

# CHAPTER 17

## INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS 17

In this chapter a law is given, ordering all sorts of persons, Israelites and sojourners, to bring their sacrifices to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, on pain of being cut off, (<sup><B170></sup>Leviticus 17:1-9); and a special and particular prohibition of sacrificing to devils is delivered out, (<sup><B170></sup>Leviticus 17:7); and the eating of blood, and of everything that dies of itself, or is torn with beasts, is forbidden under the above penalty, (<sup><B170></sup>Leviticus 17:10-16).

**Ver. 1.** *And the Lord spake unto Moses*, etc.] After he had given him the law about the day of atonement, and the rites belonging to it:

*saying*; as follows.

**Ver. 2.** *Speak unto Aaron, and unto his sons*, etc.] Who were now constituted priests, the business of whose office it was to offer the sacrifices of the people, ordinary and extraordinary:

*and to all the children of Israel*; who were all under obligation to sacrifices at certain times; under whom may be comprehended the Levites, who were not priests, and the strangers that sojourned in Israel, for these are concerned in the following law:

*and say unto them*; which is spoken to Moses, who was to say what follows to Aaron, and by him to his sons, and by his sons to the people of Israel, and by them to the strangers:

*this [is] the thing which the Lord hath commanded*; ordered to be observed as his will and pleasure by everyone of them:

*saying*; namely, what follows.

**Ver. 3.** *What man soever [there be] of the house of Israel*, etc.] Whether high or low, rich or poor:

*that killeth an ox, or lamb, or goat in the camp*; which are particularly mentioned, as Gersom observes, because of these the offerings were; for

the law respects the killing of them not for common food, but for sacrifice, as appears from the following verses; for this law was to be a statute for ever, whereas in that sense it was not, and could not be observed, especially when they were come into the land of Canaan; nor would it have been decent or convenient to have brought such vast numbers of cattle every day to be killed at the door of the tabernacle, and must have made the service of the priests extremely laborious to kill them, or even to see that they were killed aright:

*or that killeth [it] out of the camp*; which furnishes out another reason against the same notion, since it was not usual to kill for common food without the camp, but in their own tents within it; whereas to sacrifice without the camp was commonly done.

**Ver. 4.** *And bringeth it not unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation,* etc.] Near to which stood the altar of burnt offering to offer it upon, and the priests ready for such service: now the Lord would have every sacrifice brought thither

*to offer an offering to the Lord before the tabernacle of the Lord*; that it might be offered publicly, and be known to be offered to the Lord, and not to idols or devils, as in (<sup><B70></sup>Leviticus 17:7); and so to prevent private idolatry, and private persons from intruding into the priest's office; and this was typical of the acceptance of all spiritual sacrifices in the church of God, through Christ the minister of the tabernacle, which God pitched, and not man; and who is the door into the house of God, where such sacrifices are publicly to be offered up:

*blood shall be imputed unto that man, he hath shed blood*; which though it was only the blood of a beast, yet being shed as a sacrifice for man, and typical of the blood of Christ to be shed for man, was sacred and precious to God; and therefore he resented the shedding of it to any but himself, or by any person, or in any place but by his appointment; such a man was to be punished as a murderer, idolatry being equally heinous in the sight of God as murder, (see <sup><B70></sup>Isaiah 66:3);

*and that man shall be cut off from among his people*; not merely excommunicated from the church of God, deprived of the privileges of his house, but even put to death; for such a man was guilty of blood, that is, of death, and therefore to be put to death either by the hand of the civil magistrate, if his case was known and came under their cognizance, or by

the immediate hand of God by a premature death, which seems to be chiefly intended; also (see <sup><B7D></sup>Leviticus 17:10).

**Ver. 5.** *To the end that the children of Israel may bring their sacrifices which they offer in the open field*, etc.] Which, before the tabernacle was erected, they were used to offer there, as it was lawful for them to do, and on high places, but now unlawful; though sometimes this was dispensed with by the Lord, and was done by some of his prophets, as Samuel, David, and Elijah, though not by priests:

*even that they may bring them unto the Lord, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest*; by whom they were to be offered, and by him only, and which is a principal reason why they were ordered to be brought thither:

*and offer them [for] peace offerings unto the Lord*; which though only mentioned, include all others. These are only taken notice of because most frequent, and because most profitable to the people, having a part of them; wherefore if these were to be brought to the tabernacle, which came the nearest of any to their meals and feasts in their own houses, then much more burnt offerings, and sin offerings, in which the Lord, had so great a concern.

