

Deuteronomy 15:19-23
Dr. Steven R. Cook

“You shall consecrate [שִׁׁדָּשׁ *qadash* – *sanctify, declare as holy, set apart*] to the LORD your God all the firstborn males that are born of your herd and of your flock [cf. Ex 13:2, 12; Deut 12:6, 17; 14:23]; you shall not work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock.²⁰ “You and your household [along with the servants and Levites; cf. Deut 12:17-18] shall eat it every year before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses [at the tabernacle or temple].²¹ “But if it has any defect, such as lameness or blindness, or any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God [which would be an affront to God; cf. Deut 17:1; Mal 1:6-9].²² “You shall eat it within your gates [along with the servants and Levites]; the unclean and the clean [person] alike may eat it, as a gazelle or a deer.²³ “Only you shall not eat its blood; you are to pour it out on the ground like water [The blood represents the life of the animal; See Deut 12:23 and Lev 17:10-14].

Observations:

In this pericope, Moses returns to the subject of animals and what should be offered to God in sacrifice. In typical fashion, Moses repeats himself to his audience in order to drive a point. Moses’ emphasis is that firstborn male animals were to be devoted to the Lord and should be eaten only at the place God prescribed. The meal was to be eaten annually in the presence of the Lord at the place He would prescribe and the whole household was to participate in this meal.

Moses opens this pericope, saying, “You shall consecrate to the LORD your God all the firstborn males that are born of your herd and of your flock; you shall not work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock” (Deut 15:19). The word *consecrate* translates the Hebrew verb שִׁׁדָּשׁ *qadash*, which means to sanctify, declare as holy, or set apart for a special purpose. The causative verb stem (hiphil) expresses conscious intentionality on the part of the offeror to consecrate the firstborn male of the herd or flock to God (cf. Ex 13:2, 12; Deut 12:6, 17; 14:23). Israelites were to set apart the best of their herds and flocks for God, for He was the cause of all their blessings. The Lord had blessed them by giving them the land of Canaan (Deut 4:1; 9:6), which included cities, houses, wells and vineyards (Deut 6:10-11), the ability to produce wealth (Deut 8:18), and blessed their labor so they would be fruitful (Deut 7:13; 11:13-15). The Lord had been very good to them, and He deserved their very best.

The annual sacrifice of the unblemished firstborn animal looks back in history to when the Israelites were brought out of Egyptian captivity and their firstborn sons were spared from the angel of death (Ex 13:1-15). But the unblemished firstborn animal also looked forward to Christ, who is our Passover lamb (John 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7), who shed His precious blood on Calvary as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Peter explained we were redeemed from the slave-market of sin with “precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:18-19).

The firstborn male of the herd or flock was to be eaten by the offeror and his family. Moses stated, “You and your household shall eat it every year before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses” (Deut 15:20). This was an annual meal eaten at the place God would choose, which first was at the tabernacle and later at the temple. Furthermore, in addition to the immediate members of the family, the animal was to be eaten by the servants and Levites (cf. Deut 12:17-18).

However, Moses instructed them, saying, “But if it has any defect, such as lameness or blindness, or any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God” (Deut 15:21). To offer a defective animal would be an affront to God (cf. Deut 17:1), for it would not represent the very best of the herd or flock. Unfortunately, this is what Israelites were doing in Malachi’s day (Mal 1:6-9). Moses explained the lame animal could be eaten by the Israelites, saying, “You shall eat it within your gates; the unclean and the clean alike may eat it, as a gazelle or a deer” (Deut 15:22). The firstborn male animal that was lame could be eaten by the owner, his family and servants, as well as the Levite who relied on the kindness and goodness of others to help provide for him and his family.

And the animal, like all others, was to have its blood drained before it could be consumed. Moses stated, “Only you shall not eat its blood; you are to pour it out on the ground like water” (Deut 15:23). Remember, the animal’s blood represented its life, and this was to be treated in a special way and not eaten (Deut 12:23; Lev 17:10-14). 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.

Present Application:

As Christians, we do not offer animal sacrifices, nor do we worship at a prescribed location as Israel did. We do not gather at a temple, rather, “we are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor 6:16; cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17). And we do not bring grain or animal sacrifices, but “offer up spiritual sacrifices” to the Lord (1 Pet 2:5). But like Israel, what we offer to the Lord should represent our very best, for God has done His very best for us by sending His Son into the world to be our Savior. God the Son added perfect sinless humanity to Himself (Isa 9:6; Luke 1:26-35), lived a perfect and sinless life (Matt 5:17; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 John 3:5), and went to the cross as a willing sacrifice (Mark 10:45; John 10:11, 17) and paid our sin debt (Col 2:13-14; 1 Pet 2:24). In Christ we have forgiveness of sins (Eph 1:7), eternal life (John 10:28), imputed righteousness (Rom 5:17; Phil 3:9), and have been rescued from Satan’s “domain of darkness” and transferred “to the kingdom of God’s beloved Son” (Col 1:13). We received these blessings from God at the moment we accepted Christ as our Savior, believing He died for our sins, was buried, and raised again on the third day (1 Cor 15:3-4). Now saved and part of the Royal family of God, we are to serve as “ambassadors for Christ” to a lost world (2 Cor 5:20), and “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called” (Eph 4:1). As Christians living in the dispensation of the Church age, God has “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3). And these blessings enable us to live the Christlike life that honors God and blesses others. It is a life of humility, love, service, and sacrifice for the benefit of others. As Christians, we are called to offer sacrifices to God, and these sacrifices include:

1. The continual giving of the body for service to the Lord (Rom 12:1-2).
2. Confessing our sins directly to God (1 John 1:6-9).
3. Sharing the gospel with others (Rom 15:15-16).
4. Offering praise to God (Heb 13:15).
5. Doing good works and sharing with others (Heb 13:16; cf. Phil 4:18).
6. Giving our lives for the benefit of others (Phil 2:17; cf. Phil 1:21-26; 2:3-4).
7. Walking in love (Eph 5:1-2; cf. 1 Pet 1:22).