

# Clean and Unclean Animals (Deuteronomy 14:1-21)

## Expository Lessons from the Book of Deuteronomy

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### I. Background

- a. The **Book of Deuteronomy** consists of a few speeches that Moses gave to the Israelites near the end of their 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness.
- b. The second of Moses's addresses, which we are still in, began in **Deuteronomy 5** with Moses recounting the Lord giving the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. Thus far, in this second address, Moses has issued a number of warnings, admonitions, and reminders, along with specific instructions.
- c. Some of the things in the farewell admonitions of Moses repeat things that had been given earlier, especially elements of the law of Moses that were introduced in **Exodus** and **Leviticus**.
  - i. There are examples of that in the passages we will read today.
- d. One of the challenges of expository teaching and preaching is that you have little to no control over the text and topics you will encounter. In some cases, the teacher will have to dig extra hard to unearth the practical lessons that may be hidden in the text. Today is one of those days!
  - i. For the benefit of any children who may be listening (or to those who are children at heart), you may be encouraged to know that will be talking about *all kinds of animals* in this lesson!
  - ii. Also, be aware that in the Law of Moses there are several things that foreshadow important things that will later be revealed through Christ. We will encounter some of those things in this lesson as well.

### II. Don't Copy Pagan Practices Associated with the Dead

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 14:1-2**.
- b. Moses reminds the Israelites that they are a holy people set apart for God.
  - i. Recall that in **Exodus 30**, we are given a picture of the meaning of the term "holy" in the discussion about the special anointing oil and incense associated with worship in the tabernacle/temple.
    - 1. Holy means to be "set apart" for a special purpose. This special oil and incense were specifically set apart for the tabernacle service. They were not to be used for common purposes.

- ii. Peter reminds us, borrowing from the language in the Law of Moses, that we Christians are called to be a holy people as well, set apart for God's special purposes.
  - 1. "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, *a holy nation*, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...." (**1 Peter 2:9**, NKJV)
- c. I am not aware of any explanation given here or elsewhere in the Scriptures regarding what this particular (of shaving one's head for the dead) pertains to.
  - i. There are a few references in the Old Testament to shaving one's hair off as associated with ritual purification under the Law of Moses.
  - ii. The passage that most reminds me of this one is in **Leviticus 19:28**, where Moses tells them they must not gash their bodies for the dead nor put tattoo marks on themselves.
  - iii. I assume Moses was addressing an ancient pagan custom associated with the dead. When the people entered Canaan, the Lord did not want them to pick up the wicked practices of the other nations.

### III. Clean and Unclean Animals

- a. [**NOTE:** For a more detailed treatment of this subject, please see audio and notes from our expository teaching series *on Leviticus: Clean and Unclean Animals (Leviticus 11)*, recorded August 1, 2021, posted on our website.]
- b. Read **Deuteronomy 14:3-21**.
  - i. Here Moses is reminding the Israelites of what the Lord had told them almost 40 years earlier, when they were given the Law while encamped at Mount Sinai. That was recorded in **Leviticus 11**.
  - ii. The passage we just read essentially repeats what **Leviticus 11** says about the clean animals (which they were allowed to eat) versus the unclean ones (which they were forbidden to eat).
  - iii. In **Deuteronomy 14**, the animals are divided into four groups:
    - 1. Land animals (perhaps referring to four-footed mammals), in **Deuteronomy 14:3-8**;
    - 2. Animals that live in the water (including fish), in **Deuteronomy 14:9-10**;

3. Winged animals (mostly birds), in **Deuteronomy 14:11-18**; and
  4. Creeping things that fly, in **Deuteronomy 14:19-20**.
    - a. It appears that this refers to flying insects, based on what seems to be a parallel account in **Leviticus 11:20-23**.
- iv. The land animals: clean vs. unclear.
1. The clean must meet *BOTH* of the following two criteria:
    - a. Chew the cud, and
    - b. Have split (cloven) hooves.
  2. About chewing the cud.
    - a. Grasses are plentiful over much of the earth, but it is hard to extract nutrients from grasses.
    - b. Some animals are designed to digest grasses, utilizing multiple stomachs. They eat grass, store it in one of their stomachs, then regurgitate it (cough it up later) and chew again and again to extract more nutrients.
    - c. Animals that chew the cud, such as sheep, cows and goats, are sometimes referred to as *ruminants*.
  3. About split hooves.
    - a. Horses and camels have a single *hoof* (a single hard, bone-like structure at the bottom of each leg).
    - b. Pigs, sheep, and goats have split hooves (bisected, with left and right halves), which makes them more sure-footed on uneven terrain.
    - c. Most mammals (dogs, cats, foxes, bears, people, etc.) have no hooves at all. They may have feet or paws instead.
  4. One out of two is *NOT GOOD ENOUGH!*
    - a. Horses, camels and rabbits chew the cud, but do not have split hooves. Therefore, they are unclear.
    - b. Pigs have split hooves but do not chew the cud. Therefore, they are unclear. In fact, pigs eat garbage!

