

## THE BLOOD TRANSFUSION ISSUE

### JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES WERE NOT ALWAYS AGAINST BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS

In 1934 *The Golden Age* magazine (later called *Consolation* and now called *Awake*) published the following view regarding blood transfusions:

It has been discovered that, if used within a few hours after death, the blood of suicides, or those who die of heart disease, or skull fractures, can be used for transfusion purposes to save the lives of the living. This is now done regularly in a Moscow hospital. *17<sup>th</sup> January, 1934, volume 15, number 374, p. 242.*

In 1940 a similar outlook was taken by the Jehovah's Witnesses leadership as reported in the *Consolation* magazine:

In New York City a housewife in moving a boarder's things accidentally shot herself through the heart with his revolver. She was rushed to a hospital...four ribs were cut away, the heart was lifted out, three stitches were taken, one of the attending physicians in the great emergency gave a quart of his blood for transfusion, and today the woman lives and smiles gaily over what happened in the busiest twenty-three minutes of her life. *25<sup>th</sup> December, 1940, p. 19*

However, this positive view did not last and by 1943 there was a definite change leading, in 1944, to the Watchtower authority coming out as definitely against blood transfusions. Evidently this was viewed as increasing light that they didn't have back in 1934 or 1940.

### THE BASIS FOR THE POLICY ON BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS

Since 1944 the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WBTS) has urged its members to refuse to accept blood transfusions and to not allow transfusions for their minor children. This policy is primarily based upon three passages in the Scriptures which Jehovah's Witnesses interpret as permanently prohibiting the consuming of blood by anyone of mankind:

- ❖ **Genesis 9:4:** "...Only flesh with its soul [*life*]*—its blood—YOU must not eat.*"
- ❖ **Leviticus 17:12-14:** "...No soul of you must eat blood and no alien resident as an alien in your midst should eat blood ... he must in that case pour its [*the killed animal's*] blood out ... Anyone eating it will be cut off"
- ❖ **Acts 15:29, 21:25:** "...to keep abstaining...from blood..." "...that they should keep themselves...from blood..."

Ever since this policy came into effect some 65 years ago, this life or death issue has resulted in thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses having died because of their refusal to accept a blood transfusion. These ones are often looked upon as heroes of the faith—as having been loyal to Jehovah. However, has the governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses correctly understood the above texts? If not then one must ask if these dead 'loyal ones' have really been the victims of a misguided policy that is not, in fact, according to the will of Jehovah? Clearly, it is necessary to gain as clear an understanding of the above three passages as is possible.

## THE NOACHIAN COVENANT - GENESIS 9:1-17

- ❖ “Every moving animal that is alive may serve as food for YOU. As in the case of green vegetation, I do give it all to YOU. <sup>4</sup> Only flesh with its soul—**its blood**—**YOU must not eat.** <sup>5</sup> And, besides that, YOUR blood of YOUR souls shall I ask back. From the hand of every living creature shall I ask it back; and from the hand of man, from the hand of each one who is his brother, shall I ask back the soul of man. <sup>6</sup> Anyone **shedding man's blood**, by man will his own blood be shed, for in God's image he made man. <sup>7</sup> And as for YOU men, **be fruitful** and become many, make the earth swarm with YOU and become many in it” (*Gen. 9:3-7*).
- ❖ “And God added: “This is the sign of the covenant that I am giving between me and YOU and every living soul that is with YOU, **for the generations to time indefinite** (Heb. *olam*).” (*Gen. 9:12*).
- ❖ “And the rainbow must occur in the cloud, and I shall certainly see it to remember the **covenant to time indefinite** between God and every living soul among all flesh that is upon the earth. And God repeated to Noah: “This is the sign of the covenant that I do establish between me and all flesh that is upon the earth”” (*Gen. 9:16, 17*).

Because life had become of little value in the pre-flood society this Noachian Covenant was made to highlight the **sanctity of life**. So in examining this covenant *we must bear in mind that there are many metaphorical statements in it and so showing that it is not expressed in literalistic absolute terms*.

### **PART ONE:** AN ANIMAL'S “FLESH WITH ITS LIFE” MUST NOT BE EATEN

- ❖ “Every moving animal may serve as food for YOU ... <sup>4</sup> Only **flesh with its soul** [*life*]—its **blood**—YOU must not eat.” (*Gen. 9:3, 4*).

#### *WBTS EARLIER UNDERSTANDING*

All reasonable minds must conclude that it was not the eating of the blood that God objected to, but it was the bringing the blood of the beast in contact with the blood of man.

*The Golden Age, 2/4/31, p. 294 (Golden Age No. 297).*

Nevertheless, this command could not be in the literal and absolute sense because it is impossible to remove all of the blood (about half is left). So the significance of Noah's and his family's pouring out of the animal's blood was simply out of respect for the life taken and in recognition of the sacrifice made by the animal for man's benefit.

#### *A COMMAND NOT TO EAT FROM ANIMALS THAT ARE STILL ALIVE*

“...Only flesh with its soul [*life*]—**its blood**—**YOU must not eat.**”

“But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it” (NIV).

“But you must never eat any meat that still has the lifeblood in it” (NLT).

“But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood” (NKJ).

These translations indicate that the prohibition concerns the meat to be eaten from living animals and that the term ‘blood’ is here used as a metaphor for the life of the animal, so that literal blood is not being spoken of here. This command was, doubtless given because of the wicked habits of pre-flood mankind. The understanding that God in Genesis 9:4 is commanding mankind not to *eat from any animal that is still alive*,” i.e. still has its lifeblood within it, is confirmed by the following commentaries:

Rabbi Raschi (1040-1105 A.D.) in his commentary on the Talmud, with reference to Genesis 9:4, says:

He here prohibited to them the eating of a limb cut from a living animal that is to say that ‘flesh together with its life’ means: so long as **its life is in it** you shall not eat the flesh.

Both the Coffman and the Gill commentaries note that: “**Flesh with its soul [*life*]**” appears to refer to **living creatures.**” Also Theologian Claus Westermann notes that:

The original meaning of the prohibition. B. Jacob paraphrases: 'You may eat all flesh, but not flesh with its life.' The commonly accepted explanation, that the sentence forbids the partaking of blood, is not correct, though one can certainly say that it follows; however it is not stated expressly. *Genesis 1- A Commentary*, p. 464.

Furthermore, the *Hebrew Union College Annual* comments that:

Rabbinic tradition understands this formula as a prohibition (to all mankind) not to cut steaks from a living animal. Absurd or far-fetched as this interpretation may appear to some moderns, such a practice would preserve the living flesh in a fresh state for later consumption; and has, furthermore, been reported as practiced in parts of Africa - the related (rabbinic) interpretation, (forbidding) drinking the blood tapped from the veins of living animals is the regular practice of Masai tribesmen...Some sects interpret the prohibition here as interdicting blood transfusions. *On Slaughter and Sacrifice, Blood and Atonement*, vol. XLVII, p. 21.

According to Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.) Martin Luther argues for a similar understanding in his commentary. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 2, 1960, p. 138.

