

DEUTERONOMY

Lesson 18 - Chapter 14

Last week we ended part way through Deuteronomy chapter 14; and we spent most of our time discussing the God-principle of the purpose of the human will. During that discussion I told you that the purpose for the human will is to make moral choices; and that a moral choice is but to choose between obedience or disobedience to God's written laws and commands as directed by the Holy Spirit. Everything that falls outside of moral choice is but a personal preference and preferences are not governed (generally speaking) by God's laws and commands. A preference is something like choosing between planting Red Roses or Yellow Roses; or between going to a church service at 9 am or 11 am; or choosing to own an NIV Bible instead of a KJV Bible. None of these choices involves sin, while all moral choices do.

The conclusion was that, as St. Paul said, without Law there can be no sin. Therefore the Law MUST continue to exist (just as Yeshua says it does), otherwise how would we have any moral choices to make? In the case of Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, we see that if there are no rules or boundaries then there are no moral choices. Sin is the act of making a moral choice that is against God (such as directly violating His scriptural laws and commands). And if, as it was for Adam and Eve BEFORE that first law was given to them (the law against eating that particular fruit), mankind has no rules then sinning becomes an impossibility so why would we need to be saved from sins that can't even be committed?

I also commented that we should take note that the very first law God ever created for mankind concerned food (eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil) so food is what chapter 14 talks about. The Lord originally used food to demonstrate that He makes distinctions; that He divides and separates. The Lord defines boundaries for mankind; He prohibits and He permits. Dividing and separating is perhaps the primary characteristic activity of God and it shows us what He approves and disapproves of. I hope you heard what I just said. Probably God's most visible and preeminent activity is dividing and separating (the activity that He seems to use so prevalently to achieve His goals is division and separation). The act of salvation is precisely dividing and separating because some will gain salvation and others won't, according to a line in the sand that the Lord has drawn. Those who choose to stand on one side of the line gain salvation and eternal life, those on the other side don't.

God began dividing and separating when He divided dry land from the waters of the seas;

when He divided night from day; when He divided good from evil. One could say He also divided the sexes male from female. He eventually divided and separated mankind into tribes, then nations; then He divided and separated the nation of Israel as a set apart nation from all others. Then He divided and separated the tribe of Levi away from the other tribes of Israel, and divided them even further into Priests and non-Priests.

But the Lord also divided things up in other ways, and food is one of those ways. He divided food up into the suitable and unsuitable; the ritually clean and unclean, the acceptable and the unacceptable. Before we re-read the food section of Deuteronomy 14 let me state something that I am unequivocal and unyielding about: the separation He makes between clean and unclean items for eating has nothing to do with any human concept of rational, logical, or hygienic reasons. That dietary health might enter *the* equation in certain instances is completely secondary and it is absolutely NOTHING that we should point to as the method the Lord used to create the division between clean and unclean foods. In fact this notion entertained today by Jews and by a growing group of Christians that the foods listed as clean is inherently healthier than the list of unclean foods simply does not bear itself out in reality. That is not to say that in eating a biblically kosher diet that there are not health blessings bestowed upon us in a spiritual and supernatural way as a divine blessing due to our obedience to the Word of God. But the foods themselves don't necessarily have direct inherent health benefit (and others direct inherent health negatives although it is certainly possible that some might). The Japanese, for instance, are as equally famous for eating sea foods that are specifically banned as unclean as they are for living extraordinarily healthy and long lives. The Chinese and many other cultures eat animals that have paws (something specifically excluded as food) and there is no evidence that they live shorter lives or less healthy lives than anyone else. The idea that the list of biblically clean foods was based on hygiene and health is incorrect. That notion came from Jewish writers of the Middle Ages, many of whom had become famous physicians; and it has been proven to have little basis.

Rather the Lord states emphatically that the only reason for requiring Israel to eat Kosher is that Israel is holy and following God's dietary laws is one of the components of their maintaining their holiness when accomplished within the proper context of trusting and loving Yehoveh. We will find sections of the OT whereby some of the Canaanites actually decided to obey some of Israel's food laws, and even other laws concerning the care and maintenance of the fields used for crops because they saw a certain value and advantage to it; but they didn't trust Yehoveh so what was holy for Israel was simply mimicking the holy and was thus merely common for them. Now by way of example, the Canaanites certainly may have gained a physical advantage by letting their fields rest every 7 years, if they hadn't done so before. But they did NOT gain the blessings of holiness from God (or the things that come with it) simply by obeying some of those commands in mechanical fashion.