- c. Animals that *BOTH* chew the cud and have split hooves, and therefore are 'clean', include sheep, goats, deer and cows (cattle).
- 5. The Jews could not eat unclean animals, nor were they permitted to touch the dead carcasses of those animals.
- v. The water animals: The clean animals that could be eaten must have both fins and scales.
  - 1. Things in the water that do not have fins and scales, and therefore would be considered *unclean* and *could not be eaten*, include:
    - a. Lobsters and crabs
    - b. Clams and oysters
    - c. Eels (fins but no scales)
    - d. Catfish (fins but no scales)
    - e. Squid (calamari) and octopus
    - f. Sea turtles
    - g. Dolphins, whales and porpoises
  - 2. In general, fin-type fish (which also have scales), from the ocean, lakes or rivers are considered clean and can be eaten.
- vi. Birds: clean versus unclean.
  - 1. Birds that are listed as being unclean include scavengers (like seagulls), predatory birds (eagles, falcons), carrion-eating birds (like vultures), and certain other wild birds. Bats, which are also winged creatures, are included in this list as well.
  - 2. Birds considered to be 'clean' (= not on the 'unclean' list) include chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, pigeons and other domesticated birds. Jews today generally consider that any bird not mentioned on this list of unclean birds is acceptable to eat.
- vii. Insects (creeping things): clean versus unclean.
  - 1. Compare to what it says in the parallel passage, in **Leviticus 11:20-23**.

2. Note that the OSB translators used the term “insects” in **Leviticus 11** instead of the more literal expression “creeping things.”
3. The passage in **Leviticus 11** explains that the only “creeping things” that fly and may be eaten are those with jointed legs that can leap (such as grasshoppers, crickets, and locusts).
  - a. Therefore, John the Baptist was not breaking the Law of Moses by eating locusts. (**Mark 1:6**)
- c. **Question:** Why can’t you eat these animals that are designated “unclean”?
  - i. The Scripture simply says: eating unclean things will defile a person. (**Leviticus 11**)
  - ii. God is a holy God; His people must be holy (= *set apart*) because He is holy (**Leviticus 11:44-45**).
    1. This is the first place in **Leviticus** that this important statement is made: “Be holy because I am holy.”

#### IV. Dietary Laws - More Details

- a. The Jews were forbidden to eat anything that died by itself. However, they may give it to the alien or even *sell it to a foreigner*! (**Deuteronomy 14:21a**)
  - i. No eating ‘road kill’, for example.
  - ii. Perhaps there was a health reason connected with this (for instance, the animal died on its own because it was sick).
- b. Here is found the statement, “Don’t boil a lamb *in its mother’s milk*.” (**Deuteronomy 14:21b**) This is one of the three places in the Law of Moses where it is found.
  - i. This is the basis for having one set of dishes for meat and another set for dairy-type foods, in kosher households that still follow these laws.

#### V. These Laws Were Meant to be Taken Seriously

- a. **Question:** Might there be health-related reasons why the Lord prohibited his people from eating certain foods?
  - i. **Answer:** Perhaps. Some people think so.
  - ii. I remember a friend who was a physician and medical missionary (and at the time pursuing a Master’s in Public Health degree) telling me years ago that he believed there were *good public health reasons* for the dietary restrictions **in the Law**. For example:

