

Deuteronomy

Lesson 10

Chapter 14

In the last lesson, we began looking at Moses' summary of the Promised Land laws. His first entry covered the laws for the Holy Places. Specifically, all the Canaanite holy places were to be destroyed, and new Godly holy places were to be developed. Warnings were given to those who would lead the Jews to worship any other god besides the one LORD God of Israel. Proselytizers of other religions were to be executed. Followers of other religions were to be eliminated. Cities that adhered to other religions were to be eradicated. All that was against the Ten Commandments of the LORD and considered idolatry.

A. Laws for the Jewish Life

1. Death Rites that are Abominable and Detestable (14:1-2)

Now we come to the laws of the Jewish life in the new Promised Land. As such, the Jews were to be a holy people, different from all the other people of the world. But when it comes to death, the Jews could not be different than the people of the world, but they were not to react to death in the same way as all the other religions of the world at that time. To the LORD, their death rites are detestable. Chapter 14, verse 1. *"You are the sons of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave your forehead for the sake of the dead.² For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."* (14:1-2).

Every other religion in the world except for the Jewish faith given by the LORD practiced the detestable death rites of cutting the mourner's skin with fingernails or sharp objects. They also shaved their forehead *"for the sake of the dead."* The word "sake" in this context means *purpose*. What purpose would cut the skin or shaving the head be for a dead person? Both were symbols of great grief deep in the soul because of the hopelessness and lack of understanding of what will transpire in eternity. Long after the giving of this instruction, the Apostle Paul said, *"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as indeed the rest of mankind do, who have no hope."* (1 Thessalonians 4:13). All religions at that time, except the faith of the LORD as it was given to the Jews, faced death without hope and grieved with cuttings and shavings. Such was detestable to the LORD and forbidden for the Jews.

2. Land Meats that are Permissible and Detestable (14:3-8)

Then, the Jews had to be careful about the meats they would eat in the Promised Land. Some land meats are detestable, and some land meats are permissible. Verse 3. *"You shall not eat any detestable thing.⁴ These are the animals which you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat,⁵ the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope and the mountain sheep.⁶ Any animal that divides the hoof and has the hoof split in two and chews the cud, among the animals, that you may eat.⁷ Nevertheless, you are not to eat of these among those which chew the cud, or among those that divide the hoof in two: the camel and the rabbit and the shaphan, for though they chew the cud, they do not divide the hoof; they are unclean for you.⁸ The pig, because it divides the hoof but does not chew the cud, it is unclean for you. You shall not eat any of their flesh nor touch their carcasses."* (14:3-8).

This instruction was not new. Nothing much is unique in the book of Deuteronomy concerning the laws. All these food laws were given forty years earlier in Leviticus 11:2-23. The meat of the land camel, rabbit, badger, and pigs is detestable. The meat of the land, the ox, the sheep, the

goat, the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope and the mountain sheep is permissible. It all has to do with the formation of the hoof and the chewing of the cud.

3. Sea Creatures that are Edible and Detestable (14:9-10)

Then Moses repeats the instruction from Leviticus concerning the edible sea creatures. Verse 9. *“These you may eat of all that are in water: anything that has fins and scales you may eat,¹⁰ but anything that does not have fins and scales you shall not eat; it is unclean for you.”* (14:9-10).

4. Sky Birds that are Consumable and Detestable (14:11-20)

And of course, there are the sky birds that are consumable and those that are detestable. Verse 11. *“You may eat any clean bird.¹² But these are the ones which you shall not eat: the eagle and the vulture and the buzzard,¹³ and the red kite, the falcon, and the kite in their kinds,¹⁴ and every raven in its kind,¹⁵ and the ostrich, the owl, the sea gull, and the hawk in their kinds,¹⁶ the little owl, the great owl, the white owl,¹⁷ the pelican, the carrion vulture, the cormorant,¹⁸ the stork, and the heron in their kinds, and the hoopoe and the bat.¹⁹ And all the teeming life with wings are unclean to you; they shall not be eaten.²⁰ You may eat any clean bird.”* (14:11-20).

5. Dead Animals that are Edible but Prohibitable (14:21ab)

a) The Animal that Dies of Itself

Now back in the book of Leviticus, chapter 11, the LORD told Israel not to eat anything that was found dead. But Moses' added a little commentary on that these forty years later by talking about dead animals that are edible but prohibitable. Verse 21. *“You shall not eat anything which dies of itself. You may give it to the alien who is in your town so 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.”* (14:21a).

