BLOOD AND LIFE

Leviticus 17:1-16

Key Verse: 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.”

In chapter 16, we learned the significance of the Day of Atonement, when the priest entered the Most Holy place and sprinkled the blood of the sin offering on the atonement cover above the Testimony and when the scapegoat was sent to a solitary place in the desert. On that day, atonement would be made to cleanse the people so that they would be clean from all their sins. What a day, once a year! However, its true meaning is found in Christ Jesus, who died on the cross shedding all his blood, once for all, once in history, once in eternity to take away the sin of the world. That day of Jesus’ crucifixion was the most important single day in human history as the removal of man’s sin, the sin of rebellion against God. The day is the day of one’s belief in Jesus’ death and resurrection, the day of making the confession of Christ, “You are the Christ.” The day is to be today. Today’s passage, chapter 17, is another passage that reveals the gospel truth, the life-blood that makes atonement for sinners.

In verses 1-4, the LORD said to Moses, “Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites and say to them: ‘This is what the LORD has commanded: Any Israelite who sacrifices an ox, a lamb or a goat in the camp or outside of it 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.’” We see that God was strict in regard to killing and sacrificing the animals. Each of the animals had to be brought to the Tent of Meeting, to the LORD, to the tabernacle of the LORD. The man who did not do this was considered guilty of shedding the blood and had to be cut off from his people. Random killing of the animals was prohibited. God stresses this once again in verse 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.”

This can be related to the place of worship. Later on, the LORD said in Deuteronomy 12:11 in the view of entering the Promised Land, “Then to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name—there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts…” The offerings had to be made in Jerusalem, where God’s temple would be. When Jesus came, he said to a Samaritan woman who wanted to truly worship God, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.” In worship, the object of worship is the most important and should be the true God, God the Father, who sent his Son Jesus into this world. We are to worship God in Christ Jesus, who is our temple. Yet we all should watch out for convenient and superficial worship. Jesus teaches that we should worship God in spirit and truth, and God is seeking such worshippers. God cannot be mocked.

The LORD continues here in verse 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.” The sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice is to be on the altar at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. Then the LORD says, “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.” Most likely they offered their sacrifices to these goat idols/demons when they lived in Egypt. Strangely, even in our time we see the image of goat demons or goat Satan, especially on Halloween. At that time, they did not know the LORD personally. Now they experienced the grace of the LORD, who brought them out of Egypt, the land of slavery with his mighty power in his love for them. They had to worship the LORD following God’s way of offering the sacrifices. There was to be no more sacrifices to the goat demons, which is spiritual prostitution. The LORD is different from goat demons. The LORD is the One who sends the scapegoat carrying on itself all the sins of Israel into the desert. The first of the Ten Commandments is, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:2-3). The LORD said in Exodus 34:14, “Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” God’s people should know that the LORD God is a jealous God; his name is Jealous. Psalm 96:5 says, “For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.” And Psalm 135:15 says, “The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by the hands of men.” Isiah 40:19 says, “As for an idol, a metalworker/craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it.” People also make idols of wood. An interesting thing is written in Isaiah 44:15, "It is a man’s fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it.” How senseless humans are! Paul also said in 1 Corinthians 8:4, “…we know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one…” But demons work using these idols. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:18-20, “Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.”

Offering sacrifices to the goat idols/demons is spiritual prostitution, adultery, and impurity. When the Israelites abandoned the LORD their God, the only true God, the truly loving and mighty One, and turned to others gods of the nations, that are false gods and nothing but man-made idols, God’s heart was so pained and broken. For example, Judges 10:6-7 says, “Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. And because the Israelites forsook the Lord and no longer served him, he became angry with them...” Finally God could not but send them into Babylonian captivity.

1 John ends with the words, “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.” In this epistle, John doubly wrote, “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). 1 John 4:10 says, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sin.” We are to know this loving God and so love him in Christ Jesus. We should learn to depend on him in all matters; otherwise we turn to the world and seek other ways, making our hearts vulnerable the idols of the world. We are to fear God and grow in the fear of God, or else we fear people that become snares and idols in our hearts. And we are to worship God in spirit and truth, sensing God’s presence and receiving God’s word at each worship service. Loving, relying on and fearing God and worshiping him in spirit and truth, this is the way to keep our spiritual purity. When a spouse is not satisfied with his wife or her husband, that person seeks someone else. We are to love the Lord and have satisfaction in him, listening to him and coming up to him in prayer, having joy and peace in fellowship with him.

Here, the LORD says once again in verses 8 and 9, “Say to them: ‘Any Israelite or any alien living among them who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice 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.”

Now the LORD says in verses 10-12, “Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats blood—I will set my face against that person who eats blood. 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. Therefore I say to the Israelites, ‘None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood.’” Here God says a plain truth that the life of a creature is in the blood. We know that when all the blood is shed, one dies, which is the end of life. The blood sustains life. It is stressed in verses 13-14, “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, 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 eat it must be cut off.’” Now the LORD says that the life of every creature is its blood. Life equals blood. The relation between life and blood is written 3 times.

