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**BIBLE STUDY**

**Greater Refuge Memorial Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith, Inc.**

596 West Church Street, Orlando, FL 32805 ~ Phone 407.872.1984

Web site [www.RefugeOrlando.com](http://www.RefugeOrlando.com/)

***Pastor M.R. McCoy, Jr., Lead Servant***

***Bishop M. Ruel McCoy, Sr., Pastor Emeritus and Diocesan***

**“CHOSEN TO BE A PECULIAR PEOPLE”**

**Deuteronomy 14:1-20**

This chapter continues the condemnation of apostasy with an emphasis on holiness. It applies the third commandment and its restrictions. The contents of the chapter are: (1) a prohibition of pagan rites (vv. 1, 2); (2) a prohibition against eating unclean flesh, which is called an abomination (vv. 3–20); and (3) some transitional laws against pagan customs of the Canaanites (vv. 21–29).

***Deuteronomy 14:1 "Ye [are] the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead."***

***Deuteronomy 14:2 "For thou [art] an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that [are] upon the earth."***

This section deals with several matters of personal holiness, and the first concern pertains to mourning the dead. This is the first time the Israelites were called sons of the LORD your God, which speaks of their special familial relationship to God. Moses moved from a rejection of Canaanite gods to a rejection of individual Canaanite practices. It was the custom of the heathens around them to cut themselves and shave their heads in mourning for the dead. This is strictly forbidden for God's people. The reason it is forbidden is because their LORD God is the giver of life. To do this, would show no faith in God. Jesus even said that we should rejoice at one's death and mourn at one's birth. Christianity believes in life after death. Two things are evident as to the practices in verse 1: (1) The laceration of the body with the consequent flow of blood was a part of the mourning customs employed in religions outside of Israel. (2) Laceration may have been part of a seasonal rite within the Canaanite fertility cult. In this context, the rite may have been a type of imitative magic, designed to revitalize the god Baal on whom the fertility of the land was believed to depend.

***1 Kings 18:27-28***

***27 And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.***

***28 And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.***

This section deals with several matters of personal holiness, and the first concern pertains to mourning the dead. This is the first time the Israelites were called sons of the LORD your God, which speaks of their special familial relationship to God. In light of that intimate relationship the nation was not to cut themselves or shave [their] forehead for the sake of the dead. Moses warned the Israelites against following the gods of the nations. He also warned them against following their various religious practices. God had given Israel very explicit instructions regarding how they were to worship him. The relevant portions of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy provide explicit details. Therefore, an Israelite had no excuse if he chose to depart from God’s way and engage in unapproved spiritual activities. The Lord prohibited Israel from practicing the mourning rituals of the nations. They have been given God's law, and they are to set an example for the rest of the world. The world is to know these are God's chosen. Their lives are to reveal their relationship with the LORD. "Peculiar" is speaking of their being different. They are set aside to show the world the grace of God.

***Deuteronomy 14:3 "Thou shalt not eat any abominable thing."***

A major day-to-day aspect of Israel’s covenant with God involved keeping the nation’s food laws. Why God permitted some foods and prohibited others has been long debated. Some say God gave these lists of prohibited animals out of concern for the Israelites’ health. This is a popular argument, but Scripture does not give health concerns as justification for the prohibition.

***Acts 10:9-15***

***9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:***

***10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,***

***11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending upon him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:***

***12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.***

***13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.***

***14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.***

***15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.***

***Romans 14:14 "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that [there is] nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him [it is] unclean."***

***I Timothy 4:4-5***

***4 "For every creature of God [is] good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:"***

***5 "For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."***

Another explanation for the food laws was that the prohibited animals were used in false religious rites and thus were out of bounds for the Israelites. But the evidence for this is lacking as well. The term “abominable” is used in the Old Testament for something impure, unclean, and totally devoid of holiness. In 7:25 and 12:31, it is employed in association with pagan religious rites. Perhaps part of the reason for the prohibition against eating certain types of meat was the association existing between those animals and foreign, pagan religions. The separation for the Jews of these things was to teach them holiness in the LORD. The abominable food the Jews eat are abominable because God forbid them to eat it. They are being disobedient to God when they eat it.