Do you see what Moses has declared? Let us boil it down to this. If you find something dead, you, Jews, cannot eat it; however, you can give or sell the dead animal to an unclean alien so he can eat it.

b) The Goat and its Mother's Milk (14:21b)

Then we come to a strange stand-alone statement. Verse 21b. *“You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.”* (14:21b).

This topic is the third and last entry of this statute. It appeared in Exodus 23:19 and 34:26 verbatim. Many various explanations can be found for this statute, and indeed the Jews in the wilderness understood the reason for its prohibition, but the reason is lost to our understanding. No doubt it had to do with the practice observed in Egypt for which they had lived for four hundred and thirty years and perhaps was a practice in Canaan Land also, but without further documentation, we are lost. We will accept the statement at face value as the Jews were to do likewise.

6. Tithes that are Presentable and Consumable

Today, we think of tithes as the gift of money to a local congregation through the means of cash, a check, or a draft from our bank account. The tithes were surely presentable as ours are today, but they are hardly consumable. But in the time of this account in Deuteronomy, the tithes are presentable and consumable. Verse 21. *“You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year.²³ You shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and your flock, so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.”* (14:22-23).

All year long, the produce of a man's field would yield different crops in different seasons. There were two seasons for wheat, two seasons for barley, the season for collecting grapes, pomegranates, olives, and the season of the firstborn of each animal's births. For each, a tithe was required to be presented at the chosen holy place of the LORD in each tribal area. These offerings were for two reasons. The offerings were already introduced in this book to feed and care for the Levitical families who were not allowed to own fields with crops, herds, and flocks. That point is not

mentioned here but will be in verse 27. Why? Because the care of the Levitical families as receivers of these tithes was of most importance to the LORD. But in the context of this passage, it is the giver that is most important to the LORD. He says the gifts of these tithes are “*so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.*” Tithing is an act of “fear.” We are not accustomed to using this word today. In the past, it meant the same as our word “worship.” We would translate the verse today as “so that you may learn to worship the LORD your God always.” It is about giving without worrying about the receiver and what happens with the gift after leaving the owner’s hand.

a) The Option to Exchange for Money

Then we come to the option to exchange for money the product that must be tithed if the distance is too great to carry the produce or drive the animals to the holy place. Verse 24. ‘*If the distance is so great for you that you are not able to bring the tithe, since the place where the LORD your God chooses to set His name is too far away from you when the LORD your God blesses you,²⁵ then you shall exchange it for money, and bind the money in your hand and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses.*’ (14:24-25).

So, the tither who lives far from the holy place could take the produce or the animals, sell them locally, then take the money in hand and travel to the tribal holy place.

b) The Opportunity to Purchase with Money

(1) To Partake in the Presence of the LORD

Once the tither has arrived at the holy place, he would have the opportunity to purchase with money replacement produce and animals to partake of the worship in the presence of the LORD. Verse 26. “*You may spend the money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household.*” (14:26).

Upon arrival in the vicinity of the holy place, the tither could purchase replacement gifts. The gifts did not have to be precisely the same as that he exchanged for the money in his home area. He could buy any clean offering animal or produce that he desired. Of course, we know that, with time, this exchange system was perverted by the Jews. Jesus would clear the exchangers from the Temple area twice because of the corruption developed and allowed in the system.

(2) To Provide for the Portion of the Levite

But the opportunity to purchase with money with the animals or produce was also to provide for the Levite portion. Verse 27. “*Also, you shall not neglect the Levite who is in your town, for he has no portion or inheritance among you.*” (14:27).

Once arriving in the town containing the holy place of the LORD assigned to each tribal area, the tither would choose what to buy depending on the Levites' need in that location. The tither could also purchase what he wanted to give without regard to the Levites' needs. Nevertheless, the Levites in each town needed provisions in their cities for their own families.

(a) Every Third Year a Tithe

How often was this tithe audited? It was required every third year. Verse 28. “*At the end of every third year, you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year, and shall deposit it in your town.*” (14:28).

