

The Book of Deuteronomy

Lesson 10: Holy Living, Tithes, and the Sabbatical Year -- Deuteronomy 14:1–15:23

Imagine standing at the edge of the Promised Land as one of God's people, and hearing Him say of you, "you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession" (14:2). Before God says one word about what you may eat or how you must give, He tells you who you are. You are treasured. You are set apart. Everything that follows in these two chapters flows out of that identity, not toward it.

Because Israel belonged to God, even their grief had to look different from the world's. The nations around them gashed their bodies and shaved their heads for the dead, as if despair had the last word. God says, in effect, "Not you". You are My children; your sorrow is real, but it is not hopeless. From food on the table to tears at the grave, this people was to carry the unmistakable fingerprints of the God who owned them.

Then God turns to the wallet and the calendar. There is a tithe to teach the people to fear the Lord, and a third-year tithe stored up so that the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow could "eat and be filled" (14:29). Every seventh year debts were released and slaves set free, sent away not empty-handed but loaded with grain and wine. God was building a society where, as He put it, "there will be no poor among you" if only His people would obey with open hands.

We do not live under Moses, and these particular laws are not bound on us today. But listen for the heartbeat underneath them. The God who counted the widow's empty cupboard, who would not let a freed slave walk away with nothing, who tied generosity to remembering His own deliverance, is the same God we serve. These chapters press a question into us still: do our money, our calendars, and our open hands tell the truth about Whose we are?

Group Discussion: God grounds the whole section in identity, "you are a people holy to the Lord", before He ever mentions food or money. Why does it matter that God defines who His people are before He tells them how to live, and how should that same order shape the way we approach holiness and generosity today?

Personal Reflection: Deuteronomy 15 envisions a community with "no poor among you" because God's people kept open hands toward the needy. When you look honestly at your own giving and your care for the poor, what do they reveal about how deeply you trust the God who has provided for you?

Read Deuteronomy 14:1–15:23

Study Questions

1. What does God reveal about the identity and worth of His people when He calls Israel “a people holy to the Lord” and His “treasured possession”, and how is that identity meant to shape even their mourning (14:1–2)?
2. Israel was forbidden to grieve like the hopeless nations around them. In what areas of life are you tempted to mourn, worry, or react exactly like the world, and how would remembering that you belong to God change that?
3. Why did God give Israel the distinctions between clean and unclean foods, and what do these dietary laws teach about His holiness and His desire for a set-apart people (14:3–21)?
4. Where in your daily habits, choices, and appetites is God calling you to be visibly set apart, not for the sake of rules, but because you belong to Him?
5. What purposes did the various tithes serve, including the festival tithe meant to teach Israel to “fear the Lord” and the third-year tithe gathered for the Levite, sojourner, fatherless, and widow (14:22–29)?
6. Tithing was meant to train Israel’s heart, not just empty their barns. How is God using the way you handle money to train your own heart to trust and revere Him?

7. What did the sabbatical year of release reveal about God's concern for the poor and His promise that "there will be no poor among you" if His people obeyed with open hands (15:1-11)?
8. Deuteronomy 15 commands an open hand and warns against a heart that grows hard and stingy as a debt comes due. When have you felt that tug toward a closed hand, and what would open-handed generosity look like for you this week?
9. The tithes, the sabbatical year, the dietary laws, and these ordinances were given to Israel under the Old Covenant. How were they shadows pointing to Christ, what does the New Testament teach about whether they are bound on Christians, and how does the New Testament call believers to give instead (Colossians 2:16-17; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:7)?
10. Looking back across these chapters, name one specific way Jesus is forming you through them, whether in your identity, your appetites, your money, or your care for the poor.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Colossians 2:16-17, where food, festival, new moon, and Sabbath are called a shadow of things to come whose substance belongs to Christ; 2 Corinthians 9:7, where God loves a cheerful giver who gives as he has decided in his heart; 1 Corinthians 16:2, where the first day of the week giving is set in store as each has prospered; Acts 20:35, where it is more blessed to give than to receive; James 1:27, where pure religion visits orphans and widows in their affliction