



A People Holy to the Lord (Deuteronomy 14:1-21)

Josh Kruger Sr

July 30, 2023

KingsWay Community Church

We are currently preaching through the book of Deuteronomy; a series we titled “**Ruled by a Gracious God**”.

Deuteronomy is the 5th book in the Bible and the last book of what is called the Pentateuch (Penta meaning five) ... The Pentateuch is the first five books of the Bible that we believe were mostly written by Moses.

I want to take a look back and quickly recap for you how we got where we are today in Deut. 14.

We’ll start in Genesis. In chapter 37 we saw when Joseph’s brothers were very jealous of him and one day while in the field with his brothers, looking after their father’s sheep, his brothers grabbed him and wanted to kill him. But one brother, Rueben stopped them from killing him ... instead they sold him to slave traders, who sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, and officer of Pharoah, the king.

After serving Pharoah for many years, Joseph eventually became very a prominent man - the 2nd in command over all of Egypt. When famine came to the region (a great food shortage), Joseph’s dad, Jacob sent his brothers to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph recognized his brothers, he graciously forgave them and provided for them, eventually getting his father and his entire family to move to Egypt.

In Egypt, God did what he promised to Jacob in Gen 46:3 “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation” and so in Exodus (2nd book of the Bible) we see that Israel became the great nation God promised and they increased greatly in numbers ... so that when a new king started ruling Egypt, he was afraid of Israel and he started oppressing them as slaves. He also said that all the newborn sons of Israel should be killed.

But God made a way for the birth of one boy, named Moses who grew up in Pharoah’s daughter’s house. One day God appeared to Moses and told him that he must bring the people of God (Israel) **out** of Egypt and **into** the land that he swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

And even though Pharoah did not want to let them go, God sent the 10 plagues, and we eventually see in Exodus 14 the Exodus of Israel from Egypt ... and they started their journey to the promised land (Canaan).

But Israel often rebelled against God; not obeying him and serving false Gods. And as a result, they journeyed through the desert for 40 years – a journey that should have taken them only weeks to complete.

When we come to the book of Deuteronomy (where we are preaching from now), we are towards the end of that 40 years in the desert. This book is the 3 final sermons of Moses to Israel before they entered into the promised land. And God, through Moses, is preparing Israel for how they should live once they enter Canaan.

And a main theme we observe from Moses' preaching is this: that Israel is God's chosen and holy people and, based on this status before God, they are to live lives that are distinct (different) from the pagan nations around them by faith-filled obedience to God's commands and statutes given to them by Moses ... and today we'll see these included commandments as fundamental as what to eat and what not to eat. This has been a constant trajectory through Deut.

Deut. 4:5 See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

And so what we have seen in Deut. So far, and what we will see again this morning is that God's chosen people are to demonstrate (validate or prove) their distinctiveness from the world through faith-filled obedience to Him.

Let us pray!

1. The call to faith-filled obedience
2. A people chosen for His treasured possession
3. How it relates to us

1. THE CALL TO FAITH-FILLED OBEDIENCE.

The statutes / rules / commandments we see here this morning starts in v.1b saying "You shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead." This prohibition against cutting one's self and shaving the front of the head "for the dead", were both rooted in pagan customs ... the "cult of the dead" ... where pagans mourned rituals for the dead hoping to secure the "favorable influence of the dead" ... and therefore these were unacceptable and abominable practices of which Israel had to have no part in.

"This is how the Gentiles live, Israel ... do not mimic them. You are distinct from them ... live as such by faith-filled obedience to God. Don't assimilate with them ... don't become like them, don't take on their religious practices, don't worship the way they do, don't let them influence you with false ideas, reject anything from them that will lead you away from devotion to God (last 2 week's sermons) ... this is no small matter, Israel. you are not to be like them in any way ... by living lives of faith filled obedience to Yahweh"

The rest of the chapter, I think you will agree, seems strange - at least at first glance."

God (through Moses) commands dietary restrictions making a distinction between clean and unclean animals and what may and may not be eaten ... going as far as to call the unclean food

an “abomination” (something that causes disgust or hatred). This is the second time we see these restrictions in the Bible ... also in Leviticus 11.

Really, ... God is concerned with what they ate ... Yup! Why? ... well we’ll answer that in a minute, but let’s look at what they were allowed to eat and what not ...

Here is what you may eat, Israel:

Ox, sheep, goat, deer, gazelle, roebuck, wild goat, ibex (includes several species of wild goat), antelope, and mountain sheep.

