

Genesis 1:26-28

COVENANT RENEWAL

Matthew 28:18-20

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A COVENANTAL VIEW OF BLOOD

by Ray R. Sutton

(Transcendence)

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, and to all the sons of Israel, and say to them, 'This is what the Lord has commanded, saying,

(Hierarchy)

"Any man¹ from the house of Israel who slaughters an ox, or a lamb, or a goat in the camp, or who slaughters it outside the camp, and has not brought it to the doorway of the tent of meeting to present it as an offering to the Lord before the tabernacle of the Lord, bloodguiltiness is to be reckoned to that man. He has shed blood and that man shall be cut off from among his people. The reason is so that the sons of Israel may bring their sacrifices which they were sacrificing in the open field, that they may bring them in to the Lord, at the doorway of the tent of meeting to the priest, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace offerings to the Lord. And the priest shall sprinkle the blood on the altar of the Lord at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and offer up the fat in smoke as a soothing aroma to the Lord. And they shall no longer sacrifice their sacrifices to the goat demons with which they play harlot. This shall be a permanent statute to them throughout their generations."

(Ethics)

"Then you shall say to them, 'Any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and does not bring it to the doorway of the tent of meeting to offer it to the Lord, that man also shall be cut off from his people.

(Sanctions)

'And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life ["soul" literally] of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life ["soul"] that makes atonement.' "Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, 'No person among you may eat blood, nor may any alien who sojourns among you eat blood.'

(Continuity)

"So when any man from the sons of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, in hunting catches a beast or a bird which may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. For as for the life of all flesh, its blood is identified with its life. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, 'You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.' "And when any person eats an animal which dies, or is torn by beasts, whether he is a native or an alien, he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; then he will become clean. But if he does not wash them or bathe his body, then he shall bear his guilt" (Leviticus 17:1-16).

The other day I went to a movie, *Believers*. I can't recommend it because of the rating, and indeed because of the horror of the movie. So why did I go?

I wanted to see the movie because it dealt with the rise of Voodoo cults in the large inner cities of some of the largest cities in the country, Chicago and New York City to name only a couple. I have been watching the growth of these cults over the years, so I knew that the movie fictionally dealt with factual material. But when I had seen a review of *Believers*, and when I had learned of its content, I anticipated that it would touch on an issue that modern man believes he is above: occult sacrifice. And in fact, I discovered that this theme emerges in the movie, as the leading male character is a psychologist who does not believe in the occult, and who is made into a believer.

I should add that the most interesting shift from unbeliever to believer is his middle class, swinging-single mistress, who is driven into belief by her own fears. How?

The mistress is a successful artist. She meets the psychologist, who has fled from Chicago with his ten-year-old son to New York City to work as a staff psychologist for the New City Police department, after the tragic death of his wife, who was electrocuted in her own kitchen. She quickly gets romantically involved with him, and one evening she goes to a fund-raiser for a drug rehabilitation clinic that is sponsored by a white magic voodoo cult, whose main benefactor secretly heads up a counter black magic voodoo cult, one that kidnaps little boys to offer them up as sacrifices. At the party, she unknowingly receives an evil spell on her from a witch doctor who has been imported from Africa; he puts something in her facial powder that creates a huge boil on her face.

At that point in the movie, she is drawn into a whole network of people surrounding her "swinging" little society who are deeply involved in the occult. She meets the evil benefactor, who runs a secret society of successful leaders in New York City, who have all obtained their success by mak-

1. I have bold-faced this phrase in the text because its use establishes the structure of the chapter. Also, please note that the translation here is according to the *New American Standard Version*. But Gordon J. Wenham, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 239-240, translates this bold-faced-phrase, "If any." I concur with Wenham's translation.

ing Faustian pacts with the Devil by offering up their first-born sons as bloody sacrifices; that's right, they have killed their own sons in ritual sacrifice, and we learn that many of the young-child kidnappings in our society are tied to a resurgence of occult sacrifices, covered up by the police because common knowledge will create a panic.²

She also learns that the maid for her psychologist friend practices white magic over the psychologist's son, who has innocently kept a voodoo amulet that he found near the site of a sacrifice in Central Park; I should add that the maid and all her white magic voodoo friends are also very devout Roman Catholics, and we shall see in a moment how they could be in the occult and Roman Catholicism at the same time.

