

Leviticus: Explanatory Notes

I. PROHIBITION OF BLOOD.

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the Hebrews only, and his fondest expectations seem realised if he can induce *them* to act upon his warning; but the author of the Levitical ordinance boldly includes in its operation the non-Israelites also who happen to live in the Hebrew territory; he uncompromisingly proclaims the law, "No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall the stranger that sojourns among you eat blood"; he menaces with excision equally the one and the other in case the command is transgressed⁹; and he declares the obligation binding "as an eternal statute for all generations throughout all dwellings"¹⁰. The progress in the conception of the law is manifest; it appears natural and organic — provided the relative age of the component parts of the Pentateuch is rightly estimated.

But now a difficulty arose. As according to the Levitical writer, the chief reason for abstaining from blood, was its connection with the work of atonement, the law could consistently apply to the sacrificial animals only, the ox, the sheep, and the goat, the pigeon and the turtle-dove, since no other served for expiation. This is indeed the logical consequence. But such restriction would have shocked the feeling and consciousness of the nation, which had long since been taught to avoid the blood of every eatable beast, such as the roebuck and the hart¹¹; and it would have been abhorred by no one more strongly than by the Levitical author himself; he, therefore, so glaringly ignored the perplexing dilemma into which he had been pressed by his new principle, that immediately after its statement he urged, "You shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh"¹²; he seems indeed to have been aware of the untoward difficulty, since, in order to evade it, and to support the universal injunction, he deemed it necessary to fall back upon the old and time-honoured maxim, "For the life of all flesh is its soul". Yet the Levitical view prevailed so far, that the blood of quadrupeds and birds only, but not the blood of fishes, was prohibited¹³, evidently because fishes were never offered as sacrifices, though primitively their blood also seems to have been shunned as representing the soul or the life¹⁴. The Levitical theory obtained still greater force through Jewish tradition which, considering the subject from every aspect, permitted the blood of clean locusts also, unconcerned at the palpable violation of the fundamental principle that "the blood is the soul"; and starting from

⁹ Lev. XVII. 10, 12, 13.

¹² Lev. XVII. 14.

¹⁰ Lev. III. 17; VII. 26; comp.

¹³ Lev. VII. 26.

Exod. XII. 14, 20, 24.

¹⁴ Gen. IX. 4; comp. vers. 2, 3.

¹¹ Comp. Deut. XII. 15, 16; XV. 22, 23.

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