And then the rule, according to V. 6 that ... Every animal that has a cloven (split) hoof and chews the cud” – was considered clean and they could eat those animals. Some animals, like cows, eat grass which it swallows whole (mostly). This grass goes into a special area of their stomach where bacteria start digesting it. This becomes what is known as the “cud”, which the cow later re-chews before swallowing it again.

So this is a simple coding rule ... the “**IF** – then” rule. **IF** the animal has “parted hoof” **AND is a** “cud-chewer”, **THEN** you may eat it’s flesh.

BUT IF they chew the cud but does **NOT** have parted hoof, **THEN** you may **NOT** eat them because they are considered unclean ... (example, the tasty Camel, flavorful Hare and the mouthwatering Rock Badger)

Also **IF** it parts the hoof, but does **NOT** chew the cud, **THEN** you may not eat it because it is considered unclean (pig ... think pork chop people ... grilled to golden brown perfection) ... unclean!

And not only shall you not eat of it Israel, you shall not even touch it’s carcass.

But there is more:

Water creatures: They could eat anything with Fins and scales – that made them clean ... no fins and scales – unclean ... (Endless shrimp scampi, Giant king crab legs, lobster bisque) ... abominable. Red Lobster out of business, like that!

But we are not done yet.

They may also eat “clean birds”. What you cannot eat: eagle, bearded vulture, black vulture, kite, falcon of any kind; raven of any kind, the ostrich (oh boy), nighthawk, sea gull, hawk of any kind; little owl, short-eared owl, barn owl, tawny owl, carrion vulture, the cormorant, stork, the heron of any kind; hoopoe and the bat. (Three comments: 1) I’m OK with most of this list, 2) Ostrich steaks is to die for and 3) What is bat doing on the bird list? Everyone knows he is a mammal.)

And then in v:21 “You shall not eat anything that has died naturally” Cow breaks his leg and dies because he cannot eat – sorry! **BUT** you can give it to someone you know or (better even) sell it to a foreigner.

And then Moses tops it off with “:21b You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.”

I’m not sure about you, but If I was standing on the edge of the Jordan, after having been in the desert for years, ripe with expectation to go into the promised land flowing with rock badger and ostrich (or milk & honey) – If that was me ... these commandments would have made NO sense to me. God made all these animals, yet he commands us not to eat of it ... why?

Why would God make such (what feels arbitrary, non-sensical (to me)) rules for Israel to keep?

First, let us just be clear that the OT never spells out the reasons why some of these animals were considered clean and others unclean ... it was ultimately His Sovereign choice ... just like Israel was God’s Sovereign choice. And therefore, we will not engage in speculation about clean vs unclean animals.

2. A PEOPLE CHOSEN FOR HIS TREASURED POSSESSION

But the answer to the question of why God required Israel to follow these dietary laws, is quite simple friends ... it is found as bookends to this passage ... why did God want Israel to keep these commandments to eat only what is clean ... Look at v. 2 and v.21 with me ... “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God.”

God is saying, through Moses what he has said to Israel before ... You are my people, distinct from the Gentile nations around you ... and you must be exclusively committed to Yahweh ... and that should be clear by how you live ... even by how you eat.

God’s chosen people are to demonstrate their distinctiveness from the world through faith-filled obedience to Him.

Israel is “holy to the Lord”, which means Israel is “set apart” unto the Lord ... they are to live for him only, be concerned to please him only and honor him only. And these dietary laws were to help them display their distinctiveness from the nations around them ... and their devotion to the Lord God.

But friends ... we should be careful not to see this chapter as primarily concerned with the prohibition on eating, this chapter is bursting with grace for Israel ...

:1 not only were they holy to the Lord, they were “sons of the LORD your God.” This is amazing grace to an obstinate people, church!!! Israel, you are not only my people ... you are my sons and daughters. This speaks of God’s Sovereign adoption of Israel

How did that happen?

- Because they were special? No!
- Because of their exemplary obedience to God and His commandments? No!
- Because of their devotion to Yahweh? No!

Why then? Why were they the “Sons of the Lord your God” ... because

:2 the LORD has **chosen you** to be a people for his **treasured possession**, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Israel, God chose you ... undeservedly to be set apart for him ... therefore live for him ... in faith filled obedience (even to the dietary laws)

Deut. 7: goes on to state: **7**It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, **8**but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery

What amazing words, friends. Israel was a people holy to the Lord because of HIS affectionate grace, his electing grace, his saving/redeeming grace. **Israel was God's Sovereign choice. His "treasured possession"**

Israel, do not partake in these pagan rituals (like mourning the dead by cutting yourselves or shaving your heads), and do not eat all these unclean foods ... why? Because you are holy to me, set apart for me, because I Loved you, chose you out of all the peoples of the world, I redeemed you out of slavery and made you my treasured possession. That is who you are ... now demonstrate your distinctiveness, holiness, chosen-ness, "treasured possession-ness", "separateness" by faith-filled obedience to my commands.