But the young mistress discovers just how far the magical world of New York City reaches, when she engages in a search for the boy who is kidnapped by the black magic cult after it fails to recruit his father. She and the psychologist go to the head of the drug rehabilitation center, who is himself a practicing white magic witch doctor, and who instructs them as to how to break the spell on the son by ritual sacrifice of a chicken.

She drinks blood at the ceremony, and to make a long and bloody story short, she is briefly taken out of the plot when the boil on her face hatches some gross-looking, hairy insects, causing the local hospital doctors terrific consternation, but who manage to help her convalesce. In the end, however, after the boy has been recovered, and after she and the psychologist have gone to live as one big happy family on a beautiful farm in some Northeastern rural area, a beautiful picnic is interrupted by their barking dog. They all run to find the dog yelping at several goats that have been sacrificed in the upper loft of the barn. The psychologist immediately assumes that the cult has found out their hideout, but he is chillingly informed by his new wife, that **she** is the one who offered up the sacrifices. She had become a **believer**!

The movie is a reminder of man's preoccupation with **blood**. Since he first needed atonement by blood, he has not been able to escape it. He has either found blood in the sacrifices of God, or he has found it in the sacrifices of man. He has either allowed God to atone for his sin, or he has attempted to provide his own atonement through the blood of his fellow man, as in the case of Cain and his descendants who were profusely stained by man's blood (Genesis 4:10-24).

Man cannot avoid a world and life view that involves blood. He either participates in the blood of Christ, or he plunges himself into the blood of his fellow man. He must drink Christ's blood, or he will drink other blood. He may not literally drink blood, but he will just as really drink blood by symbolically and ceremonially consuming it. He cannot keep from cannibalism in some form. Modern Western man might not be in the jungles of South America or Africa, but he vicariously participates in his own "Yuppie blood-drinking-jungle" where all sorts of events often become forms of drinking blood, although these events do not necessarily have to be wrong in and of themselves.

Whether he participates in horrific blood-violent movies—many of which are shot with a first-person view, so that the viewer "feels" as though he is the one doing the killing—or he drinks up life-threatening sports events that involve and/or metaphorically involve the spilling of blood, he will become a cannibal if he does not drink the blood of Christ.

But someone might say, "Does not the passage at the beginning of this newsletter suggest the basis for cannibalism? when it says, 'The life of all flesh is its blood' (Lev.

17:14)? And, doesn't Christ Himself indicate some form of cannibalism when He says, 'He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life' (John 6:54)?" The answer is "no" to both questions! Moses and Jesus had a **covenantal** view of blood.

It's pretty obvious that Jesus had a covenantal view of blood. On the night He inaugurated the Lord's Supper, He said, "This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20). When He made this statement, the wine in the cup could not possibly have been blood, because His blood was in His veins. And even after the Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension, the physically resurrected body of Jesus is at the right hand of God the Father; it cannot be ubiquitous, meaning it cannot be everywhere. So Jesus could only have meant that one **covenantally** drinks Christ's blood, the cup of wine **representing** the real blood of Christ, making the Lord's Supper a real participation in the Death of Christ and not just a symbolic ritual.

Even though it's fairly obvious in Jesus' case, however, it may not be so obvious in Moses'. Let's consider Leviticus 17 to see that the reference of "life in the blood" is a covenantal expression.

The Covenant in Leviticus

I think that the **covenantal** context of the Book of Leviticus is very important to understand the book as a whole, as well as chapter seventeen as a unit.

The book as a whole is **covenantal**, because it is influenced by the Sinai Covenant, which was in the form similar to other near eastern treaty documents called, suzerain treaties. I have spent considerable time developing this comparison in the introduction to *That You May Prosper*,³ so I won't belabor the point here. And even more important, I showed that the Ten Commandments, clearly the Sinai covenant, are organized according to the suzerain structure, as well as the structure of Deuteronomy, which is itself a model of the covenant.⁴ But consider the observations about the book as a whole by Dr. Gordon Wenham, who writes in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Leviticus*,

The covenant is mentioned rarely in Leviticus. In fact it is mentioned only ten times altogether, of which eight occurrences are in ch. 26. But though the word covenant ["berith"] is rare, covenantal ideas pervade the whole book. Like the presence of God with Israel, the covenant is one of the fundamental presuppositions informing the theology of Leviticus. Leviticus is the sequel to Exodus. At the heart of Exodus [chs. 19ff.] is the Sinai Covenant. All that follows in Exodus is a working out of the covenant. . . . Recent studies have shed much light on the form of the OT covenant. It bears a marked resemblance to the form used in other Near Eastern texts for drawing up treaties and collections of law. This is entirely appropriate, for the Sinai Covenant was at once a treaty between God and Israel and laws imposed on the nation.⁵

