

Deuteronomy 12:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh.

Analysis

Repeating the blood prohibition: 'Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh.' The emphatic chazaq (חִזָּק, 'be strong/firm') stresses resolve needed to obey. The theological explanation: 'the blood is the life' (הַדָּם הוּא הַנֶּפֶשׁ, hadam hu hanephesh, literally 'the blood is the soul/life'). Blood represents the life-force, which belongs to God alone. Consuming blood would be appropriating what is God's. The parallel phrasing 'thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh' clarifies the principle: eating blood is eating life itself, which is sacrilege. This unchanging prohibition maintains respect for life's sanctity.

Historical Context

This principle appears in Genesis 9:4 (Noahic covenant), Leviticus 17:11 (Mosaic covenant), and Acts 15:20 (apostolic council). Its persistence across covenants suggests perpetual moral principle, not merely ceremonial. Ancient Near Eastern sacrifice often involved consuming blood to commune with deity; Israel's prohibition distinguished them. Blood's atoning role (Leviticus 17:11) requires treating it as sacred. Christ's blood, poured out for atonement, fulfills and transcends this symbolism (Hebrews 9:11-14).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the equation 'blood = life' illuminate Christ's sacrifice as giving His life for ours?
2. Why does God insist on respect for blood even in non-sacrificial contexts?
3. What does consuming Christ's blood symbolically (communion) signify given the prohibition on literal blood consumption?

Interlinear Text

בָּרָךְ	בְּרָךְ	לְבָרָךְ	תְּאַכֵּל	כִּי	פֶּן	כִּי
H7535	Only be sure	H1115	and thou mayest not eat	for the blood	H3588	
	H2388		H398	H1818		
פֶּן	כִּי	אַיִל	תְּאַכֵּל	פֶּן	כִּי	עַמְּדָה
for the blood	H1931	is the life	H3808	and thou mayest not eat	is the life	H5973
		H5315		H398	H5315	
בְּשֶׁרֶת						
with the flesh						
	H1320					

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 17:11 (Blood): For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.

Genesis 9:4 (Blood): But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.

Deuteronomy 12:16 (Blood): Only ye shall not eat the blood; ye shall pour it upon the earth as water.

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