

CHAPTER 14

Moses in this chapter teaches them,

- I.** To distinguish themselves from their neighbours by a singularity,
 - 1.** In their mourning (v. 1, 2).
 - 2.** In their meat (v. 3-21).
- II.** To devote themselves unto God, and, in token of that, to give him his dues out of their estates, the yearly tithe, and that every third year, for the maintenance of their religious feasts, the Levites, and the poor (v. 22, etc.).

◀64▶ DEUTERONOMY 14:1-21

WHAT MIGHT BE EATEN, AND WHAT NOT

Moses here tells the people of Israel,

I. How God had dignified them, as a peculiar people, with three distinguishing privileges, which were their honour, and figures of those spiritual blessings in heavenly things with which God has in Christ blessed us.

1. Here is election: *The Lord hath chosen thee*, v: 2. Not for their own merit, nor for any good works foreseen, but because he would magnify the riches of his power and grace among them. He did not choose them because they were by their own dedication and subjection a peculiar people to him above other nations, but he chose them that they might be so by his grace; and thus were believers chosen, ~~◀40▶~~ Ephesians 1:4.

2. Here is adoption (v. 1): *“You are the children of the Lord your God, formed by him into a people, owned by him as his people, nay, his family, a people near unto him, nearer than any other.”* *Israel is my son, my first-born;* not because he needed children, but because they were orphans, and needed a father. Every Israelite is indeed a child of God, a partaker of his nature and favour, his love and blessing *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us!* **3.** Here is sanctification (v. 2): *“Thou art a*

holy people, separated and set apart for God, devoted to his service, designed for his praise, governed by a holy law, graced by a holy tabernacle, and the holy ordinances relating to it." God's people are under the strongest obligations to be holy, and, if they are holy, are indebted to the grace of God that makes them so. The Lord has set them apart for himself, and qualified them for his service and the enjoyment of him, and so has made them holy to himself.

II. How they ought to distinguish themselves by a sober singularity from all the nations that were about them. And, God having thus advanced them, let not them debase themselves by admitting the superstitious customs of idolaters, and, by making themselves like them, put themselves upon the level with them. *Be you the children of the Lord your God*; so the Seventy read it, as a command, that is, "Carry yourselves as becomes the children of God, and do nothing to disgrace the honour and forfeit the privileges of the relation." In two things particularly they must distinguish themselves: —

1. In their mourning: *You shall not cut yourselves*, v. 1. This forbids (as some think), not only their cutting themselves at their funerals, either to express their grief or with their own blood to appease the infernal deities, but their wounding and mangling themselves in the worship of their gods, as Baal's prophets did (⁴¹⁸³1 Kings 18:28), or their marking themselves by incisions in their flesh for such and such deities, which in them, above any, would be an inexcusable crime, who in the sign of circumcision bore about with them in their bodies the marks of the Lord Jehovah. So that,

(1.) They are forbidden to deform or hurt their own bodies upon any account. Methinks this is like a parent's charge to his little children, that are foolish, careless, and wilful, and are apt to play with knives: *Children, you shall not cut yourselves*. This is the intention of those commands which oblige us to deny ourselves; the true meaning of them, if we understood them aright, would appear to be, *Do yourselves no harm*. And this also is the design of those providences which most cross us, to remove from us those things by which we are in danger of doing ourselves harm. Knives are taken from us, lest we should cut ourselves. Those that are dedicated to God as a holy people must do nothing to disfigure themselves; the body is for the Lord, and is to be used accordingly.

(2.) They are forbidden to disturb and afflict their own minds with inordinate grief for the loss of near and dear relations: “You shall not express or exasperate you sorrow, even upon the most mournful occasions, by cutting yourselves, and making baldness between your eyes, like men enraged, or resolvedly hardened in sorrow for the dead, as those that have no hope,” ^{<5043>}1 Thessalonians 4:13. It is an excellent passage which Mr. Ainsworth here quotes from one of the Jewish writers, who understands this as a law against immoderate grief for the death of our relations. *If your father (for instance) die, you shall not cut yourselves, that is, you shall not sorrow more than is meet, for you are not fatherless, you have a Father, who is great, living, and permanent, even the holy blessed God, whose children you are, v. 1. But an infidel (says he), when his father dies, hath no father that can help him in time of need; for he hath said to a stock, Thou art my father, and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth* (^{<2027>}Jeremiah 2:27); *therefore he weeps, cuts himself, and makes himself bald.* We that have a God to hope in, and a heaven to hope for, must bear up ourselves with that hope under every burden of this kind.