We must remember that this section of the instruction concerns the tither who lives at a distance too great to travel at a whim. Let us look at that first part of this sentence again. “*At the end of every third year, you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year*” Notice the words “*you shall bring out all the tithe*” that follows the words “*every third year.*” Thus, the LORD placed a time marker on the tither as a required time to check the book and records and make sure the whole tithe for the past three years has been properly given. If by some chance, this verse allows the tither to hold the tithe for three years, it posed a problem for the offering slain and placed on the Brazen Altar. Those offerings were to be one year or younger and spotless when offered slain. However, it does not preclude a first-born animal older than one year old from being donated to the holy place. These

animals would not be offered on the Brazen Altar; instead, they would be used for meat among the Levitical families in their homes. For the tither, three years were the limit to making the audit and transferring the gift to the holy place.

Where were the tithes of the third year to be delivered? The end of the verse says, “*shall deposit it in your town.*” Notice that it is a “*deposit ... town.*” The word *deposit* means *to store*. Because the LORD uses the word “town,” we might correctly conclude, as many commentators have, that the tithe of the first and second years was to be presented to the LORD in the holy places, from which it would be disseminated among all the Levites as needed, whereas, the tithe of the third year was presented to the Levites in your town to provide food for the Levitical families and others in need. The word “*deposit*,” which means *to store*, causes some confusion here. When the Northern of Israel's exile and the Southern Kingdom of Judah occurred about a thousand years later, the whole sacrificial system broke down and was abandoned. When the nation returned from *exile*, the system was restarted but never reestablished through the rest of the Promised Land as before because the Roman government owned the land, and the tribal areas were never established anew as tribal property. Because of all that, we have no further instruction or custom on which to rely.

(b) Every Alien, Orphan, Widow Partake

The third-year requirement was not only for the worship of the LORD and the provisions for the Levites. It is also for every alien, orphan, and widow to partake. Verse 29. “*The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.*” (14:29).

Once again, the stored tithes each third year were for the alien, orphan, and widow “*in your town.*” Surely this does not mean that offerings held in each town would survive and remain edible for three years. It would be impossible. What would they do in the other years? It is for that purpose that the most plausible understanding is that “*in your town*” means the town where the holy place is located in each tribal area; the third year was an audit year to make sure the whole tithe was given; the stored tithes would be distributed through the tribal areas as needed.

Chapter 15

B. Laws for the Lender and the Debtor

1. Seven-Year Forgiveness of Debt

Continuing with Moses' summary of the Promised Land laws, we come to the laws for the lender and the debtor. The first point concerns the seventh-year forgiveness of debt. Chapter 15, verses 1. “*At the end of every seven years, you shall grant a remission of debts.*”² This is the manner of remission: every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother, because the LORD'S remission has been proclaimed.³ From a foreigner you may exact it, but your hand shall release whatever of yours is with your brother.⁴ However, there will be no poor among you, since the LORD will surely bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess,⁵ if only you listen obediently to the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today.⁶ For the LORD your God will bless you as He has promised you, and you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; and you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you.” (15:1-6).

a) Of the Jewish Neighbor

Once the Jews took possession of the Promised Land, which would take seven years to complete, every seventh year following would be a year of the forgiveness of debts. The text uses the word “*remission*,” and we define that as a *reduction or decrease*. That is not the meaning of this word in the text. “*Remission*” here means *to forgive*. It was total forgiveness of all that was left on a

debt no matter what year in the cycle the debt was incurred. The seventh-year was considered and called a sabbatical year. Every seventh-year certain things were required. A multiple of the seven-year cycle was the forty-ninth year.

You have probably heard of the Year of Jubilee. The forty-ninth year was a forgiveness year, but at the end of that year, the following year was called the Year of Jubilee, the first year of land being that had been purchased in the last forty-nine years being returned to the original tribal family unit that acquired the land in the first seven years of taking the Promised Land. The land of each family unit was not to be sold, but if it was, on the Year of Jubilee, the title and possession of the land had to be returned to the original family. On a smaller scale, after each seven-year cycle, any debts for loans made during the seven-year cycle had to be forgiven in full among Jewish brethren. For example, a man borrows 100 dollars at the beginning of the sixth year. Over the sixth year and through the seventh year, he pays \$5.00 on the loan. He owes \$95.00. At the end of the seventh year, the Jewish lender was to forgive the Jewish debtor of the remaining \$95.00 and could never demand it to be paid.

b) Of the Alien Neighbor

But if, for example, the Jewish man made the same loan to an alien neighbor, and the exact details applied, the law was different. In the seventh year, the Jewish lender could still demand the alien neighbor the loan's full repayment for as long as it took.

c) Of the Alien Nation

When it came to loans between the Nation of Israel and, for example, the Nation of Edom, or the Nation of Moab, or Ammon or Egypt or Philistia, etc., Israel was never to borrow from anyone or any nation. Be that as it may, the Nation of Israel could be the lender to any nation. Why?

