

Triennial Torah Study – 4th Year 20/04/2013

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By Joseph F. Dumond

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Deut 14	1 Chron 14-15		Col 1-2
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In this chapter, Moses reminds the Israelites about proper and improper mourning for the dead, about the consumption of clean versus unclean animals, and about tithing. All the laws discussed in this chapter are still valid for us today, with two exceptions.

When a close friend or relative dies, we are not to follow the ways of the heathen by “cutting” ourselves in mourning and despair, as ancient pagans and certain American Indian tribes did, nor by shaving the front of our head (verse 1). The reason is given in verse 2: We are a holy people to God, and as such we are to abstain from all religious practices dedicated to pagan gods or the dead, who were believed to live on in another life.

Further, we are to abstain from eating any unclean animal (verses 3-21), which is a “detestable” or “abominable thing” when used as food. Though the only land animals specifically identified in this chapter as unclean for food are the camel, the rabbit, the rock hyrax and the pig, the general description of unclean land animals is given as all that fail to meet the criteria of both chewing the cud and having cloven hooves (verses 7-8). Thus, all reptiles and amphibians are unclean, as are worms, spiders and most insects. So too are most mammals, the only ones acceptable for food being most of the ruminants, such as bovines, antelope, deer, sheep, goats and, though not always thought of, giraffe. In addition, only those water creatures “that have fins and scales” may be eaten (verses 9-10), thus ruling out things like eels, sharks, catfish, clams, squid, lobster, crab, shrimp and all other shellfish. Clean birds may be eaten (verses 11, 20)—but these are only indirectly defined by listing unclean birds that must not be eaten (verses 12-18). From this list, we can see which birds are clean by noticing the characteristics of the birds which are unclean: (1) a clean bird has a crop; (2) a clean bird has a gizzard with a double lining which can be easily separated; (3) a clean bird is not a bird of prey; (4) a clean bird does not devour food while flying; (5) a clean bird's hind toe and middle front toe are both elongated; (6) when a clean bird stands on a perch, it spreads its toes so that three front ones are on one side of the perch and the hind toe on the opposite side. All unclean birds lack at least one of these six characteristics. This means that the following birds are clean among others: chicken, turkey, duck, goose, swan, pheasant, quail, partridge, dove (pigeon), and all songbirds. While the King James Version says the “swan” is unclean in Deuteronomy 14:16 and Leviticus 11:18, the New King James and other modern versions correctly translate the word here as referring to a kind of owl. Birds like owls, hawks and ostriches are unclean—and so are their eggs.

Verse 19 tells us that all creeping or swarming things are unclean. Yet Leviticus 11, the parallel passage to this one, clarifies that certain kinds of flying insects with jointed legs above the feet for leaping may be eaten, e.g., locusts, grasshoppers and crickets (verses 21-22). It is believed that in the ancient Middle East, these insects were ground

into a fine meal and baked into cakes—perhaps explaining the later description of John the Baptist’s eating locusts with honey (Matthew 3:4).

In verse 21 of Deuteronomy 14, the Israelites were permitted to give aliens the meat of animals that died of themselves. However, there is no indication that unclean animals were allowed to be eaten by anyone. Therefore, the prohibition for Israelites in verse 21 to eat meat of animals that died of themselves and the permission to give it to foreigners for consumption deals with only clean animals. This was, therefore, a ritual law—a point made even clearer by the fact that an Israelite who did inadvertently eat of an animal that had died of itself became ritually clean again in the evening after washing himself with water (Leviticus 17:15; compare 11:39-40). We do not read anywhere, however, that the eating of an unclean animal brought only ritual uncleanness that ended in the evening after washing. Also, this ritual law against eating animals that have died of themselves is not to be confused with another law that is still very much in effect—God’s prohibition against eating the blood of any animal (Deuteronomy 12:16, 23-25), which outlaws “strangled” clean animals from being eaten (Acts 15:29; 21:25). Another ritual law mentioned in Deuteronomy 14:8 prohibits the touching of a dead pig’s carcass. Leviticus 11 explains that touching the carcass of any unclean animal made a person ritually unclean, but only “until evening” (verses 8, 11, 24, 26, 27, 31). Indeed, the same was true for touching a dead clean animal (verse 39). The fact that a person became ritually clean again by evening, after washing himself, shows the ritualistic character of this provision. (This is not to say, however, that there were not health benefits to following even these ritual laws. For instance, an animal that died of itself may have fallen victim to a disease, thus making it potentially harmful to eat. And it remains a good practice to wash our hands after we have touched a dead animal of any kind to prevent the possible transmission of harmful pathogens. This is especially apparent when reading about how various pots and utensils were made unclean by the carcasses of dead animals in Leviticus 11.)

