

Blood and the Sacredness of Life

Our heavenly Father has given us the precious gift of Life. He expects us to recognise this, and we are to take complete care of his gift.

When a person causes the death of another person, God holds the murderer to account. This happened when Abel was killed by Cain.

The LORD said [to Cain]... “Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground”.¹

There can be no thought that the blood in the ground was still alive.

There can never, either in the case of a sacrifice or a murder, be any question of the blood’s having a posthumous active existence. ... In the Old Testament ... there is no belief anywhere that any personal life persists after a death.²

To speak of the life as in some way existent in the blood subsequent to the slaughter of the animal is to ignore the Hebrew stress on the connection of life with the body. So far were the Hebrews from thinking of an immaterial principle of life that they associated life in the age to come not with the immortality of the soul, but with the resurrection of the body. If they found difficulty in thinking of human life as persisting after the death of the body, it is most unlikely that they would think of the life of an animal as persisting after slaughter.³

Indeed, the word “blood” in both the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Greek Scriptures consistently means death.

The word “blood” in the Bible, when not used literally, normally means “death”; and very often not simply death as such, but death as involving the guilt of him who causes it.⁴

Blood directly suggested **death**, particularly a violent death. For, when blood becomes visible and begins to flow, it means that damage has been done to someone's life; and when the blood is poured out in quantity and, so to speak, thought of in isolation as now separated from the body in which it flowed, it means that a life

¹ Genesis 4:10. *The Holy Bible, New International Version.*

² *New and Living Way: An Explanation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Antony Snell SSM. The Faith Press 1959, Appendix: page 166.

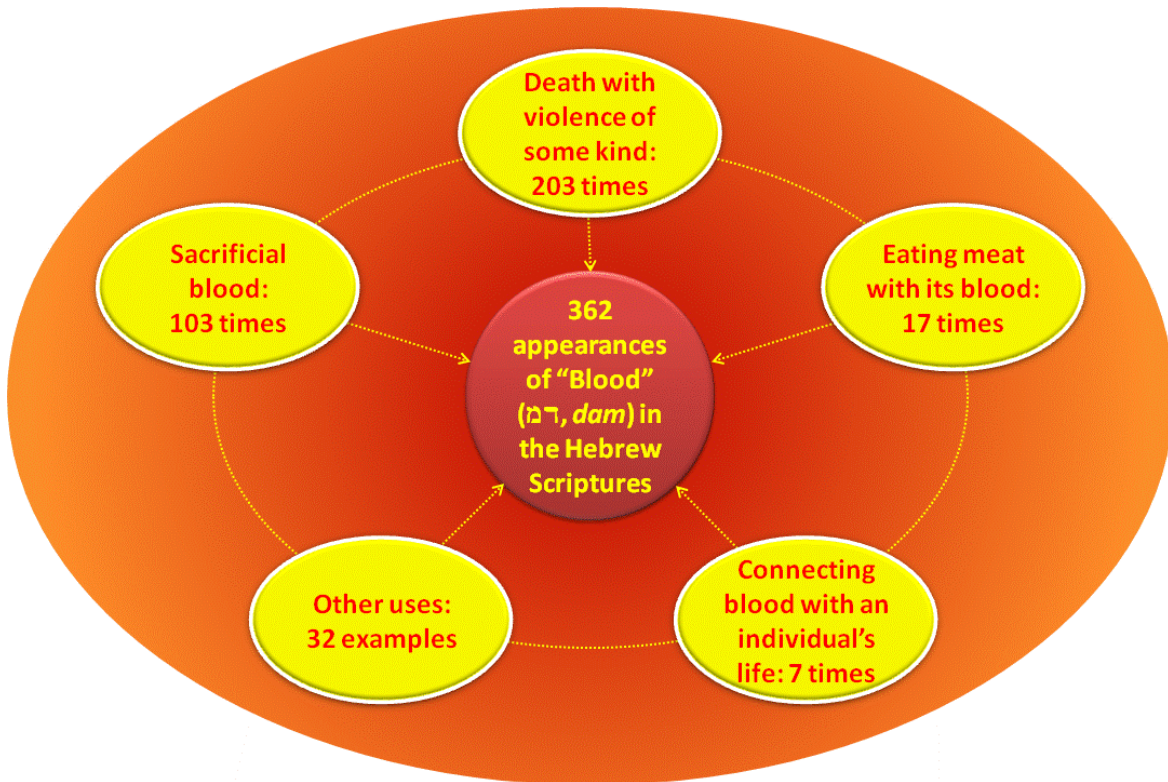
³ *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, Leon Morris, chapter 3, page 117.

