

LEVITICUS

Lesson 25 - Chapters 17 and 18

As we resume our study of Leviticus 17, we left off on a discussion of the topic of blood. And the context was that while up to the Great Flood man could on occasion kill animals that it was ONLY for the purpose of sacrifices to the Lord. Animals as a food source were prohibited until Noah received specific instruction in Genesis 9 (after the earth had been purged of wickedness by means of the flood waters), that man was now free to kill and eat ANY kind of animal.

However Genesis 9 verse 4 did place some rules about using meat as food: It says that while it's now OK for man to eat the flesh of living creatures, one must NOT eat **the blood** from that creature because LIFE is IN the BLOOD. Let's face it even early man knew that if someone got cut and their blood flowed out of their body in sufficient quantities, he died. No blood, no life.....so indeed life was in the blood quite literally.

In addition while God made blood unsuitable for food He dedicated blood for the sole purpose of atonement. The pattern was obvious: one was not allowed to eat something so sacred as **the source** of atonement, blood. The spiritual purpose for blood was life and atonement; so to use blood for any other purpose was against God's will.

What we need to grasp from what I've told you concerning the prohibition against shedding blood, or eating blood, is that this blood prohibition applies on a number of levels. In a nutshell the term **shafakh dam**, meaning shed-blood, or just "blood" for short, applies to most any case whereby blood is MISUSED. Biblically speaking murder is a misuse of blood because it ends life; drinking the blood of an animal is a misuse because blood is for atonement not sustenance; taking the life of an animal OUTSIDE THE SACRED TABERNACLE GROUNDS, and in a manner OTHER than a God-ordained ritual sacrifice, is a misuse of blood because atonement is only available inside the holy grounds. Outside of the sanctuary the taking of blood is just selfishly terminating life and is a waste. Sacrificing an animal to another god is a misuse of blood because a living creature that our Holy God created is being used to glorify a demon (another created being) or even simply a figment of somebody's imagination. And there are several more examples that we don't need to go into for now.

So let's apply our new understanding about the nature of the crime of "blood" or "shedding blood" to the NT for just a second. In that watershed Jerusalem Council meeting of 49 A.D., when St. Paul went to James the Just, Jesus' brother (who was at that time the head of the church in Jerusalem), to ask the Jewish leadership of the Messianic movement to relent from first requiring gentiles to convert to Judaism in order to worship Christ, and to establish some rules for gentiles to follow that would satisfy the Jewish purity provisions and thereby allow gentiles and Jews to worship together in Jewish synagogues. Indeed the outcome was such

that many restrictions were lifted and some basic requirements were put onto the gentiles and many of these edicts have been sadly misunderstood, misapplied, and misrepresented by church leaders.

Among those requirements for gentile Believers as recorded in Acts 15:20, one says that gentiles are to abstain “from blood”. ***NAS Acts 15:20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.***

The phrase “from blood” is ***exactly*** concerning what we’ve been talking about. It means gentiles are to refrain from ANY ***misuse*** of blood; from murder, to not drinking blood, to not draining meat of all its blood, to sacrificing an animal to another god. Whatever Scriptural laws and regulations existed about blood were to be obeyed by the gentile contingent of the church. And while I won’t get it into right now, it also includes whatever Jewish provisions were in effect at that time concerning WHERE an animal was to be killed and in whatever manner. The rules about animal slaughter changed a bit from the time of Leviticus, after Joshua led Israel into the Land of Canaan, after it was not so convenient to take an animal to the Tabernacle and have a priest slaughter it.

OK, back to the texts of Leviticus 17. Let’s re-read Leviticus 17 to start things off.

RE-READ LEVITICUS CHAPTER 17

In the first 4 verses we’re told that all domestic animals used for food had to FIRST be part of a sacrifice. And this had to be performed in accordance with all of the carefully crafted God-ordained sacrificial rituals, which meant it HAD to happen at the Tabernacle. If someone broke this law they had committed “blood” or “blood-guilt” and were therefore subject to being “cut-off” (***karet***) by God.

