

LAWS THAT MARK THE BELIEVER AS A CHILD OF GOD; AS HOLY, DIFFERENT, DISTINCTIVE DEUTERONOMY 14:01–29

Introduction

Evil is sweeping the earth today — arrogance, selfishness, covetousness, greed, immorality, sexual perversion, abuse, brutality, lawlessness and violence. Lives are being wrecked and people slaughtered because of the rampage of evil upon this earth.

This was the situation that confronted the Israelite believers. They were soon to enter the promised land and lay claim to their inheritance. Once they entered, they would face temptation after temptation to indulge in the immoral and lawless behaviour of their neighbours. Therefore, Moses had to prepare them for the onslaught of temptation that would attack them. He had to prepare them to stand strong as the people of God. They were to live holy lives, lives that were set apart totally to God. They were the people of God; therefore they were to be marked by the character of God. As God was holy, so they were to be holy; as God was pure and righteous, so they were to be pure and righteous. They were not to be conformed to the immoral and lawless ways of this world, but they were to demonstrate a transformed life, a life of righteousness. They were to bear a strong testimony to the immoral and lawless neighbours who surrounded them, a testimony of holy living. This is the subject of this important passage: *Laws That Mark the Believer As a Child of God — As Holy, Different, Distinctive*, Deuteronomy 14:1-29.

- I. Law 1: must not bear the marks of false religion (vv. 1-2).
- II. Law 2: must not eat detestable things, only clean things (vv. 3-21).
- III. Law 3: must tithe (vv. 22-29).

I. *Deuteronomy 14:01–02 The Believer Must Not Bear The Marks of False Religion*

The believer must not bear the marks of false religion. Once a person becomes a follower of the LORD, he must put off the works of darkness. He must have nothing to do with false worship and false religion. He must not participate in the rituals, ceremonies, practices, ordinances, sacraments, service or social activities of false religion. No practice of false religion is ever to be participated in by a believer. The believer is not to be identified with nor bear the marks of false religion. The Israelites had been saved from Egypt, delivered from the slavery of the world to become followers of the LORD God Himself. Therefore the Israelites were to bear the marks of God, not the marks of false religion. Note the Scripture and outline:

1. Moses declared the wonderful truth to the Israelites: you are the *children* of the LORD your God (v. 1). God had saved the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery to become His
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children, the family of God. As the *children* of God, the Israelites were to honour God and bear strong testimony to His name. They were to take on the nature of God, live as a new creation transformed by God. The old behaviour of the world was to pass away and all behaviour was to become new. They were to bear the marks of God's character not the marks of the world and its false religions.

2. Note the particular mark of false religion used by Moses to illustrate the point. It concerns the way a person mourned for the dead (v. 1). When a person died, loved ones mourned by disfiguring their bodies in pagan-like rituals. It was a common practice for a person to cut his hair on the sides or to make himself completely bald or to clip off the edges of his beard during the mourning ritual. It was also a common practice for a person to cut himself and draw blood.

Jer 16:5-7 For this is what the LORD says: "Do not enter a house where there is a funeral meal; do not go to mourn or show sympathy, because I have withdrawn my blessing, my love and my pity from this people," declares the LORD. "Both high and low will die in this land. They will not be buried or mourned, and no one will cut themselves or shave their head for the dead. No one will offer food to comfort those who mourn for the dead — not even for a father or a mother — nor will anyone give them a drink to console them."

Jer 41:5 Eighty men who had shaved off their beards, torn their clothes and cut themselves came from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria, bringing grain offerings and incense with them to the house of the LORD.

Down through the centuries, mutilation of the body has been a common practice, a ritual among some false religions. But this is not to be so, not among God's people. They must not bear the marks of false religion. There is to be no participation in false worship, no practice adopted from false religion. The believer is not to be conformed to the false religions and practices of this world. He is to live a transformed life, a life that turns away from the practices of false religion and that turns to God. The true believer becomes a follower of God, obeying God and keeping His commandments. He takes on the nature and character of God, bearing strong testimony to the immoral, lawless and false worshippers who surround him.