**Ver. 6.** *And the priest shall sprinkle the blood upon the altar of the Lord*, etc.] The altar of burnt: offering, (<sup><B7B></sup>Leviticus 1:5);

*[at] the door of the tabernacle of the congregation*; near to which it stood, (see <sup><B7B></sup>Leviticus 1:5);

*and burn the fat for a sweet savour to the Lord*; the fat that covered the inwards, the kidneys, the flanks and caul of the liver; (see <sup><B7B></sup>Leviticus 3:3,4,9,10,14-17).

**Ver. 7.** *And they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto devils*, etc.] As it seems they had done, which was monstrously shocking, and especially by a people that had the knowledge of the true God. Such shocking idolatry has been committed, and still is among the Indians, both East and West: when Columbus discovered Hispaniola, and entered it, he found the inhabitants worshippers of images they called Zemes, which were in the likeness of painted devils, which they took to be the mediators and messengers of the great God, the only one, eternal, omnipotent, and invisible <sup>f599</sup>; and so at Calecut and Pego in the East Indies, and in other parts thereof, they

sacrifice to the devil <sup>f600</sup>: one can hardly think the Israelites would give into such gross idolatry as this; wherefore by “devils” may be meant idols in general; for if men do not worship God and Christ, let them worship what they will, it is only worshipping devils, (~~4600~~1 Corinthians 10:20 ~~4600~~Revelation 9:20); and so the calves of Jeroboam are called devils, (~~44115~~2 Chronicles 11:15); hence the golden calf also, the Israelites worshipped but lately in the wilderness, might go by the same name; to which sense is the Targum of Jonathan,

“and they shall not offer again their sacrifices to idols, which are like to devils.”

The word here used signifies “goats”, and these creatures were worshipped by the Egyptians, and so might be by the Israelites, while among them; this is asserted by several writers. Diodorus Siculus says <sup>f601</sup>, they deified the goat, as the Grecians did Priapus, and for the same reason; and that the Pans and the Satyrs were had in honour by men on the same account; and Herodotus <sup>f602</sup> observes, that the Egyptians paint and engrave Pan as the Greeks do, with the face and thighs of a goat, and therefore do not kill a goat, because the Mendesians reckon Pan among the gods; and of the Mendesians he says, that they worship goats, and the he goats rather than the she goats; wherefore in the Egyptian language both Pan and a goat are called Mendes; and Strabo <sup>f603</sup> reports of Mendes, that there Pan and the goat are worshipped: if these sort of creatures were worshipped by the Egyptians in the times of Moses, which is to be questioned, the Israelites might be supposed to have followed them in it; but if that be true, which Maimonides <sup>f604</sup> says of the Zabii, a set of idolaters among the Chaldeans, and other people, long before the times of Moses, that some of them worshipped devils, whom they supposed to be in the form of goats, the Israelites might have given in to this idolatry from them, and be the occasion of this prohibition:

*after whom they have gone a whoring*; idolatry being a spiritual adultery, a forsaking God, who had taken them into a conjugal relation, and been as an husband to them, and cleaving to idols, which were as paramours; (see ~~4832~~Jeremiah 31:32 ~~4166~~Ezekiel 16:26);

*this shall be a statute for ever unto them throughout their generations*: not only this of not sacrificing to devils, but all before commanded, particularly that they should bring their sacrifices to the priest, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

**Ver. 8.** *And thou shalt say unto them,* etc.] To Aaron and his sons, and to the children of Israel, as in (<sup><BIBL></sup>Leviticus 17:2);

*whatsoever man [there be] of the house of Israel:* belonging to that nation, and to any of its tribes and families, of whatever age; as a young man or an old man, as the Targum of Jonathan; or of whatsoever rank, class, and condition in life:

*or of the strangers which sojourn among you;* that is, of the proselytes among them; not the proselytes of the gate, who were not admitted to offer sacrifice on the altar of the Lord; and if they were, they could not for non-compliance with this law be cut off from the Jewish church and commonwealth, of which they were no part, only suffered to dwell among them, but partook of none of their privileges; but this is to be understood of proselytes of righteousness, such as embraced the Jewish religion, and submitted to all the rituals of it, and had communion with the body of the people, and shared in all the immunities of their civil and church state, and so liable in case of any real practice to be cut off from them:

*that offereth a burnt offering or sacrifice;* any other sacrifice besides a burnt offering, as a sin offering, or a trespass offering, or a peace offering.

**Ver. 9.** *And bringeth it not to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, to offer it unto the Lord,* etc.] In a public manner, by one of the priests of the Lord; by which it might appear that he did not take upon him to be a priest himself, nor to offer it to an idol:

*even that man shall be cut off from his people;* from being one of them, and having communion with them, and sharing in their privileges; or by death, either by the hand of the civil magistrate, or rather by the hand of God; so Jarchi, his seed shall be cut off, and his days shall be cut off; that is, he shall die childless, and in the midst of his days, a violent and premature death. Also (see Gill on <sup><BIBL></sup>Leviticus 17:4”).

