

# BIBLE BRIEFING

## *“The Fun Zone”*

DEUTERONOMY 14 - 16

Introduction

### Chapter Fourteen

The children of Israel were to live lives that were distinct from the surrounding nations. They were to be distinctive in their *deeds*... In their *diet*... And in their *devotion*.

Distinctive Deeds (14:1-2):

Deuteronomy 14:1 “You *are* the children of the Lord your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead.

Deuteronomy 14:2 For you *are* a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who *are* on the face of the earth.

Let’s not get lost in the details. This was only one example of the principle of verse two. It’s a good one, because how we react to death reveals what we believe about life. In the New Testament, you are told not to grieve as those who do not have any hope.

Christians are great at looking at the customs of the world, then redeeming them to reveal what we really believe. Our annual Harvest Celebration is a good example.

You need to fight the notion that we are somehow crazy Jesus-freaks. Too many Christians, instead of redeeming the customs of the world, are adopting them.

Distinctive Diet (14:3-21)

We learned, in Chapter Twelve, that you could eat all the meat you wanted. Meat eating was restricted only by Moses’ comments in these next verses. The general principle was stated in verses three and six:

Deuteronomy 14:3 “You shall not eat any detestable thing.

Deuteronomy 14:6 And you may eat every animal with cloven hooves, having the hoof split into two parts, *and that* chews the cud, among the animals.

If you read through these verses, you see you could eat things like ox, sheep, goats, deer, gazelle, and antelope; and certain fish & birds. You could not camel, hares, rock hyraxes, swine, and a bunch of others listed in verses twelve through nineteen.

The line between clean and unclean was *religious*, not *nutritious*. It was, in a sense, arbitrary. It was God’s decision. You were restricted to show you were distinct from others.

In the Jewish Law, the words clean and unclean have nothing to do with the intrinsic nature or value of the creatures themselves. This was a designation given by the Lord for reasons not always explained. Some students believe that the Jews enjoyed better health because they avoided certain foods, but both Jesus and the apostles declared all foods clean, the so-called “healthful” foods as well as the “unhealthful.” Fasting is an accepted spiritual discipline, when connected with prayer, but *food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the better*” (First Corinthians 8:8). Believers who think they’re more spiritual than others because of what they eat or don’t eat need to ponder Colossians 2:16-23.

It’s likely that God declared some creatures “unclean” as a means of teaching His people to exercise discernment and to behave like a holy people in the everyday activities of life, such as eating. The same principle applies to believers today: *Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God* (First Corinthians 10:31).

Another factor in the dietary laws may have been that the prohibited creatures were in some way associated with the pagan worship that Israel was to avoid. The admonition about boiling a kid in its mother’s milk (in verse 21) may fall into that category. Some scholars think this was a pagan “fertility rite” and that the milk was sprinkled on the fields to encourage bountiful crops, but we have no archeological evidence to back up this interpretation. We do know that this strange law

explains why orthodox Jews do not have milk and meat together at a meal.

### Distinctive Devotion (14:22-29)

Deuteronomy 14:22 “You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year.

Deuteronomy 14:23 And you shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.

**Tithe** means tenth. There were many different tithes that went to various purposes. This tithe was used in the feast eaten at the Tabernacle, when you attended a feast. So, in essence, you paid this tithe to yourself! But it was to support you going to worship.

Deuteronomy 14:24 But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry *the tithe*, or if the place where the Lord your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the Lord your God has blessed you,

Deuteronomy 14:25 then you shall exchange *it* for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses.

Deuteronomy 14:26 And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household.

If the journey was too far to carry your products, you could liquidate, and then purchase what you needed for the feast. Before you get all excited about **wine or similar** (fermented) **drink**, remember that you consumed these as a meal before the Lord, in His presence.

Deuteronomy 14:27 You shall not forsake the Levite who *is* within your gates, for he has no part nor inheritance with you.

Deuteronomy 14:28 “At the end of *every* third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store *it* up within your gates.

Deuteronomy 14:29 And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who *are* within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.

The Levites had no land, so they produced no crops. They were scattered throughout Israel, ministering to the people. Another tithe

was taken every three years, for them, as well as those who were in need. Back in Numbers another tithe, for the Levites, was taken. It seems that there was a tithe for the Levites; a tithe for the feasts; and a tithe every three years, for the Levites to distribute to the poor. These tithes were not voluntary; they were taxes. They amounted to 23% of your annual income. (Actually: 10% of your income/crop; then 10% of the remaining 90%; then 3% every three years of what was left).

## Chapter Fifteen

God would be generous and bless His people. He, in turn, wanted them to reflect His generosity by giving to one another.

### Generosity Toward The Poor (15:1-11)

Deuteronomy 15:1 “At the end of *every* seven years you shall grant a release of *debts*.

Deuteronomy 15:2 And this *is* the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent *anything* to his neighbor shall release *it*; he shall not require *it* of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called the Lord’S release.

Deuteronomy 15:3 Of a foreigner you may require *it*; but you shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother,

Deuteronomy 15:4 except when there may be no poor among you; for the Lord will greatly bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance -

Deuteronomy 15:5 only if you carefully obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe with care all these commandments which I command you today.

Deuteronomy 15:6 For the Lord your God will bless you just as He promised you; you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; you shall reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over you.

Deuteronomy 15:7 “If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother,

Deuteronomy 15:8 but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.

Debts were to be canceled every seventh year. It was an act of generosity that reflected the generous nature of God. It would be a tremendous witness to surrounding (materialistic) nations. Spiritual things, relationships, unity – these were more important than wealth. **These were wealth!**

Deuteronomy 15:9 Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,' and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the Lord against you, and it become sin among you.

Deuteronomy 15:10 You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand.