⁴ *New and Living Way: An Explanation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Antony Snell SSM. The Faith Press 1959, Appendix: page 165.

has been taken. So “**blood**” became a word-symbol for “**death**”. When the psalmist says, “What profit is there in my blood?” he means, “What profit is there in my death?” (Ps. 30: 9) ⁵

“Blood” in the Hebrew Scriptures

The [Hebrew] word dam [דָּם, blood] is used in the Hebrew Bible 362 times with various shades of meaning. ... **The commonest use of dam is to denote death by violence.** ... The use of blood to denote violent death is not specially located in any part of the Old Testament, and is found almost throughout. As far as it goes, the statistical evidence indicates that the association most likely to be conjured up when the Hebrews heard the word “blood” was that of violent death.⁶



“From these figures it is clear that the commonest use of dam is to denote death by violence, and, in particular, that this use is found about twice as often as that to denote the blood of sacrifice. There is a difference also in distribution, for the blood of the sacrifices is often mentioned in Leviticus and Exodus (the actual figures are fifty-nine for Leviticus and nineteen for Exodus), but rarely elsewhere, there being no more than twenty-five references to

⁵ *The Meaning of the Word 'Blood' In Scripture*, A.M. Stibbs, page 9.

⁶ *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, Leon Morris, chapter 3, pages 112 – 114.

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sacrificial blood in all the rest of the Old Testament. By contrast the use of blood to denote violent death is not specially located in any part of the Old Testament, and is found almost throughout. As far as it goes, the statistical evidence indicates that the association most likely to be conjured up when the Hebrews heard the word 'blood' was that of violent death.”⁷

Blood shed stands, therefore, not for the release of life from the burden of the flesh, but for the bringing to an end of life in the flesh. It **is a witness to physical death**, not an evidence of spiritual survival.⁸

The use of the term *dam* in the Old Testament indicates that it **signifies life violently taken**.⁹

When the Hebrew heard the word "blood", he most likely thought of **a violent death and in particular to denote the blood of sacrifices**. There was a close connection between life and blood in Hebrew thought. **No reference is found to blood as indicating life distinct from death**. Leviticus 17:11 is not referring to life as existent after the blood has been poured out, but to death. It is a life given up in death. The life ceases to exist when the blood is poured out. **The shedding of blood stands for the bringing to an end of a life in the flesh. It is referring to physical death.** "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." ...

The Passover lamb and the scapegoat are substitutes for the offerer. **The animal sacrifice was a sign that death had already taken place**. Therefore, the death angel passed over that individual. It is the termination of life, the infliction of death that atones. Death had violently taken place as a substitute in the Passover sacrifice (Exodus 12:13).

The shedding of blood signifies a violent death, killing or murder. Life is associated with blood that flows through our veins. Life was given up in the pouring out of its precious blood. Death occurred. The dominant thought of the Old Testament is the infliction of death rather than the release of life. **The natural interpretation**

⁷ *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, Leon Morris, chapter 3, pages 113 -- 114. ("It may well be that after examination it will appear that the meaning of sacrificial blood is essentially that of one of the other groups, but for the present it seems best to leave it as a separate group.")

⁸ *The Meaning of the Word 'Blood' In Scripture*, A.M. Stibbs, page 11.

⁹ *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, Leon Morris, chapter 3, page 121.

when we think of blood and shedding of blood is death. The "blood of Christ" is a clear expression for the death of Christ. Blood is the symbol of sacrificial death; a life poured out in death. It is not the releasing of life, but the end of the life, death. Redemption is only possible by blood life poured out. Hebrews 9:22 summarizes the whole Old Testament teaching on sacrifice.¹⁰

The Life of the Flesh

In Hebrew, the word "life" [נֶפֶשׁ, *nephesh*] is associated with blood at Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:11, and Deut. 12:23, and in the theory of sacrifice.

You must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.¹¹

For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.¹²

But be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life, and you must not eat the life with the meat.¹³

The Hebrew word for "life" in those verses is *nephesh* [נֶפֶשׁ].

