

**January 5, 2020 - Deut. 12:20-32 - Blood, Sacrifice and Eating Meat**  
**Torah Reading: Deuteronomy 12:20-32 - Blood, Sacrifice and Eating Meat**  
**Psalm 119:73-104**  
**Haftarah: Isaiah 54:2-9, 17**

The first part of the reading distinguishes between eating meat for normal meals and sacrifices commanded by God, which are to be offered only at the central sanctuary. Blood is always to be poured out on the ground and not consumed. The passage ends with a warning against idolatry.

**Deuteronomy 12:20** - "When the LORD thy God shall enlarge thy border, as he hath promised thee, and thou shalt say, I will eat flesh, because thy soul longeth to eat flesh; thou mayest eat flesh, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after."

The people are permitted to slaughter an animal and eat meat at home for an ordinary meal without worrying about ritual cleanness. But animals for sacrifice must be ritually slaughtered at the central sanctuary, and it is to be eaten only there.

Rabbinical writers exhibited a tendency toward simple vegetarianism, despite this allowance:

Rashi - The Torah teaches proper conduct, that one should not desire to eat meat unless [one lives] in abundance and wealth. — [Chul. 84a.]

**Deuteronomy 12:21-22** - "If the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to put his name there be too far from thee, then thou shalt kill of thy herd and of thy flock, which the LORD hath given thee, as I have commanded thee, and thou shalt eat in thy gates whatsoever thy soul lusteth after. Even as the roebuck and the hart is eaten, so thou shalt eat them: the unclean and the clean shall eat of them alike."

Rashi - In the desert, however, the meat of a non-consecrated animal was forbidden to them, unless one first consecrated it and offered it up as a peace offering. — [Sifrei : Chul. 16b]

This is a repeal of the law in **Leviticus 17:3**, which restricted ALL slaughtering to the place of the sanctuary. But once in the land, this would be impossible. It was a practical concession to the changed conditions of settlement in the Promised Land. But this apparent disagreement caused much consternation among rabbinical interpreters.

What was the commandment that "as I have commanded thee" refers to?

Rashi - [Since this commandment is not written in the Torah we deduce that] these are the laws of ritual slaughtering given orally to Moses on [Mount] Sinai. — [Sifrei ; Chul. 28a]

But others say it simply refers back to **Deuteronomy 12:15**.

## The Prohibition Against Blood

**Deuteronomy 12:23-25** - "Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh. Thou shalt not eat it; thou shalt pour it upon the earth as water. Thou shalt not eat it; that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the LORD."

"Whoever eats any blood that soul will be cut off from his people" (**Leviticus 7:26-27**)

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement (kaphar) for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement (kaphar) for the soul." (**Leviticus 17:11**)

"thou shalt pour it upon the earth as water" - The blood was to be covered over with earth (**Leviticus 17:13**), in opposition to the practice of heathen hunters, who left it exposed as an offering to the god of the chase.

Also see **Genesis 9:4, Acts 15:28-29**.

The life is in the blood. So when slaughtering an animal, its lifeblood is poured on the ground as a gesture of returning the life to God who created it. The Pagan practice might be to pour some of the blood on an altar to thank Baal, or the spirits of the hunt, etc.

Tribal identification with one's "spirit animal" or image, evidenced in many primitive peoples, is blocked here. That's why there is a warning against idolatry again at the end of the chapter.

The Hebrew is "Be strong not to eat the blood"

Rashi - If regarding blood, which is easy to watch out for, since a person has no desire for it, [the Torah] needed to strengthen you with its admonition, how much more so [must one strengthen oneself] for all other commandments! - [Sifrei] If [in the case of] blood, which disgusts a person, he who abstains from it earns merit [both] for himself and for his children after him, how much more so [does this apply] to abstaining from theft and immorality, after which man's soul does lust. — [Mak. 23b]

On one level, this serves as a reminder that animals are God's creatures, just like we are.

But more importantly for us, the only "life" we need to consume other than our own is the life of Christ, which brings resurrection and revives us from our state of being dead in sin. The communion wine at the Afikomen represents this, and this is why the Christian ritual presented great difficulty for Jews. But the prohibition itself was in anticipation of our need for Christ's life represented in His shed blood at the cross "that maketh an atonement."

**Deuteronomy 12:26-27** - "Only thy holy things which thou hast, and thy vows, thou

shalt take, and go unto the place which the LORD shall choose: And thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, the flesh and the blood, upon the altar of the LORD thy God: and the blood of thy sacrifices shall be poured out upon the altar of the LORD thy God, and thou shalt eat the flesh."

### **The Centrality of the Sanctuary for Worship**

God restricted Israel's worship and sacrifice to the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and then in the land to the "place where He should place his name" - and then lastly to the Temple in Jerusalem.

For us, the central place of worship is a Person, not a place.

- **John 4:23** - "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him."

Jesus referred to his own body as the Temple (**John 2:19**). Jesus is the Lord's dwelling place where He has placed His name forever.

- **John 1:14** - "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

### **Warning Against Idolatry**

**Deuteronomy 12:30** - "Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise."

The widespread belief in the ancient world was that each land has its local gods that must be appeased with offerings by any who came to settle there, or the gods would resent the newcomers' neglect of payment. This was just "common sense" to the ancient mind.

The prohibition here is not "knowledge" about other religions, per se, but knowledge with a resulting desire to imitate and to worship the idols.

**Deuteronomy 12:31** - "Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods."

- **Leviticus 18:21** - "And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD."

- **Jeremiah 32:35** - "And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin."

Of the Phoenicians, Porphyry says (De Abstinencia, l. 2. sect. 56.) that in great calamities, as war or pestilence, they sacrificed to Saturn some one of those that were dearest to them. Carthage continued this custom up through the time when Rome destroyed the city.

The following verse is listed as **Deuteronomy 13:1** in the Jewish translation:

**Deuteronomy 12:32** - "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it."

This warning is supplied at the beginning, the middle and the end of the Bible.

- **Proverbs 30:6** - "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."

- **Revelation 22:18-19** - "I testify to everyone who hears the words of prophecy in this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book"

- **Isaiah 40:13** - "Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counselor hath taught him?"

Jesus accused the Pharisees of doing just that by elevating the Oral Law, which later was written down as the Talmud, over the scriptures:

- **Mark 7:8-9** - "For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men...Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition."

We exhibit perilous and inordinate self-conceit when we arbitrarily ignore scripture or add our own exceptions or twists to it, let alone come up with a new "revelation" or a pronouncement that contradicts God's word.