#### A DIFFERENT COMMAND FROM THAT OF THE MOSAIC LAW ON BLOOD

“Soul” and “blood” are equated in Genesis 9:4 in typical Hebrew parallelism so that what is really being said is that one must not eat the animal’s **life**. So this part of the Noachian covenant ensured that humans would only eat what was fully dead. This is all a very different situation and a different command from those of the Mosaic Law which did indeed forbid the literal eating of blood. However, those later commands involved the proper bleeding of animals in which case the animal was obviously fully dead, although such later actions under the Mosaic Law would ensure compliance with the principle in Genesis 9:4.

#### **PART TWO:** CAPITAL PUNISHMENT FOR MURDER/MANSLAUGHTER

❖ “Anyone shedding man’s blood by man will his own blood be shed” (Gen. 9:6).

This command was, doubtless given because of the violence which had necessitated the flood and perhaps because of Cain’s murder of his brother Abel. It was a completely different punishment from that which Cain experienced and so now such capital punishment would act as a deterrent and “*shedding man’s blood*” is clearly a metaphor for **murder/manslaughter** which may include methods which do **not involve literal blood** e.g. strangulation or poisoning; and so is not taken in the absolutely literal sense.

- “*Shedding man’s blood*” obviously cannot refer to simply cutting oneself and so it is evident that it cannot apply to the modern day procedure of taking a blood sample for testing or other similar puncturing of the skin.
- Furthermore, the Scriptures make it clear that this command in 9:6 could not refer to the killing of an enemy in warfare and so we understand that Jehovah made exceptions to the 9:6 command for certain ‘special circumstances.’

Evidently the Noachian covenant is not about ‘absolutes’ and is not to be taken in a strict, *literal* sense. Therefore, Genesis 9:6 does **not refer to literal blood** but speaks of it as a metaphor for life. If taken literally then there would be no prohibition against taking someone’s life by poisoning, strangulation, clubbing, or beating to death because one has not literally shed their blood. So because 9:6 uses the word ‘blood’ in a metaphorical way it is clear that it is also used metaphorically in 9:4. So we must conclude that:

- Blood of a living creature symbolized ‘life’.
- Shed blood symbolized ‘the wrongful taking of life’ i.e. murder.
- Blood that is “*poured out*” symbolized death.

**PART THREE: THE MULTIPLYING OF MANKIND**

❖ “Be fruitful and become many” (Gen. 9:7).

This command to populate the earth was clearly diametrically at odds with murder which reduced the population. So whereas *Parts One and Two* of the covenant are in the context of prohibiting killing; a blood transfusion is intended for the saving of life and harmonizes with the original purpose of the Noachian covenant. However, as shall be shown this aspect of the covenant was not to be forever absolutely.

THE CURRENT JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES’ APPLICATION OF  
THE NOACHIAN COVENANT

The main publication of Jehovah’s Witnesses on this subject is the 1990 brochure: *How Can Blood Save Your Life?* In this brochure it is stated that:

In one early reference, the Creator declared: “Everything that lives and moves will be food for you...But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.” He added: “For your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting,” and he then condemned murder. (Genesis 9:3-6, *New International Version*) He said that to Noah, a common ancestor highly esteemed by Jews, Muslims, and Christians. **All humanity** was thus notified that in the Creator’s view, blood stands for life. This was more than a dietary regulation. Clearly a moral principle was involved. Human blood has great significance and should not be misused. The Creator later added details from which we can easily see the moral issues that he links to lifeblood. p.3

However, was the command in Genesis 9:12, 16 an absolute command to be for all mankind forever or was it for the *special circumstances existing at the time?*

NOT A COVENANT FOREVER ABSOLUTELY

*The Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* demonstrates a variety of definitions of the Hebrew term *olam* in Genesis 9:12, 16:

- (a) The Heb. word *olam*, a long time or duration.
- (c) The main component of *olam*’s meaning is according to common consent “most distant time,” with reference both to the past and the future, and occasionally to both...the allotted time span extends throughout the whole life of the persons concerned, but it is also limited to it.
- (d) The meaning of a life span is also applicable on generations and even on the existence of a nation as a whole.
- (e) God’s promises, which are established forever, remained bound to their point of reference in himself, and are, therefore, not automatically timeless and irrevocably valid.

Also examples are given of:

- The slave “forever” (Ex 21:6; Deut 15:17), but lasting logically up to the end of his life or that of his master.
- Eli and his household enjoying ministry “forever,” but only during the time they are faithful.

Furthermore, the reference in Genesis 9:12 of “**for the generations**” is parallel with other later Bible statements where the word *ohlam* occurs and which prove to be not meaning forever. Examples concern the Sabbath and the shekinah light in the temple:

- ❖ “And the sons of Israel must keep the sabbath, so as to carry out the Sabbath **during their generations**. It is a covenant **to time indefinite** (Heb. *ohlam*). Between me and the sons of Israel it is a sign to time indefinite...” (Ex. 31:16, 17).

Similar to the burning of the tabernacle light (*shekinah*) as “a statute to time indefinite **during YOUR generations**” (Lev.24:2, 3) which later became spiritualized in Jesus as “the light of the world” (John 8:12) and therefore the literal light does not literally burn to time indefinite. So too the Sabbath continues to time indefinite, but in its spiritualized form, no longer as an ordinance/statute but in the sense of “rest” now being found only in Jesus. These factors indicate that the Noachian covenant also was not meant to last absolutely forever. Furthermore there are a couple of other issues which indicate that the Noachian covenant was not meant to be absolutely forever.

### LATER GENTILES WERE NOT UNDER THE NOACHIAN COVENANT

#### SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES AT THE TIME

The governing body of Jehovah’s Witnesses claims that the Noachian Covenant applies to all of mankind. This was certainly true in Noah’s day for his generation. However, Jehovah’s Witnesses only pick for application *PARTS ONE and TWO* concerning ‘blood’ and ‘murder’ as applicable to all mankind today. This is seen from the fact that the individual Jehovah's Witnesses are not encouraged by the governing body to apply Genesis 9:7 so as “to be fruitful and become many;” but rather they are permitted to use birth control methods. This stance rather goes against the spirit of *PART THREE* of the covenant. Yet regarding the “be fruitful” command the *Awake* of 22 Sept 1989 p23, 24 correctly stated: “This command clearly related to the **special circumstances existing at the time.**” This was because both Jesus and Paul encouraged singleness from NT times and so not to “be fruitful and become many.” This clearly demonstrates that the Noachian covenant was not to be binding on mankind forever.

#### GENTILES NOT UNDER ANY COVENANT UNTIL THE 1<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Ephesians 2:12 describes the Gentiles as “*strangers to the covenants of promise*” including the Genesis 3:15 promise and the Noachian covenant.

NOTE: In all of these points there is nothing in the Noachian covenant that speaks of **the transfusion of** human blood or that a blood transfusion is a misuse of blood.

### LEVITICUS 17:12-14 APPLIED ONLY TO ISRAEL

- ❖ “...No soul of you must eat blood and no alien resident as an alien in your midst should eat blood ... he must in that case pour its [*the killed animal's*] blood out ... Anyone eating it will be cut off.”

#### GENTILES WERE NEVER UNDER THE MOSAIC LAW COVENANT

- ❖ “YOU were...alienated from the state of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise” (*Eph. 2:12*)
- ❖ “For whenever **people of the nations** that do **not have law** do by nature the things of the law...” (*Rom. 2:14*).
- ❖ “...you must not eat any body [already] dead. To the **alien resident** you must give it, and he must eat it; or there may be the **selling of it to a foreigner...**” (*Deut. 14:21*).

