

R [REDACTED] Jensen

24 Running Deer Road
Phenix City, Alabama 36870

Office: [REDACTED]
Home: [REDACTED]

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Watchtower Bible & Tract Society
Writing Department
25 Columbia Heights
Brooklyn, New York 11201

Re: Blood and upholding righteous standards

Dear Brothers

I appreciate your letter of May 30, 2001, and the telephone conversation of May 17th where some time was spent talking about two concerns, of many, raised in my correspondence on this subject of blood and upholding righteous standards. This is my final letter on the subject. It will express some thoughts regarding your latest comments, thoughts that are sincere and honest before God, and out of respect for Him and you brothers. I do not expect a personal reply.

Your letter states, "You present your reasons for concluding, since the Mosaic Law had been canceled, that the decision of the first-century governing body 'to keep abstaining... from blood and from things strangled' would be limited only to a reaffirmation of what you feel are the meaning and scope of the commands given by God to Noah in Genesis chapter 9 regarding respect for blood and life."

One of my reasons for concluding the decision to abstain from blood is limited to a reaffirmation of what God said to Noah is because our publications say, "*So, there was not an imposing on Gentile Christians of a responsibility to conform to the Mosaic Law or some portion of it but, rather, there was a confirming of standards recognized prior to Moses.*" (United Worship page 149) If, in respect to blood, the decision of the first-century governing body was "a confirming of standards recognized prior to Moses" and "not an imposing on Gentile Christians of a responsibility to conform to the Mosaic Law or some portion of it," then we must be able to prove our present application in accord with "standards recognized prior to Moses." In respect to blood, the only such stated biblical standard is, as indicated on the same page of the United Worship book, the law Jehovah gave to Noah as recorded at Genesis chapter 9. This is why part of my focus was so concentrated on what can be affirmed as recognized requirements from what was said to Noah.

As for what I feel is the meaning and scope of the commands given by God to Noah, scrupulously I have avoided reading my own ideas into the text of Genesis 9 in the way of deductions. Instead I have diligently looked at what God actually addressed and actually required without adding deductions to that. My comments about how Noah could have used blood without violating what he was told by God do not assert that Noah did use blood one way or another, or that God gave specific permission for that use. Those comments only assert what we know, that Noah could have used blood in other ways without violating what God required of him as recorded in the inspired Scriptures. In the main, there is no disagreement about what God addressed to Noah and what He required of Noah. We agree that, to Noah, Jehovah's command was given in relation to his killing animals for food. We also agree that Noah was told he could not eat blood from animals he slaughtered for food. Did Jehovah require more than He addressed or stated?

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Blood & Upholding Righteous Standards

In our conversation of May 17, 2001 much was said about what Noah may or may have not have deduced from what he was told by God in respect to blood. Nevertheless, what Noah might or might not have thought about what Jehovah said to him is just that, deduction. All we know for sure is what God said to Noah, which included what He required of Noah in light of His speaking and using of blood metaphorically for life. We need not try to deduce what Jehovah required of Noah in this respect. What God required was not left unstated, as though Noah would have to wonder or deduce what was expected. What did Jehovah address in his decree to Noah?

Your letter of May 30, 2001 agrees that God's command in Genesis chapter 9 "not to eat the blood with the flesh admittedly was given to Noah in relation to his killing animals for food." This is exactly what God addressed in his decree to Noah, and it agrees with what we have published in our literature on the subject. Though your letter goes on to say, "[Noah] would have no basis for assuming that he could eat blood otherwise," it is also true that God did not address to Noah how he should otherwise use blood or whether he could or could not otherwise use blood, or eat unbled carcasses he had not killed. It is true that Noah might have had a basis for deducing that he should treat blood special, but it is also true that God did not require this of him. Furthermore, it is also true that, prior to the flood, Noah could already have been using blood for some purpose as were animals skins and, perhaps, other parts such as ligaments. Jehovah himself set the standard of man using animal carcasses by providing clothing of animal skins to Adam and Eve. Accordingly, since God had not forbidden other uses of blood, Noah might also have had basis for deducing that if God did not want blood used in this fashion then He would have said so. You raise the question of whether Noah could eat blood taken from an animal still living, such as some Masai people do. God gave animals to Noah to serve as food. (Gen. 9:2,3) But Noah was prohibited from eating living animals because explicitly God prohibited him from eating animals with nephesh. (Gen. 9:4) Animals eaten in the manner described conflicts with God's law to Noah because they were yet living. Quite literally, they have nephesh. Since Noah was prohibited from eating animals yet with nephesh, then God's requirements to Noah forbade the practice you questioned¹. Did Jehovah require more of Noah than He stated explicitly?