1. A person can get a parasitic disease called *trichinosis* from eating undercooked pork (since pigs are susceptible to this parasite).
  2. Also, bear in mind that pigs will eat almost anything (including human garbage); in contrast, cows and sheep (clean animals) just eat grass.
  3. Shellfish, which are 'filter feeders', tend to concentrate in their bodies whatever pollutants (including bacteria) are present in their local marine environment. Eating clams, scallops, mussels, or oysters harvested from polluted waters can lead to a variety of illnesses.
- b. We also find heroic examples in Jewish history of those who would not compromise. They kept these dietary commands even when put to *the ultimate test*.
- i. The heroic story of Eleazar in **2 Maccabees 6:18-31**.
    1. Note that the books of **1 and 2 Maccabees** were included in the Old Testaments of the Catholic and Orthodox Bibles. These books also were in most King James Version (KJV) Bibles from the time they were first published in 1611 until about the year 1900.
    2. The stories in **2 Maccabees** take place during the time when Israel was ruled by the Greeks and their successors, prior to the time when the Romans took over that part of the world.
      - a. The Greeks were trying to force the Jews to abandon their adherence to the Law of Moses, by openly violating the dietary requirements of the Law.
    3. From the text of the story about Eleazar:
      - a. A 90-year-old Jewish man refuses to compromise and eat the flesh of pigs.
      - b. He will not even *pretend* to eat pig's flesh (as suggested by those who wanted to spare him from death).
      - c. He is concerned about the example he is setting for those who follow, the younger generation of Jews.
      - d. He feared God more than the rulers and died a painful death as a result.

- e. To me, he is a great example of a man who finished his spiritual race strong to the very end. He demonstrated a noble way to live and to die in one's advanced years!
- ii. A similar heroic story follows in **2 Maccabees 7**, regarding seven brothers and their mother who refuse to eat swine's flesh. All of them are willing to *give up their lives* to remain faithful to the Law of Moses.

## VI. God's People No Longer Need to Follow These Dietary Laws

- a. Jesus taught that it is not what goes into our mouths that defiles us, but rather *what comes out of our mouths*, from the overflow of our hearts. Thereby, Jesus stated all foods were purified. (**Mark 7:14-23**)
- b. The dietary restrictions in the Law of Moses were used to show Peter, through a vision, that the Gentiles would be acceptable to God *even without following these laws*.
  - i. Read **Acts 10:1-19**.
    - 1. Three times, while in a trance, Peter is told to "kill and eat" from an assortment of animals that included "all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things and birds of the air". From the description, this clearly included animals that were on the "unclean" list in **Leviticus 11**, animals that Jews were forbidden to eat.
    - 2. Peter protests these instructions, insisting, "I have *never* eaten anything common or unclean!" (**Acts 10:14**)
  - ii. Read **Acts 10:24-29** and **10:34-35**.
    - 1. God used the dietary laws and a vision to show that *all people* now can be acceptable to God.
    - 2. The animals (clean and unclean) were used to foreshadow different types of people (Jew and Gentile).
  - iii. In **Acts 15**, Peter testified at the Council in Jerusalem, where the issue was whether the Gentile believers also had to follow circumcision and the rest of the Law of Moses. James confirmed what Peter and Paul had said, and he also used a prophecy from **Amos 9:11-12** to reinforce the point.
    - 1. Conclusion of the Council: a letter is issued to the Gentile believers. See **Acts 15:28-29**.

- a. The Gentiles must abstain from eating things offered to idols, things strangled, and blood. They also must abstain from sexual immorality.
  - b. However, Gentiles *would not* be bound to follow the commands related to circumcision, dietary rules or other parts of the Law of Moses.
- c. In the beginning, there was a struggle in the church regarding whether Christians still had to follow the Law of Moses (or just certain parts of it). This issue comes up prominently in **Acts** and several of the letters.
- d. Paul addressed this issue decisively in **Colossians 2**.
  - i. Read **Colossians 2:13-23**.
    - 1. Our sins, as well as the “handwriting of requirements” (the Law of Moses), were *taken away and nailed to the cross* at the crucifixion of Jesus (**Colossians 2:14**).
    - 2. We are no longer to be judged by anyone regarding *food or drink, sabbaths, festivals, etc.*
    - 3. Those things were “a shadow of things to come”. Note that Paul had previously made the point that circumcision foreshadowed Christian baptism.
  - ii. The writer of **Hebrews** makes a similar point, namely that while we are no longer under the Law of Moses, that Law *did provide a shadow of things to come* (which we now see fulfilled in Christ and the church).
    - 1. “For the law, having *a shadow of the good things to come*, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect...” (**Hebrews 10:1**, NKJV)

## VII. Another Look at the Foreshadowing of the Dietary Laws

- a. Recall that in many places in Scripture, God uses clean and unclean *animals* to communicate things about humans. Two examples from the New Testament come to mind:
  - i. “*Do not be unequally yoked together* with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” (**2 Corinthians 6:14**, NKJV)
    - 1. This statement is reminiscent of a command in the Law of Moses: “You shall not plow with an *ox* and a *donkey together*.” (**Deuteronomy 22:10**)