3. Note the two reasons why God's people must not bear the marks of false religion.
 - a. First, because they are holy (v. 2). This simply means they are set apart to God, dedicated and consecrated to Him. They are to live different lives — pure and righteous lives that honour and bear strong testimony to God's holy name. To be holy means that a person lives a *different kind* of life. He lives a distinctive life, distinctive in that it is pure and righteous, distinctive in that it shuns the immoral and wicked things of this world. The genuine believer has nothing to do with the false religions and worship of this world. God had chosen the Israelites to be His holy people; therefore, this was the kind of life they were to live before Him, a life that was totally set apart to Him.

b. Second, God's people were chosen to be a people for Himself, a *very special treasure*, a *treasured possession* of His (v. 2; see Deut 4:20; 7:6). Note this fact: God did not choose the Israelites because they were special. On the contrary, they were a stiff-necked, stubborn people (Deut 9:6; 9:13; 10:16; 31:27). God chose the Israelites to be His special people, His special witnesses and missionary force to the lost of the world. When God saved the Israelites out of Egypt, there was nothing special about them. They were slaves, poor and destitute, considered to be the scum of the earth by the other nations of the world. Nevertheless, God saved them, saved them to become His special treasure, the people who would become the true witnesses of God upon this earth. He chose them by His grace, not because of any merit or value within them. It was His sovereign choice and will alone that chose them to be His special people. Because of this — because God had chosen them, because they were His special people, His treasured possession — they must not bear the marks of false religion. They must live holy and pure lives, obeying God and keeping His commandments. They were to be a strong testimony and strong witness for Him to the immoral and lawless of this earth. They were to bear the marks of God Himself not the marks of false religion and worship.

Thought 1. We must not participate in any practice of false religion or worship, not participate in any...

- ritual
- study
- service
- worship
- social or recreational activity

As believers, we are to be holy, separated and set apart unto God. We are to live lives that are distinct and different, that differ entirely from the immoral and lawless of this world. We are to live lives that are holy and righteous, pure and just, that bear strong testimony, and witness to the immoral, the wicked and the false worshippers of this world.

(1) We must live holy lives, lives that are totally set apart to God, lives that are righteous and pure.

Luke 1:74-75 *To rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

1 Cor 6:19-20 *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*

1 Pet 1:15-16 *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*

Lev 11:45 *I am the LORD, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.*

(2) *We are chosen to be the people of God, His special treasure, His treasured possession.*

1 Pet 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Exo 19:5-6 “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites. ”

Deut 7:6 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

(3) We must not ever participate in any practice of false worship.

1 Jn 5:21 Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

Lev 19:27-28 “Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard. Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD.”

Deut 11:16 Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them.

Deut 14:1-2 You are the children of the LORD your God. Do not cut yourselves or shave the front of your heads for the dead, for you are a people holy to the LORD your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be his treasured possession.

II. Deuteronomy 14:03–21 The Believer Must Eat Only Clean Things And Not Detestable Things

The believer must not eat detestable things, only clean things. God cares about man’s body; this is the reason He gave this law to the Israelites. God created the human body for man; therefore, God insists that man take care of his body. This is clearly seen in the food laws discussed in this passage. Obviously, God gave the laws for health reasons, to protect His people from disease, bad diet and parasites. Medicine had not yet advanced enough for the people to fully understand the reasons for the food laws. Nevertheless, God knew, so He protected His people by giving them laws to govern what they ate. Animals that were more likely to carry parasites or disease were forbidden: they were designated as unclean food. Animals that were less likely to carry parasites or disease were edible: they were called clean animals.

But note this fact: God had more than health in mind when He gave the cleansing laws. God had a spiritual purpose in mind. The laws of cleanliness and defilement were symbolic of spiritual truth, of being spiritually clean and undefiled. The laws of cleanliness set God’s people apart as a clean, holy people. God’s people were to

be distinct and different from the surrounding people and nations. The surrounding nations and people were living unholy lives, lives of immorality and lawlessness. But God's people were to be distinct and different in this very fact: they were to live holy lives. They were to bear a strong testimony that they followed God and obeyed His commandments. They ate only clean food: they took care of their bodies. They kept them clean and healthy — all in *obedience* to God's law governing cleanliness. Simply stated, holiness demands that God's people conform to the laws of God, including the laws of cleanliness. The laws of cleanliness were a visible sign that the people of God were not "conformed to this world" (Rom 12:2). They lived a different kind of life from the people who surrounded them, lives that obeyed God and His commandments. The food laws were a testimony, a strong witness that the people of God had a very special relationship to the LORD. (See notes, Lev 11:1-47.) The commentator John Maxwell says this:

*The food laws provided an opportunity to exercise faith and obedience. Very clearly, God has assured them that this is His will concerning their dietary habits, and whether the regulations seemed reasonable or not, they were to obey. Such a test is quite similar to the one given to Adam and Eve concerning the forbidden fruit. Apart from God's command to the contrary, both they and Israel could have chosen to eat or not eat without any violation of conscience. From a human stand point, God's rules made no sense. Therefore, according to this explanation, this was a higher test of obedience. To obey this command meant no sacrifice or hunger since many good meats were allowed. Here then was a true test of whether Israel would simply obey God's word. It was not the observance of the food laws per se that distinguished Israel as holy, but an attitude of total and willing allegiance to God in love and obedience. This obedience transcended human reasons; it relied not upon outward conditions. (John Maxwell, *The Preacher's Commentary on Deuteronomy*, p. 200.)*

1. The land animals that the Israelites could eat had two characteristics or traits (vv. 4-6): they were to be animals that have a split hoof and chewed the cud. Note that both traits were an absolute necessity. The animals included...

- ox, sheep, goat
- deer, gazelle, roe deer
- mountain sheep
- wild goat, mountain goat, antelope

The land animals that could not be eaten were animals that had only one of the two traits (w. 7-8). For example, some animals only chew the cud and others only have a split hoof. These were not to be eaten at all. Several examples are given...

- the camel
- the rabbit
- the pig
- the coney or rock badger

2. The water creatures could include animals that lived in the seas, lakes, rivers, pools and streams (vv. 9-10). The Israelites could eat any water creature that had both fins and scales. However, they were not allowed to eat any water creatures that had only fins or

only scales (v. 10). A water creature with only one of these traits was counted unclean, that is, ceremonially or spiritually unclean. The believer was never to eat its meat.

3. The Israelites could eat any bird that was clean (v. 11). Note that no example of clean birds is given, and no trait or characteristic as to what makes a bird clean or unclean is given. The unclean birds alone are listed. Keep in mind that this is a symbol of being spiritually, ceremonially unclean. The birds that were to be counted unclean are...
 - eagle, vulture, buzzard
 - red kite, black kite, falcon
 - raven
 - ostrich, screech owl, sea gull, hawk little owl, great owl, white owl
 - pelican, osprey, cormorant
 - stork, heron, hoopoe, bat
4. The Israelites were forbidden to eat any insect that flew or swarmed (v. 19). The flying or swarming insects were counted unclean to the believer. Note that Scripture is emphatically clear: the Israelites must not eat them. However, they could eat any winged insect that was clean (v. 20). Although no list is given here in *Deuteronomy*, the book of *Leviticus* does list all varieties of locusts, katydids, crickets, and grasshoppers (see note, Lev 11:20-23).
5. The Israelites could not eat any animal that was found dead (v. 21). However, they could give the meat to a foreigner. The reason is clearly stated: God's people are a holy people, a people totally set apart to God. They are a people who are to live distinctive, different lives, that is, lives that are pure and righteous, bearing strong witness to the immoral and lawless neighbours who surround them. (See note, Lev 11:24-40.)
6. The Israelites were not to cook a young goat in its mother's milk (v. 21). The picture is that of a kid, a baby lamb or goat, that was being taken away from its mother, the very mother who had given it life. The kid was being cooked in its mother's milk. The point is probably this: life is precious to God; therefore, the dignity of life is to be respected and protected by man. The very sight of taking a young goat or sheep from its mother and then cooking it in its mother's milk is a distasteful, detestable thought. God did allow the killing of goats and sheep, but only for food. The killing had a deliberate purpose, a necessary purpose, that of providing food for man. But in the killing, man was still to demonstrate the dignity of life. He was to show by this simple act that he was distinctive, different from the peoples of the world. He did not believe in the taking of life except for the necessary purpose of food.

Thought 1. The true believers of Israel were to be strict in keeping these laws governing food. This means that every time a believer saw a clean or unclean animal, the thought of God was to enter his mind. He was to think about the commandment to live a holy and clean life before God. What a lesson for us today, for all believers. When we see the unclean and clean things of this earth, we should immediately think of God. We should focus upon God's call to us, that we live holy and clean lives.