Finally, Deuteronomy 14:22-29 discusses some tithing principles that are still valid today. This passage does not address the first tithe, which was to be given to the Levites for their work (compare Numbers 18:21). Some have argued that the tithe mentioned in Deuteronomy 14:22 is the first tithe. Yet, if that were the case, it would be the only tithe mentioned here without an explanation for its use. It makes more sense that the use of the tithe mentioned in verse 22 is spelled out in the verses that follow (verses 23-26)—and these verses clearly refer to a second tithe, which is to be used by the tithe-payer for himself and his family in the observance of God’s feasts. Then follows a brief mention of a third tithe, saved only every third year out of a seven-year sabbatical cycle (verses 28-29; compare 26:12; Leviticus 25:2-4) to be given to the poor—i.e., the Levite (who was not allowed to own any land), the stranger, the fatherless and the widow. All three tithes are attested to by the well-known first-century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus (compare *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 4, chap. 4, secs. 3-4; chap. 8, secs.

8, 22).

1 Chronicles 14

As time draws on, David’s kingdom increases in fame throughout the region due to God’s blessing and unification of all Israel. But again, one of David’s weaknesses is exposed in that he takes to himself yet more wives. The account in 1 Chronicles 3:5-9 lists the children born to David in Jerusalem. Four sons are born by Bathsheba (including Solomon). Nine sons are born to his other wives. There are also other sons and daughters born to David’s concubines. Hiram, King of Tyre, a powerful city-state on the Mediterranean coast north of Israel and center of the Phoenician Empire, shows great respect by sending builders and materials to help build a palace for David at Jerusalem. This demonstrates David’s growing prominence—that the ruler of the Phoenician Empire, which dominated ancient maritime commerce, would seek to cement an alliance with Israel through such projects.

The Philistines, on the other hand, regarded David's strength as a threat to their nation. Here, David's real strength is shown as he once again seeks God first for instruction in regard to the Philistines. After defeating the Philistines, David burns the idols that are left behind. Once again, God is with him in defeating his enemies.

Psalms 30 is written by David in his dedication of the palace built for him in Jerusalem. In these verses, David recounts both the dark times and the bright times. This chapter can be a testimony for us today. All of us have experienced troubling times in our lives in which we cried out to God for His intervention. Though we never deserve it, and cannot earn it, God has constantly shown us His endless grace and mercy. Individually, it would be helpful to record some of our own trials and remember how God has always delivered us when we have sought

Him, as David did, with all our heart. Can God look upon each of us and say, "I have found _____ a man/woman after My own heart, who will do all My will"? We have a great advantage today, as we can strive to emulate the positive qualities of a man like King David and also learn not to repeat his mistakes.

Let's follow the example of David and give thanks to God forever!

1Chronicles 15

When David hears that those of the house of Obed-Edom have been blessed due to their possession of the ark, he is once again encouraged to bring it to Jerusalem. The account in 1 Chronicles 15 reveals that David is now aware that the ark had not been transported according to God's instructions: "Then David said, 'No one may carry the ark of God but the Levites, for the LORD has chosen them to carry the ark of God and to minister before Him forever'" (verse 2). And to them he says in verse 13, "For because you did not do it the first time, the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order" (Hebrew mishpat, "judgment, law, decree, charge").

Again, God's law, charge or decree concerning the transport of the ark can be found in Exodus 25:14-15 and Numbers (4:5, 15; 7:9; 10:21). The ark was to be carried on the shoulders of the Levites, through the use of poles that were inserted through rings. That is now done "as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD" (1 Chronicles 15:15).