Certain deductions are made in your letter from the fact that Jehovah spoke of blood illustratively for life. But should we deduce what prohibitions Jehovah expects of us from this illustrative use of blood or should we ask ourselves, "As a result of God's illustrative language, what did He require?" Knowing what God requires as a result does not need deduction because God stated His requirements. On the other hand, concluding that Jehovah intended more than He stated demands deductions on our part. As a congregation, should we insist on what God stated as His requirements or what we deduce beyond that? This is at the crux of one of my concerns, and it deals with "a confirming of standards recognized prior to Moses." Should we understand this confirmation from explicit requirements recognized prior to Moses, or otherwise?

Your letter addresses the idea of accepting certain principles from the Mosaic Law as a means of providing guidance in the matter of abstaining from blood. I fully appreciate what Jehovah required of Jews and Jewish proselytes. Admittedly, early Jewish Christians probably kept many provisions of the Mosaic Law, including probably those on blood too, whether doing so was required or not. Though I appreciate this, there remains the text of Deuteronomy 14:21, also part of the Mosaic Law, and how it harmonizes or not with our conclusions. Your letter's address of this text does not contain reasoning demonstrating that it is contrary to what God required of Noah. The assertion is made that "Jehovah evidently did not see fit at the time to strictly enforce his requirements upon those who did not know him." But this assertion assumes that the provision of giving unbled carcasses as food was contrary to Jehovah's requirements for non-Jews as given to Noah. Since,

¹ Eating excretions like milk is different than eating blood of a living animal. Milk is excreted by designation; blood is not. Eating blood or flesh of a living animal is an assault whereas eating a natural excretion is not. Under the Noachian decree when an animal is assaulted for food it must be killed and its blood not eaten.

admittedly, God only addressed eating blood of slaughtered animals to Noah, then concluding that eating unbled and unslaughtered carcasses was a violation of what God required to Noah is a deduction rather than a direct reading of God's requirements for Noah's offspring. I would ask: If Deuteronomy 14:21 is in harmony with God's requirements to Noah, what then? How would that affect our understanding and teaching? And, I would certainly think we should assume that each portion of the Bible reflects God's will in harmony with his fundamental standards, unless it can be conclusively demonstrated otherwise². (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17) So, while I agree with the idea that principles set forth in the Mosaic Law do provide us with guidance, the question is, if Deuteronomy 14:21 is, in principle, harmonious with Genesis 9, then what guidance does that give us in relation to the Christian standard to abstain from blood? Does God require us to abstain from blood as Noah was required to abstain from blood, or as Jews were required to abstain from blood? This too gets back to the important question: what standard was recognized prior to Moses?

I agree that early Christians were influenced by what they learned about and from the Mosaic Law. But, in respect to blood, if what was required of Jews under the Law was more than what God required of Noah, and since God's spirit required abstinence from blood without further explanation, should we then deduce the more stringent requirements of the Mosaic Law, which requirements were part and parcel with atonement sacrifices that are no longer required? This question remains because our reasoning so far has not proved, or evidenced, that Deuteronomy 14:21 is anything less than harmonious with Genesis chapter 9. If it is harmonious then Noah and his offspring were not required to abstain from blood to the same extent that Jews had to abstain from blood. Also, if Deuteronomy 14:21 is harmonious with Genesis chapter 9 that would not make God's requirement to Noah contrary to the Law of Moses, as if the two would become disharmonious. The Law of Moses would not disagree with requirements given to Noah, the Law of Moses would simply require more because of its additional requirements of sacred sacrifices.

