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A Holy People

14: 1-21

A holy people DIG: Why would the mourning customs of verse 1 be prohibited? What is the overall purpose of these dietary mitzvot? What do the phrases “holy to ADONAI” and “unclean” imply? How would these mitzvot help Isra’el to become a distinctive and holy people?

REFLECT: In what ways are believers in Yeshua called to be separate and holy? In what area of your life would you like to grow in holiness? How? Are there any ungodly customs you have adopted which interfere with your holiness? What will you do about them? When?

As a holy people, the Israelites were set apart from all the other nations because the holy presence of ADONAI was with them, and they received God’s holy Torah.

Chapters 14 and 15 are specifically designed to keep **Isra’el** sanctified. The mitzvot covered in these chapters cover every aspect of the life of **the Israelite**. Stressing that the individual Israelite belongs to **God, His** property, and under the teaching and loving protection of a divine **Creator**.



A holy people (14:1a and 2): You are the children of ADONAI your God (14:1a). For the first time in the Scriptures, a **people** are called **children of God**. This new title spoke of a new relationship that began when **YHVH** chose **Isra’el** (Exodus 4:22; Isaiah 43:15). We should never take for granted that we are **the children of ADONAI [our] God**, and a

holy people to ADONAI [our] God. Those are privileges that we don't deserve and that we could never earn, and we enjoy them only because of **God's** love and grace. **God** announced to Pharaoh: **Isra'el is My son, My firstborn (Exodus 4:22)**, and because Pharaoh wouldn't listen and obey, Egypt lost all their firstborn.

Because of **their** unique relationship to **YHVH** as **His chosen people** and **special treasure**, the Israelites were responsible to obey **Him** and truly be a **holy people**. **For you are a holy people to ADONAI your God - from all the peoples on the face of the earth, ADONAI has chosen you (to see link click [Bf](#) - God's Chosen People) to be His treasured people (14:2).** Forty years previously, after **Bnei-Yisra'el** had gone out from the land of Egypt, they came to the wilderness of Sinai, and camped there right in front of the same mountain as **they** were now. **Ha'Shem** announced to **Isra'el**, **"Now then, although the whole earth is Mine, you will be My treasured possession, You will be to Me a kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation"** (Exodus 19:5-6a).

Yeshua brought out the same point in **His** parable (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ [Fb](#) - The Parable of the Hidden Treasure**). **Their** relationship to **God** was the most important factor in **their** national life, for without **Him**, **Isra'el** would be like all the other **nations**. But as a **holy people**, **they** had to learn and distinguish what was allowable and what was not.³³⁵

*Dear Wonderful and Holy Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that **You** are perfectly holy and there is not even a hint of anything unclean in **You**. As a father wants his children to be like him, so **You** want **Your** children to be holy. **ADONAI spoke to Moses saying: Speak to all the congregation of Bnei-Yisrael and tell them: You shall be kedoshim, for I, Adonai your God, am holy (Leviticus 19:1-2).** Guide us to remember that though **Your** love is so great, so also is **Your** holiness and **Your** children need to be diligent in walking in loving ways. Thank **You** for giving us your **Ruach ha-Kodesh** to live in us and to help us. Praise **You** that you never leave us. **For God Himself has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you," so that with confidence we say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear (Hebrews 13:5-6a).** In **Yeshua's** holy name and by the power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

Prohibition of certain mourning rituals (14:1b): You are not to cut yourselves or shave your forehead for the dead (14:1b). Both customs are well-known rites in connection with mourning and were Canaanite practices related to Ba'al (**First Kings 18:28**) and the cult of the dead. We have learned from the mythological texts relating to Ba'al, there is a description of the mourning of El following the death of Ba'al. Among the variety of mourning rites, El is described as cutting himself. In the "Legend of Aqht," there

is a reference to professional mourning women who also cut themselves to let blood flow. It is clear from these texts that the laceration of the body with the consequent flow of blood was a part of the mourning customs employed in religions outside **Isra'el**. **The Israelites** were thus forbidden to participate in such actions; though the actions themselves could appear to be innocent enough, they were associated with practices and beliefs that were reprehensible to the covenant of faith and therefore to be avoided.³³⁶

The kosher (fit or proper) section of the Scriptures. A Jewish orthodox home is characterized by the kind of food eaten and the manner of its preparation. The Oral Law (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law**) **added many additional requirements for the observant Jew. For example, the Oral Law states that you eat meat, you need to wait six hours before you can eat a dairy product. The meat and the dairy cannot mix, even in the stomach. It is important to point out that both Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles can choose to observe these kosher commandments, not out of any effort to take on the yoke of the Torah, but because of our freedom in Messiah to do so** (see the commentary on **Galatians Bb - The Antioch Incident: How Can You Force Jews to Live Like Gentiles**).