Deuteronomy 15:11 For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'

Generosity should not be a cause of grudging, but of gladness. We should rejoice in giving – helping our needy brothers and sisters.

Temper this with stuff Paul mentions in the New Testament.

Generosity is not a reward for laziness. If a man won't work, he shouldn't eat.

The seeming contradiction between verse four (**there shall be no poor among you**) and verse eleven (**the poor shall never cease out of the land**) is resolved by paying attention to the context. During the Sabbath Year, the lenders were obligated to remit the debt (or the interest owed) by their poor Jewish brothers, unless there were no Jewish poor people who owed them money; and there would be no poor if the people obeyed God's laws.

#### Generosity Toward The Desperately Poor (15:12-18)

The Israelites practiced a form of indentured slavery by which you could sell yourself to satisfy a debt. If this should occur, the self-imposed slavery could only continue six years.

Deuteronomy 15:12 "If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you.

Deuteronomy 15:13 And when you send him away free from you, you shall not let him go away empty-handed;

Deuteronomy 15:14 you shall supply him liberally from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your winepress. *From what* the Lord has blessed you with, you shall give to him.

Deuteronomy 15:15 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 thing today.

Redeem is a financial term. It means, *to pay the price required to possess what was once owned and later lost*. God owned mankind fully; lost Him in man's rebellion; but in love determined to buy man back.

Sometimes, continued serving was preferable to freedom:

Deuteronomy 15:16 And if it happens that he says to you, 'I will not go away from you,' because he loves you and your house, since he prospers with you, Deuteronomy 15:17 then you shall take an awl and thrust *it* through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also to your female servant you shall do likewise.

Deuteronomy 15:18 It shall not seem hard to you when you send him away free from you; for he has been worth a double hired servant in serving you six years. Then the Lord your God will bless you in all that you do.

These were called bond-slaves, or bond-servants. It gives you insight when the New Testament encourages you to be the Lord's bond-servants.

### Generosity Toward The Lord (15:19-23)

Deuteronomy 15:19 "All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to the Lord your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock.

Deuteronomy 15:20 You and your household shall eat *it* before the Lord your God year by year in the place which the Lord chooses.

The best was for the Lord... *But you shared it with Him!!*

Deuteronomy 15:21 But if there is a defect in it, *if it is lame or blind or has any serious defect*, you shall not sacrifice it to the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 15:22 You may eat it within your gates; the unclean and the clean *person alike may eat it*, as *if it were* a gazelle or a deer.

Deuteronomy 15:23 Only you shall not eat its blood; you shall pour it on the ground like water.

Be honest about giving God your best.

## Chapter 16

We've been speaking about feasts. The first seventeen verses of Chapter Sixteen present the joy and rejoicing God expected at these celebrations.

Sometimes I say that we're the fun Church; or I use the word 'fun' to describe what we're doing. I mean Christian joy that is just flat fun!

Three feasts are highlighted. Moses emphasized only three of these seven special occasions because they were the feasts that every Jewish male would be obligated to celebrate at the central sanctuary every year

Deuteronomy 16:1 "Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night.

Deuteronomy 16:2 Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to the Lord your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where the Lord chooses to put His name.

**Abib** is mid-March to mid-April on modern calendars. It's also called Nisan. They commemorated their deliverance, secured by the blood of the substituted lamb. It began a week long celebration, the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Deuteronomy 16:3 You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, *that is*, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), that you may remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life.

Deuteronomy 16:4 And no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory for seven days, nor shall *any* of the meat which you sacrifice the first day at twilight remain overnight until morning.

The food was consistent with the event's haste. Symbols can be powerful; we should think about presentation.

Deuteronomy 16:5 "You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates which the Lord your God gives you;

Deuteronomy 16:6 but at the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 16:7 And you shall roast and eat *it* in the place which the Lord your God chooses, and in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents.

Deuteronomy 16:8 Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there *shall be* a sacred assembly to the Lord your God. You shall do no work on it.

It was an all-nighter! Exodus Twelve suggests the original generation stayed-up all night. And it went on for a week. It was a time of reunion, joy, and celebration.

The next feast on the calendar was the Feast of Weeks.

Deuteronomy 16:9 “You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from *the time* you begin to *put* the sickle to the grain.

Deuteronomy 16:10 Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the Lord your God blesses you.

This came to be called Pentecost, because it fell fifty days after Passover. It was a celebration of God’s blessing upon them, as the corn began to be harvested.

Deuteronomy 16:11 You shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who *is* within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who *are* among you, at the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide.

Deuteronomy 16:12 And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.

Rejoice at the changes God has brought to your life. You, too, were a slave, but have been set free. Don’t look back on slavery favorably.

The third major feast was Tabernacles, or Booths.

Deuteronomy 16:13 “You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress.

Deuteronomy 16:14 And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who *are* within your gates.

Deuteronomy 16:15 Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the Lord your God in the place which the Lord chooses, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice.



It was celebrated for seven days after the harvest, in the fall of their year. They lived in makeshift booths to commemorate the Exodus. The theme was again joy and rejoicing.

Deuteronomy 16:16 “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed.

Deuteronomy 16:17 Every man *shall give* as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you.

God’s generosity towards you is what encourages your generosity to Him. You don’t come **empty handed**, because His strong arm has saved you!

(The remaining verses of Chapter Sixteen belong thematically with the next chapter).

## Conclusion

As God’s people, we have many reasons to celebrate the greatness and goodness of the Lord. We’ve been redeemed by the blood of Christ (Passover), we’re indwelt and empowered by the Spirit (Pentecost), and we’re generously supported by the Lord in our pilgrim journey (Tabernacles). Our time here on earth is brief and temporary, but one day we shall enter heaven where Jesus is now preparing places for us.