By dividing and separating food into clean and unclean the Lord is giving us yet another physical and visible demonstration of a heavenly spiritual principle: He **declares** what is holy (for His own mysterious reasons) and all else is not. Yet holy things are intended only for holy

people. Therefore it follows that a set apart people should only eat food that has been set apart and declared clean (meaning acceptable to the Lord). I know that many of you have finally accepted this principle that the holiness is defined by God alone, and yet I can tell you that others have come to me still not quite understanding the point I am making here (this is the reason I bring it up so often). NOTHING and no one but the Lord has self-created holiness. Every procedure, ritual, animal, instrument, object or law that God deems to be holy is holy only because He deems it; and it maintains that holiness only when it is used in the proper context. YOU, as a disciple of Yeshua, are holy ONLY because God has made a determination to GIVE you a holy status and you accepted it; and that determination is that IF you demonstrate your trust in Him by means of faith in His son THEN He will consider your sins paid for, your relationship with Him restored, and give you eternal life. Could the Lord have chosen another way to determine holy status? I imagine He could have; given time we could probably all think of a number of interesting ways the Lord could employ as the criteria for a man to be saved and ways to then follow. But, He didn't. Therefore one way is holy and another is not, and we are not given the option to choose other ways no matter how logical or tolerant or traditional or comfortable that they might seem to us.

Let's re-read Deuteronomy chapter 14 starting in verse 3 and to the end of the chapter.

READ DEUTERONOMY 14:3 – end

As we have covered all this in detail in our study of Leviticus we'll only lightly touch on the matter of food here in Deuteronomy. If you need a refresher I suggest you refer to some of Torah Class's recorded lessons.

Verse 3 sets the tone for what follows as well as establishing a general rule: no Hebrew is to eat anything disgusting, or better abominable. In Hebrew the word is **to'evah**; in English another good choice of words might be **abhorrent**. The idea is that to eat things that the Lord has not set apart as legitimate food is among the most displeasing things that one can do before God. **To'evah** is a strong Hebrew term reserved for things that are especially unclean, unholy, unlawful, and have absolutely no place in the life of one who calls the God of Israel their God. But don't be confused; this general rule of **to'evah** is not separate or different from the list of unclean animals the Lord is pronouncing in the next few verses. Rather these unclean animals ARE **to'evah**, abhorrent, to the Lord when used as food by Israel.

Allow me to remind you of another interesting principle that the Rabbis have been so good to observe: that which CAN technically be eaten and digested by a human does NOT make it legitimate food. None of us would walk outside, dig in the dirt, and eat earthworms because it is not food (even though it would probably not harm us). In other words, none of us would have

earthworms on our shopping list when we go to the Supermarket. Worms might be technically edible but are not biblically classified as food. It works the same way later on in the Bible; unclean food is not even spoken of or classified as “food”. If it is unclean, even though it might technically be edible, it is NOT FOOD. The term “food” is not applicable to those items God has declared as unclean.

Note that in verses 4 and 5 that a number of different animals are listed as suitable for food and therefore “clean”. Only three of those animals are domesticated animals and the rest are wild game. Canaan had an abundant supply of wild game and Israelites would wind up eating much deer, and antelope, and mountain goat and so on; all completely acceptable as food.

Verse 6 gives us the general criteria on how to determine a clean animal that is NOT on this list of 10 specific animals; it must BOTH chew the cud AND have a hoof that is separated into two. As verse 7 explains by means of example, camels, hares and the Coney (abundant and common animals in Canaan) DO chew the cud but they DON'T have a separated hoof so therefore these are NOT clean and must not be eaten. Then it goes on to say that the REASON pigs are unclean for Israel is because while a pig DOES have a separated hoof it does NOT chew the cud. Here is the perfect example of what I spoke of earlier: a cow is not necessarily more hygienic or healthier to eat than a pig even though God classifies one as clean and the other not. This idea that pigs eat bad things and therefore their meat is comparatively unhealthy doesn't follow because many acceptable wild animals for Israel (even domestic animals like the goat) will eat ANYTHING. Goodness, even chickens will eat practically anything. I'll never forget when I was just a young boy, living in the farm communities and ranchlands of Imperial Valley, California, when I was staying the weekend with a friend out on his family farm. We went out to gather some eggs from the chicken coup just in time to see a tiny mouse attempt to scurry across the dirt floor only to be instantly caught and eaten by a chicken with other chickens trying to join in the feast. And Chicken IS a biblically kosher food.