The borrower is always under the thumb of the lender, for example. Today, if you have made a loan for your house, you have assigned the house as the loan's collateral. The house is in your name, but the lender has a lien against your house. You cannot sell your house without paying off the lender at the closing. In short, the lender is in charge of what you do with the money you are selling the house for, at least to the point of what you owe on the balance and interest. If you miss a payment on the loan, the lender can take the house from you and put you on the street with nothing. Suppose you borrow \$100.00 and used your house as collateral for the loan. Suppose you had paid the loan down to \$5.00, but then you lost your job, and you could not pay the \$5.00. Your house is worth \$150,000, but you still owe \$5.00 on the loan. After a time, if you do not pay the \$5.00, the lender can take your \$150,000 home away from you because you still owe \$5.00.

For that reason, the LORD forbids the Nation of Israel from being a debtor of any other nation. However, the LORD permits the Nation of Israel to be the lender to any other nation. Thus, other nations would be under the thumb of Israel.

d) Of the Poor Brother

You may remember that long after this setting, the LORD Jesus told His followers, "the poor will always be among us," it is a statement that was true then. It was true in the days of Moses; it is still true today. Poor people are poor because poor people do what poor people do no matter how much wealth flows through their fingers. Suppose all have to do with their think about caring for that which has been given them. Of the poor neighbors, Moses address in verse 7. *"If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; ⁸ but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks. ⁹ Beware that there is no base thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,' and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing; then he may cry to the LORD against you, and it will be a sin in you. ¹⁰ You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings. ¹¹ For the poor will never cease to be in the land;*

therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.' (15:7-11).

When we step back and look at the context in this passage, a clear point is being made that might not be accurately translated into our English. Follow me here. Poor people are always going to be in every town. Poor people are still going to have needs that they cannot provide on their own, maybe because of their own habitual doing, perhaps because of life's circumstances. Poor people may have at one time been stable on their own, but a turn of the family structure changed the nature of the family stability. Poor people may be poor because of the decisions of other family members. On and on, we can go with the reasons for which a person is poor. At some time in their life, everyone has their time in the barrel, we might say. Here the LORD, through Moses, seems to be saying, if a poor person, for whatever reason, a poor person has become poor, arrives on your doorstep and is part of your biological family, help that person to the extent that he needs to be supported. For the Jews, in these circumstances, they are to disregard the seven-year limitation on loans and give to family members what is required at the time. In this passage, the bottom line is that if a family member wants to borrow, you can lend, knowing that the loan will turn out to be a gift in the end. If you find a poor family member in need and can help, give the gift, do not make a loan.

2. Six-Year Kinsman of Debt

Departing from the topic of the poor brother, Moses turns to the topic of the purchased kinsman. Verse 12. *'If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free.¹³ When you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed.¹⁴ You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you.¹⁵ You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore, I command you this today.¹⁶ It shall come about if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he fares well with you;¹⁷ then you shall take an awl and pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also, you shall do likewise to your maidservant.¹⁸ It shall not seem hard to you when you set him free, for he has given you six years with double the service of a hired man; so the LORD your God will bless you in whatever you do.'* (15:12-18).

a) The Kinsman to Continue in Service

Living in America in the twenty-first century, we are appalled at the thought of purchasing a human for any reason. Frankly, the entire Bible holds that same position. When it uses the term "slaves," the context almost always means "employees" of a person or nation. That point is valid in all the laws of the LORD for the Nation of Israel. It is not to say that the Bible does not report the unjust slavery at the hands of other nations that are not in a relationship with the LORD. The Bible does document such atrocities and condemns them. Nevertheless, we come to this passage, and a Jew has purchased a kinsman. How can that be?