Eph 4:24 *And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

2 Cor 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

2 Cor 6:17-18 *“Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters,” says the Lord Almighty.*

2 Cor 7:1 *Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

James 4:8 *Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

Lev 11:45 *I am the LORD, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.*

III. Deuteronomy 14:22–29 The Believer Must Tithe

The believer must tithe. Seldom does a subject grab the attention of a congregation as much as money. In this Scripture, Moses gives a strong sermon on stewardship. Standing there preaching to the people, he covers seven truths about tithing, truths that are applicable to any generation of believers.

1. Tithing is to be a *regular practice*. The Israelites were to set aside one tenth of their produce *each year* as a tithe to the LORD. Through Moses, God told His people exactly how much they could keep and how much they were to give, and note, the tithe was to be given *year by year* (v. 22).
2. Tithing is to be *offered at the worship centre* in the presence of the LORD (V. 23). The Israelites were to take a tithe of their grain, new wine, oil and the first-born of their herds and flocks to the worship centre and offer them to the LORD. Note exactly where the tithe was to be offered: at the *worship centre* chosen by God, that is, the worship centre that He honoured and where He chose to place His name. The central worship centre chosen by God was the Tabernacle and later the temple. Wherever these were to be located in the future, God’s people were to take their tithes there.
3. Tithing is to be a *spiritual testimony* (v. 23). Tithing strengthens a person’s reverence and fear for the LORD; it also teaches others to reverence and fear the LORD. When an Israelite tithed, he was declaring that he trusted God and depended upon God. He knew that he was dependent upon God for health to work and earn a living. Moreover, he knew that he was dependent upon God for a job, for the strength of the economy, for rain and for a fruitful crop and food. He was totally dependent upon God for the necessities of life. This was the very reason, he was tithing:

to demonstrate his love, dependence and trust in God. Thus his tithing served to strengthen his own faith as well as to teach others to reverence and fear the LORD.

4. Tithing is to be a *flexible law*. Circumstances of a person's situation are to be considered (v. 24). The circumstances covered by Moses involved a person who lived too far away to carry his tithe to the worship centre. In such a situation, a person could exchange the tithe — his crops and animals — for silver (v. 25). He could then use the silver to buy whatever offering he needed to tithe at the worship centre (v. 26). Note this fact: it was this flexibility that led the priests of later generations to place money-changers in the temple courts (see John 2:14-16).

The point to see is the concern of God for the extreme circumstances of His people. Living in an imperfect world, God's people sometimes get themselves in financial binds. In such circumstances, the law of tithing has to be flexible until the person can get out from under the financial difficulty. However, a person must never use circumstances as an excuse for not giving offerings to the LORD. If a believer is ever so irresponsible that he gets himself into a financial bind, he must immediately attack the problem. He must correct the situation, for God does not want any believer under the pressure of financial difficulties. The believer is to straighten out any financial predicament so that he may tithe and have enough to give to the needy.

5. Tithing is to be a *joyful experience* (v. 26). When the Israelites took their offerings to the central worship centre, they were to eat and rejoice around a fellowship meal cooked from part of the tithe. This was to be a joyful time shared with other believers at the worship centre.
6. Tithing is to be a *benevolent witness* for the LORD (vv. 27-29). Note the law: every third year, the Israelite believers were to take the tithe of their produce and store it in each town (v. 28). The purpose for this storage was to provide for the Levite ministers and the needy of every town: the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows of the community (v. 29). Note that the support of the Levite ministers is emphasized: the people were never to neglect the Levite ministers. Supporting them was an absolute necessity, for they were to receive no allotment or inheritance in the promised land. They were to focus totally upon the LORD not upon financial and business matters. Their call was to minister to the people and teach them the ways of God. Therefore, the people must support them.
7. Tithing is to be a *beneficial exercise*. If the Israelite believer was faithful in tithing, God promised to bless him, to bless all the work of his hands. Whatever he did with his hands — his job or employment — would be blessed by God (v. 29).

Luke 6:38 “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Luke 21:1-4 *As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins: "Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."*

Acts 4:34-35 *That there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.*

Acts 20:35 *In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*

1 Cor 16:2 *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*

2 Cor 9:6 *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously*

2 Cor 9:7 *Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Deut 16:17 *Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you.*

Lev 27:30 *A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.*

2 Chr 31:5 *As soon as the order went out, the Israelites generously gave the first-fruits of their grain, new wine, olive oil and honey and all that the fields produced. They brought a great amount, a tithe of everything.*

Prov 3:9 *Honour the LORD with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your crops.*

Prov 11:25 *A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.*

Prov 22:9 *A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.*

Mal 3:10 *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." ■*