Did you follow Wenham's logic? To summarize, he says that although the Book of Leviticus rarely mentions the word covenant, it obviously bears the influence of the covenant (I would even go so far as to say that the book is a **covenantal document**, but this topic is worthy of another newsletter.) He reasons in such a way because he knows that Leviticus is the "sequel" to Exodus, and the "heart of the Exodus" is

3. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: I.C.E., 1987), pp. 14-17.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 214-224. See also the "Preface," Gary North, *Sinai Strategy* (Tyler, Texas: I.C.E., 1986).

5. Gordon J. Wenham, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Leviticus*, p. 29.

2. You may remember that a huge grave of several hundred bodies, including the bodies of many young children, was discovered a few years ago in Ohio. The story was that these people were killed in a cultic manner, but it suddenly disappeared. I have friends in Ohio who have tried to find out the facts, but it seems that the facts have vanished!

the Sinai Covenant. He is saying that Leviticus is like an appendix to a covenantal document, the Ten Commandments, or it is like an elaboration on a covenantal event.

I think Dr. Wenham, however, could have drawn on more specific **internal** support for his thesis. I believe that he could have appealed in the introduction of his commentary, as he does later on, to the **covenantal structure of some of the individual chapters**,⁶ which brings us to Leviticus 17. I am convinced that this hinge chapter between the two halves of the book is organized as a covenant. It has five clear parts, what I believe to be the structure of the Biblical covenant, and these parts have a specific grammatical indicator to mark them.

There is an introduction, and then there follows four paragraphs set off by each beginning with "Any man," which Wenham is quick to take note of in his commentary,⁷ even though he does not comment per se on the covenantal structure of Leviticus 17. But grammatical markers are not enough. Let us examine the content of these sections to see if they basically follow the covenant.

True Transcendence (17:1-2)

The Deuteronomic covenant begins, "And Moses spoke all that the Lord commanded him" (Deut. 1:3). It declares who is Lord of the covenant by establishing that Moses' words are distinct from God's, and thereby also declares that the creation of the covenant originates with God. It is part of a paragraph that begins, "These are the words of" (Deut. 1:1), which is similar to the structure of verse 3.

Meredith Kline goes so far as to say that this phrase is a **formula** for introducing covenants.⁸ He points out that the Hebrew titles of books are derived from the opening words of the book, not from key statements in the book, such as in the Septuagint; for example the Septuagint selects the name for Deuteronomy from Deuteronomy 17:18, "A copy of this law," or "second law." He further notes that the opening line of Deuteronomy, "These are the words of," is identical to the way that suzerainty treaties begin. He concludes that this way of naming the books of the Bible—taking the first words of the book as its title—was a covenantal method of distinguishing the documents. Finally, he adds that the common Gospel expression, "Verily, verily," or "Truly, truly," meaning, "Thus saith the Lord," fits this covenantal pattern of introducing the covenant, and it implies that Jesus was formulating a covenantal statement every time it appears.

(Wow! Stay tuned sports fans: Kline's insight is going to provide me with lots of copy for future newsletters [D.V.] on these "Truly, truly" covenants in the Gospels. And I'm sure he'll appreciate the fact that once again one of his initial observations leads right up to the pearly gates of the reconstructionist paradigm, and of all things, the reconstructionist paradigm in the Gospels!)

Thus, given the way a covenant is often introduced, the parallel between Deuteronomy and Leviticus 17 seems obvious. The former begins, "These are the words of . . . Moses spoke all that the Lord commanded," and the latter opens, "Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying" (17:1). I am forced to conclude on the basis of the similarity between these two that Leviticus 17 is a miniature covenant, verses 1-2 being a statement of the transcendence of the Lord by declaring who **authors** the covenant.

Hierarchy (17:3-7)

One of the prominent features of the hierarchical section of the Deuteronomic covenant (Deut. 1:5-4:49) is its refer-

ence to the dangers of **idolatry**: "So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any **form** [idol] on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the water" (Deut. 4:15-18). The theme is also combined with the theme of adultery, when Moses concludes his warning against idolatry, "For the Lord is a consuming fire, a **jealous** God" (Deut. 4:24).

