

THERE MUST BE BLOOD

THE LAW:

Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy

The reason for the color of redemption's thread fills the pages of the books of the law, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy: blood. Because death entered the world as the cost of sin, it makes perfect sense that the physical representation of life would be required to pay for it. As a central aspect of His law, God required that sin be paid for in blood. Poured out on the altar to acquit the individual and on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant to absolve the nation, animal blood flowed freely in God's system of atoning sacrifices. But day after day, year after year, it became readily apparent that there could never be enough blood to completely cleanse the sin of the world.

A COSTLY CLEANSING

God knew this, of course. This insufficiency informed His master plan to pay for sin once and for all—a redemption that in His perfection only He could accomplish. God the Father sent God the Son on the ultimate rescue mission, and Jesus became our mercy seat, transforming the place of judgment into the place of mercy. The system

of sacrifices in Leviticus was never meant to be permanent, because they were sacrifices “which can never take away sins” (Hebrews 10:11). Everything that it was designed to accomplish—atonement, sanctification, and holiness—was made possible on a one-time, ongoing basis by the blood of the final sacrifice, Jesus Christ. Until He came, the law existed to remind God’s people of their great need and of His great love in desiring to have a relationship with them.

A Spirit-Led Conscience

It shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing; and he shall bring his trespass offering to the LORD for his sin which he has committed. (Leviticus 5:5-6)

Sin is an ugly word. Most people hate it, marginalizing its importance or simply denying its existence. But the plain truth is that sin impedes any relationship we as fallen creatures could have with God. Leviticus opens with seven chapters answering the question, How can I approach God? God wants a relationship with you, but His holiness makes it impossible for you to approach Him the way you would another person. Relativists say that all paths lead to God, but God’s Word says that He is exclusive: Lifeblood is required to approach Him.

In the Old Testament, God’s response was to have Israel come to Him through the blood of animal sacrifices. People couldn’t just waltz in through the curtains of the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and have a chat with God; they needed a blood sacrifice and a priest.

God established a series of offerings that made relationship with Him possible. The sin and trespass offerings were mandatory because sin requires payment,¹ and everyone sins.² We are sinners by nature *and* by choice.

Walk Away: A Tale of Two Goats

He shall take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the LORD and the other lot for

the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat on which the LORD's lot fell, and offer it as a sin offering. (Leviticus 16:7-9)

God instituted Yom Kippur, the annual Day of Atonement, for the Jews as a solemn observation of sin's cost and the need for forgiveness. Aaron, as the high priest, made an offering for himself and his family, and then brought out two goats. One had a good future, and the other, a bad one. One goat was let loose, and the other was killed—a perfect anticipation of New Testament atonement.

One goat was sacrificed because the wages of sin is death; the other went free, covered only by the priest's bloodied handprints and a confession on the people's behalf—given life, just as the apostle John later described: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). That second goat was sent out of sight, and the people celebrated its disappearance—because, as David later said, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12).

Jesus's first words from the cross were, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). It's noteworthy that, first and foremost, He addressed our greatest need: forgiveness. Centuries before, Yom Kippur made this clear. However, whereas in the Old Testament sins were never completely removed but only covered for a time, under the new covenant, Jesus took away the sin of the world³ once and for all for those who receive Him.

Life Is in the Blood

The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul. (Leviticus 17:11)

To please God, you must be sanctified—made holy. The law showed that sacrifice was required to become holy—more specifically, spilled blood was required. Blood coursing through our veins means life. To shed blood is to end life, and that's the cost of sin: death. Animal sacrifices were an acceptable substitute under the old covenant, and the key phrase in the law is right here in Leviticus, a book where blood is

mentioned more than 400 times in 357 verses: “the life of the flesh is in the blood.” Spiritually, the power of sacrificed blood shows the sanctity of life. It was the distinguishing factor for Israel as it became one nation under God.