The account in 2 Samuel 6 reveals the deep respect and care that David takes in carrying out God's instructions concerning transportation of the ark. Sacrifices are offered to God after those bearing the ark have "gone six paces" (verse 13). It is unclear whether this means just once, after the first approximately 18 feet traveled, or if it implies once every 18 feet that the ark is carried, all the way to Jerusalem.

David once again rejoices with shouting, music and dancing as the ark is carried into Jerusalem. This is not just loud "noise," because those appointed to perform are skilled musicians and singers. David is a skilled musician and composer himself. His manner of celebration, however, earns the contempt of his wife Michal. We will see more about the specifics of her derision in this instance when we read soon of David's return home, but it is apparent that Michal despised him for much more than his actions on this occasion.

Michal's is a terribly tragic story. She was very much in love with the young heroic David in his earlier years (1 Samuel 18:20, 28). And when he bravely killed 200 Philistines to marry her (verse 27), she must have loved him even more. But her love for David estranged this young princess from her father King Saul. Indeed, when Saul sought to kill David, Michal put her own life on the line to help her husband escape (19:11-18). But his escape only resulted in her separation from him as David spent at least 10 years fleeing from Saul. In fact, Saul annulled her marriage to David and had Michal wed to another man named Palti (25:44). While in this new marriage, her father and Jonathan, her brother, died in battle.

David, now recently established with the full regal power of Israel, had demanded that Michal be restored to him. So she was forcibly taken from her husband, Palti. As he wept uncontrollably (2 Samuel 3:15-16), it is apparent that he sincerely loved her—and perhaps she had come to love him in return. Yet here she was back with David—no longer the young hero but king in her father’s stead (a position no longer disputed since the assassination of her brother Ishbosheth shortly after her return to David). Worse, she could expect no monogamous devotion from her husband. David now had a harem—and she had to compete with at least six other women for whatever attention she might receive from him.

As The Nelson Study Bible concludes: “It is not likely that these mere actions of David, as he celebrated before the Lord at the return of the ark, brought about Michal’s hatred of him (6:16). Her hatred had probably grown over the years. Her sarcastic words [which we’ll soon read] on David’s great day of religious and spiritual joy came from a lifetime of pain (6:20). Unlike her brother Jonathan, Michal did not accept her God-given lot and trust God for her future happiness (1 Sam. 23:16-18). Instead, she became bitter not only at David, but also toward God [which appears evident in that she was not joyful over the return of the ark and the restoration of tabernacle worship—even staying home instead of participating in the celebration]. Tragically, Scripture gives no indication that there was any healing for Michal. She died childless ([2 Samuel] 6:23)” (“A Love That Turned to Hate,” p. 517).

How Are We ‘Translated Into the Kingdom’?

Colossians 1:13 describes physical saints as already having been translated into the Kingdom.

As such, this passage seems to imply that Christians are now in the Kingdom of God.

However, this clearly isn’t the case, since 1 Corinthians 15:50 tells us that “flesh and blood

[physical bodies] cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”

Part of the confusion here comes from the meaning of the word kingdom. In addition to meaning a literal kingdom, the Greek word *basileia*, translated “kingdom,” denotes sovereignty and royal power (Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, “Kingdom”).

This passage in Colossians shows that God’s sovereignty and power begin in the life of the Christian at conversion. The New International Version Study Bible explains that in this verse the word kingdom “does not here refer to a territory but to the authority, rule or sovereign power of a king. Here it means that the Christian is no longer under the dominion of evil

(darkness) but under the benevolent rule of God’s Son.”

Virtually all other occurrences of *basileia*, when referring to the Kingdom of God, point to the literal dominion that Christ will establish at His return (Matthew 6:33; Revelation 11:15). As “heirs of God” in training to inherit that future Kingdom (Romans 8:15-17; Matthew 25:34; Revelation 20:4, 6), Christians are thus already subject to the sovereignty and authority of that Kingdom, although not yet residents of it.

Jesus Christ, ruler of the coming Kingdom, is the Lord and Master of Christians now

(Philippians 2:9-11). God rules the lives of converted Christians who voluntarily obey Him and His laws. They submit themselves to God’s *basileia*—His royal sovereignty and power. They individually are part of the Church, the Body of Christ, which God also rules. But the Church collectively looks to God’s coming world rule when the *basileia* will be fully established. The context leading up to Colossians 1:13 also helps clarify the meaning. Verse 9 begins a description of points Paul and Timothy regularly included in their prayers. One of the blessings they were

thankful for was that God had qualified them and the other members to receive the inheritance of the saints (verse 12). That inheritance, eternal life, does not come until Christ returns (1 Corinthians 15:50-52; Romans 8:17). This is why the Bible refers to the saints as heirs of the Kingdom (James 2:5).