So this later prohibition in the Mosaic Law of the eating of an already dead animal was **limited to Israel** which is why an Israelite could sell it to a Gentile, and thereby showing that any law concerning blood was never made binding on the nations:

## UNDER THE MOSAIC LAW SACRIFICES INVOLVED BLOOD AND FAT

- ❖ “And he must lay his hand upon the head of his offering, and it must be slaughtered at the entrance of the tent of meeting; and Aaron’s sons, the priests, must sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar. And he must present some of the communion sacrifice as an offering made by fire to Jehovah, namely, **the fat** that covers the intestines, even all **the fat** that is over the intestines, and the two kidneys and **the fat** that is upon them, the same as that upon the loins. And as for the appendage upon the liver, he will remove it along with the kidneys. And Aaron’s sons **must make it smoke** on the altar, upon the burnt offering that is over the wood that is on the fire, as an offering made by fire of a restful odour to Jehovah.

8 And he must lay his hand upon the head of his offering, and it must be slaughtered before the tent of meeting; and Aaron’s sons must **sprinkle its blood round about upon the altar**. And from the communion sacrifice he must present its **fat as an offering made by fire to Jehovah**. The entire fatty tail is what he will remove near the backbone, and the fat that covers the intestines, even all the fat that is upon the intestines, and the two kidneys and the fat that is upon them, the same as that upon the loins. And as for the appendage upon the liver, he will remove it along with the kidneys. And **the priest must make it smoke on the altar** as food, an offering made by fire to Jehovah. ““And if his offering is a goat, then he must present it before Jehovah. And he must lay his hand upon its head, and it must be slaughtered before the tent of meeting; and Aaron’s sons must **sprinkle its blood round about upon the altar**. And from it he must present as his offering, as an offering made by fire to Jehovah, **the fat** that covers the intestines, even all **the fat** that is upon the intestines, and the two kidneys and the fat that is upon them, the same as that upon the loins. And as for the appendage upon the liver, he will remove it along with the kidneys”

(Lev. 3: 2-4, 8-15).

*The Anchor Bible Dictionary* states: “Because they embodied life, both blood and fat were allotted by biblical legislation to God,” volume 1, p. 761. *So if the governing body of Jehovah’s Witnesses wishes to apply the Mosaic Law to their policy of denying a blood transfusion it would be consistent for them to also deny the eating of any animal fat.*

### HOW DID AN ISRAELITE AVOID THE BLOOD LEFT IN THE MEAT?

*The Anchor Bible Dictionary* notes:

The biblical sources agreed that a consumption of animal blood by Israelites and the strangers in their midst, even when incidental to eating meat, is a heinous crime equivalent to homicide (Lev. 17:4), and constitutes “treachery” (1 Sam. 14:33) against God. Biblical legislators differed, however, as to how one might eat meat without unlawfully consuming the blood. The solution of Leviticus 17 (P; cf. 1 Sam. 14:34-35) was to make all slaughter of domestic animals sacrificial, thus giving the blood to God... Only after the blood had been dashed against the altar, the fat turned to smoke, and the altar and the priests had take their share, was the sacrificer permitted to eat the meat. Volume 1. 762.

### THE DECREES OF THE LAW OF MOSES ARE NOT APPLICABLE TO CHRISTIANS

- ❖ “...blotted out the handwritten document, which consisted of decrees and which was in opposition to us; and He has taken it out of the way by nailing it to the torture stake” (*Col. 2:13, 14*).
- ❖ “You are parted from Christ, whoever you are that try to be declared righteous by means of law.” (*Gal. 5:4*).

- ❖ “Now that we have been **discharged from the law**” and “For Christ is the end of the Law”  
(Rom. 7:6 and 10:4).

*Because the governing body of Jehovah’s Witnesses uses the Mosaic Law as part of the basis for its blood policy it undermines the value of the blood of Christ and its ransoming value (2 Cor. 3:14-15).*

*THERE IS NOTHING UNCLEAN FOR A CHRISTIAN*

- ❖ “There is **nothing** from outside a man **that passes into him** that can defile him; but the things that issue forth out of a man are the things that defile him ... Thus he declared all foods clean”  
(Mark 7:15, 19).

*Here Jesus showed that it was not the eating of particular foods that affected their **ritual purity**.*

LIFE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ITS SYMBOL

*ILLUSTRATION*

Which is more important, the **symbol** or the **reality**, **blood** or **life** e.g. the **red wine** or **Jesus’ shed blood**. A similar illustration would be: the **wedding ring** or the **marriage**. So when Abel was murdered his blood was viewed as a symbol of his life. It was the loss of life that was the tragedy and so his blood was only the metaphorical way of referring to his life: “*Your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground*” (Gen. 4:10).

*THE BLOOD OF DAVID’S MEN REPRESENTED THEIR LIVES*

- ❖ “After a while David expressed his craving and said: ‘O that I might have *a drink of water* from the cistern of Bethlehem that is at the gate!’ At that the three mighty men forced their way into the camp of the Philistines and drew water...bringing it to David; and he did not consent to drink it, but **poured it out** to Jehovah. And he went on to say: ‘It is unthinkable on my part to do this! [Shall I **drink**] **the blood of the men going at the risk of their souls?**’” (2 Sam. 23:13-16).

This was a chastisement of the men for not showing sufficient respect for the sanctity of their own lives. So David shows that is not the literal blood, as represented by the water poured out, that is important but the life that it represents.

PRESERVATION OF LIFE TAKES PRECEDENCE  
OVER COMMANDMENTS

- ❖ “Next he [*Jesus*] said to them: ‘Is it lawful *on the Sabbath* to do a good deed, **to save** or to kill a **soul [a life]**?’” (Mark 3:4, 5).

*Jesus was here invoking the rabbinic principle of **pikuach nefesh**: that the obligation to save life supersedes Jewish law:*

- ❖ “At this some of the Pharisees said: ‘why are you [*the disciples*] doing what is **not lawful on the Sabbath?**’ But Jesus said in reply to them: ‘Have you never read the very thing David did when he and the men with him **got hungry?** How he entered into the house of God and received **the loaves of presentation** and **ate** and gave some to the men with him, *which it is lawful for no one to eat but for the priests only?*’ And he went on to say to them ‘Lord of the Sabbath is what the Son of Man is’” (Luke 6:2-4).

This example used by Jesus is recorded in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. The account does not mention the “**hunger**” that is noted by Jesus. He evidently knew of this detail because of what was recorded in the *Jewish Commentary* which states:

...because he found only the bread of the presence there [in the house of God], David said to him, 'Give me some to eat, so **that we will not die of hunger**. The preservation of life takes precedence over the Sabbath.'

Additionally, the **loaves of presentation** were freshly baked and set on the table **on the Sabbath** (Lev. 24:5, 8). Hence the event of 1 Samuel 21:1-6 occurred on the Sabbath. This fact would have been known by the Pharisees to whom Jesus was speaking and was the very point Jesus was making. The two factors were:

- The hunger being life-threatening because David and his men were being pursued by Saul's men, so that they needed food to give them the needed strength to escape, and;
- The event having occurred on the Sabbath.

