



## A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

### THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

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#### CLEAN AND UNCLEAN BODILY CONDITIONS (17:1-16)

##### The Place of the Passage

This passage begins the section of Leviticus that scholars call the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26). This name is used because of the repeated emphasis on being holy. Though scholars generally treat chapters 17–26 as the Holiness Code, Leviticus 20:22–27 seems like a conclusion to the purity and holiness law groupings. Therefore it is best to think of chapters 17–20 as holiness laws complementing the purity laws of chapters 11–15. Viewed this way, these groups of purity laws and holiness laws mirror each other, following the same basic outline:

Leviticus 17 opens the holiness section with laws on diet corresponding to the purity laws on diet in Leviticus 11. We previously learned that eating pork or touching a dead rodent made a person ritually unclean. We now learn that eating a sacrifice meal with “goat demons” or in communion with any false god is not just unclean but morally sinful (vv. 17:7,9). New Testament Christians rarely encounter pagan sacrifice meals like those addressed in this chapter, but the imperatives we study here will help us think more carefully about the importance, “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,” of doing “all [to] the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

##### The Big Picture

God’s people are to enjoy worship meals only with him, abstain from communing or uniting with other gods, and eat all our food to God’s glory.

##### Gospel Glimpses

**THE TRUE BLOOD OF ATONEMENT.** The blood of animals was never to be treated as the actual source of life for the offerer. If animal sacrifices had been the actual source of forgiveness, Old Testament offerers likely would have been commanded to consume the animal’s blood. As noted already, some ancient religions did command sacrificers to unite with an animal’s life and imbibe its strength by consuming its blood. The prohibition against this practice in Israel was a profound rejection of any thought that animals could, in themselves, atone for human sin. In fact, Leviticus 17 says, “I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people” (v. 10). Rather than establishing the Hebrew worshiper within God’s covenant, placing faith in the animal itself brought exclusion from God’s people! Old Testament animal sacrifices were always intended to point to the Lamb of God who would come to take away the sins of the world. It was therefore not a contradiction of Old Testament law but a harmonious fulfillment of it when Jesus

introduced the command to partake in his blood at the New Testament communion table. He is the One whose blood is the actual source of our atonement. The Levitical prohibition against blood consumption pointed to the true blood of atonement provided on the cross.

### **Whole Bible Connections**

**CONSUMING BLOOD.** In Acts 15, the apostles and elders met in Jerusalem to discuss whether Gentile Christians should be required to keep the Mosaic law. At that meeting the leaders of the New Testament church concluded that Gentile believers should not be expected to keep the Old Testament rituals, since the rituals were merely pointers to Christ. Many Jewish Christians at that time, however, still observed the Mosaic law (compare Acts 21:17–26), and continued to do so until God removed the temple (Acts 6:14; Hebrews 8:13). For this reason, the Jerusalem Council required Gentile believers to observe certain limited strictures that would allow law-observant Jewish Christians to eat at the same table with them. Among those requirements was the command not to eat blood (Acts 15:20,29). That requirement is rooted in the prohibition in Leviticus 17. Some Christians believe that this New Testament text means Christians must still abstain from blood. Others believe that all observance of the Mosaic rituals was to end with the destruction of the temple in AD 70 and that the restriction against blood in Acts 15 also expired at that time.

### **Theological Soundings**

**GUARDING THE TABLE.** In I Corinthians 11:23–32, the apostle Paul gives instruction for the proper observance of the Lord’s Table, drawing upon the truths found in Leviticus 17. In Leviticus 17, failing to guard the blood of sacrificial animals was likened to sin against human blood (v. 4). In the New Testament, failing to honor the communion elements is sin against the blood of Christ (I Corinthians 11:27).

**HONORING GOD AT OUR TABLES.** Leviticus 17 reports that many of the Israelites were sacrificing from their herds to “goat demons, after whom they whore” (v. 7). Believers today might not find the prospect of goat demons all that enticing, but the lesson in this text is more relevant than might first appear. Israel was attracted to goat demons because such worship allowed them to slaughter and eat their herds in their own fields (v. 5). Rather than going to the trouble to take livestock to the tabernacle as “sacrifices of a peace offering” (v. 5; see Lev. 7:12–15), it was considerably easier to slaughter them in rituals “in the open field,” at home (17:5). The root sin exposed in this passage is one of failing to give God praise, giving glory to others instead. Modern believers won’t likely turn to goat demons when they eat, but failing to give God thanks continues to be a common temptation faced by New Testament believers. Paul’s instruction is relevant: “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”.

## **Glossary of Terms**

**EXCOMMUNICATION.** In the NT, a form of church discipline that revoked a person's privileges as part of the community of believers. Typically imposed for unrepented sin or heresy, to preserve the community's purity and hopefully to bring the offender to repentance (Matthew 18:15–18; I Corinthians 5; 2 Cor. 2:5–11; I Timothy 1:18–20).

**COVENANT.** A binding agreement between two parties, typically involving a formal statement of their relationship, a list of stipulations and obligations for both parties, a list of witnesses to the agreement, and a list of curses for unfaithfulness and blessings for faithfulness to the agreement. The Old Testament is more properly understood as the old covenant, meaning the agreement established between God and his people prior to the coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the new covenant (NT).

**Please answer the following questions:**

**Leviticus Chapter 17**

1. If a sacrifice was made in or out of the camp instead of at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the one making it was guilty of what? (vv. 3-4)
2. When a person shed blood improperly, what happened to him? (v. 4)
3. Why was this rule made? (v. 5)
4. Who had sacrificed to their false gods in the field? Was this restriction just for the Israelites? (v. 5)
5. What is he to burn, that makes a sweet savor to the LORD? (v. 6)
6. To what idols had they been offering? (v. 7)
7. To whom did this rule apply? (v. 8)
8. What was the penalty for disobedience? (v. 10)
9. What part of the creatures is in the blood? (v. 11)

10. What is the only way to do away with sin? (v. 11)

11. What was neither Israelite nor alien among them to eat? (v. 12)

12. If they were hunting clean animals what were they to do with the blood? (v. 13)

13. What happens to those who eat blood? (v. 14)

14. If anyone ate anything found dead or torn by wild animals, what was he to do? (v. 15)

15. What if he failed to do this? (v. 16)