So that when the Gentile nations look at you ... at your lives (your worship, your customs, your diet ... all of you), they will see that you belong to the only true, glorious, Holy God.

These dietary rules church, as arbitrary and non-sensical as they might seem church, were to display God's glory. And obeying them would honor the one whose "treasured possession" they were. This was not a call for blind obedience to a bunch of weird rules ... it was their call to spiritual worship ... a call to honor God; a call to proclaim his Glorious name.

Israel ... God's chosen people were to demonstrate their distinctiveness from the Gentiles through faith-filled obedience to Him.

3. APPLICATION: How it relates to us?

Question: Are these dietary laws applicable to Christians today? Should we obey these commandments in Deut. 14 and not eat lobster, calamari, or ostrich?

No, they are not. Why not?

Because of the precious blood of Jesus Christ; because of the gospel. Because we no longer live under the old covenant, but we live under a "better covenant", the new covenant established and inaugurated by Christ through the shedding of his blood.

Here is the thing ... The only way to attain righteousness (right standing with God) under the Old Covenant was **perfect** obedience to the **entire** law (Jas. 2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.) Perfect obedience ... that was the only

way to become righteous ... and not just obedience by works, it had to be obedience pursued by faith. Rom 9:31 Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. **32** Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.

And so - did Israel obey all the commandments and statutes given to them under the Mosaic Law perfectly. NOPE ... They never could ... which really was one of the purposes of the law. The purposes of the Law was:

1. To reveal the holy character of the eternal God to the nation of Israel
2. To set apart the nation of Israel as distinct from all other nations
3. But also, it was to reveal the sinfulness of man, the depravity of man, and the need for a savior. The law was given so that Israel could see their sinfulness before a Holy God and that they would live Holy lives unto him. But friends, the law did not provide salvation for Israel. (Rom 3:20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.)

And so, although Israel had a mediator (Moses) ... what they desperately needed was a better mediator, a redeemer. And that mediator – that redeemer - came in the form of Jesus Christ, the Son of God - who according to Eph. 2 “abolished the law of commandments expressed in ordinances”

You see, Israel was imprisoned under the law – desperate for redemption. Just like they were imprisoned in Egypt and needed redemption.

Listen to Gal. 3:23-26 **23** Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. **24** So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. **25** But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, **26** for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

Oh what good news church, not only for Israel, but for you and me also (Gentiles) who can now become “sons of God” - not by works of the law, not by obedience to the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.

You see ... you and I, like Israel, were born with a sin nature, we are rebellious towards God, desiring to live for ourselves and to run after and worship all manner of idols ... totally separated from God. Him being holy – we being sinful. And you and I, like Israel needs a better mediator, a redeemer. None of us are good enough to please God and to appease his righteous anger against our sin. None of us are “morally positive” enough to be saved. Like Israel, we are in great trouble.

But friend, Jesus Christ came to earth; eternal God the Son, perfect in being, living in perfect union with the Father and the Spirit ... yet he willingly left the excellencies of heaven, to come to earth as a man to be the better mediator - to make a way for Israel - and for us - to be reconciled to the father.



He lived a faultlessly obedient, sinless life (as a man) and then he willingly went to the cross as our substitute; **bearing** our sin, **accepting** our punishment, **exhausting** the Father's wrath against our sin ... **dying** the death we deserved to die. And in return ... he **offers** his righteousness. And now if you believe that Jesus did these things for you ... and if you repent of your sins and ask the Father to forgive you ... and if you turn away from living for yourself to living for Christ, then you will one day stand before the judgment throne of God and he will declare you INNOCENT of all sins – on account of Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice of himself (the spotless lamb) on your behalf.

Under the old covenant, the priests had to repeatedly offer the same sacrifices – daily - for the forgiveness of sin ... but when Christ had offered for ALL TIME a single sacrifice of sin, he sat down at the right hand of God. Why did he sit down – because his sacrifice was perfect, and sufficient and complete for all people and all times. Now by faith we become sons of God.

Oh friend, if you are not a Christian, hear this word today ... there is salvation in Jesus Christ. Please talk to me or a faithful Christian friend about this. In Christ Jesus, you can become a son and a daughter of God, through faith. You can become the bride of Christ.