These two points were used by Jesus as an example to answer the accusation about breaking the Sabbath. This same example also shows that the preservation of life takes precedence over the Sabbath. This fits in with the general Jewish tradition that *all commandments of the Scriptures (except idolatry, incest and murder) must be suspended to save a human life*. This is why in Mark's account of this confrontation with these Pharisees Jesus says:

- ❖ "The Sabbath came into existence for the sake of man, and not man for the sake of the Sabbath; hence the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (*Mark 2:27, 28*).

Clearly, from the above, Jesus also makes the preservation of human life take precedence over commandments.

NOTE: In John 7:22, Jesus shows that it was understood that the prohibition against the work of *cutting* on the Sabbath was to be suspended when the **8<sup>th</sup> day circumcision rule** happens to fall on a Sabbath. This precedence was not stated in the Law but was interpreted in the Oral Torah for the purpose of avoiding confusion.

### ATONEMENT BY BLOOD

- ❖ "...I shall certainly set my face against the soul that is eating the blood, and I shall indeed cut him off from among his people. For the soul of the flesh is in the blood, and I myself have **put it upon the altar for YOU to make atonement** for YOUR souls, because **it is the blood that makes atonement** by the soul [in it]" (*Lev. 17:11*).

*The Dictionary of Biblical Images* notes that:

As the early Christians came to grasp that atonement is reached through the blood of Christ and not through the blood of bulls and goats (Heb. 10:4), some saw, probably on the basis of Leviticus 17:10-11, that the law forbidding the consumption of animal blood was no longer binding. p. 101.

### WHAT DO ACTS 15 AND 21 MEAN REGARDING THE "ABSTAINING FROM BLOOD"?

- ❖ **Acts 15:29, 21:25** "...to keep abstaining...from blood..." "...that they should keep themselves...from blood..."

#### THE ISSUE IN JERUSALEM

The issue recorded in Acts 15 was: Should **Gentile** Christians observe the Law of Moses?

- ❖ "Yet some of the sect of the Pharisees that had believed rose up from their seats and said 'It is necessary **to circumcise** them and charge **them to observe the Law of Moses**.' ... Peter rose and

said to them...why are you making a test of God by imposing upon the neck of the disciples *a yoke* that neither our forefathers nor we were capable of bearing? On the contrary, we trust to get saved through the undeserved kindness of the Lord Jesus in the same way as those people also.”

(Acts 15: 5, 7, 10, 11)

In Acts 15:20, 29 four things are noted:

1. “things polluted by idols.” This clearly refers to idolatry.
2. “fornication (Gk *porneia*.)” This is better translated “sexual immorality.”
3. “what is strangled.” This refers, of course, to meat.
4. “blood.”

Why were only those four things mentioned? Apparently there is no definitive answer. However, two explanations, contrasting with the Jehovah’s Witnesses understanding, will be presented here. The second explanation seems the more plausible but there is considerable uncertainty.

### EXPLANATION 1

#### TEMPORARY IMPOSING OF FOUR PROHIBITIONS IN THE MOSAIC LAW FOR ALIEN RESIDENTS

This explanation has been offered by a number of former Jehovah’s Witnesses and with significant support from some Bible commentaries. However, there are a few problems with this explanation which will be noted at the end of the explanation.

#### THE FOUR PROHIBITIONS

❖ “James answered saying ... my decision is not to trouble those **from the nations** who are turning to God but to write **them** to **abstain from: things polluted by idols** and from **fornication** and from **what is strangled** and from **blood**” (Acts 15:13, 19-20).

*James may be referring to Leviticus 17 which gives the command not to **eat** blood but nothing more than that.*

#### FOR THE SAKE OF HARMONY WITH JEWISH CHRISTIANS

*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* notes:

But in reality they [*the prohibitions*] should be viewed not as dealing with the principle issue of the council but as meeting certain practical concerns; not as being primarily theological but more sociological in nature; **not as divine ordinances** for acceptance before God but as **concessions to the scruples of others** for the sake of harmony within the church and the continuance of the Jewish Christian mission.

*Volume 9, p. 448.*

The November 15, 1892 WT said:

He (*James*) further suggested writing to them merely to abstain from pollutions of idols, and from things strangled and from blood - as by eating such things they might become **stumbling blocks to their Jewish brethren.**

This view was repeated in the WT magazine of April 15, 1909 and is the common understanding of bible scholars. According to the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* volume VIII:

With the disappearance of the Jewish-Christian community of Jerusalem at the time of the rebellion (AD 67-70), the question about circumcision and the observance of the law ceased to be of importance in the Church, and soon became a dead issue.

As an example Timothy was circumcised as a concession to Jewish feeling (Acts 16:3). Also Paul and

four men with him purified themselves in deference to the Jewish Law. (Acts 21:20-26). There is no reference in Acts 15 to the Noachian covenant which in any case did not apply after the introduction of the Mosaic Law covenant. James was, in fact, strongly recommending that Gentile Christians abide by the same rules as an *alien resident* living in Israel as stated in Leviticus 17 and 18 and stated in the same order as the Acts 15:29 and 21:25 requirements.

Also the *Word Biblical Commentary* on the Letter of James also takes this view concerning the motive for such abstention mentioned in Acts 15:

A comparable instance would be the use of the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15, which laid down “rules” for promoting table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles in the nascent communities. It may be argued, from the Jewish Christian side sponsored by James, that such restrictions, listed in **Acts 15:19–20; 21:25**, were *needful, lest Jewish sensitivities should be damaged*. The rules promoted goodwill until the day when a true *koinonia* between both wings of the church could be established on a lasting and theologically valid base. Paul moved to that position more rapidly than other preachers and leaders in his day; hence the debates that run through his epistles (Galatians, 2 Corinthians, Philippians: see Martin, “Setting of 2 Corinthians,” in *2 Corinthians*, WBC 40 [Waco: Word, 1986], lii–lxi) and which caused temporary hostility to his mission as a world-embracing manifesto. The future, however, clearly lay with Paul if the church was to fulfill its role as a truly “catholic” movement with a task to reach out to all nations and proclaim Jesus Christ as universal Lord. **The Apostolic Decree could have no place in such a widened vision**, since, for Paul, it looked back to Mosaic-Levitical regulations and taboos that the advent of a new eschatological age in the coming of Israel’s messiah and the world’s ruler had antiquated. The “husk”—needful at one stage—had to drop away in order to allow the “kernel” to be seen on its own and for what it was.

#### *ACTS 15:20 and 28 GIVE ONLY AN ADMONITION RATHER THAN A COMMAND*

*The reason is given in verse 21:*

- ❖ “...**For** from ancient times **Moses** has had in city after city those who **preach him**, because he is read aloud in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

Hence, the reason for the admonition was because Moses was read throughout the Roman Empire. **Gentile** Christians would indeed cause great offence to Jews and Jewish Christians if they did not comply with this admonition because these 4 activities were all condoned by non-Christian Gentiles and were the things most likely to cause offence to the Jew. However, if the prohibition of these 4 activities was prolonged it would be putting the Gentile Christians under the same unbearable *yoke*.