The key word embroidered on the new covenant isn't do but done, because Jesus completed and fulfilled all the requirements of the law.

God forbade the Jews from eating blood. The power of atonement was the main reason why—it took lifeblood to be made right with God, something that none of us could ever accomplish ourselves by giving or consuming blood. This was so ingrained in Jewish culture that Jesus shocked the Jews when He told them, “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:54).

The startling metaphor came from an even more surprising truth: True life can come only by Jesus's death. His once-and-for-all sacrifice paid redemption's ultimate price.

Spiritual cleanness comes from belief in the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse you from sin; it's not tied to what you eat. The key word embroidered on the new covenant isn't *do* but *done*, because Jesus completed and fulfilled all the requirements of the law. He blotted out “the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” (Colossians 2:14 KJV).

Consider the tedious, endless nature of the old covenant system. There was always one more sacrifice, one more lamb, day after day, year after year: “According to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission [of sin]” (Hebrews 9:22). In the new covenant, remembrance replaced repetition. The next time you celebrate communion, breathe a sigh of relief and rejoice in the limitless atonement that transformed your relationship with your heavenly Father and brought you into His family. Grafting you onto the bloodline took a bloody cross, but the result is a saved and satisfied soul no longer bound to sin or its accompanying sacrifices.

Leviticus makes one fact abundantly clear: Redemption's cost must

be paid in blood. The Levitical system, however, demonstrated that no amount of animal blood or human giving could permanently erase sin's debt. God's holiness requires that death must be overcome with life—a perfect, stainless life. And in His great love, He provided the one sacrifice that would fulfill His requirements: His Messiah, Jesus Christ.

EVERY NUMBER HAS A NAME

The book of Numbers gets its biblical title from a pair of censuses taken along the way—reminders of God's protection and provision of His people in a very inhospitable environment. The people multiplied under His care in the wilderness, but didn't progress in recognition of it—so they pretty much stayed put, turning an eleven-day journey to the Promised Land into a forty-year holding pattern.

Even though Israel's bad attitude kept the people from experiencing the abundant life God had for them in the Promised Land, He took care of them. But God's agenda went beyond their needs to the needs of the entire world. In preserving Israel, He sustained a genealogy within a nation that could present the Savior who would offer forgiveness for sin. The extent to which God was committed to fulfilling this need can be seen in His patience with the people of Israel.

Both Leviticus and Numbers have a wilderness setting. Their stage is the desert wasteland between Egypt and the promised land of Canaan. But whereas the central theological theme of Leviticus is atonement, Numbers focuses on the faithfulness of God to fulfill His promises to give the progeny of Abraham the land of Canaan. Thus, the nation that would bring forth the Messiah would have a homeland.⁴

God even organized Israel's camp in a way that foreshadowed redemption. With the tabernacle at the center, He set the twelve tribes around their meeting place with Him in such a way that, from the air, the camp was in the shape of a cross. The tribes placed east of the tabernacle were proportionally larger than the other three camps and required more space to extend in that direction. Is this significant? It most certainly is, because it points to God's ultimate purpose for all mankind: to know Him better as Lord and Savior.

Remember Your Deliverance

If anyone of you or your posterity is unclean because of a corpse, or is far away on a journey, he may still keep the LORD's Passover. . . They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break one of its bones. According to all the ordinances of the Passover they shall keep it. (Numbers 9:10, 12)

On the first anniversary of the Passover, God told Moses to remind the people—in the midst of their busy lives—to stop and honor God for His deliverance of them from Egypt.⁵ He specifically instituted the practice that none of the Passover lamb's bones should be broken in the process of sacrificing, preparing, or eating it. Seems like a harmless if peculiarly specific instruction—until we look at Jesus's crucifixion.

The anguished heaving and gasping of a crucified individual could last for days. For this reason it was a regular practice of the Roman soldiers to break their victims' legs after a while, preventing them from being able to brace their bodies to draw a breath, hastening the end. In Jesus's case, the Passover was fast approaching, and the Jewish leaders wanted to head home to observe it. So they asked Pilate to break the legs of all three men. But when the soldiers came to Jesus “and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs” (John 19:33).