The "idolatry/adultery theme" stressed that Biblical religion does not consist in a hierarchy of gods, for of course, there is one God, and any flirtation with another god is adulterous by nature. It parallels remarkably the same theme in the hierarchical commandments of the Ten Commandments. In the first set of five commandments, the hierarchy commandment (commandment two) says, "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth" (Ex. 20:4). In the second set of five commandments, beginning with the sixth commandment, the hierarchy commandment (commandment seven) says, "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14).

When we examine the second section of Leviticus 17, we see the very same emphases. We are introduced to the main theme of the chapter: blood outside of the sacrificial context. We learn that any animal sacrificed outside the camp, and which was not brought to the tent to be offered properly as a sacrifice, was considered a sacrifice to a **false god**. We arrive at a major hierarchical theme, but the warning also associates idolatry with covenantal adultery when it says, "And they shall no longer sacrifice their sacrifices to the goat demons [or, "goat **idols**"] with which they play the **harlot**" (Lev. 17:7). The emphasis that is unique to this paragraph in Leviticus 17 is identical to the idolatry/adultery theme found in the hierarchical section of the Deuteronomic covenant.

Ethics (17:8-9)

The third section of the Deuteronomic covenant is called the ethics segment because it has to do with the requirements for faithfulness. It emphasizes total **consecration** to the True Suzerain, and by this consecration the enemies of the Lord are defeated: dominion by ethics (Deut. 7:1-26).

The third section of Leviticus matches the ethical theme in an interesting way. Unique to this paragraph, it warns **against offering whole-burnt offerings outside the tent** of meeting. What does this offering have to do with the ethics theme of Deuteronomy?

First, in *That You May Prosper*, I pointed out that there are **five** main sacrifices in the Old Testament that follow the covenantal pattern in their order of offering: reparation offering,⁹ sin (purification) offering, whole-burnt offering, cereal offering, and peace offering.¹⁰ Notice that the **whole-burnt offering** falls in the ethics slot.

Second, but more specific, the whole-burnt offering concerned the same theme of the ethics section of the covenant. A perfect male animal was to be used to convey the idea of **total consecration** to the Lord (Lev. 1:3,10).

So, again we find that the distinctive feature of this short paragraph compares perfectly with the covenant.

Sanctions (17:10-12)

The fourth aspect of Deuteronomy is the actual ratifica-

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 249-250.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

8. Meredith Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 135-136.

9. I use Gordon Wenham's designation of this offering: Gordon Wenham, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Leviticus*, pp. 106-112. This offering is also called a "trespass sacrifice." But Wenham correctly prefers to call it a **reparation offering**.

10. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, pp. 84-86.

tion of the covenant. It stresses ratification by means of the curse sanctions; Israel answers "amen" twelve times to the twelve curses of the covenant (Deut. 27:15-26). It emphasizes that **judgment** leads to blessing. So **judgment** is a major, if not the major motif.

When we come to the fourth part of Leviticus, we discover that a main theme of **judgment** surfaces. First, we find that the central point of the chapter is to forbid blood-drinking, because blood-drinking represents taking another life, meaning blood-drinking is a covenantal act of the false sanction of murder: "Any man . . . who eats blood, I will set My face against that person . . . for the life ['soul'] of the flesh is in the blood" (Lev. 17:10-11).

Notice that "life" actually means "soul." This cannot mean that the soul of a man is literally in the blood, for one could not imbue a dead body with life by simply putting blood in it, although cult groups believe such nonsense, because some of them will not allow blood transfusions (i.e. one's soul is transferred to another's body). A more accurate and **less life-threatening** understanding of this verse is a **covenantal** one (the covenantal interpretation allows for blood transfusions): the blood **represents in a covenantal way** the soul or life of the body, as is indicated by the NASV interpreters' addition of the italicized word in verse fourteen: "blood is **identified** with its life ['soul']" (Lev. 17:14). Thus, since blood represents life, the drinking of blood represents taking life, or murder, which is a wrongful sanction and **judgment** on a person. To put it another way, drinking of blood represents **wrongful death**.¹¹

Parenthetically, this covenantal interpretation refutes the false notion that life is somehow magically infused into the one drinking the blood, as cannibals believe, and as Roman Catholics, who hold to the doctrine of transubstantiation, inadvertently end up believing, which explains why white magic voodoo cult members in the *Believers* could also be devout Roman Catholics. If you think about it, if life were **really physically** and not just **really covenantally** in the blood, as the doctrine of realism would teach, then there would be no rationale for avoiding blood-drinking, and there would be no explanation as to why the prohibition against blood-drinking is continued in the New Testament (Acts 15:20).