#### *“ABSTAIN FROM” IS NEITHER ABSOLUTE NOR INDEFINITE*

The phrase **abstain from** is **not** being used in the **absolute sense** because it is impossible to drain meat of absolutely all blood. Obedience to this command in the absolute sense would require that all Christians should ensure that their meat is koshered, which Jehovah’s Witnesses do not do. Neither would the transfusion of blood components be acceptable. The phrase **abstain from** is not being used in the **indefinite sense**. It applied:

- To Gentile Christians, and
- During the time and circumstances of transition from the Jewish congregation to the Christian congregation.

#### *ABSTAINING FROM THINGS POLLUTED BY IDOLS WAS NOT INDEFINITE*

An indication that the Acts 15 and 21 command is not indefinite, is found in the fact that Paul writes concerning one of those four subjects in **1 Corinthians 8:4-12:**

- ❖ “Now concerning the eating of foods **offered (sacrificed) to idols**, we know that **an idol is nothing** ...” Note *KIT* has “*sacrificed*” **8:4**.

- ❖ "...but some being accustomed until now to the idol, eat food as something **sacrificed to an idol**, and their **conscience** being weak is defiled" **8:7**.
- ❖ "Keep watching that this authority of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone should see you, the one having knowledge, reclining at a meal **in an idol temple**, will the **conscience** of that one who is weak be built up to the point of eating foods **offered (sacrificed) to idols**" **8:9, 10**.
- ❖ "...when you people thus sin against your brothers and wound their **conscience** that is weak you are sinning against Christ" **8:12**.

This is not exactly the same as the issue over eating meat bought at a meat market, but is of a Christian "*reclining at a meal in **an idol temple***" and "*eating things **sacrificed to idols***" in all **good conscience** because he knows that an idol is nothing. His sin would be the wounding of the brother's weak **conscience**. Therefore, if by Paul's time, the issue of "*eating food sacrificed to idols*" was a matter of not wounding his brother's weak conscience then the issue of "*abstaining from blood*" would also be for the same reason. So with reference to Acts 15:20, 29 it can be seen from 1 Corinthians 8 that Paul did not view the abstaining from "*things sacrificed to idols*" in an indefinite sense. This shows that the indefinite sense cannot be applied to the other aspects of Acts 15: 20, 29 including "*abstaining from blood.*"

NOTE: The aspect of **fornication** is mentioned because it is in the list for the alien resident in Leviticus 17 i.e. a Gentile living in Israel. For a Christian fornication would absolutely be guarded against. **Gentile** Christians would indeed cause great offence to Jews and Jewish Christians if they did not consider their consciences e.g. it was recommended to Paul in Acts 21:23-25 to perform a Jewish ritual for the sake of the Jews.

#### PROBLEMS WITH THIS VIEW

It is faulty to state that the words of Acts 15:20, 28 are only an admonition and not a command just because verse 21 says:

- ❖ "...**For** from ancient times **Moses** has had in city after city those who **preach him**, because he is read aloud in the synagogues on every Sabbath."

The reason the view is faulty is because James, in harmony with Peter, was not directing the Gentile Christians to go to Jewish synagogues to hear the decrees of the Mosaic Law Covenant read. James had just said that it was wrong to place the yoke of the Old Covenant on the Gentile believers (Acts 15:10). The fact was that the Old Covenant ended with Jesus' sacrifice. Additionally the Jerusalem brothers sent Judas and Silas along with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch (vss. 25-27). This was to add to Paul's and Barnabas' testimony that none of the decrees of the Old Covenant were relevant for the Gentile Christians.

The explanation concerning 1 Corinthians 8:4-12 about meat offered to idols is also faulty.

- a. Because Paul was never in favour of the eating of meat known to have been offered to idols because this involved idolatry (1 Cor.10:19-21). In fact, if the brothers knew for sure that some food or drink had been offered to an idol, they were not to eat or drink it.
- b. Paul's statement that "*if anyone should see you...reclining at a meal **in an idol temple***" was not saying that a Christian could frequent an idol temple with impunity, but rather that they actually should not even be in an idol temple. He asks the question "*will not the conscience of that one who is weak be built up to the point of eating foods offered (sacrificed) to idols.*" (1 Cor. 8:9, 10).

- c. At Revelation 2:14 Jesus is against the Christians at Pergamum because “*you have there those holding fast the teaching of Ba’laam, who went teaching Ba’lak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols...*” This contradicts the argument that Paul was removing the prohibition against eating meat offered to idols or even sitting in a pagan temple to do so.

## EXPLANATION 2

### IDOLATROUS PRACTICES RELATED TO GENTILE TEMPLES

The command of Acts 15 stated by the Jerusalem brothers was concerning “*those from the nations who are turning to God.*” That means that it related to the non-Jewish Christians who were living particularly in the Greek and Roman cultures of the time where idol-temples were common in most Greek and Roman cities and often a central feature for the whole city. So the major problem for the non-Jewish Christians was that many aspects of life involved idolatry related issues. These pagan temples served as:

- places of idolatry
- places of ritual prostitution
- slaughter-houses
- eating establishments

Evidently their Jewish brothers in Jerusalem realised the spiritually difficult situation, and so sent words of guidance for them. So the 4 subjects noted in Acts 15:20, 29 related to these matters commonly connected to those pagan temples, namely:

“things polluted by idols.” This clearly refers to idolatry.

“fornication (Gk. *porneia*.)” This is better translated “sexual immorality.”

“what is strangled.” This refers, of course, to meat.

“blood.”

#### 1. “**Abstain from things polluted by idols.**”

Paul made it crystal clear that he was against anything related to idolatry when he said:

- ❖ “What, then, am I to say? That what is sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No; but I say that the things which the nations sacrifice they sacrifice to demons, and not to God; and I do not want YOU to become sharers with the demons. YOU cannot be drinking the cup of Jehovah and the cup of demons; YOU cannot be partaking of “the table of Jehovah” and the table of demons.” (1 Cor. 10:19-21).

*So if the non-Jewish Christians of Corinth knew that some food had been dedicated to an idol they were not to eat it. This view clearly paralleled the statement in Acts 15:20 on idolatry.*

#### 2. “**Abstain from sexual immorality** (Gk. *porneia*).

Older translations of the Scriptures have rendered the Greek word *porneia* as “fornication,” yet even Watchtower publications have demonstrated that the word *porneia* had a much wider usage than ‘fornication’ and so is well rendered “sexual immorality” as in most modern Bibles.

#### TEMPLE PROSTITUTION

The main lexicons show that the meaning of *porneia* was originally associated with prostitution. They also show that *pornee*, refers to a woman selling herself, and  *pornos*, to a man selling himself. Unlike the standard of morality of the Jewish world the whole Greco-Roman world had a very different and low standard which included the pagan temples serving as brothels for ritual prostitution where both men and women temple slaves offered their services, for payment. So the

reference in Acts 15:20 seems to be for the non-Jewish Christians to keep away from the temple prostitutes and not in any way to prostitute themselves. Jewish Christians would already be aware of the dangers of any sexual immorality.

NOTE. Babylon the great is described literally as *“the mother of the prostitutes”* (Gk. *pornee*).