John witnessed this, and later, as he wrote his Gospel, connected the dots to the practice of the Passover. He saw that it foretold Jesus as the ultimate Passover Lamb, bones unbroken and blood shed for the sins of mankind—not a victim, but the victor. John even pointed out that the fact the Roman soldiers had left Jesus's legs unbroken was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.⁶

God's plan of salvation was not accidental but intentional. Jesus is the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). And just like at Passover, God wants His people to remember and celebrate His deliverance, which was a key part of His overarching plan to save us from sin and restore our relationship with Him.

Look Up to Live

The LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a

pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived. (Numbers 21:8-9)

One chapter after Moses found out he would not be entering the Promised Land, he modeled the Messiah’s heart and interceded for God’s hardheaded people yet again. The harsh lesson God had taught Moses when he struck the rock didn’t go unheeded. Rather than let bitterness take root, Moses submitted to God’s punishment, trusting God with the bigger picture rather than letting his own feelings govern his actions—“See? I told you how obnoxious these people are. Let ’em have it, Lord!”

And when it came to the episode of the bronze serpent, there was definitely a bigger picture in God’s mind. In the Old Testament, bronze was often associated with judgment. The altar of sacrifice in the tabernacle’s courtyard was made of bronze, and was regularly covered with animal blood in payment for sin. So this snake on a pole represented God’s righteous judgment—but also His cure.

Jesus, in telling Nicodemus that a person must be born again to see God’s kingdom, compared being lifted up on the cross to Moses lifting up the serpent.⁷ Now, there’s nothing scientific about bronze or a snake that either should heal a snakebite—just as there’s nothing inherently logical about a man’s crucifixion saving mankind.

Both situations required faith. The snake was raised up to heal those who had been bitten because of their sin, but they had to trust Moses’s instructions enough to look up at it. To do that, they first needed to admit they had done wrong. Antivenin wouldn’t heal those bites—only confession, repentance, and trusting in God. Similarly, no religion or self-help book or great works will solve a person’s sinful state—only looking up at the cross of Christ, an instrument of hopelessness made hopeful by God’s great love.

God’s grace truly is amazing. Even though an entire generation would die in the wilderness because of their failure to be faithful to Him, He would try again with the next generation, bringing them up

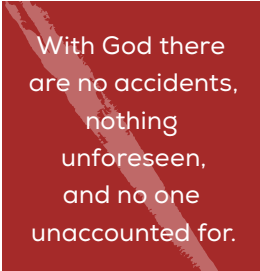
to speed on all He had done to provide for His people, establish His standards, and preserve the line of the Messiah. Redemption's strands are coiled around this moment, reminders that with God there are no accidents, nothing unforeseen, and no one unaccounted for.

Seeking Asylum

You shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there.

(Numbers 35:11)

God's mercy and heart for justice often took physical form. He gave instructions that when the people of Israel eventually crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, they were to establish cities of refuge where those who killed someone by accident could seek asylum.⁸ They could safely reside in those cities either until the community judged the case, or until the death of the high priest, at which time they were set free.



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What a striking image of Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest, whose death set us free from a just condemnation. The lowest of the low could find safety in a city of refuge, and we can do the same today in Christ, no matter what we've done, our wandering hearts redeemed because of His great love for us. In Christ, we're more than just the teeming millions of mankind; we're names that He wants written in His Book of Life.