[Nephesh] does not mean the principle of life, or 'life' as a general noun, but the special individual life of any living creature. It is this *nephesh* which is destroyed when the creature is killed, and it is irrelevant to argue that life goes on though this creature's life does not. **Hebrew has another word for 'life' in the more general sense, a word which does not come into the discussion about blood at all.**¹⁴

Nephesh, [נֶפֶשׁ] which is translated 'life' in Leviticus 17: 11, is not coterminous with the English 'life'. It can mean something very like 'life yielded up in death'. ...

The word [*nephesh*] is used in such a variety of ways with regard to death. But even more important for our present purpose are certain passages where *nephesh* plainly points to death. ...

The association of *nephesh* with *dam* in Leviticus 17: 11, etc., cannot be held to prove that life is thought of as still existent after the blood has been poured forth. This use of both *nephesh* and

¹⁰ *Leviticus 17:11 Blood of Atonement* at <http://www.abideinchrist.com/messages/lev17v11.html>

¹¹ Genesis 9:4. *The Holy Bible, New International Version*.

¹² Leviticus 17:11. *The Holy Bible, New International Version*.

¹³ Deuteronomy 12:23. *The Holy Bible, New International Version*.

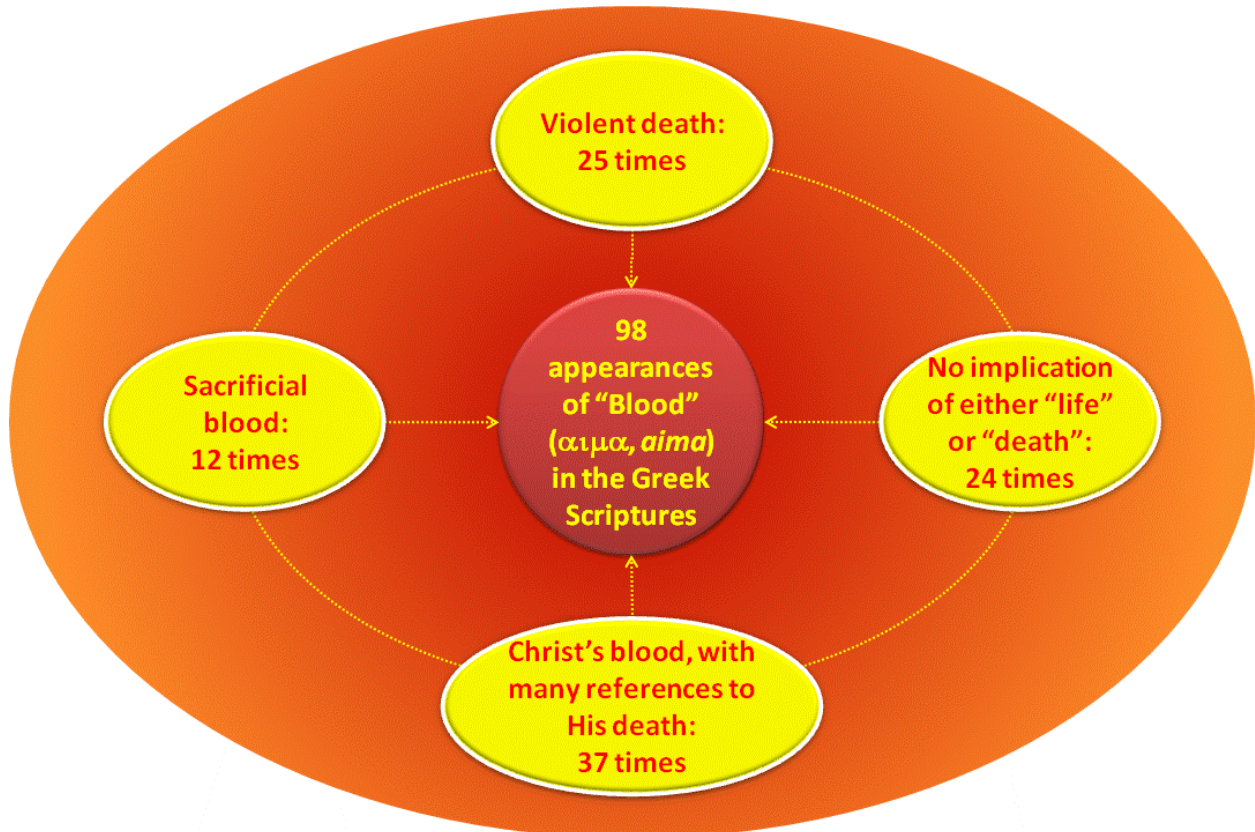
¹⁴ *New and Living Way: An Explanation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Antony Snell SSM. The Faith Press 1959, Appendix: page 165.