And this is what the apostle Peter said of those whom are saved through faith in Jesus Christ: 1 Peter 2:**9** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **10** Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Church Jesus did for us what the law could never do ... we are counted righteous, not based on obedience to the law, but based on faith in Christ. Rom 10:4: For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

So let me ask you this question again: Are Christians free from obedience to the dietary laws, like not eating bats. Absolutely. The Bible is clear on that.

Remember Peter's vision in Acts 10:9-16 when he was hungry and while in a trance, saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, ... and in it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. (Clean and unclean mixed) ... and he heard a voice: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean."**15** And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common."

This has a dual meaning ... in Christ, no more is there clean and unclean food ... and in Christ, no more is there Jew and Gentile ... they are now all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28) We were the Gentiles – we should rejoice!!!

God overturned the old clean/unclean distinctions and dietary laws when Jesus fulfilled the law – and so the purity commandments, and dietary commandments and sacrificial commandments are no longer in effect.



So does this mean that Christians have no more commandments to obey? Oh we do! Oh no, the Christian life is one marked by obedience ... Jesus said that if we love him, we will obey his commandments. If you are a Christian your life should be a life of obedience.

God's chosen people are to demonstrate (validate or prove) their distinctiveness from the world through faith-filled obedience to Him.

So let me ask you today friend ... does your life demonstrate (or validate / prove) your distinctiveness from the world through faith-filled obedience to God ... or does your life look eerily similar to those of the people in the world around you. I can give many examples ... but I think if you are a Christian you should be able to know how your life should be different than your non-Christian co-workers, friends, family. Does your life look different, friend? This is a very serious question.

Maybe you think some of these Christian rules (don't date an unbeliever, honor your father & mother, don't gossip or slander etc.) are stupid rules (almost like not eating shrimp, right).

But friend, remember that you and I are not our own – we were bought with a price (Jesus' life) and so we MUST live in such a way that we demonstrate our union with Christ (like Israel had to do with dietary restrictions), and if that is absent in our lives, ... if we are unremarkably dissimilar to non-Christians who has no regard for Christ, then we have serious reason for concern ... and we need to repent before God and ask him for mercy to change. I beg of you church, do not pursue friendship with the world ... live in a way that clearly displays your distinctiveness in Christ James 4:4 Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?

Hear this quote from John McArthur "The narrow way and the broad way both claim to be the way to God. The wide gate is not marked "Way to hell"; it is labeled "Heaven", the same as the narrow gate ... it just does not go there"

And so we can say the same as we did for Israel: "This is how the World lives, Christian ... do not mimic them. You are distinct from them ... live as such by faith-filled obedience to God. Don't assimilate with them ... don't become like them, don't take on their practices, don't live the way they do, don't let them influence you with false ideas, reject anything from them that will lead you away from devotion to God (last 2 week's sermons) ... this is no small matter, Christian. You are not to be like them in any way ...

Friends, how we live has eternal consequences, and your and my responsibility is to fight and struggle and contend for godly living and obedience to Christ.

But just like Israel, we are unable to obey fully and live perfect God-honoring lives.

But thanks be to Christ and the grace found in him. And thanks be to his new command.

In John 13:34 (Jesus said) A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. **35** By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."



This is so similar to the commandment given to Israel ... except that now our distinctiveness is not to be demonstrated by what we eat and not eat, it is to be demonstrated by our love for one another.

Also in Matthew 22:36-39 when a Pharisee asked the greatest commandment in the Law?" **37** And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. (Where does this come from? – Deuteronomy 6:5) **38** This is the great and first commandment. **39** And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

The greatest commandment we have today, is not what to eat or not to eat, or what to wear and what not to wear ... your and my greatest commandment to obey is to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind. Total devotion to God alone. This is our highest call of obedience church – to delight in God. As John Piper rightly said: We must delight in God. And only God can change our hearts so that we delight in God"

And so how do we obey the command to love God above all ... we ask him to change our hearts. And the more God changes our hearts to delight in him, the more we will be able to live lives that are in line with all the other commandments. The more God gives us grace to love him, the more we will demonstrate our distinctiveness from the World through faith-filled obedience to Him.

It was the same for Israel ... and it is like that for us today. If we turn our eyes upon Jesus, and look full in his wonderful face ... then what ... then the things of this world will grow strangely dim ... in the light of his glory and grace.

Like Israel, we have many commands to obey church ... this Bible is filled with commands for us to obey – but lets' endeavor together to focus hard on the greatest command; let's ask God to change our hearts ... that we may grow in our love for Christ ... let us trust him to increase our desire to cherish him and let us ask him to rid us of worldliness. Oh may we grow in our love for, delight in and awe of God so that we may glorify him with our lives.