LEVITICUS

Chapter 17

*Eating Blood Forbidden*

**The Lord said to Moses, 2 “Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites and say to them: ‘This is what the Lord has commanded: 3 Any Israelite who sacrifices an ox, a lamb or a goat in the camp or outside of it 4 instead of bringing it to the entrance to 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. 5 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. 6 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 an aroma pleasing to the Lord. 7 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.’ 8 “Say to them: ‘Any Israelite or any alien living among them who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice 9 and does not bring it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to sacrifice it to the Lord—that man must be cut off from his people. 10 “ ‘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. 11 For the life of a 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. 12 Therefore I say to the Israelites, “None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood.” 13 “ ‘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, 14 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.” 15 “ ‘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 ceremonially unclean till evening; then he will be clean. 16 But if he does not wash his clothes and bathe himself, he will be held responsible.’ ”**

**17:1–4** Outside the tabernacle, God considered the ritual sacrifice of animals and disposal of their blood a capital crime. Only those sacrifices commanded by God and offered at the entrance to the tent of meeting were permitted. (TLSB)

**17:4** *tabernacle of the Lord*. The people, with few exceptions (e.g., Dt 12:15, 20–21), were directed to sacrifice only at the central sanctuary (Dt 12:5–6). Sennacherib’s representative referred to Hezekiah’s requiring worship only in Jerusalem (2Ki 18:22). One reason for such a regulation was to keep the Israelites from becoming corrupted by the Canaanites’ pagan worship. (CSB)

*bloodguilt*. The life of any creature is in its blood (vv 11, 14). God compares their needless slaughter to murder of human beings. (TLSB)

*cut off from his people.* See note on 7:20. (CSB)

God’s punishment may include execution at His own hand, but most certainly a dismissal from God’s covenant community. (TLSB)

**17:5** *they sacrifice in the open field*. Pagan nations poured the blood of slaughtered animals on the ground to appease the “spirits.” The Lord required singular devotion and one altar. (TLSB)

*to the priest, that is, to the Lord*. See note on 6:6. (CSB)

**17:7** *goat demons*. Earth spirits envisaged as he-goats much like the satyrs of mythology. Cf 2Ch 11:15; Is 13:21; 34:14. Some interpreters associate these pagan deities with the Azazel goat, though Scripture never affirms such an association. (TLSB)

*prostitute themselves.* See 20:5–6; see also Jdg 2:17 and note. (CSB)

**17:1–9** God proclaims His dwelling place as the exclusive place for sacrifices. He does not want His people running after false gods. Today, avoid every association with idolatrous practices. Jesus is the only way to the Father (Jn 1:17–18; 14:6). He alone atones for our sins of idolatry with His precious blood (Rm 3:25). By God’s grace, He offers eternal life (Rm 6:23). • Father in heaven, grant us undivided hearts focused on Your dear Son, who came to ransom us from our sin, that we might receive the joy of Your salvation. Amen. (TLSB)

**17:10–12** God reserved blood for a divine purpose, the atonement of sins. (TLSB)

**17:11** *the life of a creature is in the blood.* See note on Ge 9:4. The blood shed in the sacrifices was sacred. It epitomized the life of the sacrificial victim. Since life was sacred, blood (a symbol of life) had to be treated with respect (Ge 9:5–6). Eating blood was therefore strictly forbidden (see 7:26–27; Dt 12:16, 23–25; 15:23; 1Sa 14:32–34). (CSB)

*blood … makes atonement.* Practically every sacrifice included the sprinkling or smearing of blood on the altar or within the tabernacle (v. 6; 1:5; 3:2; 4:6, 25; 7:2), thus teaching that atonement involves the substitution of life for life. The blood of the OT sacrifice pointed forward to the blood of the Lamb of God, who obtained for his people “eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12). “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb 9:22). (CSB)

**17:13–14** The Israelites and those who came among them as strangers were permitted to hunt birds and animals to supplement their diets. The blood from these birds and animals was drained on the ground and covered with earth. Dt 12:15–16, 20–25; 15:21–23 use this ordinance as permission to slaughter domestic animals for their consumption. (TLSB)

**17:15** *found dead or torn.* Such animals would not have had the blood drained from them and therefore would be forbidden. (CSB)

**17:10–16** God forbids the wanton killing of birds and animals. He desires that respect be shown for all life. Those who kill wantonly are held accountable for each life. Thanks be to God for the precious, life-giving blood of Jesus, who has reconciled us to the Father. • Father of mercy, You provided Your ancient people with ordinances that respected lifeblood as the atonement of sins. By Christ’s blood, You redeemed all people. Thank You for Your gracious gifts through Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)