**Deuteronomy 14:21**

[*https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-14/deuteronomy-1421/*](https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-14/deuteronomy-1421/)

*The Israelites are to refrain from eating anything which dies naturally because they are a holy people to the Suzerain (Ruler) God.*

The last dietary law of this passage prevented the Israelites from eating animals found already dead. Moses declared that the people were to *not eat anything which dies of itself*. An animal that dies naturally has not been properly killed and its blood has not been poured out the way the Suzerain (Ruler) God demanded it ([Leviticus 17:14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Leviticus+17.14&t=NASB95); [Deuteronomy 12:16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+12.16&t=NASB95)). The Israelites were prohibited from eating such a beast.

However, the meat of a dead animal was perfectly acceptable for people who were not part of God’s covenant. The people were permitted to*give it to the alien who is in your town, so that he may eat it.*An *alien* (Heb. “gēr”) was a non-Israelite who resided in the land of Israel, making it his permanent home. He or she may have fled his homeland for political or economic reasons, and was often poor and needy ([Deuteronomy 1:16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+1.16&t=NASB95); [5:14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+5.14&t=NASB95)). The person was typically seen as a proselyte, someone born outside of Israel, but by choice living among the Israelites and following their ways ([Deut 31:12](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deut+31.12&t=NASB95" \t "BLB_NW)).

They could also *sell it to a foreigner*. The term *foreigner* (Heb. “nokrî”) refers to someone who had a permanent home in another country but may be traveling within the borders of Israel. The *foreigner* often traveled in Israel for trading purposes and thus was able to take care of himself. That explains why Moses commanded the Israelites to *sell* the dead animal to a *foreigner*but*give* it to an*alien*.

The reason why the Israelites were not to eat the meat of dead animals was because they were *a holy people to the LORD*their*God*. The term *holy* (Heb. “qādôsh”) refers to that which is set apart for a specific purpose. It entails a separation from the profane—that which was used for ordinary purposes. The Israelites were holy because a holy Suzerain God elected them as His vassals and set them apart for His special purpose. Thus, the Israelites were to reflect that holy status God conferred upon them in every way, including, of course, eating a proper diet.

At the end of the verse, Moses commanded Israel not to *boil a young goat in its mother’s milk*, a command that also occurs in [Exodus 23:19](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+23.19&t=NASB95) and [34:26](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+34.26&t=NASB95). The meaning of this text is a matter of debate. It might mean that in ancient times, people regarded meat boiled in sour milk as highly desirable and sophisticated, because it had a better taste than meat boiled in water. It could also be prohibited because it was a Canaanite pagan fertility ritual. Or it could mean that something that promoted life (the mother’s milk) should not be used to destroy life. In any case, it is a perverse image—a young creature cooked in that which was designed to nourish it from its own mother.

**Biblical Text:**

**21You shall not eat anything which dies *of itself*. You may give it to the alien who is in your town, so that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner, for you are a holy people to the Lord your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.**