

## Deuteronomy 12:20-28

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When the LORD your God extends your border as He has promised you [rewarding them for their obedience], and you say, ‘I will eat meat,’ because you desire to eat meat, *then* you may eat meat, whatever you desire [freedom to enjoy God’s blessings].<sup>21</sup> “If the place which the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, then you may slaughter of your herd and flock which the LORD has given you, as I have commanded you; and you may eat within your gates whatever you desire [i.e., eat animals normally used for sacrifice].<sup>22</sup> “Just as a gazelle or a deer is eaten [animals not used for temple sacrifice], so you will eat it; the unclean and the clean [person] alike may eat of it.<sup>23</sup> “Only be sure not to eat the blood [under any circumstances, whether religious or secular], for the blood is the life [cf., Lev 17:11], and you shall not eat the life with the flesh [cf., Gen 9:4; Acts 15:20].<sup>24</sup> “You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out on the ground like water.<sup>25</sup> “You shall not eat it, so that it may be well with you and your sons after you [to continue God’s blessings], for you will be doing what is right in the sight of the LORD [by adhering to God’s directive].<sup>26</sup> “Only your holy things which you may have and your votive offerings, you shall take and go to the place which the LORD chooses [His sacred space].<sup>27</sup> “And you shall offer your burnt offerings, the flesh and the blood, on the altar of the LORD your God; and the blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out on the altar of the LORD your God [as an atoning act], and you shall eat the flesh.<sup>28</sup> “Be careful [שמר *shamar* – to guard, keep, watch over, preserve] to listen to all these words which I command you [to obey them], so that it may be well with you and your sons after you forever [to continue God’s blessings], for you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God [by adhering to God’s directive].

### Observations:

Moses opens this pericope with an expectation that his audience will enter the land of Canaan and take possession of it. Once in it, Moses also expects that God will bless His people by expanding their territory and giving them abundant food to eat, saying, “When the LORD your God extends your border as He has promised you, and you say, ‘I will eat meat,’ because you desire to eat meat, *then* you may eat meat, whatever you desire” (Deut 12:20). This was a repetition of what he’d said previously (Deut 12:15). Jack Deere comments:

Modern readers may find this repetition a bit tedious. But it should be remembered that Deuteronomy was originally presented in sermonic form to Israel. Normally repetition is important in the learning process, but it is doubly important in oral

presentations as the audience does not have the opportunity to “read” over something missed the first time.<sup>1</sup>

Moses continues, saying, “If the place which the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, then you may slaughter of your herd and flock which the LORD has given you, as I have commanded you; and you may eat within your gates whatever you desire. Just as a gazelle or a deer is eaten, so you will eat it; the unclean and the clean alike may eat of it.” (Deut 12:21-22). When Israel was in the wilderness, the tabernacle was situated in the middle of their campground and God required His people kill their domesticated animals in front of the sanctuary and priests (Lev 17:1-5). This was doable because of the proximity of the tabernacle. However, it appears Moses modified this law to account for great distances an Israelite would have to travel once God chose a sacred space where His name would be permanently represented. Daniel Block writes:

Without modifications to the Sinai legislation, everyday diet would be restricted to wild game and vegetarian foods, and the people would have to be satisfied with eating the meat of domesticated animals only at celebrations at the central sanctuary. In this passage Moses modifies the previous regulations, removing a legal constriction of Israelite life in the land and inviting the people to enjoy the products of their labor and the blessing of Yahweh.<sup>2</sup>

Jack Deere adds:

The earlier prohibition (Lev 17:1–12) against eating meat without offering it first at the tabernacle was only meant to apply while the Israelites were in the wilderness, when their “homes” were near the religious sanctuary. Now the people were about to move into the Promised Land where the majority would live too far away from the central sanctuary to bring all meat there. So permission was given to slaughter and eat animals at home for “secular” meals.<sup>3</sup>

Here we see the Lord extending freedom to kill and eat those animals not offered to God in worship. These were animals the people desired to eat, but the great distance they would need to travel made killing it difficult. So, the Lord relaxed His previous command in order to satisfy their desires. And it did not matter if the Israelite was ceremonially clean

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<sup>1</sup> Jack S. Deere, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 285.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 316.