Further down is listed what kinds of sea creatures can be used as food and in general the rule is they must have fins AND scales; so things like eels, shellfish, lobsters, crab, squid, octopus and whale were not clean for food.

Some birds could be consumed as food as was demonstrated in Exodus out in the Wilderness when God sent Quail as meat for the loudly complaining Israelites. Since there really is no visible physical characteristic to easily distinguish (and thereby classify) one bird from another (as clean or unclean), general characteristics are not given. Instead we are given a specific list of birds that are UNCLEAR; presumably all the others are OK for food. Therefore the ever-popular chicken has always been considered a good and clean food for Hebrews and we'll find it today at the center of many meals during the Jewish holy days.

Now in practice, because there are hundreds and thousands of species of birds, the early Hebrew Sages determined that certain behavioral characteristics of the birds listed here (unclean birds) could be ascertained and applied to other non-listed birds that displayed similar behaviors in order to determine which should be avoided. At the top of the list of unclean bird behaviors are those who eat dead flesh or are birds of prey. There are actually some other technical characteristics that Rabbis have determined make certain birds unclean, but we won't get into that today because too much explanation would be required. In general birds that primarily eat grains (even if they might occasionally supplement with insects) are considered clean; though a list of preferable birds was also created. Birds like chickens, quail, doves, partridge, ducks and geese, turkey, Cornish hens, and others of this ilk are standard fare for Jewish tables.

Verse 19 (at least in the English) seems a little like double-talk. It seems to say that all winged swarming things are unclean, and then turns around and says that some of them are clean. The key to understand this paragraph is the word "swarming" (in Hebrew **sherets**). **Sherets** refers to living creatures that swarm or crawl: insects, or rats, or frogs, and certain sea creatures that walk on the sea bottom (like lobsters and crabs among others). The only CLEAN winged creatures that are recognized by the ancient Hebrews are certain winged insects such as particular varieties of locusts that leap and jump using two powerful back legs. Therefore ants, termites, grubs, and other similar creatures fall into the **sherets** category and are thus forbidden to be classified as food.

In verse 21 we get some prohibitions about WHEN the clean animals can be eaten, and it centers on the manner in which these living creatures died. If they died of a natural death (age or disease or accidental injury) generally they may NOT be eaten. And to kind of prove my point about the concept that it is not necessarily a matter of inherent hygiene or nutrition that makes one animal clean or another unclean, here we have an instruction that even though God's set apart people, the Israelites, are prohibited from eating an otherwise clean animal that has died from natural causes, an animal that has died from natural causes may be given to the **ger** or sold to the **nokri**. This is not a case of God telling Israel to give unsafe, unhealthy or poisonous food to non-Israelites. A **ger** is a non-Hebrew who lives among Israel and has agreed to be part of the Hebrew community and (for the most part) honors the God of the Hebrews and the Laws of Moses. However, a **ger** is also a person who has not gone so far as to join one of the Israelite tribes in an official capacity. A **nokri** is one who does not dwell among the Hebrews; rather, he dwells alongside the Hebrews and outside of their camp. He does not necessarily honor Yehoveh. If a Hebrew's animal dies, the Hebrew is therefore to either offer it as a gift to the **ger** or is also just as free to sell it for money to the **nokri**.

Now although I've drawn a fairly firm and rather easy to determine line between what a **ger** and a **nokri** is, in practice the difference more represented social and economic status; a kind of class system prevalent in virtually all societies of that era.

And this law not to eat an animal that died from natural causes, but others can, is explained in the sentence that immediately follows: “For you are a people consecrated (or in some versions, holy) to the Lord your God.” In other words (just as I have made a point of repeating) Israel is to follow different food laws than other people as food is part of what separates them from other cultures.

Before we move on to the next section of Deuteronomy 14 that deals with different matters, I would like to make a very brief comment about Kosher eating as it pertains to the New Testament and modern Christians. It is very clear in the Scriptures themselves, and in Hebrew writings of that era, from the Community Documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and a warehouse full of other Jewish documents from before and after the time of Christ that Rabbis had so expanded and inflated the rules of Kosher eating that Moses himself probably would not have recognized them. If you were to look at the several Talmudic tractates in which diet is dealt with, and compare them to Leviticus and especially Deuteronomy (which simplified the requirements once Israel entered Canaan) you’d have to wonder where in the world these Hebrew Sages got their ideas to demand such detailed procedures. Messiah spoke loud and clear on this subject and said that these and other traditions had virtually replaced God’s Word and that in the end it was never a matter of what went into a person’s mouth (food) that rendered that person clean or impure in God’s eyes, but what came out (meaning speech that revealed the innermost thoughts of that person). This certainly was not Jesus abandoning the dietary laws of the Torah; for He said Himself in Matthew 5:17-19 that not one jot or stroke of a pen would be removed from the Law until heaven and earth had passed away. And when we suppose to contrive doctrines that do the exact opposite of this (supposedly because of what Paul said) be on notice that while most of the Church may not know any better, you in Torah Class DO!

