

EIGHTH MESSAGE
MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE CONCERNING
NOT EATING FAT OR BLOOD
Leviticus 7:22-27

Introduction

This message contains only six verses, and it is an enlargement on instructions that already had been given in Leviticus 3:17 (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 1). This message emphasizes that the Israelites were not to eat the fat of an animal that was suitable for offering on the altar or the blood of any animal at any time. Those portions of the fire-offerings were reserved for Jehovah. The blood was to be splashed or poured around the side of the altar as a sign that the worshiper was dedicating his life to Jehovah. The fat was to be roasted on the altar because the finest and best belonged to Jehovah, the Lord of the universe. Even in their homes, the Israelites were not to eat fat from any animal that could be offered on the altar or the blood from any animal.

The reason for not eating blood was that the blood contained the life of the animal, and life was to be given the greatest respect. That principle predated the law and began when Jehovah first authorized people to eat the meat of animals. Before the flood, God had given people only fruit and vegetables to eat (Gen. 2:16). After the flood, God authorized Noah and his descendants to eat meat, but at the same time he commanded them not to eat blood or even any meat that still had blood in it (Gen. 9:3-4). He combined that command with the warning that He would require the life of any man who took the life and blood of another (Gen. 9:5-6). That combination of thoughts made it clear that the reason people were not to eat blood was to show respect and honor to life. That principle of respect for life did not begin at Sinai, but it was incorporated into Israelite law at Sinai. This passage gives the fullest description of how that principle was to be observed in Israel.

The Israelites were forbidden to eat fat for a different reason. The fat from animal fire-offering was to be roasted on the altar in every type of offering, because the finest and best belonged to Jehovah, the Lord of the universe. That principle also carried over into the daily meals of the Israelites. They were forbidden to eat fat even at home, because it belonged to Jehovah. Thus, every Israelite meal was a type of offering to God. The command not to eat fat began at Sinai and was not a part of God's commands before the law.

This message may be outlined as follows:

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Interpretation

CHAPTER 7

Introductory note (7:22)

Verse 22. **And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,**

This verse contains the now familiar wording that indicates the beginning of a new message from Jehovah, spoken out of The Tabernacle. This message was spoken to Moses, as was true of most of them..

- (1) Eating fat forbidden
(7:23-25)

Verse 23. **Speak to the people of Israel, saying, You must not eat any fat of a head of cattle or a sheep or a goat.**

Speak to the people of Israel, saying. This message returned to addressing the people again. Messages 5, 6, and 7 had been addressed to the priests, because those messages pertained to portions of the offerings for which the priests were responsible. This message and MESSAGE 9 describe portions of the offerings that pertained to the people that had not been fully explained in MESSAGES 1-4.

You must not eat any fat of a head of cattle or a sheep or a goat. This commandment repeats the instructions given in Lev. 3:17 (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 1 under the heading You must not eat any fat or any blood). However, the command is made more specific in this verse. It states that the prohibition applies to the fat of a head of cattle or a sheep or a goat. Those animals were the types of animals that could be used for fire-offerings. This limitation makes it clear that the requirement related to fire-offerings and their meaning.

Verse 24. **You may put fat of a carcass and fat of a prey to any use, but eating you must not eat it.**

They were permitted to use fat from an animal that was unclean or that was a wild animal for any purpose other than eating it. Since the fat was considered to be the best, it belonged to God from every type of animal. Other purposes for which the fat could be used were softening leather, oiling knives, or providing lubrication. However, when it came to fat of an animal, it was reserved for God. Fat was not to be eaten, not because it had life in it like the blood did, but because it was the best part that was reserved for God. It was reserved for God because ancient people, like many people today, think the fat is an especially delicious food. Reserving it for God showed respect not for the fat itself but for the God for whom it was reserved.

Verse 25. **For everyone eating fat of livestock from which a fire-offering to Jehovah may be made, then the person eating [it] shall be cut off from His people.**

This verse states that the prohibition applied in a special way to an animal that could be used as a fire-offering (see comments on Lev. 1:9 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading a fire-offering). The penalty for eating fat from an animal that could be offered on the altar was that the offender was to be “cut off from His people,” which means he was to be put to death. He had rebelled against Jehovah and no longer belonged among God’s people. He needed to be removed from among them by being put to death (see comments on Lev. 7:20 in MESSAGE 7).

(2) Eating blood forbidden
(7:26-27)

Verse 26. And you must not eat any blood in any of your dwellings, of bird and of livestock.