Verse 13 of Colossians 1 continues this theme, adding that those qualified as heirs, those whose status had changed from nonheirs to heirs, were also “translated,” or transferred, from the power of darkness to the Kingdom of God.

We, as modern-day saints, also exchange systems of government when we are converted. We now give our allegiance and obedience to the Kingdom of God, even though that Kingdom has not yet fully come.

In 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul uses a different comparison to help us understand this, calling us “ambassadors.” An ambassador is one who represents a kingdom or other government, but resides in a different land. Christians are thus ambassadors for God’s Kingdom, representing His way of life in our current earthly situation and age in which we reside. We are not yet in the Kingdom of God.

Colossians 2:16-17: Are God’s Laws Obsolete?

Many people assume from Colossians 2:16-17 that Paul is saying that God’s laws about the Sabbath, Holy Days and clean and unclean meats are no longer necessary.

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days . . .” he wrote (KJV). Let’s examine these verses’ context and historic setting to see if they support that view.

Did Paul intend to say that God’s laws are abolished? If so, we find some immediate problems. If this is what he meant, it’s difficult to explain why he left the issue so muddled by not clearly stating that these practices were unnecessary. After all, the Colossian church was primarily gentile (Colossians 2:13), so Paul could have used this epistle to make it plain that these practices were not binding on Christians.

However, Paul nowhere said that. Instead, regarding the practices of festivals, new moons and Sabbaths, he said only to “let no one judge you,” which is quite different from saying these practices are unnecessary or obsolete.

A more basic question to ask is whether Old Testament practices were even at the core of what Paul was addressing here. Was Paul even discussing whether Christians should keep the laws regarding clean and unclean meats, the biblical festivals, the weekly Sabbath or any other Old Testament laws?

When we read the rest of this chapter, it quickly becomes obvious that other issues were involved. Among these were “principalities and powers” (verse 15), “false humility and worship of angels” (verse 18), ascetic rules forbidding to touch, taste and handle (verse 21) and “neglect of the body” (verse 23).

Further, Paul referred to the false teachings in Colosse as rooted in “persuasive words” (verse 4), “philosophy and empty deceit” and “the tradition of men” (verse 8). He also referred to submitting to “regulations” of this world (verse 20) and “the commandments and doctrines of men” (verse 22).

Could Paul, who in Romans 7:12 described God’s law as “holy and just and good,” possibly be referring to the same law here, or is he addressing something entirely different?

When we consider the historical context, the answer becomes clear. As the Church expanded from the Holy Land into pagan areas such as Asia Minor, Italy and Greece, it had to deal with pagan philosophies, some with very ascetic beliefs. These influences are particularly noticeable in the writings of Paul, Peter and John.

Some of these philosophies overlapped in the idea that spirit is good while matter is evil. The physical body, consisting of matter, was considered evil. And since the body was evil, it was to be treated harshly.

The Colossian Christians were being judged by a worldly philosophy for how they observed festivals, new moons and Sabbaths—which they apparently did in a joyous and festive manner. The Colossians celebrated these days in a manner that was entirely contrary to the ascetic approach of self-denial. They understood that the Sabbaths and annual festivals are clearly commanded in the Old Testament. (New moons, it should be noted, were used as the biblical markers of time but never declared to be sacred Sabbaths, nor are they listed among the annual sacred festivals.)

By cautioning the Colossian members not to let others judge them for how they observed these times, Paul didn't question whether they should be kept. The obvious implication of these verses is that these gentile Christians were in fact observing these days, and in no way did Paul tell them to desist.

Instead, the issue he addressed is that Christians should not let others judge them by misguided ascetic standards concerning what they ate or drank or how they observed the Sabbaths or festivals (verse 16).

Colossians 2 is actually a condemnation of ascetic human philosophy, not a discussion of which laws are binding for Christians!