Second, the **judgment** theme is emphasized in the fourth part of Leviticus 17 by a special sanction attached to the blood-drinking prohibition. It uniquely appears in the phrase, "I will set My face against" the one who drinks blood, because the comment does not appear in relation to the other sanction statement that is consistently found in each paragraph: "He shall be cut off." And, it is a common form of expressing severe judgment (Lev. 20:3,6; 26:17; Ezek. 14:8). So, the thrust of the paragraph seems to be quite in line with the covenantal pattern.

Continuity (17:13-16)

The final section of the covenant addresses the disposition and dispossession of inheritance (Deut. 31-34). It specifically describes the inheritance in and on the land, for everything on the land belonged to the Israelite, which would have included the animals. It says in the "Song of Moses," "And he ate the produce of the field; and He made

him such honey from the rock [a reference to the Promised land that 'flowed with mild and honey,' Deut. 31:20], and oil from the flinty rock, curds of cows, and milk of the flock, with fat of lambs, and rams, the breed of Bashan, and goats" (Deut. 32:13-14).

Not surprisingly, the final segment of Leviticus 17 addresses issues concerning the animal life of the land that would have been part of the inheritance, but if it were not killed properly, or if it were allowed to contaminate the hunter, the individual could be essentially disinherited. It says of hunting animals in the land, "When any man . . . in hunting catches a beast or a bird which may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth" (Lev. 17:13). Notice that the command here is careful to protect the ground, the inheritance, because blood on the ground "cries out for judgment" (Gen. 4:10).

And in the case where an Israelite comes in contact with a **dead** animal, or where he lost his own blood through some sort of conflict with an animal, he was **temporarily** unclean until he washed (Lev. 17:15-16). But if he didn't wash, he "bore his guilt" (Lev. 17:16), and he was "cut off from the midst of the assembly" (Num. 19:20), which meant a loss of inheritance.

Thus, the final segment of Leviticus 17, like all of its paragraphs, follows the covenant. We can conclude that this chapter and its ideas are covenantal, and we can conclude that the Bible has a covenantal view of blood.

Conclusion

The covenantal view of blood in Leviticus has a number of ramifications, some of which we have already seen. But perhaps the most significant application for our time concerns God's judgment on the blood. It recently occurred to me that the two most horrible plagues, since the plagues sent upon Egypt, have been diseases in the **blood**: the Bubonic Plague and AIDS. And not ironically, two of the greatest plagues during the plagues on Egypt had to do with the **blood**: turning the Nile into blood, and the death of the first-born, requiring blood on the doorposts for death to pass over.

Is there a connection between the judgment of blood on Egypt and the judgment in blood on our civilization? Yes, in general the Bible teaches that any nation that covenants with God and which breaks covenant can expect plagues on the order, and even higher order, of the Egyptian plagues: "If you are not careful to observe all the words of this law which are written in this book, to fear this honored and awesome name, the Lord your God, then the Lord will bring extraordinary plagues on you and your descendants . . . He will bring back on you all the plagues of Egypt . . . Also every sickness and plague which is not written in the book of the law" (Deut. 28:58-61).

Specifically, however, from our study in Leviticus 17, the blood judged in these judgments represents a broader judgment. In Leviticus 17, blood covenantally represented the rest of the body, so that a judgment on it means a judgment on the total person. It symbolizes life, and when it is destroyed or contaminated in the society at large, a greater judgment is symbolized, a judgment that is on our whole **civilization**! The only way out is to trust in Christ's death, which is a death symbolized in the **cup** of the Lord's Supper of the New Covenant (Luke 22:20). By drinking the wine of communion, we covenantally ingest His blood, participating in His death that leads to salvation—from death to life—unlike improper blood-drinking that leads from death to death!

11. Gordon Wenham, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Leviticus*, p. 245. He basically arrives at the same interpretation saying, "By refraining from eating flesh with blood in it, man is honoring life. To eat blood is to despise life. This idea emerges most clearly in Genesis 9:4ff., where sanctity of human life is associated with not eating blood. See also, H. W. Wolff, *The Anthropology of the OT* (London: SCM, 1974), pp. 10-25.