<sup>3</sup> Jack S. Deere, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 285.

or unclean, since the animal was not going to be used for worship, but only consumption. And Moses repeats his previous command about not eating the animal's blood, saying:

Only be sure not to eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh. You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out on the ground like water. You shall not eat it, so that it may be well with you and your sons after you, for you will be doing what is right in the sight of the LORD. Only your holy things which you may have and your votive offerings, you shall take and go to the place which the LORD chooses. And you shall offer your burnt offerings, the flesh and the blood, on the altar of the LORD your God; and the blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out on the altar of the LORD your God, and you shall eat the flesh. (Deut 12:23-27)

As mentioned in the previous lesson, Israel was to understand that “the life of the flesh is in the blood” (Lev 17:11a) and was to treat it with respect in all situations. The blood symbolized life, which God has given to all creatures. If the animal was killed at home, the blood was to be drained before eating. If the animal was brought to the tabernacle or temple, the blood was to be drained beside the altar. In those ritual offerings the priests would catch some of the blood and sprinkle it on the altar or on the mercy seat, atop the ark of the covenant, on the Day of Atonement. In this way they treated the blood of the animal as special. This requirement not to eat animal blood was not unique to Israel, for God had previously forbidden Noah and his descendants from eating blood, saying, “you shall not eat flesh with its life, *that is*, its blood” (Gen 9:4). And this command was repeated in the New Testament to Christians, calling them to “abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood” (Acts 15:20).

Moses desired his people be blessed by the Lord, and he knew that blessing depended on their faithful obedience to His commands. Therefore, Moses said, “Be careful to listen to all these words which I command you, so that it may be well with you and your sons after you forever, for you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God” (Deut 12:28). *Be careful* translates the Hebrew verb שָׁמַר *shamar*, which generally means *to guard, keep, watch over, or preserve*. Here, it refers to the obligation of the Israelites to adhere to God's commands. If they would obey the Lord, the result is that it would be well them as well as their children after them. By obeying God's command, they would ensure His approval and blessing, not only for themselves, but for their children after them.

For the Christian, the subject of blood in the New Testament is significant, especially the blood of Christ. In the Old Testament, an animal was sacrificed and its blood was shed in

order to atone for sin. Concerning the animal sacrifice, God told His people, “For the life 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 that makes atonement” (Lev 17:11). The word *atonement* translates the Hebrew verb כָּפַר *kaphar*, which means to “cover over, pacify, propitiate, [or] atone for sin.”<sup>4</sup> The animal that gave its life on the altar covered the offender’s sin; but this was a temporary covering, until Jesus could come and offer Himself as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). To take away sin—and the guilt caused by sin—communicates the doctrine of expiation. Jesus came into this world and lived a perfectly sinless life (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 John 3:5), and then gave “His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). As believers, we are redeemed, not by anything this world can offer or by anything we can do, but by “His precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:19). The “blood of Christ” refers to Jesus’ atoning work on the cross, in which He bore our sin and paid the penalty that rightfully belonged to us. The blood of Christ is the coin of the heavenly realm that God accepted as payment for our sin. As a result of the death of Christ, we are “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood” (Rom 3:24-25a). *Propitiation* translates the Greek word ἱλαστήριον *hilasterion* which refers to a sacrifice that satisfies God’s righteous demands for our sins. The sacrifice changes God’s disposition toward us from wrath to satisfaction. At the cross, God judged our sin as His righteousness required, and saves the sinner as His love desires.

When we believe in Christ as Savior (1 Cor 15:3-4), we are forgiven all our sins (Eph 1:7), given new life (John 10:28), and gifted with God’s own righteousness (2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9). At the moment of salvation, there is relational peace between us and God (Rom 5:1), and we have become part of His family (Eph 2:19), will never be condemned (Rom 8:1), and made free to serve Him in righteousness (Rom 6:11-14; Tit 2:11-14).

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<sup>4</sup> Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers 1979), 497.