2. They must be singular in their meat. Observe,

(1.) Many sorts of flesh which were wholesome enough, and which other people did commonly eat, they must religiously abstain from as unclean. This law we had before ^{<5112>}Leviticus 11:2, where it was largely opened. It seems plainly, by the connection here, to be intended as a mark of peculiarity; for their observance of it would cause them to be taken notice of in all mixed companies as a separate people, and would preserve them from mingling themselves with, and conforming themselves to, their idolatrous neighbours.

[1.] Concerning beasts, here is a more particular enumeration of those which they were allowed to eat then was in Leviticus, to show that they had no reason to complain of their being restrained from eating swines' flesh, and hares, and rabbits (which were all that were then forbidden, but are now commonly used), when they were allowed so great a variety, not only of that which we call butcher's meat (v. 4), which alone was offered in sacrifice, but of venison, which they had great plenty of in Canaan, *the hart, and the roe-buck, and the fallow deer* (v. 5), which, though never brought to God's altar, was allowed them at their own table. See ^{<5122>}Deuteronomy 12:22. When of all these (as Adam of *every tree of the garden*) they might freely eat, those were inexcusable who, to gratify a

perverse appetite, or (as should seem) in honour of their idols, and in participation of their idolatrous sacrifices, *ate swines' flesh, and had broth of abominable things* (made so by this law) *in their vessels*, ^{<2504>} Isaiah 65:4.

[2.] Concerning fish there is only one general rule given, that whatsoever had not fins and scales (as shell-fish and eels, besides leeches and other animals in the water that are not proper food) was *unclean and forbidden*, v. 9, 10.

[3.] No general rule is given concerning fowl, but those are particularly mentioned that were to be unclean to them, and there are few or none of them which are here forbidden that are now commonly eaten; and whatsoever is not expressly forbidden is allowed, v. 11-20. *Of all clean fowls you may eat.*

[4.] They are further forbidden, *First*, To eat the flesh of any creature that died of itself, because the blood was not separated from it, and, besides the ceremonial uncleanness which it lay under (from ^{<2513>} Leviticus 11:39), it is not wholesome food, nor ordinarily used among us, except by the poor. *Secondly*, To *seethe a kid in its mother's milk*, either to gratify their own luxury, supposing it a dainty bit, or in conformity to some superstitious custom of the heathen. The Chaldee paraphrasts read it, *Thou shalt not eat flesh-meats and milk-meats together*; and so it would forbid the use of butter as sauce to any flesh.

(2.) Now as to all these precepts concerning their food,

[1.] It is plain in the law itself that they belonged only to the Jews, and were not moral, nor of perpetual use, because not of universal obligation; for what they might not eat themselves they might give to a stranger, a proselyte of the gate, that had renounced idolatry, and therefore was permitted to live among them, though not circumcised; or they might sell it to an alien, a mere Gentile, that came into their country for trade, but might not settle it, v. 21. They might feed upon that which an Israelite might not touch, which is a plain instance of their peculiarity, and their being a holy people.

[2.] It is plain in the gospel that they are now antiquated and repealed. For *every creature of God is good, and nothing now to be refused, or called common and unclean*, ^{<5001>} 1 Timothy 4:4.

~~5142~~ DEUTERONOMY 14:22-29

TITHES FOR FEASTING AND CHARITY

We have here a part of the statute concerning tithes. The productions of the ground were twice tithed, so that, putting both together, a fifth part was devoted to God out of their increase, and only four parts of five were for their own common use; and they could not but own they paid an easy rent, especially since God's part was disposed of to their own benefit and advantage. The first tithe was for the maintenance of their Levites, who taught them the good knowledge of God, and ministered to them in holy things; this is supposed as anciently due, and is entailed upon the Levites as an inheritance, by that law, ~~4182~~ Numbers 18:24, etc. But it is the second tithe that is here spoken of, which was to be taken out of the remainder when the Levites had had theirs.