One of the sections of the New Testament in which an awful lot of mischief has been done by uninformed Christian scholars is in the book of Acts when the sheet is let down from heaven and it is full of animals that are unclean for eating. I’ll just quote Duane L. Christensen, the editor of the World Biblical Commentary (a conservative Evangelical Christian book) on the subject: “..... ***Peter’s vision of a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth that contained all manner of unclean animals, was primarily a symbolic communication on the matter of including the Gentile man Cornelius with the people of God.....***”

Let me expound just a bit: this vision of Peter’s was a metaphor. It took what was perhaps the primary visible and known symbol of Judaism in that era, Kosher eating, and used it as a metaphor for the many gentile peoples of the world that God wanted included in His Redemption plan. Judaism had developed two doctrines, however, that went well beyond Scriptural intent and these doctrines created an insurmountable wall between Jews and gentiles; first was that the Jews decided that gentiles were NOT simply “common” (as opposed to holy) people, rather they were inherently unclean. And for a Jew to come into too close of contact with a gentile automatically defiled that Jew. Second was that the Kosher dietary laws made it a practical impossibility that a Jew could ever eat food that a gentile had

merely prepared. In fact to even eat at the table of a gentile, or with a gentile present (no matter who prepared the food), made every Jew present ritually impure according to Tradition.

Of course this was not only a popular but very unbalanced and non-Scriptural view, but also it was more than just a little bit offensive to gentile Believers. So by means of a divine vision Peter saw that the Lord certainly did not hold with those manmade traditional beliefs and therefore told Peter that he certainly could be in the company of gentiles because gentiles were not inherently unclean. In time Paul took that understanding to mean that when he was in the home of a gentile that if that gentile offered him food that was not strictly Kosher then Paul should eat that food because the need for the understanding and fellowship between Jewish and gentile Disciples of Yeshua trumped the food laws for that situation. However that did not mean Paul ever thought those laws were abolished. Rather this was but a demonstration of the principle of *Kal V'homer* (the principle of light and heavy) whereby when there is an obvious clash between two God-principles whereby both cannot be obeyed simultaneously, then the one with the most weight must be chosen.

The section on dietary law now ends and laws concerning giving and fair dealing begin in verse 22. This set of laws will continue on into Deuteronomy 15 and 16 and it is really just another aspect of the humanitarian focus Moses is expounding upon in his sermon on the mountains of Moab. It is an interesting phenomenon that if one looks closely at traditional Judaism we see a great deal of concern for social justice and fairness, and it is Deuteronomy that drives this concern for them. Unfortunately as we who have ever belonged to one or more of the three thousand or so Christian denominations have observed, when we focus too tightly on one area of Scripture to the exclusion of another our doctrines, traditions and behavior becomes unbalanced. This is why we have the emergence of prosperity doctrines as the central tenants in some churches; or we'll have others that believe handling poisonous snakes is a proof of true faith. Another more recent example of this unbalanced doctrinal Christianity is the so-called "laughing church" that believes if we'll just show more joy by laughing a lot (particularly during worship services) then we'll be healed of diseases. More subtle are ones that make one of the Trinity more important than the others (whether it be the Holy Spirit for some or Jesus for others) or perhaps whereby God is the Father is strictly the Old Testament God and therefore nearly irrelevant today, and so on and so forth (there's far too many rather far-out doctrines to address in our lesson today).

The Jews have historically become so overly focused on human social justice that they have allowed that concern to override both God's other commandments and (just about as often) common sense has also taken a back seat. When we study Joshua and then Judges we're going to get many examples of exactly that propensity towards unbalance that actually amounts to rather severe disobedience. We'll see that many of Israel's leaders in the Promised Land will allow their human desire for fairness and compassion for foreigners to drive them to do the very things the Lord has been making such a point of prohibiting; namely making treaties with the Canaanites, allowing pagan worship to continue within their boundaries, and even joining with some of the Canaanites in marriage to show respect and

tolerance and hopefully gain a peaceful coexistence.

