

Deuteronomy 12:15-16

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-12/deuteronomy-1215-16/>

Moses gives guidelines concerning the slaughter of animals to be used for meals and not for sacrifices.

After describing the place where offerings and sacrifices were to be made, Moses then discussed the slaughter of animals that were not used in sacrifices. He told them, *However, you may slaughter and eat meat within any of your gates.* The phrase *within any of your gates* means to be inside the city or town where this was being done.

This was a major policy change for Israel. During the exodus, animals could be slaughtered only at the tabernacle door ([Leviticus 17:3 – 6](#)). This practice worked well when the Israelites dwelt near a religious site, such as when they camped around the tabernacle in the wilderness. However, such a practice would be difficult, even impossible, in the Promised Land since some people would live far from the central sanctuary which the LORD chose (vv. 20-22). Therefore, Moses allowed the Israelites to slaughter and eat animals *within their gates*.

Also, they were allowed to eat *whatever you desire, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you.* This was based on the provision of the LORD. The LORD has specified what was clean. It was those foods God had *given*. But within that category, they could eat whatever they chose.

Moses made it clear to the Israelites that the act of slaughtering animals at home was not a part of their prescribed ceremonial worship. As such, there was no need to limit the *slaughter* of animals for food to the place which the Suzerain (Ruler) God chose. The Israelites could *slaughter* animals for food *within any* of their *gates*, according to the means the Suzerain God has provided for them. And since the *slaughter* of animals for food was not a part of ceremonial worship, both *the unclean and the clean may eat of it*.

The phrase *the unclean and the clean may eat of it* does not refer to physical cleanliness. Rather, the phrase refers to ceremonial impurity and purity. Being *unclean* included many everyday circumstances, such as a woman birthing a child, or someone having touched a dead carcass ([Lev 11:15;12:1-](#)

7). That which was unclean was prevented from taking part in community worship until the proper ritual had been done to remove the impurity of that person ([Leviticus 11-15](#); [Numbers 19](#)). Since this provision dealt with slaughtering animals for consumption as food, there was no distinction between *unclean and clean*. Both were invited to eat and gain sustenance. Both the clean and the unclean were allowed to partake of the meal served in the home.

The phrase *as of the gazelle and the deer* means the Israelites were allowed to eat from their herds and flocks the same as they could eat the *gazelle and the deer*. The *gazelle and the deer* were wild animals and were acceptable to eat under the Law ([Deuteronomy 14:4 – 5](#)). But being wild animals, the *gazelle and the deer* were not suitable for sacrificial slaughter. They would only be eaten in the home. Sacrificial animals were limited to domestic animals from the herd and flock ([Leviticus 1:2](#)). The point is that the Israelites were allowed to eat meat in the home from the herd and flock (animals suitable for sacrifice) just as they could eat wild animals (animals not suitable for sacrifice).

Although the slaughter of animals for food was permitted, the blood was prohibited from being consumed. Moses said, *Only you shall not eat the blood; you are to pour it out on the ground like water*. In [Leviticus 17](#), the Suzerain God gave the reasons why the blood of animals was not to be eaten: because *the life of all flesh is its blood* ([Leviticus 17:14](#)), the LORD prohibited eating the blood. Since blood symbolized life, it belonged to the Life-giver, God Himself. It was not to be shed nor consumed by humans. Thus, when the people of Israel simply slaughtered animals to eat meat at home, they were to drain the blood from the meat and *pour it out on the ground like water*.

In both cases, the result is the same: the blood of the animal was not to be consumed out of respect for life. After Noah's flood, God gave the meat of animals to humans to eat, likely because the earth's productivity was so diminished ([Genesis 9:1-4](#)). However, God forbade the consumption of blood in that grant. Although animals were given to humans for food, their life was still precious, and to be respected.

Biblical Text:

¹⁵ **“However, you may slaughter and eat meat within any of your gates, whatever you desire, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it, as**

of the gazelle and the deer. ¹⁶ Only you shall not eat the blood; you are to pour it out on the ground like water.