2. Why not plow with an ox and donkey yoked together? For one thing, since an ox is much stronger than a donkey, you wouldn't be able to keep a straight line while plowing,
  3. However, there may be a second reason. Note that an ox is a *clean animal*, while a donkey is an *unclean one*. (A donkey has a monolithic hoof, similar to a horse.)
- ii. Also, an admonition from Peter, that Christians must not backslide spiritually and return to their old way of life. Read **2 Peter 2:20-22**.
1. Peter uses two proverbs to illustrate his point, rather graphically: "... 'a dog returns to his own vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.'" (**2 Peter 2:22**)
  2. Note that *dogs* and *pigs* are both considered *unclean animals*. (Dogs have paws, and pigs do not chew the cud.)
  3. Consider the spiritual lessons from the unclean animals here.
    - a. While sheep and goats eat pure grass, dogs will *lick up even their own vomit*. (They are not discriminating; it's disgusting!).
    - b. Pigs, after washed, will return to wallowing in the mud (similar to pig-like Christians who are washed of their filth in baptism, but later return to their old ways).
- b. **Question:** Could the Lord be trying to communicate something MORE to us in the distinction between clean and unclean animals?
- i. **Answer:** Yes; several early Christian writers thought so.
  - ii. From Irenaeus, bishop of the church in Lyons, in Gaul, writing c. 180 AD (note that as a child he had learned from Polycarp, who in turn had learned from the apostle John):
    1. "Now the law has *figuratively* predicted all these, delineating man by the [various] animals: whatsoever of these, says [the Scripture], have a double hoof and ruminant, it proclaims as clean; but whatsoever of them do not possess one or other of these [properties], it sets aside by themselves as unclean.
    2. "Who then are the clean? Those who make their way by faith steadily towards *the Father and the Son*; for this is denoted by the steadiness of those which *divide the hoof*; and they meditate day and night upon the words of God, that they may

be adorned with good works: for this is the meaning of the ruminants.

3. "The unclean, however, are those which do neither divide the hoof nor ruminate; that is, those persons who have neither faith in God, nor do meditate on His words: and such is the abomination of the Gentiles. But as to those animals which do indeed chew the cud, but have not the double hoof, and are themselves unclean, we have in them a figurative description of the Jews, who certainly have the words of God in their mouth, but who do not fix their rooted steadfastness in the Father and in the Son; wherefore they are an unstable generation.
4. "For those animals which have the hoof all in one piece easily slip; but those which have it divided are more sure-footed, their cleft hoofs succeeding each other as they advance, and the one hoof supporting the other. In like manner, too, those are unclean which have the double hoof but do not ruminate: this is plainly an indication of all heretics, and of those who do not meditate on the words of God, neither are adorned with works of righteousness; to whom also the Lord says, 'Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say to you?'
5. "For men of this stamp do indeed say that they believe in the Father and the Son, but they never meditate as they should upon the things of God, neither are they adorned with works of righteousness; but, as I have already observed, they have adopted the lives of swine and of dogs, giving themselves over to filthiness, to gluttony, and recklessness of all sorts."
  - a. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 5, chapter 8; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 534)
  - b. Irenaeus saw the reference to 'clean' animals *chewing the cud* as providing a picture of those who *meditate on the Word of God day and night*, as it says at the beginning of **Psalm 1**.
    - i. "Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; *But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.* He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper." (**Psalm 1:1-3**, NKJV)

- c. Irenaeus saw the animals with the split hooves (more sure-footed than animals with single, undivided hooves) as foreshadowing those who followed *both* the Father *and the Son*. That is unlike the Jews, who (even though they meditate on the Scriptures) believe in the Father *but reject the Son*.
    - i. "... He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has *both the Father and the Son*." (**2 John 9**, NKJV)
- iii. For similar insights from other early Christian writers regarding the significance of the distinction between clean and unclean animals, see also:
  - 1. Clement of Alexandria, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, pp. 289, 456 and 555-556.
  - 2. Novatian, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 647.
- iv. **Practical Lessons for Us: Learn to imitate clean animals. They provide an important example.**
  - 1. Don't be like the pig or the dog (the unclean animals). They eat garbage and even their own vomit. Be discriminating in what we read and look at, so that we will not become spiritually polluted by sin.
  - 2. Don't be like the pig, diving back into the sins and filth of the old life after we have had those sins washed away.
  - 3. We must follow *both* the Father and the Son (to have steadier footing in the face of challenging spiritual terrain).
  - 4. Let us be like the cows and sheep that seek out pure food on which to feed: *the word of God*. And then, after we take it in, ruminate on it throughout the day and night, and do what it says!