Verse 5 makes it clear that this ordinance concerning blood was not a preemptive strike; the Israelites were currently killing animals from their flocks and herds out in the open fields thinking that this didn’t count. The idea was that if they were OUTSIDE THE CAMP of Israel, God’s rules on blood didn’t apply. Further the Israelites very likely were building small crude altars and offering some of these animals to the gods they had learned to worship in Egypt, or even sacrificing to Yehoveh thinking they still had the right to do so (remember, until the establishment of the priesthood that had only weeks earlier been ordained by God, the senior firstborn of each Hebrew family acted as the one who performed rituals for the family). Let us also remember that these laws about blood were for all these foreigners as well..... the mixed-multitude.....who were among the Hebrews, as well as for the natural descendants of Jacob.

Why while Israel was in the Wilderness would God require all animals used for food to be first offered as a sanctuary sacrifice, and then after they entered the Land of Canaan He allow some slack in the procedure? As with everything else we’ve witnessed this was a teaching process. Yehoveh was in the midst of wringing 400 years of Egypt out of Israel, and showing those non-Israelites who lived among His people that there was more to Him than just bringing

judgments upon nations who came against Him. It was going to take 40 years in the wilderness for Israel to adopt some new ways while forgetting most of their old ways. Once they got into Canaan and spread out over the land it was nearly impossible that all meat be brought on a several days journey to the place of the Tabernacle.....and years later to the Temple in Jerusalem.....for slaughter when it involved food. However the lesson had been taught and Yehoveh's requirement for sacrifices to be made only at the place He designated remained intact with no deviations allowed.

Now for those of you who have paid close attention in our Leviticus study, we get an interesting nuance in verses 5 through 8. We have thus far studied 5 basic classifications or categories of sacrifices: the 'Olah, Minchah, Hata'at, Asham, and Zevah Shelamim. Each of these sacrificial categories is for a precise reason; each has a precise ritual and each has a certain occasion upon which it is to be performed. Some of these classes of sacrifice are mandatory; that is they are **not** voluntary and must be performed when the Law says they must or there is an unpleasant consequence. Others of these sacrificial categories **are** voluntary and in general the worshipper decides for himself WHEN and IF he is going to offer it to God. In verse 5 the reference as to the type of sacrifice that is to be brought before the Lord is a Zevah Shelamim. The significance of this is that it is a type of offering that can be brought to the Lord at the decision of the worshipper. So an Israelite who decided it was time for his family to eat meat could bring a Zevah Shelamim offering at his whim and go home from the sanctuary with the remainder of the animal on his shoulders. Further some of the offerings had to be completely destroyed by fire; in others portions that weren't burned up were to go to the priests so the worshipper did not receive any portion of the animal for himself. The Zevah Shelamim, however, provided for the bulk of the sacrificial animal to go to the worshipper. So as I mentioned many months ago for this and other reasons the Zevah Shelamim sacrifices were undoubtedly the most numerous sacrifices performed (at least while they were out in the Wilderness).

Verse 8 makes it clear that all these regulations apply to foreigners living among Israel as well as the natural Israelites. And although it gets lost in translation verse 8 in essence makes clear that the ENTIRE range of sacrifices, every category with no exceptions, must be performed at the Tabernacle. Do you see where it says: **".....Say to them further, if anyone of the house of Israel or of the strangers who reside among them offers a burnt offering or a sacrifice...."**? Well, the burnt offering in the original Hebrew is 'Olah, and the word sacrifice in Hebrew is Zevah....short for Zevah Shelamim. The 'Olah is the chief of all sacrifices and therefore it ALL goes to the Lord.....not even the priests get any of the meat. Further this is the most strictly mandatory of all the sacrifices. The Zevah is the opposite end of the spectrum from the 'Olah: the Zevah is the one that in most cases is purely voluntary, can be offered as often or as seldom as the worshipper decides, and it is the one sacrifice in which the worshipper keeps the largest portion of meat for himself. So the idea here of saying " if someone offers a burnt offering (Olah) or a sacrifice (Zevah), it is like our American saying "from A to Z" or "from soup to nuts".....it indicates all inclusiveness.

Now we just can't pass up those words of verse 7, which says that the people will no longer offer their sacrifices to the goat-demons of the wilderness. Obviously the Israelites WERE doing this at this point in their history. Even more obvious, since we just finished studying

Leviticus 16 and Yom Kippur with its Scapegoat ritual, there is a link between the Azazel to whom the Scapegoat was sent, and the goat-demon reference here in Leviticus 17.

Remember that Azazel and goat-demons are thought to be evil powers that rule the wilderness regions. I think in some sense or another they are quite real. Not that they are necessarily demons that look like goats, but indeed they are some sort of spiritual powers and principalities whose domain was the barren desert regions, the wilderness. And the people (Israelite and foreigner alike) were sacrificing to these demons and God says it was to come to an abrupt halt!