### 3. “Abstain from what is strangled”

Blood from slaughtered animals must be drained immediately, otherwise it quickly coagulates. So if an animal is strangled it will contain blood which may have been unacceptable to Gentiles as well as Jews. However, it may be that this instruction was given for very different reasons related to the rituals in the pagan temples. In view of the idolatry theme of the first point mentioned in these 4 issues in Acts 15:20 it seems very likely.

NOTE. A.T. Robertson in his *NT Pictures* says concerning Acts 15:20: “Harnack argues ably against the genuineness of the word *pniktou* (strangled) which is absent from D Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian.” Also, some have said that “the Western text omits the word also in verse 29.”

### 4. “Abstain from Blood’.

Was this a reference to blood as mentioned in the decrees of the Old Covenant, or did it refer to something else? As stated above it is clear that all Jewish Christians were free from the decrees of the Mosaic Law and that Gentile Christians were never to come under its yoke. So there must have been a different reason for the giving of the command to non-Jewish Christians regarding blood. In harmony with the first two issues as related to the Greco-Roman temples which served as places of ritual prostitution, slaughter-houses and eating establishments in relation to idolatry so, too, blood seemed to have played some role in the pagan rituals. Certainly, blood was in evidence as the animals were slaughtered. Also the worship of Artemis (Diana) included the **ritual use of blood**, as did the pagan religion of Mithraism. However, although presently there is uncertainty concerning what exactly was meant by the phrase “abstain from blood” in Acts 15, we do know that, in the context of the other issues raised it did not concern the Mosaic Law but most likely involved the pagan temples of the Greco-Roman world.

#### WHY THE STATEMENT ABOUT MOSES BEING PREACHED?

❖ “...**For** from ancient times **Moses** has had in city after city those who **preach him**, because he is read aloud in the synagogues on every Sabbath” (*Acts 15:21*).

The main thrust of the letter that James was having delivered to the non-Jewish Christians in Antioch and for wider distribution was to inform them that they did not have to follow the rules of “the circumcision” party because Christians are not under the Mosaic Law’s decrees i.e. they were not to come under the Old covenant. They were to take no notice of the fact that in the many Greek and Roman cities, there were Jews who continued to preach Moses in spite of the Old Covenant having ended with Christ’s death. This was a warning to those Christians to be on guard against any Jews who would persuade them otherwise.

#### CONCLUSIONS REGARDING EXPLANATION 2

Because it is clear that Christians were not under any Genesis 9:3-7 covenant laws supposedly applicable to all nations and because Christians were not under any part of the Mosaic Law these 4 points in Acts 15 cannot have been requirements taken from the Hebrew Scriptures for the non-Jewish Christians either permanently (*JW teaching*) or for any period of transition. Furthermore, because these instructions were for the non-Jewish Christians living in a culture of idolatry and that the instructions begin with a command to avoid idolatry and avoid *porneia* that is connected with temple prostitution it seems most likely that the prohibitions on “strangled things” and “blood” also relate to the city centre-pieces, namely the pagan temples as places of idolatry, ritual prostitution, slaughter-houses and eating

establishments. It certainly makes no sense to imagine that the Jerusalem brothers were detailing **all the rules** of conduct that all Christians would have to follow for all times henceforth. This is because Jesus, through his emissaries, gave many more and many kinds of instructions and guidelines than just these 4 aspects of conduct regarding right moral conduct. Also there is no proof that, as some say, Paul did away with these 4 points after serving a supposed purpose.

NOTE: The phrase “Good health to you!” in the NWT of Acts 15:29 simply means “Farewell!” as in the NWT footnote and has nothing to do with ones having good health because of keeping the 4 instructions.

### THIS ISSUE IS NEVER MENTIONED BY JESUS – NEITHER IN THE REST OF THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

If abstaining from blood according to the Jehovah’s Witnesses interpretation was an important Bible subject for Christians why is it never mentioned in any other context in the Christian Scriptures:

- Either by Jesus.
- Or in 1 Corinthians 5 as a reason to ‘quit mixing’ with a disfellowshipped brother.
- Or in 1 Corinthians 6 as one of the reasons given for one to be kept out of the kingdom.
- Or in Revelation 21:8 concerning all the evils that make one worthy of second death.

### THE WATCHTOWER FALSE ANALOGY

The governing body of Jehovah’s Witnesses has claimed that the administering of a blood transfusion is comparable to intravenous feeding and therefore one would effectively be ‘eating blood’. However, this is not correct. If alcohol or antibiotics are injected into a person the effect is the same as if administered by mouth. This is not the case with blood. If blood is eaten, the digestive process kills this living tissue; but if transfused, it retains its form and functions fully in the body. This is because it is really an organ transplant similar to a liver transplant, the effect of which is completely different from eating liver. Although modern-day strict orthodox Jews kosher their meat, they would not put that procedure ahead of a life or death situation. Furthermore, they take blood transfusions because they do not view that procedure as comparable to the blood laws given to Israel.

### ANOMALIES IN JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES TEACHING ON BLOOD

- Since various blood fractions are permitted by the governing body, then doesn’t this invalidate their appeal to the Leviticus 17:3 command to pour out the blood on the ground.
- The distinction between a non-life-sustaining fraction as acceptable and a life-sustaining fraction as unacceptable, has no basis in the Scriptures which gave a straight prohibition against the eating of blood.
- The medical use of blood is based on the very purpose for which blood was designed – providing nutrients, oxygen etc. and as noted above, the sustaining of life was paramount to Jesus and early Jewish society. So such usage of blood could be viewed as actual evidence of one’s respect for the sacredness of life and the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ view as the very opposite.

### MISREPRESENTATION OF THE FACTS IN THE BROCHURE ‘HOW CAN BLOOD SAVE YOUR LIFE’

Page 4 suggests that it was an **emergency situation** that is described in 1 Samuel 14:31-35 which says that the Israelite soldiers “*fell to eating along with the blood,*” which was not permissible for them. However, in this case, it was not an emergency involving life. They were extremely hungry, but

not in fear of their lives as were David and his men in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. Also they were not executed for breaking this law. Instead sacrifices were made for them.

Page 5 says:

James referred in Acts 15 to writings containing the commands about blood stated to Noah and to the nation of Israel.

COMMENT: In fact, James' only quotation is from Amos 9:11, 12. This has nothing to do with Noah or blood. Although the NASB and NIV Bibles give a cross reference to Genesis 9:4 this is simply a reference to the word *blood* and not a reference to the command given to Noah.

Page 5 speaks of '*fundamental ethical norms for Christians*' in Acts 15. However, this is based on the governing body's incorrect understanding of the reference to 'blood' in these texts.

Page 5: Why, in quoting Joseph Priestly, has the brochure referred to the words of the founder of The First Unitarian Church (*a member of Christendom in the view of Jehovah's Witnesses*)? The unquoted part of Priestley's statement shows that he never reached a conclusion about blood:

The question concerning the lawfulness of eating blood...not of a moral nature, but as it is a subject of much less importance than the rest and a more doubtful nature...I would not have my reader conclude, that I am fully determined in my judgement of it.

#### MISQUOTES FROM EARLY CHRISTIANS

Because there were some versions (based on the Western text) of the Book of Acts where the term *blood* (which seemed strange to Greeks) had been changed to *blood-shedding*, many of the comments by early Christians refer to murder. Yet the brochure quotes them as if they refer to drinking blood. This, of course, is misleading because a rule against murder naturally would be binding on Christians.