**Ver. 10.** *And whatsoever man [there be] of the house of Israel,* etc.] That is by birth an Israelite, of every age, sex, or condition, as before:

*or of the strangers that sojourn among you;* proselytes of righteousness, for the following law was only obligatory on such, and upon Israelites, as appears from its being lawful to give or sell that which dies of itself to a stranger, that is, to a proselyte of the gate, or to an Heathen, (<sup><BIBL></sup>Deuteronomy 14:21);

*that eateth any manner of blood*; that is, as Ben Gersom interprets it, of beasts and birds, concerning which the prohibition only is, according to him; for as for the blood of others there was no obligation, nor were any guilty on account of them; particularly the blood of fishes, and of locusts, or human blood, the blood of a man's teeth, which a man might swallow without being guilty of the breach of this law<sup>f605</sup>. Some restrain this to the blood of the sacrifices before treated of; but Jarchi observes, lest any should think, because it is said, it is "the blood that maketh the atonement for the soul": that a man is not guilty only on account of the blood of sanctified things, therefore it is said "any manner of blood":

*I will set my face against that soul that eateth blood*; signifying how greatly he should be provoked thereby, how much he should resent it, how exceedingly displeasing it would be to him, and what severity might be expected to be exercised towards him for it; for dreadful it is to have the face of God set against a man, (see ~~<B946>~~ Psalm 34:16). Maimonides<sup>f606</sup> observes, that this form of speech does not occur in any third precept besides these two, concerning idolatry or sacrificing a son to Moloch, (~~<B918>~~ Leviticus 20:3), and eating blood; because eating of blood gives an occasion to one species of idolatry, worshipping of devils, (see ~~<B925>~~ Leviticus 19:26);

*and will cut him off from among his people*; which confirms the above sense of the phrase of cutting off as expressive of death by the hand of God; (see Gill on "~~<B974>~~ Leviticus 17:4").

**Ver. 11.** *For the life of the flesh [is] in the blood*, etc.] The animal life or soul, the life and soul of every creature, and even the animal life and soul of man; agreeably to which our famous Dr. Harvey, who found out the circulation of the blood, says of it, that it is the principal part which first appears in generation; is the genital part, the fountain of life the first that lives, and the last that dies; the primary seat of the soul or life, from whence motion and pulsation take their rise; in which the innate heat is produced the vital spirit is generated and the life consists<sup>f607</sup>; and therefore it is spread all over the body, and according to the condition that it is in, such is the health and such the diseases of the body; yea, the affections of the mind, such as fear, shame, joy, and anger are discovered by it. Hence Antoninus the emperor, more than once, calls the soul a vapour or exhalation arising out of the blood<sup>f608</sup>; and the sentiments of various Jewish writers agree herewith: says Aben Ezra, it is a truth, that the soul or life,

with which man lives, is in the blood of the heart; so says Jarchi the soul or life depends upon the blood; and Ben Gersom observes, that the blood is the vessel of the soul to carry in it the fundamental heat, and food to the parts of the body; and hence the animal only dies when the blood is removed;

*and I have given it unto you to make an atonement for your souls:* that being the life of the creature, was given for theirs to preserve them alive, and secure them from death their sins deserved; and so the Targum of Jonathan is, for the sins of the soul; which shows that these sacrifices were vicarious, in the room of men, and for the life of them, and to atone for them; and is the reason given why blood should not be eaten, at least while these typical expiatory sacrifices were used. Ben Gersom seems to intimate, as if it was only the blood of those that was forbidden: his words are, hence we learn says he, that they were not guilty of cutting off, but on account of the blood, which, according to its way was put upon the altar; and this was the blood of the soul as it saith the blood of the bullock, and the blood of the goat; but the blood that was pressed out, and the blood of the members they were not guilty of cutting off, on account of them:

*for it [is] the blood [that] maketh an atonement for the soul;* so here was life for life, soul for soul as Aben Ezra expresses it; it was a vicarious sacrifice and atonement, typical of the sacrifice and atonement of Christ, in the room and stead of his people, there being no atonement, no remission of sins without shedding of blood; and the reason of the prohibition of eating blood was to direct to that blood as the atonement for sin, and to keep up a reverence of it, and a value and esteem for it; but now seeing that blood has been shed and atonement made by it, the end of the law is answered, and the reason of it ceased, and so the law itself; and as Christ's blood is now to be eaten in a spiritual sense, the eating of blood in a literal sense, properly dressed, is lawful. And indeed, as before observed the law concerning it was never binding upon Gentiles, only on Jews and proselytes.