dam in other contexts makes it more probable that the meaning here is that of life given up in death. This is supported by the fact that it is 'the life of the flesh' that is said to be in the blood, and it is precisely this life which ceases to exist when the blood is poured out.¹⁵

"Blood" in the Greek Scriptures

In the New Testament, the word 'blood' (Greek: *aima*), while it is sometimes used in its direct literal sense to describe actual blood, is much more often used, as in the Old Testament, in a metaphorical sense as a way of referring to violent death, and of connecting other people with it. ...

When "the souls of them that had been slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held" are said to cry, "How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood?" (Rev. 6:9, 19, RV) they obviously mean by "avenge our blood", "avenge our death", or rather "the causing of our death" and "the shedding of our blood" or as we might say, "our murder".¹⁶



¹⁵ *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, Leon Morris, chapter 3, pages 116-117.

¹⁶ *The Meaning of the Word 'Blood' In Scripture*, A.M. Stibbs, page 16.

It seems tolerably certain that in both the Old and New Testaments **the blood signifies essentially the death**. It is freely admitted that there are some passages in which it is possible to interpret the blood as signifying life, but even these yield a better sense (and one which is consistent with the wider biblical usage) if understood to mean “life given up in death”. In particular, there seems no reason for disputing the dictum of J. Behm: “ ‘Blood of Christ’ is like ‘cross’, only another, clearer expression for the death of Christ in its salvation meaning” (TWNT, I, p.173).¹⁷

Abel's Blood Cried Out

Since blood was the sign of Abel's death, it called out for vengeance and punishment.

This posthumous crying of Abel's blood is twice mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews: once in 11:4 the phrase “though dead, he still speaks,” and again in 12:24 where our Lord's blood is said to speak better than Abel. The second of these passages implies that **in a sacrifice blood cries beneficially, as in a murder it cries for punishment**: exactly, indeed, as the eighteenth-century Italian hymn says, “Abel's blood for vengeance pleaded to the skies, but the blood of Jesus for our pardon cries.” ...

There can never, either in the case of a sacrifice or a murder, be any question of the blood's having a posthumous active existence; but that shed blood is bound to “cry” in any case. If shed in accordance with God's provision, it will cry for good; if shed against God's will, it will cry for vengeance.¹⁸

Applying God's Principles

It is important to understand what the Bible is telling us on these matters, for this will help us take proper care of the gift of life that God has given us.

The ability to reason on **Bible principles** is especially important today. ... If we understand the relevant Bible principles, we should be able to **make wise decisions** that both satisfy our conscience and keep us in God's love.¹⁹

Every life (the individual life of every living creature, particularly human) is specially God's own peculiar possession and gift, and

¹⁷ *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, Leon Morris, chapter 3, page 126.

¹⁸ *New and Living Way: An Explanation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Antony Snell SSM. The Faith Press 1959, Appendix: pages 165 – 166.

¹⁹ *Keep Yourself in God's Love*, Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, page 74

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may therefore not be destroyed without guilt, unless this is done by his specific permission and command.²⁰

Any idea that “blood” symbolises “life” is only a very recent one, originating in 1881 with Bishop Westcott. This idea does not represent true Bible principles. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a detailed analysis, and the reader is referred to the sources listed at the conclusion.

Throughout Scripture, “blood” represents death, but in all of medical practice, the blood being offered does not represent the death of the donor. Whether in food or in sacrifice, the presence of the blood showed that the owner of that blood was dead. In the transfusion of blood, the presence of the blood does not show that the owner of that blood is dead.




Blood in Medical Procedures

In the medical transfusion of blood, it is not calling out for vengeance or punishment. It is provided as a gift of life, making it possible for another person to recover. A transfusion fully supports the Bible principle that life is sacred.

