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MINISTRIES

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Parashah Points: Re’eh – Why Eat Clean?

Welcome to another episode of Parashah Points—short thoughts from the weekly Torah Portion.

This week’s Parashah Point comes from Re’eh, which is Hebrew for “see,” and it goes from Deuteronomy 11:26 to Deuteronomy 16:17.

This Torah portion gives instructions regarding YHWH’s prescribed place of worship, a warning against idolatry, a warning against false prophets, and a reiteration of God’s laws regarding clean and unclean animals, tithes, the Sabbatical year, and the three pilgrimage festivals.

There’s a lot we can talk about in this Torah Portion. Today we’re going to talk about why God gave laws regarding what not to eat.

Deuteronomy 14:3 (NASB)

[You shall not eat any detestable thing.](#)

Our Torah Portion this week repeats some of the dietary instructions previously given in Leviticus 11. For instance, meat from animals like deer, goats, antelope, and so forth, are acceptable for food. But meat from animals like camels, rabbits, and pigs, are not acceptable for food. There are “clean” vs. “unclean” classifications for fish and birds as well.

Have you ever wondered why God cares so much about what we eat? Why is it a big deal if we want to get a slice of ham on our sandwich instead of turkey or beef? What is the basis for classifying a pig, for example, as “unclean”?

Various explanations have been given for these distinctions.

First, many have argued that God prohibited some animals for health reasons. Undercooked pork can cause trichinosis, for example. Some have objected to this view by pointing out that “clean” animals, like undercooked beef, can cause salmonella, and is therefore also dangerous. While there is some merit to the idea that eating unclean animals can be dangerous to your health, that doesn’t appear to account

for all the data. (For more information on the health concerns of eating unclean meat, see our teaching, [Pig Science](#).)

A second explanation for God's dietary laws is that some types of animals were used in pagan worship or represented pagan gods. This view has some problems, however, due to the fact that many *clean* animals, like goats, were also used in pagan worship.

A third explanation is that the animals are moral symbols. For instance, a clean animal on chewing the cud reminds us to meditate on the law. A pig, however, has dirty habits that point to filth and self-indulgence. This view, however, seems a bit contrived.

While the biblical text doesn't give the full rationale for why some animals are classified as clean and others as unclean, the text *is* clear when it comes to the *function* of these laws:

Deuteronomy 14:2

For you are a people holy to the Lord [YHWH] your God, and the Lord [YHWH] has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

YHWH's people are to be holy unto him. Even the little things in life, like getting turkey on our sandwich instead of ham, are a constant reminder that we belong to YHWH. Our lives—and our stomachs!—are not our own. Even eating is a form of worship.

Thank you for joining us for another Parashah Point!

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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