I. They are here charged to separate it, and set it apart for God: *Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed*, v. 22. The Levites took care of their own, but the separating of this was left to the owners themselves, the law encouraging them to be honest by reposing a confidence in them, and so trying their fear of God. They are commanded to tithe *truly*, that is, to be sure to do it, and to do it faithfully and carefully, that God's part might not be diminished either with design or by oversight. Note, We must be sure to give God his full dues out of our estates; for, being but stewards of them, it is required that we be faithful, as those that must give account.

II. They are here directed how to dispose of it when they had separated it. Let every man lay by as God prospers him and gives him success, and then let him lay out in pious uses as God gives him opportunity; and it will be the easier to lay out, and the proportion will be more satisfying, when first we have laid by. This second tithe may be disposed of,

1. In works of piety, for the first two years after the year of release. They must bring it up, either in kind or in the full value of it, to the place of the sanctuary, and there must spend it in holy feasting before the Lord. If they could do it with any convenience, they must bring it in kind (v. 23); but, if not, they might turn it into money (v. 24, 25), and that money must be laid out in something to feast upon before the Lord. The comfortable cheerful using of what God has given us, with temperance and sobriety, is really

the honouring of God with it. Contentment, holy joy, and thankfulness, make every meal a religious feast. The end of this law we have (v. 23): *That thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always*; it was to keep them right and firm to their religion,

(1.) By acquainting them with the sanctuary, the holy things, and the solemn services that were there performed. What they read the appointment of their Bibles, it would do them good to see the observance of in the tabernacle; it would make a deeper impression upon them, which would keep them out of the snares of the idolatrous customs. Note, It will have a good influence upon our constancy in religion *never to forsake the assembling of ourselves together*, ⁻⁸¹⁰⁵ Hebrews 10:25. By the comfort of the communion of saints, we may be kept to our communion with God.

(2.) By using them to the most pleasant and delightful services of religion. Let them *rejoice before the Lord, that they may learn to fear him always*. The more pleasure we find in the ways of religion the more likely we shall be to persevere in those ways. One thing they must remember in their pious entertainments — to bid their Levites welcome to them. Thou shalt not *forsake the Levites* (v. 27): “Let him never be a stranger to thy table, especially when thou eatest before the Lord.”

2. Every third year this tithe must be disposed of at home in works of charity (v. 28, 29): *Lay it up within they own gates*, and let it be given to the poor, who, knowing the provision this law had made for them, no doubt would come to seek it; and, that they might make the poor familiar to them and not disdain their company, they are here directed to welcome them to their houses. “Thither let them come, and eat and be satisfied.” In this charitable distribution of the second tithe they must have an eye to the poor ministers and add to their encouragement by entertaining them, then to poor strangers (not only for the supply of their necessities, but to put a respect upon them, and so to invite them to turn proselytes), and then to the fatherless and widow, who, though perhaps they might have a competent maintenance left them, yet could not be supposed to live so plentifully and comfortably as they had done in months past, and therefore they were to countenance them, and help to make them easy by inviting them to this entertainment. God has a particular care for widows and fatherless, and he requires that we should have the same. It is his honour, and will be ours, to help the helpless. And if we thus serve God, and do

good with what we have, it is promised here that the Lord our God will *bless us in all the work of our hand*. Note,

(1.) The blessing of God is all in all to our outward prosperity, and, without that blessing, the work of our hands which we do will bring nothing to pass.

(2.) The way to obtain that blessing is to be diligent and charitable. The blessing descends upon the working hand: “Except not that God should bless thee in thy idleness and love of ease, but in all the work of they hand.” It is the hand of the diligent, with the blessing of God upon it, that makes rich, ²¹⁰⁴Proverbs 10:4, 22. And it descends upon the giving hand; he that thus scatters certainly increases, and the liberal soul will be made fat. It is an undoubted truth, though little believed, that to be charitable to the poor, and to be free and generous in the support of religion and any good work, is the surest and safest way of thriving. What is lent to the Lord will be repaid with abundant interest. See ²³⁴⁰Ezekiel 44:30.