We find similar things happening in Israel today. The Israeli government seems driven to self-destruction (and cheered on, by the way, by the majority of the American Jewish population) by doing everything it can to help and even advance their enemies who make it known in no uncertain terms that peace with Israel is an impossibility. Be that as it may, it's one thing for the pagan world to demand Israel to give up land, sovereignty, even money and lives for the Palestinian cause; it's quite another for the Jewish people and the Israeli government to advocate virtually the same thing.

This is exactly the mentality that Moses' protégé Joshua and his successors will foster. All in the name of their human ideal of social justice, and of love and mercy, they will do the exact things Yehoveh told them NOT to do with their foreign neighbors.

My Believing friends listen to me: this principle applies not just to our Jewish brothers and sisters and not just to Israel. We, upon accepting the Jewish Messiah whose very authority rests on the Biblical covenants between God and Israel, cannot set aside God's laws and principles at our convenience and whim. We cannot count on love and mercy as the universal humanistic solvent that dissolves away the Lord's specific commands not to mix our worship of Him with pagan worship practices; nor to celebrate pagan holy days or mix those observances with ours; nor to tolerate the presence of pagan gods among us. That some congregations are now essentially pronouncing that there is no difference between Yehoveh and Allah breaks the commandment to worship no other gods. We are most definitely to strive for social justice, which we do much too little of; but never are we to do that in the context of men's philosophies and human relativism. The values and principles the Lord has given to us are better than those of the world, even if the world doesn't think so.

An annual tithe from the fruit of the land was to be given to Yehoveh. He was, after all, the owner of the land and therefore rightfully had a portion of the land's increase coming to Him. But even more than ownership it was He who gave the land its fertility and increase. The tithe (meaning 1/10th) is to be brought to the central sanctuary. Until King Solomon built a permanent Temple to God in Jerusalem in the mid-900's B.C., the location of the sacred tent, the Wilderness Tabernacle, was moved a few times. Therefore we don't see a specific place where the Altar was located (it would, however, spend the majority of its time resting in Shiloh).

The purpose of the tithe as ordained by God was unusual for that era. A tithe (or something like it) was generally, among the pagans, merely taxes paid to the king. But here that was not the case. The tithe was used to support the maintenance of the Tabernacle and of all those who were assigned to serve it: the Priests and the Levites.

Because Israel was going to live spread out over several thousand square miles in the Land of Canaan, the distance to bring their produce to the central sanctuary as an offering was an issue. In some cases it would simply spoil during the long journey. In other cases (if it was animals) likely a few would be lost to wild animals or accidents along the way. And even more practically if one possessed substantial fields, and thus owed a substantial tithe, it would have taken a large amount of wagons and labor to transport all that produce to the Tabernacle. Therefore in verse 24 we get the principle that produce can be exchanged for money. That is a value of money could be assigned to that produce and the money could simply be given in its place. This has even led to the Jewish Tradition that money can be looked at as frozen labor. In other words, we work for wages and the money is representative of our labor time; then we give of our money and it is essentially the same thing as the giving of our labor.

Then in verse 27 is an admonition to be sure not to neglect the Levites living among you. Here's the thing: the Levites were given 48 cities to live in throughout the 12 tribal territories. It was the duty of the tribes to support those Levites and their cities. However the Levites being spoken of here are separate from the Priests. Recall that only certain families among the tribe of Levi could be priests. The remainder (the majority) was blue-collar workers around the Tabernacle and they essentially worked for the Priests. The Scriptures generally make this distinction by calling the Priests, priests, and by calling those non-priest blue-collar workers Levites. The Priests received most of their livelihoods from the portion of the ritual sacrifices that were due to them. The Levites generally did NOT receive a portion of the ritual sacrifices so it was from tithes and offerings that they received their support.

Now an interesting curve ball is thrown into the mix; every 3 years the annual tithes that were due were NOT to be taken to the central sanctuary, the Tabernacle; instead they were to be stored in whatever town or village one belonged to. This was the core of the Hebrew welfare system. It was from these communal stores that the poor and the sick could draw food to survive. In addition Levites were allowed to take from this storehouse of food. And, the storehouse also included money since as of now produce could be exchanged for money and money given for tithes and offerings. Please also notice that the food warehouse was to be made available to ALL disadvantaged folks; widows, orphans, even foreigners.

The principle expressed here is that at all times the interests of the poor and needy stand before the Lord and He looks to His people above all others to fill that need among men. And while the needs of one's family, and then his community of Believers might have some priority, it cannot be an excuse to ignore active charity wherever it is needed.

We'll start chapter 15 next week that further expands the measures Yehoveh commands to protect the poor and disabled.