First, we must not miss that the Hebrew, male or female, kinsman was sold to the Jew. That means that the Hebrew was in slavery for some reason to someone who owned the Hebrew, and it would have had to be a non-Jew who owned the Jew. The Jewish man was able to purchase his kinsman for some price to take that kinsman out of the permanent ownership position of some non-Jew and bring him back into the freedom of Jewish life. To pay back the Jew who purchased his release, the kinsman would work as a servant/employee for six years. At the end of the sixth year, at the beginning of the seventh year, the debt was to be considered paid, and the redeemed kinsman servant/employee was freed from the job, blessed beyond belief by the relative who purchased his redemption.

Second, we must put two and two together here. The enslaved Jew was sold to a kinsman Jew. In the Nation of Israel, kinsman were members of the same tribe of Israel. Therefore, they lived in the same tribal area. When the land is divided to each tribe over the next seven years in the sorry

line, that tribal land will further be divided to each family unit according to each family's patriarch. Each patriarch would receive a portion of land for him and his sons and families to live on and own. That land would always and forever belong to that patriarch's family line. Even if it was sold some time in a forty-nine-year cycle, on the forty-ninth years, the new, or we should say, the last new owner of the land would be required to give the land back to the descendants of the original patriarch's family. With that stated, we might correctly assume that the servant/employee probably lived with his own family on his own land in his own tribal home and then worked on the land of the Jewish relative who redeemed him six days out of each week, just as we live in our own homes and travel to work each day. Of course, there would have also been those who lived with the redeemer to be close to the job.

b) The Kinsman to Continue as Servant

(1) The Male

In certain situations, at the end of the seven years, the servant/employee might want to stay on with the redeemer permanently. What then? Well, Moses answered that with a new twist for Deuteronomy. We read it. We will reread it. *"It shall come about if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he fares well with you;¹⁷ then you shall take an awl and pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant forever."*

In other words, at the end of the seventh-year, the servant/employee can appeal to the redeemer and offer his services for life as an employee. The mark would be a hole in the ear of the servant/employee.

(2) The Female

We have been talking about male servants so far, but what if the redeemer purchased a female from the hands of a non-Jewish owner? Notice that the passage states that the female maidservant/employee was treated just like the male servant/employee was treated. And at the end of it all, after the sixth year was over, whether the male or female servant/employee stayed or left, the redeemer was to rejoice because the LORD God would bless him for his generosity to his kinsman. The latter has worked six years for the redeemer.

The ending of this passage brings us to an interesting fact for which we only have one clue in the word of God. Evidently, when a person hired on as a servant/employee, the contract was for three years. We find that seven-hundred-years after this moment during the life of Isaiah in chapter 16 verse 14. *"But now the LORD says: Within three years, as a servant bound by contract would count them...."* If we are correct and hired employees contracted in three-year blocks of time, then the purchased kinsman working for six years to pay his cost he indeed did work for double the time.

C. Laws of the Firstborn Males from Herd and Flock

Rounding out this chapter, we come to the laws of the firstborn males from the herd and flock. Verse 19. *"You shall consecrate to the LORD your God all the firstborn males that are born of your herd and your flock; you shall not work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock.²⁰ You and your household shall eat it every year before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses.²¹ But if it has any defect, such as lameness or blindness, or any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God.²² You shall eat it within your gates; the unclean and the clean alike may eat it, as a gazelle or a deer.²³ Only you shall not eat its blood; you are to pour it out on the ground like water."* (15:19-23).

Ever since the firstborn sons of Israel were redeemed the tenth plague in Egypt, the firstborn male of every Jewish family and the firstborn male of the ox, sheep, and goat were special to the LORD. Here we will not discuss the firstborn male sons of the families because they are not addressed here. We will focus on the firstborn of the beasts. This passage is not speaking of the firstborn of a mother ox, sheep, or goat every year. It is speaking of the firstborn male offspring of the mother animal the first time when gives birth. If her firstborn is a female, it does not count. It is

only concerned with the firstborn male. All firstborn male ox, sheep, or goat belong to the LORD, and He requires that they be brought as an offering, slain, and eaten in the holy place of each tribal area. If it is not spotless, it does not count. This spotless animal is to be tended with the greatest care. When the animal is presented to the LORD in His chosen place in each tribal area, the clean and unclean humans can eat the cooked meat. That is for the Jew and being shared with the non-Jew just as the meat of clean wild animals can be shared with other Jews and non-Jews. But the blood, as always, is to be poured on the ground and not eaten.

In the next lesson, we will continue with Moses' summary of Jewish life laws in the Promised Land. We will begin with the laws of the three major high holy feasts required by the LORD.