In Scripture	In a blood transfusion
<p>“Blood” always means the death of the victim.</p> <p>And the death is most often violent.</p>	<p>The donated blood does not indicate that the donor has died.</p>
<p>In the sacrificial system, the presence of blood showed that the victim had died.</p>	<p>The received blood is a fusion of donated body tissue.</p>
<p>Christ (DIED) for us. We have been justified by his (BLOOD) We were reconciled through the (DEATH) of [God’s] Son. (Romans 5:8-10, NIV)</p>	<p>The donated blood shows a willing support for anyone in need.</p> <p>It demonstrates the utmost respect for the value of life.</p>

²⁰ *New and Living Way: An Explanation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Antony Snell SSM. The Faith Press 1959, Appendix: page 165.

In a Sacrifice	In Food	In a medical procedure
The fat and the blood are to be kept for ritual sacrifice.	The absence of blood in food shows that the animal was dead before it is eaten.	The willingly given blood in the bag does NOT show that its owner is now dead.
The blood at the altar shows that its owner is now dead.	Neither human flesh nor human blood play any part in sacrifice or in Jewish diet.	The blood has been given to support a fellow human who is in need.
The blood had been the "life of the flesh", and it has now been taken away.		

		
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The Conclusion that the GB wants to arrive at

The Governing Body needs the word "blood" to represent "life", since it argues that the life in the blood is being used as food to *sustain* a patient.

A human is not to sustain his life with the blood of another creature (Genesis 9:3, 4).²¹

The Governing Body says that administering blood or its main constituent parts "feeds" or "sustains" a patient. The ideas of *feeding* and *sustaining* force the Governing Body to say that the "blood" represents "life". They start with their desired conclusion and use that to drive the reasoning it presents.

What God seeks

Jehovah's Witnesses are dying every day, because of their Governing Body's faulty Bible principles. God, however, seeks the transformation of the heart, rather than the offering of a sacrifice.

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.²²

²¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Question of Blood* page 17. (Page 14 of their booklet *Blood, Medicine and the Law of God* uses the expression, "to nourish".)

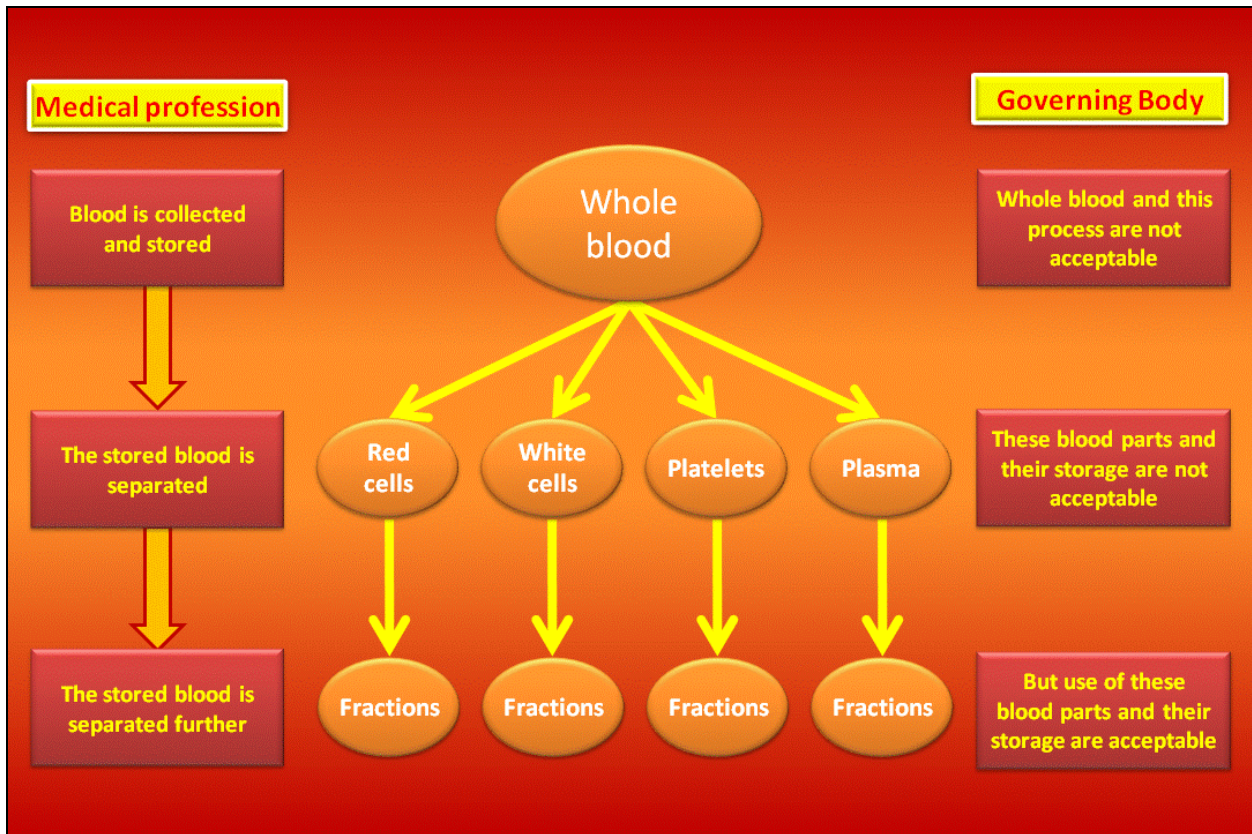
Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, "Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."²³