An ancillary illustration was raised regarding the fatty tails of sheep. Your letter asks: "Would an Israelite be able to eat this fatty tail, since it was detached from the animal that was still alive?" Unlike what was said to Noah about blood, the Law of Moses addressed fat—and blood—aside from whether its original host had been killed or not. That is, beyond addressing fat of animals slaughtered for sacrifice, the Law of Moses explicitly addresses fat in the abstract, as a substance to abstain from eating regardless of circumstances. The very text cited of Leviticus 3:17 unequivocally states, "It is a statute to time indefinite for your generations, in all your dwelling places: You must not eat any fat or any blood at all." As with blood, Israelites were not to eat any fat, period. Context of these requirements allows no room for distinction between whether the fat—or blood—was taken from a living or dead creature, or one slaughtered or unslaughtered. For this reason I do not see relevance in your illustration for our subject. In respect to blood, what was said to Noah was not as restrictive as what was later said and imposed on Jews under the Law of Moses. Just as Noah was not told to waste blood out onto the ground as was later required of Israel, he was also not told unequivocally that he could

² God allowing and, in some cases, providing for polygamy is not evidence that Deuteronomy 14:21 contains a similar deviation on Jehovah's part because they are not the same subject. At most God's allowance and provision for polygamy shows that He does sometimes deviate from His norm, not that deviation is common or that we must conclude it by default because a text does not otherwise accord with a particular conclusion of ours (such a conclusion would be circular reasoning). In the case of polygamy we have Biblical texts demonstrating that this provision was a deviation. We have the account in Genesis of God's comments regarding the first marriage and we have Jesus' statement that those words represent God's standard. This is enough to establish that polygamy provided for in the Mosaic Law was a deviation from God's norm. But such is not the case with Deuteronomy 14:21 and the subject of blood because Deuteronomy 14:21 speaks of eating unbled flesh of unslaughtered animals, not eating unbled flesh of slaughtered animals as forbidden to Noah. So there is no obvious discord between the two texts. Also, unlike the subject of polygamy, there is no defining text in the Christian scriptures specifying that Deuteronomy 14:21 is a deviation from God's norm for humankind apart from the Law of Moses. Christian texts such as Acts 15:28,29 do not provide this definition because those texts cannot be understood by themselves, that is without definition from elsewhere in the Bible—and that is the whole question, that is, what texts are applicable and do the defining.

not eat any blood. He was told not to eat the blood of animals whose life he had taken in order to sustain his own with a meal. Of course, what we deduce from that is another matter.

Interestingly, God's spirit did not inspire the first-century governing body to say 'abstain from any sort of blood' or, 'abstain from all blood,' just as it did not inspire 'abstain from feeling of blood' or, 'abstain from looking at blood.' The spirit moved those brothers to say "abstain from... blood," which, though indicating an abstention and a subject of abstention, does not by itself indicate exactly what is required. The decree is not absolute in that it cannot be understood by itself. It lacks defining elements like the extent or type of abstention and what blood should be abstained from. Again, this is why the decree requires definition from elsewhere in the Bible, and is another reason for my inquiries. If the decree were absolute then it would not require this external definition, that is external of the three texts in the Christian Scriptures where it is mentioned.

Finally, I noticed that your letter does not comment on the conflicting matter addressed in my letter, and discussed on the telephone, about us using from the donated and stored blood supply but forbidding the replenishing of the very same thing we deplete. In conversation it was stated to me that it is a personal conscience matter whether a Christian decides to donate blood that will be used in fractionated forms, the same fractionated forms that we likewise leave to personal conscience as to acceptance. I was told that this act being left up to each Christian's conscience naturally follows from what we have already published about decisions to accept fractions of blood. If put on the spot and asked about this issue, I will repeat the same thing told me, that each one must decide this matter for themselves before God as a matter of personal conscience. If asked for verification on this point, I can only show what our publications have stated, and what naturally follows from that.

I appreciate the forbearance of you brothers, and your willingness to reply to a few of my questions asked. Please do not feel I am pitting my views against those of our governing body. I am merely trying to use my mental and spiritual faculties as reasonably, objectively and conscientiously as possible, and that with Jehovah's written word the Bible in full and prayerful view. (Prov. 3:5,6; Acts 17:2,3,11; 1 John 4:1) If I was content to lean on my own understanding, as if pitting my personal views against anyone else's, my efforts would not be so intensely focused on reasoning from the Scriptures and requesting assistance from you brothers. I agree that "logically, to enjoy God's backing, one must teach only what God reveals in his Word and reject teachings based on human wisdom or tradition." (The Watchtower, June 1, 2001 page 14) Rest assured that my faith in God and His wonderful promises has not subsided. I continue in His service.

Respectfully,
Your fellow servant of Jehovah



Robert Jensen