And you must not eat any blood. This commandment also repeats instructions given in Lev. 3:17 (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 1 under the heading You must not eat any fat or any blood). Jehovah permitted eating meat from animals, but even when people ate animals they were to show respect for the life of that animal. Life is a special creation of God. It is not an outgrowth of anything else, and it is not an accident. It deserves utmost respect because of God's wondrous work in creating it.

in any of your dwellings. This prohibition was to be observed in all of their homes, whether in a tent, a house, or a palace. It did not apply only to meals eaten in The Holy Place. It applied to all meals at home. Every time a person ate meat, he was to prepare it in such a way that no blood remained in the meat. By doing so, he was to show respect for life every time he ate meat.

of bird and of livestock. Jehovah included blood of birds and of livestock. Though usually the word "livestock" does not include wild animals, the commandment does not limit the prohibition to animals used as fire-offerings. Evidently the prohibition was intended to include blood from any kind of animal or bird. The purpose was to show respect for all forms of life.

Verse 27. Every person who eats any blood, that person shall be cut off from His people.

Every person who eats any blood. The prohibition is all inclusive. It includes every person who eats blood. It also includes any kind of blood. It was meant to apply to all blood all the time.

that person shall be cut off from His people. A person who disobeyed this commandment was guilty of rebellion against God. He no longer belonged among God's people and was to be removed from them by death (see comments on Lev. 7:20 in MESSAGE 7).

Application

Christians have a strong obligation to honor life, especially human life. We are obligated to honor life because it is a special creation of God. When Jesus gave His life for our sins, He supplied to us an additional reason for respecting and honoring life, even beyond the reason given to the Israelites. Though we are not obligated to observe the Old Testament rituals, we are obligated to live its principles. We should be as respectful of life as any ancient Israelite, even more respectful. No life of any kind should be taken casually. We have permission from God to take animal and bird life for worthwhile purposes, which may be for food or for using products made from them. But we should never destroy life simply for pleasure or out of disregard for its value. We are especially obligated to respect human life, because it is made in God's image. All forms of human life are sacred and should be treasured, including pre-born life, elderly life, weak or deformed life, dependant life, or life of a different nationality or race than our own. We do not have the right to destroy it or abuse anyone's life, except within the limits God has authorized in His Word. Cases where taking a person's life may be permissible are in a just war and in judicially determined and justified capital punishment. God is the author and owner of all human life. He alone has the right to decide its destiny.

The question remains as to whether Christians should avoid eating blood as a means of showing respect for life. The New Testament speaks directly to that subject, and what it says should not be reasoned away or ignored. At the Jerusalem Conference described in Acts 15:6-35, the question of eating requirements for believers in Jesus was discussed at length. The apostles and the elders and the whole church in Jerusalem agreed that believers were no longer obligated to observe the ritualistic and dietary rules of the Old Testament law. However, they specifically said that the prohibition against eating blood or meat that had blood in it still

applied. They sent out that conclusion to Antioch and to all of the world. That decision should not be explained away or diluted. Many have said that the instruction made at the Jerusalem Conference not to eat blood was a concession to Jewish believers, but the point of the decision at the Jerusalem Conference was that making concessions for Jewish legalism was not valid. The decision was that circumcision and keeping the law of Moses was not required of believers in Jesus. If the Conference had turned around and said that in the instance of blood observing the Jewish law did apply, it would have been grossly inconsistent and hypocritical. The obligation of Christians not to eat blood is binding, but it is not based on the Jewish law. It is based on the principle of respect for all forms of life. That principle preceded the Jewish law and also continues after it. Avoiding eating blood is still a way of showing respect for the wonder of God's marvelous creation of life. We should observe it today.

The commandment to the Israelites not to eat fat does not have the same application for Christians today as does the commandment not to eat blood. The command not to eat blood had a moral significance. The command not to eat fat had a ceremonial significance, so that obligation ended when practicing the ceremonies ended. The command not to eat blood preceded the Jewish law and continues to exist after the law, but the command not to eat fat began and ended with the Jewish law. On the other hand, the principle involved in the command to the Israelites not to eat the fat of animals is still valid. That principle is that the best belongs to God. We should be glad to give the best of everything we have to Him, though we no longer need to symbolize it by not eating fat. Giving the best to God included giving Him the first tenth of our income and the best of our talents and energy. He deserves our best because of all He is and because of all He has done for us. However, nothing in the New Testament indicates that Christians are obligated to symbolize our desire to give the best to God by refraining from eating fat. That prohibition to the Israelites was founded on the ritual offerings at the altar. Those offerings are no longer an obligation to Christians, and neither is the extension of those offerings by not eating fat at home. The removal of this obligation says nothing about the wisdom of eating fat for health purposes. Avoiding eating fat to prevent the build-up of cholesterol in our arteries or the excessive collection of triglycerides in our bodies is an entirely different question, which is not dealt with in Leviticus. What is dealt with in Leviticus is that avoiding eating fat was a ritual obligation, and the New Testament clearly reveals that the ritual obligations of Israel are not required for Christians today. However, the truth that this commandment taught to the Israelites still remains for us today. We should give the best of all we are and have to God.