Further in the Scapegoat ritual when the Scapegoat was sent out to Azazel, it was by no means a sacrificial offering to the "goat-demons" (something that is being prohibited here); it was actually the opposite. Rather the Scapegoat was loaded up with all of Israel's sin and uncleanness and sent back to the Evil One, out in the wilderness; it was all flung right back into his face, as a reproach by God, and proof of Yehoveh's invincibility and power OVER Satan and all his demons.

Then in verses 10-12 we are again told what we've previously discussed: that no one among the entire throng of people of the Exodus are to partake of blood or they will be cut off.

Verse 13 starts a new instruction and it involves the killing of non-domestic animals; wild animals. So the first 12 verses of chapter 17 refers to domestic animals...approved food and sacrifice sources.....which is entirely different from wild animals that **can** be used for food, but never for sacrifices. The idea is that when man hunts animals.....deer, antelope, birds.....he doesn't have to drive his prey towards the sanctuary and kill it there! But neither can man drink the wild animal's blood just because it is wild; the blood provisions apply to ALL meat. The blood of a wild animal is not suitable for sacrifice so it must be drained from the animal and buried in the ground; the life, which is in the blood, must be returned to the dust (which is to return it to God) and NOT used for food. Blood is either to be used for God purposes or it is to be disposed of; it is NEVER for men to decide. And the penalty for disobeying God's command concerning wild animal blood is just as serious as for the misuse of domestic animal blood: the violator is to be cut-off.

Verses 15 and 16 deal with what must have been an everyday matter for these refugees from Egypt, something they would encounter both in the wilderness and after they've settled in the Promised Land: what to do with a valuable or a wild animal that has died naturally or has been killed by another animal. After all meat was an expensive commodity and they weren't about to waste it. Interestingly its not that the person is instructed AGAINST eating flesh that was killed in those manners, its just that the person who does so becomes unclean. And that uncleanness lasts until the end of the current day.....sunset.....and until that person takes a ritual bath and washes his garments. If a person takes those steps to become clean again then all is well. If he doesn't then we're told in verse 16 "he shall bear his guilt".

Let's take a moment and understand this "he shall bear his guilt" comment because we'll see it many times throughout the Torah and the OT.

The idea as concerns our current case is this: if a person chooses to eat the flesh of an animal

that has died of natural causes, or from an accidental death (fell off a cliff), or it was attacked and killed by another animal then that person has NOT done something against God; God permits it. HOWEVER if a person **chooses** to do this allowed thing, there is **mild** consequence that goes with it in that he becomes ritually impure for a few hours and MUST take a ritual bath and MUST wash clothes. There is NO sin or transgression against God here. God really isn't even saying He'd rather you didn't do it. Yet upon choosing to eat the flesh of animal that died this way there are conditions. BTW: here is another of those examples that shows that uncleanness and sin are not necessarily directly linked. The person in this particular scenario becomes unclean for a short time, but has committed no sin (it is much like the woman who is on her monthly cycle).

IF you follow those conditions laid out by God then there is no problem. But if you don't NOW you have transgressed against Yehoveh. Not because you ate meat that was killed in that manner but because you failed to follow His ordained purification procedures. So to "bear the guilt" means you are guilty of trespassing against God for failing to follow His procedures and now there will be judgment of some sort; the exact punishment (if any at all), the time and the place, are completely at Yehoveh's prerogative. Further, since you now bear the guilt you must make an atoning sacrifice, something that would NOT have been required if one would have followed the ritual purity procedures.

Let's move on to Chapter 18.

When we read chapter 18 we're going to be reminded of chapter 15 because human sexuality is front and center in these verses. When one takes the time to read the Holy Scriptures...more than just a few verses at a time and too often completely out of context.....we soon find that human sexuality plays a huge role in the Bible. Why? Because sexuality it is a basis of propagating physical life; a physical life that God created to operate and multiply in that way. We simply cannot get around it; we are male and female, we are very different from one another, and God has put a nearly irresistible attraction between the sexes. God has given us sex NOT only for procreation but also for joy and pleasure provided it is within the boundaries of marriage. And as is the case among humans we (unfortunately) abuse the wonderful gifts Yehoveh has given us. Sometimes the abuse is out of misunderstanding, at other times its out of ignorance, but more it's flat out disobedience or a very misguided belief that as Christians God's commands no longer apply to us.