#### INFORMED CHOICE

Because of the faulty explanation of the Scriptures on this issue by the governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses, the misinformation shown above and their being selective concerning vital information, the governing body is denying the individual Jehovah's Witness the ability to make an informed choice. This means that the individual makes a life or death choice based on incorrect information.

### WTS HISTORY REGARDING BLOOD

1945 - Blood transfusions and blood products are officially banned. The policy is based on the false belief that blood was ultimately the food that sustains the body. This was known to be wrong in the late 1800s.

1954 - Blood serums (gamma globulin fraction) are put in the same category as transfusions.

1958 - Blood serum like diphtheria antitoxin and gamma globulin are now O.K. i.e. a matter of personal judgment.

1959 - It is now wrong to store one's own blood and later transfuse it.

1961 - Disfellowshipping for one's acceptance of a blood transfusion. Also personality traits, murderous or suicidal impulses are attributed to transfused blood.

1963 - The 1958 ruling is overturned. Any blood fraction is now forbidden.

1964 - The 1963 ruling is overturned. Blood serums are now OK. Witness doctors may administer blood to non-Witness patients.

1974 - The 1964 ruling is overturned. Blood serums now a matter of conscience.

1975 - Plasma factors for haemophiliacs are unacceptable. Four months later in 1975 there is a reversal for the haemophiliacs. But only those who left their address with the Society were informed. This reversal was not made official or published in the Watchtower magazine for another 3 years in 1978. So other haemophiliacs mistakenly risk losing their lives.

1977 - Blood transfusions are now considered to be **organ transplants**. (The booklet, 'Jehovah's Witnesses and the Question of blood,' p. 41)

1980 - Reversal of the policy on **organ transplants**. Now it is a matter of conscience.

1982 - The doctrine of major and minor blood components.

1984 - Bone marrow - now a matter of conscience - but discouraged.

1992 - Whether or not food contains blood is not of concern to the Christian unless one suspects that it does.

1995 - **Brief storing** of one's own blood outside the body is now permissible for transfusion termed Normovolemic Hemodilution and autologous blood salvation procedure.

1997 - Elders are now to provide understanding to those who have accepted a transfusion. The governing body allows Jehovah's Witnesses in Australia to accept a new therapy called *autografting*. It involves the transfusion of white blood cells.

2000 - In the U.S.A the elders are no longer to disfellowship those who accept a transfusion unless it becomes known and they are deemed unrepentant.

2001 - The governing body's new blood policy permits, in essence, 100% of blood in fractionated form.

2004 - Ordinary Jehovah's Witnesses are told for the first time that they have personal choice re: haemoglobin. (Apparently Jehovah's Witnesses have been using Polyheme and Hemopure where available in clinical trials).

## THE POSITION AS OF 2006

### *INCONSISTENCY*

The governing body requires that Jehovah's Witnesses do not use whole blood or any of the **major fractions** of blood. These are arbitrarily stated by the governing body to be: plasma, red cells, white cells and platelets. Nevertheless, Jehovah's Witnesses are given the choice to use any of the ***fractions of the major blood fractions***. So if, for example, all of the fractions of plasma (water, albumin, immunoglobulins, clotting factors, vitamins, hormones etc) were used at different times this would effectively amount to the taking of plasma. The same principle would apply to all the other fractions so that in effect a person would then have taken whole blood. Furthermore, the governing body requires that Jehovah's Witnesses do not use stored blood. However, the use of any of the fractions of blood fractions is the use of stored blood.

### *HYPOCRISY*

Jehovah's Witnesses are required not to make donations of their own blood. However, they are allowed to use many medical products that are derived from blood. Because of the governing body's failure to acknowledge and apply an accurate understanding to this subject but rather to cover over their

faults with misinformation leading to the deaths of thousands who have not been able to make a truly informed choice the governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses and all who promote such a policy must be seen as blood-guilty:

- ❖ “However, If YOU had understood what this means, ‘I want mercy, and not sacrifice, YOU would not have condemned the guiltless ones’” (*Matt. 12:7*).

#### UNCONSCIONABLE OVERSIGHT

Without the Rho-GAM immune globulin serum being administered to women who are Rh-negative there is a risk to the unborn baby of the development of severe anaemia, which can cause foetal heart failure, or severe haemolytic disease. This could lead to cerebral palsy or death of the baby. When the *Awake* of 8-22-65, p. 18 stated that the taking of a serum injection was now a matter of conscience for the individual mother concerned the article failed to include the Rho-GAM serum which had been excluded just four months earlier. At least one witness baby was born with severe cerebral palsy which could have been prevented if the mother had known of the current allowing by the governing body of one's conscience in this matter and she had then received the Rho-GAM shot.

### QUESTIONS OF SERIOUS CONCERN

#### THE SANCTITY OF BLOOD I.E. LIFE

- If the Jehovah's Witnesses' organization really is God's organization then why did God wait from 1919 till 1944 to reveal this vitally important doctrine?
- How can 'abstaining from blood' allow for the use of a fraction of a blood fraction? With reference to blood the WT magazine of September 15, 1961, p. 559 said: "Whether whole or fractional, one's own or someone else's, transfused or injected, it is wrong."
- If this was a real issue in Christianity would the Apostles (*if they'd had the technology*) have made many picky rules concerning which fraction of blood was allowable and which was not allowable? Does this not smack of legalism worse than that of the Pharisees?
- If blood is to be poured out on the ground, how could it be right for a Jehovah's Witnesses to use a fraction of a blood fraction?
- If even one's own blood must not be stored for later transfusion, can it be right for a Jehovah's Witnesses to allow a blood sample for testing to be taken and then stored? Vaccines are also cultivated in stored blood.
- Why has the governing body allowed Jehovah's Witnesses the use of Hemopure (*made from cows blood*) and Polyheme (*derived from haemoglobin*) for transfusions?

### LIFE OR DEATH SITUATIONS

Because of the potentially severe health risk factors involved in the transfusion of blood, the above study is not an endorsement of blood transfusions **as a general medical treatment**, but rather it is simply for the purpose of demonstrating that the Scriptures cannot legitimately be used to form a dogma for the rejection of the use of blood transfusions in **life or death situations**. Nevertheless, the health risks of receiving a blood transfusion are often not as great as the governing body states.

## THE LENGTHS THE ORGANIZATION HAS GONE TO IN PROMOTING ITS BLOOD DOCTRINE

The Watchtower, 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1962 stated:

According to one authority: “the blood in any person is in reality the person himself. It contains all the peculiarities of the individual from whence it comes...” Transfusing blood, then may amount to transfusing personality traits. How great the danger may become if the blood is taken from blood banks to which criminals and other derelicts of society have contributed!

Many decades ago the following story and its point was published in an *Awake!* magazine:

For forty years Robert Khoury was known as an honest man. Then he was given a blood transfusion after a fall. “I learned that the donor was a thief,” Khoury told police. “When I recovered I found I had a terrible desire to steal.” And steal he did. He confessed to stealing £10,000 in six robberies in three months. Khoury threatened to sue the doctor who arranged the blood transfusion, if he receives a severe sentence for his thievery.

