'.

d. Read **Hebrews 9:1-10:25**.

- i. This important passage explains the importance of Jesus' sacrifice of His own blood on our behalf, which was foreshadowed by the blood offerings sacrificed in the tabernacle service.
- ii. Points made in this text include:
 1. Once a year (on the Day of Atonement), the High Priest entered the second part of the tabernacle, the Most Holy Place, but was required to enter *with the blood* of animals. That blood had been offered for the sins of the people as well as the sins of the High Priest. (**Hebrews 9:6-8**)
 2. The service of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement foreshadowed what Jesus, our High Priest, would do on our behalf. Jesus entered the Most Holy Place (heaven) with His own blood. (**Hebrews 9:9-14**)
 3. Jesus did this once for all time, as opposed to repeating it once every year. He entered heaven itself (as opposed to the tabernacle, a copy of the heavenly realities), with His own blood (as opposed to the blood of animals, which was powerless to remove sins), to make the perfect sacrifice. (**Hebrews 9:12, 9:23-10:4**)
 4. The blood of Jesus' own sacrifice and death also served to bring in a new covenant, just as the covenant of Moses was brought in by the people being sprinkled with blood. (**Hebrews 9:15-20**, pointing back to **Exodus 24:4-8**)
 5. Therefore, we now have the boldness to enter the Most Holy Place (heaven itself) by the power of the blood of Jesus, which opened up our way of access into the presence of God. (**Hebrews 10:19-20**)
 6. As Christ was foreshadowed by the service of the High Priest, our lives are foreshadowed by the priests. We have had our hearts sprinkled (with the blood of Christ, to cleanse us spiritually) and our bodies washed with water. (**Hebrews 10:21-22**)

V. **The Significance of Blood – Some Implications for Us**

- a. We are forbidden from eating blood.
 - i. Read **Acts 15:19-21**.

- ii. The apostles met in Jerusalem to discuss the matter of Gentiles who were coming to the faith.
 - 1. The issue at hand: Did they also have to follow the requirements of the Law of Moses?
- iii. The conclusion the apostles came to: the Gentiles did not have to follow the whole Law of Moses, but did need to observe the following four requirements:
 - 1. Abstain from things polluted by (or offered to) idols.
 - 2. Abstain from sexual immorality
 - 3. Abstain from things strangled. (Presumably this meant they could not eat animals that had been strangled to death and the blood not properly removed.)
 - 4. Abstain from *blood*. (I assume this referred to eating or drinking blood or things made from blood, as opposed to being killed with the blood properly removed.)
- iv. Recall that even today blood (from animals or humans) is often closely associated with pagan sacrifices, witchcraft and the occult. Early Christian writers commented on this.
 - 1. From Origen, a teacher in the church of Alexandria, Egypt, writing c. 248 AD:
 - a. “But it is to be observed that the Jews, who claim for themselves a correct understanding of the law of Moses, carefully restrict their food to such things as are accounted clean, and abstain from those that are unclean. They also do not use in their food the blood of an animal nor the flesh of an animal torn by wild beasts, and some other things which it would take too long for us at present to detail.
 - b. “But Jesus, wishing to lead all men by His teaching to the pure worship and service of God, and anxious not to throw any hindrance in the way of many who might be benefited by Christianity, through the imposition of a burdensome code of rules in regard to food, has laid it down, that ‘not that which goes into the mouth defiles a man, but that which comes out of the mouth; for whatever enters in at the mouth goes into the belly, and is cast out into the draught. But those things which proceed out of the mouth are evil thoughts when

spoken, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.’ (**Matthew 15:17-19**)

- c. Paul also says, ‘Meat does not commend us to God: for if we eat, are we not the better; neither, if we do not eat, are we the worse.’ (**1 Corinthians 8:8**) Wherefore, as there is some obscurity about this matter, without some explanation is given, it seemed good to the apostles of Jesus and the elders assembled together at Antioch [*Jerusalem*; see **Acts 15:4-6**] and also, as they themselves say, to the Holy Spirit, to write a letter to the Gentile believers, forbidding them to partake of those things from which alone they say it is necessary to abstain, namely, ‘things offered to idols, things strangled, and blood.’ (**Acts 15:28-29**)
- d. “For that which is offered to idols is sacrificed to demons, and a man of God must not join the table of demons. As to things strangled, we are forbidden by Scripture to partake of them, because the blood is still in them; and blood, especially the odor arising from blood, is said to be the food of demons. Perhaps, then, if we were to eat of strangled animals, we might have such spirits feeding along with us.”
 - i. (Source: Origen. *Against Celsus*, book 8, chapters 29-30; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, p. 650)
- 2. For a different understanding regarding the ‘prohibition on blood’ at the Council of Jerusalem in **Acts 15**, consider Tertullian in *On Modesty*, chapter 12; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, pp. 85-86.
 - a. He holds that this prohibition on blood includes *not spilling human blood* (i.e., murder).
- v. Based on the above, Christians are forbidden from eating blood. This has been the case for God’s people from the very beginning.
- b. Let us appreciate the great cost it took to redeem us.
 - i. **Illustrative Personal Example:** My wife Alison recently had an extended stay in Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, involving two major surgeries and round-the-clock medical care at one of the best hospitals in the US. From her window in the hospital, we could hear helicopters landing on the roof of the hospital bringing in patients on an

emergency basis from remote locations. This level of medical care is extremely expensive, easily running into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, or even higher.

1. After contemplating the high cost of the life-saving medical care she was receiving, Alison gratefully remarked, "If I manage to survive and get out of this situation healthy, I had better do something important with the rest of my life (in view of the high cost involved in restoring her to health)."
- ii. The apostle Peter makes a similar point, regarding how Christians should respond in view of the extraordinarily high cost paid by Jesus to redeem us.
 1. Read **1 Peter 1:13-21**.
 2. "...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, *but with the precious blood of Christ*, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (**1 Peter 1:18-19**, NKJV)
- iii. The **Hebrews** writer also reminds us of what it took to redeem us, warning us that we must not keep on sinning (and thereby desecrate the blood of Christ that redeemed us).
 1. Read **Hebrews 10:26-31**.
 2. (*Regarding a Christian who deliberately keeps on sinning*) "...Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, *counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing*, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" (**Hebrews 10:29**, NKJV)
- iv. Similarly, we are reminded by John that the blood of Christ continually cleanses us, *if we walk in the light*.
 1. "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and *the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*." (**1 John 1:7**, NKJV)
- v. Let us never forget the enormous cost that was paid to redeem us from sin and death: the precious blood of Christ. When we appreciate the price that was paid for us, much more than any amount of gold or silver or dollars, that should motivate us to live lives worthy of the great price that was paid.
 1. This is one more great motivation for us to stay away from sin!