Now as much as the Church talks of and hopes for unity, what we find in the Torah.....and really in the NT if we'd ever actually read it and trust it for what it says.....is this constantly expanding God-pattern of division, election, and separation as the MEANS to a Godly type of unity. That is Yehoveh sets up dynamics and rules of what is good, what promotes Godly defined life, what is holy and what is eternal. All else is against....opposite....of these divine governing dynamics and rules: evil, death, sin, and the short-lived physical for instance. So Yehoveh divides all things into two basic categories: for Him and against Him. Then He elects whom or what will be included in each category. Next He makes a deep chasm, an impassable barrier, between the two sides: He separates.

It is not God that is constantly seeking physical unity in our physical world: it is man. The Lord

seeks spiritual unity. Man has always tried to put back together those things that God has divided and separated. God draws sharp distinctions; man wants to blur that distinction or remove them altogether. We have a name today for drawing sharp distinctions: intolerance. In the current world intolerance is a bad thing. Better, says our secular humanist planet, is tolerance whereby the distinctions are done away with. Nimrod's rebellion at the Tower of Babel revolved around trying to physically unify people instead of allowing them to be divided and separated as God wanted.

No this is not a polemic against unity in the Body of Messiah. God is unity.....He is One, echad. But that is entirely different than our human notion of unity, which has so severely infected the church that other than the buildings where we meet, there is precious little difference between what we as Believers choose as a way of life and what everyone else chooses. Our notion of unity is more akin to consensus, which is but agreements achieved by compromise, with a goal of universal agreement and single-mindedness. We divide ourselves up into smaller and smaller groups until we feel sufficiently comfortable, then try to unite everyone in that small group via groupthink, and then hope it will grow. Think of it as Humanity, or the Body of Christ, standing in an enormous circle, holding hands, and singing Cum-ba-yah. Bu, that is not the kind of unity that God is, or is seeking, for us.

Rather Yehoveh wants us to be of one spirit with HIM.....with Christ. If I am of one spirit with Christ and you are one spirit with Christ, then you and I **are** in unity. I don't hold your hand, I hold Christ's (metaphorically speaking). You don't hold my hand, you hold Christ's. Then we are unified. Do you see the rather enormous difference? One is a method of group control, which is man's way; the other is how the Lord comes into a spiritual relationship with us, His way.

So what we are going to witness in Leviticus 18 is yet another chapter in the ongoing Biblical saga of God setting up that which is good and holy, and separating it from that which is evil and unclean. And as His holy and set apart nation Israel is to follow the one and forsake the other, just as we to do as those who have been grafted into Israel by faith in Yeshua.

Another thing we're going to see undergo further development in this chapter is the family unit. Here will we find Yehoveh's definition of who is included in a family and who is not. Who is the head and focus of the family unit and who is not. The Bible from beginning to end revolves around a patriarchal family; that is men, the fathers, are the leaders.....and the responsible party by the way... of the family unit. I'm not going to go into a politically correct apology that woman are not the head of the family unit; God didn't apologize about it so I see no need to. Yet as I mentioned earlier all gifts could be perverted and distorted; that men would abuse their wives and daughters or treat them as less than equal value in God's eyes was an absolute abomination to Christ and He taught against it. He didn't teach against the God-ordained male leadership of the family; he taught against the male leadership's abuse of power and authority, and dereliction of the duty to selflessly shepherd his family.

I tell you this because as we begin to read chapter 18, I want you to understand the context of what we're reading; that these instruction are being spoken of from the male point of view. That is it is understood that these are instructions to Israelite males.....not females.....at every

level of Hebrew society; AND it also applies to the foreigners who now live within the boundaries of Hebrew society. Naturally females are affected by these rulings but that is primarily because of what God enjoins men from doing.

READ LEVITICUS CHAPTER 18 all

An appropriate name for this chapter is probably God's Principles of Human Sexual Behavior. And right out of the box we see Yehoveh draw the distinction between the behaviors of the world versus the behaviors expected of Israel and those who are attached to Israel. The people are told that they are neither to continue the sexual behaviors that were acceptable in the place they left behind, Egypt, nor to take up the sexual habits of the people who currently occupy the land that Israel will take over in the future, the Canaanites. Now let's be clear: there is nothing we've encountered so far that says that these Israelites lived in a state of disgust in Egypt nor were they particularly concerned about the immoral nature of the society they would eventually encounter in Canaan. It was Yehoveh who was disgusted and concerned and He was going to make Israel aware of His disgust and teach them to adopt His ways. So much of this was relatively new to the Israelites, as we'll discuss in a couple of minutes.