In this chapter, the animals are divided into three classes; animals that live on the ground, fish that live in the water, and birds that fly in the air. The list of creatures is divided into the same categories as in **Leviticus 11:1-23**, according to habitat - land (**11:4-8**), water (**11:9-10**), or air (**14:11-20**), probably thereby reflecting the order of the creation narrative. There was nothing specifically wrong with these animals, or fish or birds. It was merely the means by which **God** separated **Isra'el** from **her** sinful neighbors and their pagan religions.³³⁷ **Therefore, the object of these commandments was to sanctify Isra'el. For I am ADONAI your God. Therefore, sanctify yourselves, and be holy, for I am holy. You are not to defile yourselves with any kind of creeping thing that moves on the earth (Numbers 11:44). Yeshua** echoed the same sentiment when **He** said: **It's not what goes into the mouth that makes the person unclean; but what comes out of the mouth, this makes one unholy (Matthew 15:11).**

Clean and unclean animals on land (14:3-8): This list should be understood as representative, rather than comprehensive. Only the land animals that **chewed both the cud** and had **hoofs completely split in two** were acceptable for **the Israelites** to eat. An animal possessing only one of these features was to be regarded as **unclean**.³³⁸ **You are not to eat any detestable thing. These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, and the mountain sheep. Among the animals, you may eat any animal that splits the**

hoof - the hoof completely split in two - and chews the cud. Yet of those that chew the cud or have a split hoof, you are not to eat the camel, the hare, and the rabbit - because they chew the cud but do not split the hoof, they are unclean to you. The pig, because it splits the hoof but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you - you are not to eat their meat or touch their carcasses. The association with the Canaanite religious cults, and hygiene, made **the pig unclean (14:3-8).**

Clean and unclean fish that live in the water (14:9-10): Fish had to possess both **fins and scales** to be fit for consumption by **an Israelite**. This requirement left a limited variety of fish fit for consumption. **Of all that are in the waters, these you may eat: whatever has fins and scales you may eat, but whatever does not have fins and scales you are not to eat,** such as the catfish in the Sea of Galilee, and eels, rays, and lampreys in the Mediterranean coastal waters, were therefore **unclean** and not to be **eaten (14:9-10).**³³⁹

Clean and unclean birds that fly in the air (14:11-20): It should be noted that the identification of many of the birds in this section is uncertain. **You may eat all clean birds.** The category of birds presents the most complicated section of **unclean** creatures. **But these are the ones you are not to eat: the eagle, the vulture, the buzzard, the red kite, the black kite, and any bird of prey of that kind, every raven of any kind, the ostrich, the owl, the seagull, a hawk of any kind, the little owl, the great owl, the white owl** (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Ad - The Owl as a Symbol of Judgment](#)), **the pelican, the Egyptian vulture, the cormorant, the stork, a heron of any kind, the hoopoe, and the bat.** These verses list twenty-one species or subspecies, some of which are difficult to identify. This long list seems to consist mainly of birds of prey that consume other dead animals. **All winged insects that swarm are unclean to you - they are not to be eaten.** Without giving any details, this passage confirms that **Israelites could eat any clean insect or bird (14:11-20).** **Leviticus 11:20-23** provides more information by dividing the entomological world into those **unclean** insects that walk on all fours, and those **clean** insects that have jointed legs for hopping.

Peter's vision of various **unclean** animals and **ADONAI's** encouragement of **him** to **eat any** of those animals indicates that maintaining the **clean/unclean** distinction was not required of believers in the Dispensation of Grace (see the commentary on [Hebrews Bp - The Dispensation of Grace](#)). The animals **Peter** saw were no longer **unclean** (see the commentary on [Acts Bf - Peter's Vision](#)). **The Lord** had made them **clean** what had been **unclean**. This significant shift is related to the transition from a focus on the nation of **Isra'el** to the Church, where there is **neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is neither male or female** - because **the middle wall of separation** has

been **broken down and the two have become one (Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:14).**³⁴⁰

Regardless of a creature's status as **clean** or **unclean**, the **Israelites** could not **eat the meat** of any animal, fish or bird they found already dead. **You are not to eat anything that dies of itself** because it was likely that there was still blood in the carcass (see the commentary on Hebrews [Cu - Do Not Eat the Blood](#)). But **they** were allowed to **give it to** a non-**Israelite** who lived in their midst or **sell it to a foreigner. You may give it to the outsider within your gates so that he may eat it or you may sell it to a foreigner (14:21a).**

The Israelites were further prohibited from **boiling a young goat in its mother's milk** (see the commentary on [Exodus Ci - A Holy People](#)). This prohibition no doubt reflects a practice common in Canaanite religion, which was not to be permitted in the religion of **the Israelites (14:21c)**. It is possible that one of the Ugaritic texts, which appears to contain a reference to "cooking a kid in milk," may provide a background to the specific rite prohibited in **Deuteronomy**. In that case the prohibited rite would be one that had close associations with the fertility cult.³⁴¹ As a result, observant Jews today have two completely different sets of dishes, one for **milk** products and another for **meat** products.

In conclusion, all these food mitzvot would have reminded **Isra'el** of her unique status before **YHVH**. No **Israelite** could **eat** without realizing that in every area of **their** lives, **they** were to set apart for the glory of **God**. Likewise, an **Israelites** diet served as a testimony of **their** relationship to **the LORD** in the presence of the goyim. As this section of Scripture began, so does it conclude: **For you are a holy people to ADONAI your God (14:21b).**