

### Clean and Unclean Food

#### Deuteronomy 14

**Deuteronomy 14:1-2** - *“You are the children of the Lord your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead. <sup>2</sup> For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”*

#### Background Notes

The primary subject in Deuteronomy 13 was commands about false prophets. Israel was to show no tolerance in this area, because God wanted His people to be set apart from the foreign nations and their pagan religions.

In chapter 13 we saw that God allowed false prophets to arise as a test of faith for His people. Would God's people remain faithful to the Lord - or would they fall away into idolatry? The false prophets were also a test of the people's faithfulness to the laws of the Lord. Would they judge and eliminate the false prophets as God's laws required - or would they let them live, and thus reap the consequences of disobedience? God wanted His people to be set apart from all the surrounding pagan nations, and set apart from any evil influence of the false prophets.

In chapter 14 God taught His people that they were not only to be set apart from the practices of pagan nations, but they were to be set apart by their distinctive ***lifestyle*** – a lifestyle that would reflect God's holiness. They were not to cut themselves nor shave the front of their heads when mourning for the dead (v1). Those practices were connected with Canaanite mourning, and God's people Israel were to be different. They were not to get involved. This law was also given in Leviticus 19:27-28: *“You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard. You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the Lord.”*

The reason for all these laws and restrictions was that God's people were to be a separate people - a holy people. God's chosen people were to be set apart for the Lord from all other peoples on the face of the earth (v2). This unique position was to be reflected in the very lifestyle of the children of Israel. Chapter 14 gave two areas where Israel was to be different and distinct among the nations: the area of food and the area of money.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The Lord's people should be different than the world's people in what they consume.

**Deuteronomy 14:3-21** - *"You shall not eat any detestable thing. <sup>4</sup> These are the animals which you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, <sup>5</sup> the deer, the gazelle, the roe deer, the wild goat, the mountain goat, the antelope, and the mountain sheep. <sup>6</sup> And you may eat every animal with cloven hooves, having the hoof split into two parts, and that chews the cud, among the animals. <sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, of those that chew the cud or have cloven hooves, you shall not eat, such as these: the camel, the hare, and the rock hyrax; for they chew the cud but do not have cloven hooves; they are unclean for you. <sup>8</sup> Also the swine is unclean for you, because it has cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud; you shall not eat their flesh or touch their dead carcasses.*

<sup>9</sup>*"These you may eat of all that are in the waters: you may eat all that have fins and scales. <sup>10</sup> And whatever does not have fins and scales you shall not eat; it is unclean for you.*

<sup>11</sup>*"All clean birds you may eat. <sup>12</sup> But these you shall not eat: the eagle, the vulture, the buzzard, <sup>13</sup> the red kite, the falcon, and the kite after their kinds; <sup>14</sup> every raven after its kind; <sup>15</sup> the ostrich, the short-eared owl, the sea gull, and the hawk after their kinds; <sup>16</sup> the little owl, the screech owl, the white owl, <sup>17</sup> the jackdaw, the carrion vulture, the fisher owl, <sup>18</sup> the stork, the heron after its kind, and the hoopoe and the bat. <sup>19</sup> "Also every creeping thing that flies is unclean for you; they shall not be eaten. <sup>20</sup> "You may eat all clean birds.*

<sup>21</sup>*"You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to the alien who is within your gates, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner; for you are a holy people to the Lord your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk."*

This section is a review of the dietary laws that were given in Leviticus 11. When we read these verses, the first two questions that probably come to mind are: 1) why did God give these laws? And 2) why exactly were certain animals, and birds, and fish clean and others unclean? Why did a cloven hoof and chewing the cud make an animal "clean," whereas if it lacked these features it was "unclean"? By the way, the fact that the rabbit or rock badger do not regurgitate their food is not a scientific error in the Bible. Their constant chewing falls within the scope of the Hebrew phrase that was used here, and was rendered "chew the cud" in most translations.

Why did the Lord give these laws to His people in the Old Testament? We don't have all the answers to our questions about these clean and unclean laws, but let me share some reasons that are probably part of the answer.

**a. For hygienic purposes.**

Without refrigeration and the knowledge of disease and bacteria that we have today, God's people needed these dietary laws to stay healthy. In the hot climate of the Middle East, meat would decay rapidly. We know that many of these creatures could carry disease. By the way, the fact that the people of Israel were not to eat anything that died of itself (v21), but they could give it to aliens or sell it to foreigners - this did not mean that God was allowing them to pass disease on to foreigners! No! Under the Law, the children of Israel were not to touch anything that had died, including humans.

**b. To keep God's people separate from any pagan practices and any possible syncretism.**

For example, the law that God's people were not to boil a young goat in its mother's milk (v21). We know from the ancient Rash Shamrah tablets that this was a pagan Canaanite practice. They believed that this practice would increase the fertility of their fields and flocks. So some of the clean and unclean laws were meant to clearly separate God's people from any superstitious or idolatrous practices.

**c. For the spiritual lessons and spiritual pictures associated with these laws.**

Let's face it. We are what we eat, both physically and spiritually. What we consume greatly affects us. For example, what books are we consuming? What are we watching on TV? What are we consuming on the internet? Is it clean or unclean? Does our daily diet include the Word of God?

Maybe the combination of "chewing the cud" and the "cloven hoof" are a spiritual picture - that "what we digest" and "how we walk" go together. The Lord's people should be different than the world's people in what they consume.

## **2. The Lord's people should be different than the world's people in how they give.**

**Deuteronomy 14:22-29** - *"You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. <sup>23</sup> And you shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always. <sup>24</sup> But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the Lord your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the Lord your God has blessed you, <sup>25</sup> then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses. <sup>26</sup> And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household. <sup>27</sup> You shall not forsake the Levite who is within your gates, for he has no part nor inheritance with you.*

<sup>28</sup> *"At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. <sup>29</sup> And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do."*

Laws about the required tithe were given in Leviticus 28 and Numbers 18. The question here is whether the required tithe in Deuteronomy 14 was the same tithe - or a second tithe? Some early rabbinic commentaries state that the Deuteronomy 14 tithe was a second tithe that was brought to Jerusalem. It was given every three years. Part of it was used as a feast of celebration before the Lord, and the rest was given to the Levites.

If the distance from their homes to Jerusalem was great, their grain and flocks could be exchanged for money, and the money brought before the Lord. The portion for the feast of celebration could be used for whatever meal they wanted, including wine made from grapes, or stronger drink made from grain (v26). (However, this did not mean that they could get drunk!)

The second part of this tithe would go to the Levites who lived in their hometowns. This part of the tithe provided for the Levites, and for the orphans, widows, and aliens who were in that town. *“And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do”* (v29). This system of giving was unique in the ancient world. God’s people were different from the world’s people in their giving!

This should be true today as well. The New Testament doesn’t command Christians to tithe, but if we follow the principles of giving that are taught in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, we will be **generous!** And that means we’ll **at least** be tithing! The Lord’s people should be different than the world’s people in how they give.

## Practical Application

### Dare to be different!

We often hear that we should “dare to be a Daniel” in our Christian courage and backbone. What about daring to be different in what we consume and what we feed our minds on? How about daring to be different in our giving? Are we generous in our giving - or do we only give token amounts to the Lord?

Is there any significant difference between us and the unbeliever in what we feed into our minds and in how much we give away of our money? Let’s hope there’s a difference! If we’re to stand out as God’s people in a dark world, there must be some **visible differences** in the way we live!

Dare to be different!