I'd like you to also take notice that these rules are presented kind of like the 10 Commandments, part 2. They are announced to Israel in the same kind of form....." I am the Lord thy God, you shall not.....", and then the list of shall's and shall-not's commences. And like the 10 commandments not much reason is given for the decisions God has made concerning how Israel will deal with sexual morality other than for the fundamental principle that "I am holy so you are to be holy", or, that the things God prohibits are far more than a minor irritation to Him....they are detestable, an abomination, He hates those behaviors. And in the positive it says in verse 5 that those who obey these commands will enjoy life.....real life.....the kind of life that is from God. It is not implying that to break one of these laws that you'll necessarily die.

Verse 6 sets up the primary dynamic upon which the bulk of what follows will adhere; and it is that none of you (remember, it's referring to MEN, males, when it says "you") shall (according to most Bible texts) come near your own flesh to uncover nakedness. Or, as the CJB says, you're not to approach anyone who is a close relative in order to have sexual relations with them; that is much closer to what is being discussed here.

Let's take a minute to define a couple of terms that we'll find in many places in the Word of God: **uncover nakedness** and **his own flesh**. What *uncovering nakedness* is referring to is usually the uniquely male or female body parts or it is referring to having sexual relations in general. And when the Bible speaks of **his own flesh** it is referring to the developing Biblical definition of "close relatives". The idea is that a man is not to have sexual relations with a female who falls within certain boundaries of those who are part of his family.

So with that understanding it makes most of the list of who a man can have sexual relations with and who he can't fairly comprehensible. But depending on your version we can get these odd sounding instructions as in verse 13: TNK **Leviticus 18:13 Do not uncover the**

nakedness of your mother's sister; for she is your mother's flesh.

We can easily understand the instruction that a man is not to have sex with his mother's sister, his aunt. But what is this about the aunt being her mother's flesh? Well as you've undoubtedly figured out it means that the mother's sister and the mother are close biological relatives.....and the Biblical term for being a close relative is being of someone's flesh.

But what do we make of an earlier verse, vs. 7? TNK **Leviticus 18:7 *Your father's nakedness, that is, the nakedness of your mother, you shall not uncover; she is your mother -- you shall not uncover her nakedness.***

When it speaks of a man uncovering his father's nakedness, is it talking about a man committing a homosexual act with his own father? No. "Your father's nakedness" is possessive; that is, it is referring to nakedness that your father OWNS. In this case it's making the point that your father exclusively owns sexual access to your mother. She is his and his alone.

I have no intention of spending a lot of time examining the remainder of Leviticus chapter 18. Yet I want to look at these verses sufficiently that we see for ourselves that the Torah says some things that many modern liberal teachers, pastors, and commentators say aren't there. And as uncomfortable as it can be to discuss deviant sexual behavior in a mixed class like this we must do it because God sees human sexuality.....and its proper use and purpose.....as vitally important in His scheme of things. After all the goal of Torah Class is to find out what Holy Scripture says rather than just assuming that Christian doctrines that have developed around societal changes and political correctness over the centuries properly represent God's word.

Further these sexual taboos.....and that is primarily what we have in Leviticus 18, a list of no-no's..... will play an important role in how humans develop as a species. We have all known both experientially and scientifically that there is great danger in making the gene pool of one's family too small.....hence our MODERN laws against incest. It is interesting that with all the other absolutely terrible (and often embarrassing) things discussed with such frankness in the Bible that we really don't hear much direct mention of babies with severe birth defects that caused mixed gender nor of mental retardation. Oh I'm sure it existed in some amount.....but it must have been quite insignificant, at least among the Israelites, or there for sure would have mention concerning it.

And a major factor that such defects **were** so insignificant can be traced to these laws that place strict limitations on what was allowable interbreeding among humans who were related. But we must also NOT assume that all this was only about biology or genetics; as with so much of what we have come to find about "clean and unclean" sometimes there is no direct correlation of the laws and commands to human danger or human benefit that can be easily discerned. It was a decision by Yehoveh, for His own good reasons, and that's about the end of it.

We'll get into the dicey subject of incest and deviant sexual behavior next week.