The GB's Inconsistent Attitude

As well as failing to follow true Bible principles, *The Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses* is neither consistent nor reasonable.

The Governing Body does allow its followers to accept some parts of blood. Further, the Governing Body has absolutely no problem with vaccinations that are made from animal's blood.

In addition, to obtain those elements of blood that the Governing Body does not condemn, the medical profession uses processes that the Governing Body condemns outright. The Governing Body says that blood may not be taken nor may it be stored, since this is against their "Bible principles". However, to obtain those parts of blood which the Governing Body does permit, the medical profession takes blood and stores it.



²² Psalm 51:16-17. *The Holy Bible, New International Version.*

²³ Psalm 40:6-8. *The Holy Bible, New International Version.*

While it speaks so strongly against the medical use of whole blood and some parts of blood, the Governing Body is not so concerned about removing every trace of blood or fat from food, which is spoken of explicitly in the Hebrew Scripture:

This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live: You must not eat any fat or any blood.²⁴

Summary and Conclusion

To convince its followers that they must refuse the medical use of whole blood and some elements of blood, the Governing Body relies on its false Bible principle that says “blood” means “life”. It needs to do this because it says that the received blood provides life and sustenance to the recipient. In doing this, the Governing Body is accepting a very recent invention that is not based on sound Bible principles.

As far as the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures are concerned, nothing could be further from the Truth, for they consistently apply the meaning of *death* to “blood”, and it is usually a violent death. In the case of murder, such as with Cain and Abel, the word “blood” is associated with the idea of *guilt* and the calling for *vengeance and justice*. None of these Bible principles applies in the transfusion of blood.

Apart from its inability to understand Scripture, the Governing Body is inconsistent in its stance. It denies its followers the medical use of whole blood, the primary constituent parts of blood, as well as the process of donating, collecting and storing blood outside the body. However, the Governing Body allows its followers to accept vaccinations made from blood, and it allows the parts of blood that are derived from its primary constituent parts. These medical processes that the Governing Body finds acceptable rely on blood being donated, collected and stored, a process that the Governing Body condemns.

Accepting blood-based products and procedures allows the Governing Body and its followers to travel internationally – since that normally requires vaccinations – and there is a suggestion that otherwise some close personal lives could be placed in jeopardy.

Caution

This Study has focused on the **Bible** principles associated with the word “blood” and on the inconsistent and irrational views of the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

It is not the purpose of this Study to either advocate or to oppose the use of blood or its components in any specific instance.

Every medical procedure has the potential to harm the patient. The decision whether to accept any medical procedure must be made by trained medical experts in consultation with the patient or with the duly authorised representative.

²⁴ Lev 3:17. *The Holy Bible, New International Version.*

References

Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, Leon Morris, Chapter 3 is available at
http://www.jwstudies.com/apostolic_preaching_of_the_cross.pdf

New and Living Way: An Explanation of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Antony Snell SSM
pages 165 - 169 is available at http://www.jwstudies.com/blood_antony_snell.pdf

The Meaning of the Word 'Blood' In Scripture, A.M. Stibbs, is available at
http://www.jwstudies.com/The_Meaning_of_Blood_.pdf

and at

http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/blood_stibbs.pdf

My more thorough expositions of the subject of “blood” are available at
<http://www.jwstudies.com/blood>

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