**Ver. 12.** *Therefore I said unto the children of Israel, no soul of you shall eat blood,* etc.] Great or small as Jarchi observes, for the reason above given; which, though not expressed before, was the true reason of this law, which had been given before, and now repeated; (see <sup>ORBIT</sup> Leviticus 3:17 7:26,27);

*neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood*; any proselyte of righteousness; this is not observed before.

**Ver. 13.** *And whatsoever man [there be] of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you*, etc.] This form of speaking, which is often used in this chapter, is still observed to point out the persons on whom the law is obligatory, Israelites and proselytes of righteousness:

*which hunteth and catcheth any beast or fowl that may be eaten*; that is, clean beasts and fowls, such as by a former law are observed; and this excepts unclean ones, as Jarchi, but includes all clean ones, whether wild or tame, that may be taken and killed though not taken in hunting; but such are particularly mentioned, because not only hunting beasts and fowl were common, but because such persons were more rustic and brutish and, being hungry, were in haste for their food, and not so careful about the slaying of the creatures, and of, taking care about their blood:

*he shall even pour out the blood thereof, and cover it with dust*; that it might not be eaten by men, nor licked up by beasts and that there might be kept up a reverend esteem of blood, being the life of the creature; and this covering of it, as Maimonides<sup>f609</sup> tells us, was accompanied with a benediction in this form,

“Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, the King of the world, who hath sanctified us by his precepts, and hath given commandment to us concerning covering of the blood:”

and the same writer elsewhere<sup>f610</sup> gives us another reason of this law, that the Israelites might not meet and feast about the blood, as the Zabians did, who, when they slew a beast, took its blood and put it into a vessel, or into a hole dug by them, and sat and feasted around it: (see <sup><B9B></sup>Leviticus 19:26).

**Ver. 14.** *For [it is] the life of all flesh*, etc.] Of every animal:

*the blood of it [is] for the life thereof*; for the production, preservation, and continuance of life; that on which life depends, as Jarchi observes:

*therefore I said unto the children of Israel, ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh*; of beasts or birds, whose flesh was fit for food; but their blood was not to be eaten, for the reasons before given:



*for the life of all flesh [is] the blood thereof*; which is repeated, that it might be observed and taken notice of, as that in which the force of the reason lay for giving this law:

*whosoever eateth it shall be cut off*; by death, whether he be an Israelite or a proselyte of righteousness; wherefore if this law was now in force, its penalty also would be continued, whereas it is not, and which shows the abrogation of it. Also (see Gill on “<sup><8704></sup>Leviticus 17:4”).

**Ver. 15.** *And every soul that eateth that which died [of itself]*, etc.]

Through any disease upon it, or by means of any other creature seizing upon it and worrying it, or was not lawfully killed; if a man ate ever so little of it, even but the quantity of an olive, it was a breach of this law; which is connected with the preceding, there being a similarity between them, because such creatures must have their blood in them, not being regularly let out, and so eating of them would offend against the above law. It is very probable, as Grotius thinks, that Pythagoras took his notion from hence, and strictly enjoined his followers to abstain from all animals that died of themselves, as Laertius <sup>f611</sup> and Aelianus <sup>f612</sup> relate, and which Porphyry <sup>f613</sup> suggests, was what universally obtained among men:

*or that which was torn [with beasts]*; though not dead, yet ready to die, and so unfit for food; (see Gill on “<sup><2231></sup>Exodus 22:31”);

*[whether it be] one of your own country, or a stranger*; a native of Israel, or a proselyte of righteousness; for as for any other stranger he might eat of it, (<sup><6142></sup>Deuteronomy 14:22);

*he shall both wash his clothes, and bathe [himself] in water*; in forty seahs of water, as the Targum of Jonathan, dip himself all over:

*and be unclean until the even*; and so have no conversation with men in civil or religious things:

*then shall he be clean*; when he has washed his garments, and bathed himself, and the evening is come, and then shall be admitted to society as before: this is to be understood of one who ignorantly eats of the above things, not knowing them to be such; otherwise, if he did it presumptuously, he was to be punished.

**Ver. 16.** *But if he wash [them] not*, etc.] Neither wash his clothes: nor bathe his flesh; if he is negligent, and does not take care to make use of these ablutions:

*then he shall bear his iniquity*; his guilt shall remain on him, and he shall suffer the punishment the law exposes him to, either by the hand of God, or the civil magistrate, which is due to persons that enter into the sanctuary in their uncleanness, or eat of holy things. For not washing his body the punishment was cutting off, and for not washing his garments, beating, as Jarchi says.