THE ULTIMATE PROPHET

Jesus quoted the book of Deuteronomy ten times—and with impact. He summed up the Law of Moses by commanding that we love God with all we've got, and that we love our neighbors as ourselves.⁹ He also used Deuteronomy to discuss the shortcomings of divorce¹⁰ and to encourage the honest establishment of witnesses in disciplinary hearings.¹¹ Perhaps most impressively, Jesus wielded Deuteronomy like

a shield as He deflected Satan's temptations during His forty days in the desert.¹²

It's fitting, then, that on the verge of entering the rest of the land of promise, the messages Moses gave to remind God's people of His deeds and His words provided a forecast of and touchstone for the greatest Prophet of them all, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Redemption's scarlet threads are highly visible in the fabric of that chapter.

Jesus would make possible for everyone the greatest journey of all—from sin's condemnation to redemption's forgiveness, and the greatest rest of all—the peace and power of going through this life restored by His love and led by His Spirit.

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The One

I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him. (Deuteronomy 18:18-19)

God sent many prophets to Israel over the years, revealing His word and will. All of them were training the ears of His people to hear His voice and obey in anticipation of the ultimate prophet: the Messiah. Here, through Moses, He made mention not of many prophets but of one. All of God's prophets spoke God's words, but this capital-P Prophet would be different. He would do that and more.

The Jews anticipated the arrival of this Prophet from this point on. That's why, thousands of years later, they asked John the Baptist if he was Elijah, who, along with Moses, was one of the most highly regarded prophets in Israel, and then if he was "the Prophet"—the Messiah (John 1:21). That was a direct reference to this prophecy. And when Stephen, the first martyr, testified before the Jewish leaders, he quoted this passage as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ.¹³ Moses was telling

the Jews to expect a coming Messiah. Even Jesus said as much: “If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me” (John 5:46).

The Messiah would be God’s ultimate spokesman, His final Word, expressed in human form, on the most important issue people face: forgiveness for sin and restoration to relationship with their Maker. God’s final word with regard to salvation is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment of more than 350 prophecies about the Messiah, predictive promises given through multiple sources over thousands of years about God’s plan to redeem mankind from sin’s clutches. And one of His final statements was “It is finished,” announcing that the transaction for salvation had been completed.

When you’re His,
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God’s perfect prophetic record is perfectly expressed in His Son. And just as God’s perfect track record underscores His trustworthiness, Jesus Christ can be trusted with the most important matters in your life—salvation and sanctification (and everything else as well). When you’re His, there’s nothing you can’t bring to Him, nothing you can’t put in His hands and trust to His care.

Choose Life

I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

God made it simple to follow Him. He gave Israel His law, and the command to study it and live it out. The people didn’t need to have a mystical vision or make a far-off pilgrimage; they could draw close to God simply by choosing to obey Him. “The word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it” (Deuteronomy 30:14). He allowed all people to have the power to choose Him or to turn away.

God’s words are right there at your fingertips—and the choice that

Moses laid out is even closer, a matter of your own heart. Once you've heard with your ears, you must listen with the core of your being. God sets the choice before each of us: life or death, blessing or cursing, good or evil. Of course, He wants you to choose life because it's the best choice. It will bring blessings of a life filled with peace, joy, and fulfillment. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep," and that those who choose Him "will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:11, 9). Choosing Jesus as Savior is a one-time event, but choosing to submit to His lordship is a daily decision.

I read about a building in the Midwest with a pitched roof. If the rain falls on one side, it drains off and eventually ends up in the Great Lakes, and then the Atlantic Ocean. If it runs off the other side, it goes to the Ohio River, and then to the Gulf of Mexico. One breath of wind in either direction makes a huge difference in the end. Similarly, one choice can change your life and your eternal destiny. Redemption's tapestry is filled with such momentous decisions.

The way to God is still simple: Choose the life that Jesus Christ offers. Paul quoted this passage from Deuteronomy, concluding "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). If you haven't already made that choice, you can do so right now—and if you have, you've been connected to the bloodline of Christ. You are on the road to heaven, the path of God's blessing. And once you're on that journey, you can help others see the importance of that one simple decision. Israel would resolve to follow God and entered the Promised Land because of it—a foreshadowing of the rest anyone can have upon choosing Jesus Christ.