***Deuteronomy 14:4 "These [are] the beasts which ye shall eat: the ox, the sheep, and the goat,"***

***Deuteronomy 14:5 "The hart, and the roebuck, and the fallow deer, and the wild goat, and the pygarg, and the wild ox, and the chamois."***

***Deuteronomy 14:6 "And every beast that parteth the hoof, and cleaveth the cleft into two claws, [and] cheweth the cud among the beasts, that ye shall eat."***

***Deuteronomy 14:7 "Nevertheless these ye shall not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the cloven hoof; [as] the camel, and the hare, and the coney: for they chew the cud, but divide not the hoof; [therefore] they [are] unclean unto you."***

***Deuteronomy 14:8 "And the swine, because it divideth the hoof, yet cheweth not the cud, it [is] unclean unto you: ye shall not eat of their flesh, nor touch their dead carcase."***

The three verses above, are a re-stating from Leviticus of the meat that is permitted the Israelite to eat. Perhaps, for health reasons, we would feel better, if we followed these rules ourselves. The above would be classified as clean animals. "Pygarg" is an antelope. This separation of themselves from things God had forbidden to the Jews to eat, separates them from other people. We see a Scripture in the New Testament, which shows this was just for the Jews. Another concern related to personal holiness was the eating of food and the laws of kosher (as they became known in post-biblical Judaism). The nation was to eat no detestable thing. The types of foods the Israelites ate were an important matter to the Lord because they are related not just to diet but also to theology. While it is not always clear what specific animal is being mentioned in these verses, the animals were grouped according to the domain in which they lived. These included land animals, water creatures, and those whose domain is in the air. Land animals included domesticated animals such as oxen, sheep, and goats, and wild game animals such as deer, gazelles, wild goats, and others. These were to have divided hooves and to chew the cud. Animals that do not meet these two criteria were forbidden to be eaten: these included camels, rabbits, the hyrax (a small rodent resembling a woodchuck), and pigs. No reason is given why these characteristics were determiners. Holiness is a major focus in this passage (cf. they were to be “a holy people,” 14:2), and it encompasses a wide variety of domains: spiritual, ritual, symbolic, and physical. The emphasis here is on the outward display of an internal condition in that what the Israelites ate was to reflect a clear fixed picture of external holiness. Clean animals were expected to meet a fixed standard (in this case animals that split the hoof and chew the cud). So, any creature that did not meet that standard was considered unclean and therefore not emblematic of holiness.

***Deuteronomy 14:9 "These ye shall eat of all that [are] in the waters: all that have fins and scales shall ye eat:"***

***Deuteronomy 14:10 "And whatsoever hath not fins and scales ye may not eat; it [is] unclean unto you."***

Again, the separation here is of those fish which are scavengers and eat anything. The fish without fins have no discretion about what they eat. They are blood eaters. The same explanation would relate to the next category, describing creatures from the domain of water. Anything with fins and scales was permitted to be eaten, but all other creatures that live in the water were forbidden. Fish that were permitted were to picture the purity and holiness that the Israelites were to reflect even in their diet.

***Deuteronomy 14:11 "[Of] all clean birds ye shall eat."***

***Deuteronomy 14:12 "But these [are they] of which ye shall not eat: the eagle, and the ossifrage, and the osprey,"***

***Deuteronomy 14:13 "And the glede, and the kite, and the vulture after his kind,"***

***Deuteronomy 14:14 "And every raven after his kind,"***

***Deuteronomy 14:15 "And the owl, and the night hawk, and the cuckoo, and the hawk after his kind,"***

***Deuteronomy 14:16 "The little owl, and the great owl, and the swan,"***

***Deuteronomy 14:17 "And the pelican, and the gier eagle, and the cormorant,"***

***Deuteronomy 14:18 "And the stork, and the heron after her kind, and the lapwing, and the bat."***

***Deuteronomy 14:19 "And every creeping thing that flieth [is] unclean unto you: they shall not be eaten."***

***Deuteronomy 14:20 "[But of] all clean fowls ye may eat."***

The third domain included creatures that occupy the sky. Clean birds were permitted to be eaten, but in this passage no example of clean birds is given. The list of unclean birds, however, includes the eagle, vulture, buzzard, kite, raven, ostrich, owl, sea gull, hawk, pelican, stork, heron, and bat. This may be because they are birds of prey that eat their catch without properly draining blood, or eat carrion, like vultures, also mentioned in the list. Other miscellaneous food restrictions were given. We see the reason these are forbidden to eat, is that they do not follow both the cloven hoof and chewing the cud. Pork that is not well cooked can make you very sick. This is a law of preservation for the Jews. You might list it as a dietary law. A swine is a scavenger. Therefore, it is forbidden. The birds that are forbidden here, on the whole are "scavengers", and live of dead things. They are part of God's system of cleaning up the dead things on the earth. The most important thing about these things, is God's care for His people. We see that God wants them to learn to obey His commands without questioning why.

**QUESTIONS**

1. Why were they not to cut themselves for the dead?
2. What did Jesus say about birth and death?
3. Who were they to set an example for?
4. What kind of people were they called in verse 2?
5. Thou shalt not eat any \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_thing.
6. What are the beasts they can eat?
7. "Pygarg" is an \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
8. What are some of the animals they cannot eat?
9. Why was pork specifically forbidden?
10. What kind of law is covered here?
11. What fish can be eaten?
12. What fish are forbidden?
13. What are some birds strictly forbidden to eat?
14. "Scavengers" live of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ things.