We now pay attention to what the LORD said. Life is in the blood or life is the blood is not all that God has said. God specifically said, “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.” This is truly a revelatory statement. We see the flow – life, blood and atonement, atonement for life. In KJV, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.” The flow is, the life of the flesh, the blood and the atonement for the soul.

Blood comes through sacrifice. At the beginning of man’s fall, God clothed Adam and his wife with garment of skin (Ge 3:21), which must have been provided through animal sacrifice with bloodshed. When Noah came out of the ark after the flood, Noah sacrificed burnt offerings of animals, with which God was pleased (Ge 8:20-21). God commanded Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering at the region of Moriah, and then God provided a ram, which Abraham sacrificed as a burnt offering instead of his son Isaac. It was a vivid implication of God’s sacrificing his own Son at the very place of the mountain Moriah (2 Ch 3:1), around 2000 years later. What an amazing allusion!

Then in Exodus, God let the Israelites shed the blood of the Passover lamb for each house to be put on the doorframes of their houses so that the angel of death would pass over the houses (Ex 12:13) and so their firstborn sons would be saved, while the angel killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians. Afterwards, as we studied in Leviticus, the burnt offering, the fellowship offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering, all involved the blood sprinkled and poured on the altar. As for the sin offering, the blood was sprinkled on the curtain of the sanctuary (Lev 4:6). On the day of atonement, the blood was sprinkled behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover and on the atonement cover/mercy seat above the Testimony in the ark in the Most Holy Place (Lev 16:14).

At the time of the Temple in Jerusalem the king Solomon offered a sacrifice of fellowship offering to the LORD: twenty-two thousand cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats, along with burnt offerings and grain offerings (1 Ki 8:62-64). At the time of king Hezekiah he celebrated the Passover to the LORD providing a thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep and goats for the assembly, and the officials providing them with a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep and goats (2 Ch 30:24). King Josiah celebrated the Passover providing a total of fifty-six thousand sheep and goats and three thousand and eight hundred cattle (2 Ch 35:7). All these animals were slaughtered.

Then God sent his Son Jesus into this world. When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, he exclaimed, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29). Indeed, He was killed as the Lamb of God. He was totally broken on the cross shedding his whole blood, until a sudden flow of blood and water burst out of his pierced side. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5:7, “…Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed.” And he said in Romans 3:25, “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.” John said in 1 John 2:2, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins…” (4:10). The author of Hebrews said in 9:22, “In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” Particularly the blood of Christ provides perfect forgiveness, for Christ through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God as written in Hebrews 9:14. So there is an astounding declaration in Hebrews 9:12, “..He entered the Most Holy Place by his own blood, obtaining eternal redemption.” And Peter said in 1 Peter 1:18-19, “…it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed…but with the precious blood of Christ…” Then we read in Revelation 1:5b, “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood” (1:5b) and in 7:14, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” What a journey of bloodshed for the atonement, forgiveness of sins, from Genesis to Revelation, from God’s clothing Adam and his wife with leather garments, the Passover lamb, and slaughtering numerous animals until Christ’s being slain with the shedding of his entire his blood! What a prophetic word that it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life! The blood points to the blood Christ. Praise God for his unsearchable and unfathomable, profound plan for the salvation of mankind! And many thanks and praise to our Lord Christ Jesus our Lord, who offered his life-blood for the atonement, the forgiveness of our sins and redemption, eternal redemption.

In this grace how are to live? Jesus once said, “My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink” (Jn 6:55). We are to feed on Jesus, in whatever circumstances. And Hebrews 12:4 says, “In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.” How much we need to struggle against our giant ego, self-love, pride, disobedience, rebelliousness, lust, selfishness and self-centredness that hinders us from serving God and his flock of sheep, etc.! God wants us to struggle to the point of shedding blood so that we may resemble Christ and be Christ-centred. Surely it is not physical fighting but spiritual fighting with the words of God. May God bless S. Ian’s struggle with God’s words and each messenger for our SBC. Revelation 12:11 says, “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.” They were those who loved Christ Jesus more than their own lives. They gave their lives to the Lord Jesus. We also read in Revelation 16:5-6, “Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: ‘You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.” In God’s history, many prophets and saints were martyred and their blood shed on the ground. And God worked powerfully through their sacrifices. Truly God’s history is the history of blood, Christ’s shed blood for the atonement and saints’ shed blood for Christ. What a beautiful history! God wants us to join in this history of God. Someone said that the Bible is the book of the blood. Quite agreeable. If the blood is taken out of the Bible, it is not the Bible. Similarly, if the blood is taken out of one’s faith, that is not Christian faith. May we keep the blood in our Bible and in our Christian faith.

Jesus said in Mark 10:45, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” And he said in Mark 8:35, “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.” Since Jesus gave his blood, his life to me, so I may give my blood, my life to him, dwelling in his grace. Amen!