Sadly the unsuspecting majority of individual Jehovah’s Witnesses believed such absolutely unscientific nonsense.

### SUMMARY OF SCRIPTURAL POINTS

#### I. THE NOACHIAN COVENANT - GENESIS 9:4-7

- The organization’s statement that the Noachian covenant is literally “forever” is incorrect. This is because the command to “Be fruitful and become many” is no longer binding upon all mankind according to Jesus and Paul. The Hebrew word *olam* means for a long time. Examples are of:
  1. The slave “forever” (Ex 21:6; Deut 15:17) i.e. his or his master’s lifetime.
  2. The keeping of the Sabbath during “the generations...forever” (Ex. 31:16, 17) as being only until the Mosaic Law ended.
- The commands of the covenant were not absolute, exceptions were made.
- Blood is here used as a metaphor for life. Its use is symbolic not literal.
- Genesis 9:4 most probably refers to the custom of eating animals that are still alive.
- All the statements concerning blood are made in the context of killing, either animals or humans. This contrasts with the purpose of giving a blood transfusion which is that of preserving life.
- Later Gentiles were not under the Noachian Covenant and were not, in fact, under any covenant until the 1<sup>st</sup> century New Covenant. They were “*strangers to the covenants of promise*” (Eph 2:12).
- Genesis 9:4 is not about human blood.
- The Noachian Covenant is never mentioned outside of Genesis in relation to ‘blood.’

#### 2. LEVITICUS 17:12-14 APPLIED ONLY TO ISRAEL

- ❖ “...No soul of you [*Israelites*] must eat blood and no alien resident as an alien in your midst should eat blood ... he must in that case pour its [*the killed animal’s*] blood out ... Anyone eating it will be cut off.”
- ❖ “For whenever people of the nations that do **not have law** do by nature the things of the law...”  
(*Rom. 2:14*).

THE LAW OF MOSES IS NOT APPLICABLE TO CHRISTIANS

- ❖ "...and **blotted out the handwritten document**, which consisted of **decrees** and which was in opposition to us; and He has taken it out of the way by nailing it to the torture stake"  
(Col. 2:13, 14).

THERE IS NOTHING UNCLEAN FOR A CHRISTIAN

- ❖ "There is **nothing** from outside a man **that passes into him** that can defile him; but the things that issue forth out of a man are the things that defile him ... Thus he declared all foods clean"  
(Mark 7:15, 19).

THE BLOOD OF DAVID'S MEN REPRESENTED THEIR LIVES

- ❖ "After a while David expressed his craving and said: 'O that I might have *a drink of water* from the cistern of Bethlehem that is at the gate!' At that the three mighty men forced their way into the camp of the Philistines and drew water...bringing it to David; and he did not consent to drink it, but **poured it out** to Jehovah. And he went on to say: 'It is unthinkable on my part to do this! [Shall I **drink**] **the blood of the men going at the risk of their souls?**'"  
(2 Sam. 23:13-16).

PRESERVATION OF LIFE (*pikuach nefesh*) TAKES PRECEDENCE OVER COMMANDMENTS

- ❖ "Next he [*Jesus*] said to them: 'Is it lawful *on the Sabbath* to do a good deed, **to save** or to kill a soul [*a life*]?'"  
(Mark 3:4, 5).
- ❖ "Have you never read the very thing David did when he and the men with him **got hungry**? How he entered into the house of God and received **the loaves of presentation** and **ate** and gave some to the men with him, *which it is lawful for no one to eat but for the priests only?*"  
(Luke 6:3-4).

The Sabbath was to be suspended when the **8<sup>th</sup> day circumcision rule** happens to fall on a Sabbath.

WHAT DO ACTS 15 and 21 MEAN REGARDING THE "ABSTAINING FROM BLOOD"?

**EXPLANATION 1** - The admonition to temporarily apply the four prohibitions to alien residents in *Leviticus 17 and 18* to Gentile Christians:

- ❖ "...to write them to **abstain from: things polluted by idols** and from **fornication** and from **what is strangled** and from **blood**" (Acts 15:13, 19-20).

The phrase "abstain from" is neither absolute (*i.e. ensuring that meat is koshered*) nor indefinite.

**PROBLEMS WITH THIS VIEW:**

It is a command and not just an admonition.

The argument about meat offered to idols is faulty because:

Paul was never in favour of the eating of meat known to have been offered to idols because this involved idolatry (1 Cor.10:19-21).

At Revelation 2:14 Jesus says it is wrong "**to eat things sacrificed to idols...**"

**EXPLANATION 2** –*Idolatrous practises in Gentile temples and not relevant to Jews.*

The issue concerned "*those from the nations who are turning to God*" in the Greek and Roman cultures. The pagan temples served as:

1. **places of idolatry** and therefore concerning "things polluted by idols."
2. **places of ritual prostitution** and therefore concerning "*porneia*."

3. **slaughter-houses** and therefore concerning “what is strangled.”
4. **eating establishments** and therefore concerning “blood” in the pagan rituals of the worship of Artemis (Diana) and in Mithraism.

The statement that: “*from ancient times Moses has had in city after city those who **preach him***” in Acts 15:21 was a warning that Christians, in being not under the Mosaic Law, were to take no notice of the Jews in the many Greek and Roman cities who continued to preach Moses so that those Christians would be on guard against any attempt persuade them into Judaism.

## CONCLUSION

The Scriptures used by the governing body of Jehovah’s Witnesses to back up their policy all refer to animal blood that was not to be **eaten**. In the first instance in Genesis 9 it referred to the practice of the eating of **live animals** because the eating of such fresh meat was very strengthening. For Israel the prohibition went further inasmuch as the Israelite was not to eat the blood of an already **dead animal**. However, Christians are not under the Mosaic Law. Yet, the eating of blood has an entirely different effect on the body than the transfusing of it. If the **transfusing of human blood** was a serious violation of God’s law for all mankind then the practice by the nations of the mixing of blood as in the blood brotherhood ceremonies would have been condemned; whereas the Scriptures do not even mention it. However, much of the organization’s policy on blood began on the mistaken premise that a transfusion of blood equates with the digesting of blood for the **sustenance** of the body. The fact that a transfusion is actually an **organ transplant** means that the Bible’s various prohibitions on the *eating of blood* have nothing to do with blood transfusions. Once these facts were acknowledged by the governing body **in 1980** the banning of the administering of any blood product for Christians should have been lifted to make it a matter of the individual’s genuine own conscience as with other organ transplants. Because of applying a legalistic western mind-set rather than understanding the spirit of the biblical statements in their Hebrew context the governing body has arrived at very different conclusions to those of almost all Bible scholars and most of Jewish rabbinic understanding. Because of following the governing body’s directives regarding blood transfusions thousands of individual Jehovah’s Witnesses over many decades have lost their lives or have denied treatment to their family members who have then died. Most have made their decisions based on the faulty biblical understanding, a false analogy and the misleading historical and medical information presented to them authoritatively by the organization. So if the above information is basically correct, then one wonders what will be the eventual position before the various courts of those who have made the governing body’s policies on blood. More importantly what will be the position of such people before the Almighty God for having naively or arrogantly promoted a dangerous death-dealing teaching which is out of harmony with the facts revealed when one intelligently and diligently investigates the Scriptures and their background.

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