

Leviticus Chapter 11

Verses 1-47: This section contains further legislation on the consumption of animals. Abel's offering hints at a "post-Fall/pre-Flood" diet of animals (Gen. 4:4). After the Noahic flood, God specifically had granted man permission to eat meat (Gen. 9:1-4), but here spelled out the specifics as covenant legislation. All of the reasons for the prohibitions are not specified. The major points were:

- (1) That Israel was to obey God's absolute standard, regardless of the reason for it, or the lack of understanding of it; and
- (2) Such a unique diet was specified that Israel would find it difficult to eat with the idolatrous people around and among them.

Their dietary laws served as a barrier to easy socialization with idolatrous peoples. Dietary and hygienic benefits were real, but only secondary to the divine purposes of obedience and separation.

Verses 1-8: Of the four-legged animals, only those with a divided hoof that also chewed the cud were permissible to eat. This included cattle, sheep, goats, and deer and excluded camels, rabbits, and pigs. The prohibition against eating "their flesh" also meant not touching their "carcase". Even the carcasses of clean animals were considered unclean (11:39-40; Deut. 14:3-8).

Leviticus 11:1 "And the LORD spake unto Moses and to Aaron, saying unto them,"

The one being the chief magistrate, and the other the high priest, and both concerned to see the following laws put into execution. According to Jarchi, the Lord spoke to Moses that he might speak to Aaron; but being now in office, and one part of his office being to distinguish between clean and unclean, the following discourse is directed equally to him as to Moses.

"Saying unto them": As follows.

Leviticus 11:2 "Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, These [are] the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that [are] on the earth."

For to them only belong the following laws, and not unto the Gentiles, as Jarchi rightly observes. These were parts of the ceremonial law, which was peculiarly given to them, and lay, among other things, in meats and drinks.

"These are the beasts that ye shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth": They are not particularly mentioned here, but they are in (Deut. 14:4). And they are these ten: The ox, the sheep, and the goat, the hart, and the roebuck, and the fallow deer, and the wild goat, and the pygarg, and the wild ox, and the chamois. Of all (see notes on Deut. 14:4-5). Here's only some general things are observed to describe them by, as follow.

We will be studying in this lesson the dietary laws that God sent down to His chosen people. In the practice of the Mosaic law, it was very important what you ate and drank. Under grace all things are clean for the Christian, if they are prayed over before they are eaten.

1 Timothy 4:4-5 "For every creature of God [is] good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:" "For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

We also know about the sheet lowered from heaven, and Peter directed to kill and eat things that he had classified as unclean.

Acts 10:11-15 "And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:" "Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air." "And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." "But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." "And the voice [spake] unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, [that] call not thou common."

In giving this lesson on the dietary laws, I am not saying that we are to keep them today. I will, however, try to point out the obvious reasons God has given these ordinances.

Verses 3-23: This section is repeated in (Deut. 14:3-20), in almost exact wording. The subject matter includes animals (verses 3-8), water life (verses 9-12), birds (verses 13-19), and insects (verses 20-23).

Leviticus 11:3 "Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, [and] cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat."

That is, whose hoof is parted and cloven quite through. For there are some creatures that have partitions in their feet, but not quite through, they are parted above, but underneath are joined together by a skin. Wherefore both these phrases are used to describe the beasts lawful to be eaten. For such are all horned cattle; nor are there any cattle horned forbidden to be eaten.

"And cheweth the cud among the beasts, that shall ye eat": Who having no upper teeth cannot thoroughly chew their food at once, and therefore bring it up again out of their stomachs into their mouths and chew it over again, that it may be better prepared for digestion in the stomach, and so yield better nourishment. And this makes the flesh of such creatures fitter for food. And these creatures have more stomachs than one. The ventricles for rumination are four.

This would probably be better understood, if we knew that clovenfooted meant a claw, or a split hoof. It also means to split or tear and fissure. I do not believe that God was restricting these animals for the reason most believe. I believe that God was telling His family which animals He made for food and which animals were on the earth for other purposes.

Leviticus 11:4 "Nevertheless these shall ye not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the hoof: [as] the camel, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he [is] unclean unto you."

The camel has a divided foot of two large parts, but the division is not complete and the two toes rest on an elastic pad.

The camel was obviously made by God for transportation for the desert people. The one thing that makes you know for sure that was God's purpose for this animal, is the fact that the camel can go many days without water. This would be a tremendous advantage in the desert. We studied in the book of Genesis that animals were made for the use of man. In the first chapter of Genesis beginning at the verse 20 all the way to the end of the chapter, you will read why God made the animals, fowls etc. God prepared the earth and everything on the earth, and then made man, after He had prepared the earth and made it habitable for man.

“Verses 5-6: “Coney ... hare”: While not true ruminating animals, the manner in which these animals processed their food gave the distinct appearance of “chewing the cud”.

Leviticus 11:5 "And the coney, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he [is] unclean unto you."

"The coney": The Old English name for a rabbit. It bears some resemblance to the guinea-pig or the marmot, and in its general appearance and habits (Prov. 30:26; Psalm 104:18). It might easily be taken for a rodent. But Cuvier discovered that it is, in its anatomy, a true pachyderm, allied to the rhinoceros and the tapir, inferior to them as it is in size.

"He cheweth the cud": The Hyrax has the same habit as the hare, the rabbit, the guinea-pig, and some other rodents, of moving its jaws when it is at rest as if it were masticating. The rodents were familiarly spoken of as ruminating animals, just as the bat was reckoned among birds because it flies (see Lev. 11:19). And as whales and their congeners are spoken of as fish, when there is no occasion for scientific accuracy.

We would probably understand this a little better if we knew what the word coney means. This means a rock rabbit. A few years ago, many people learned the hard way why God had included this animal in the group of unclean. Rabbit fever became a threat to those who ate rabbit. Even today those who hunt rabbit, will not eat them at certain times of the year.

Leviticus 11:6 "And the hare, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he [is] unclean unto you."

Or, "though he chews" it.

"But divideth not the hoof, he is unclean to you": And so not to be eaten; so Plutarch says, that the Jews are said to abstain from the hare, disdaining it as a filthy and unclean animal. And yet

was in the greatest esteem with the Romans of any four footed beast, as Martial says. Moses, as Bochart and other learned men observe, is the only writer that speaks of the hare as chewing the cud. Though they also observe, that Aristotle makes mention of that in common with those that do chew the cud, namely a "coagulum" in its stomach. His words are, "all that have many bellies have what is called a coagulum or runnet, and of them that have but one belly, the hare;" only that. This creature being prone to lust, may be an emblem of lustful persons, who give up themselves to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness (Eph. 4:19). The "hare" in this verse may be an animal that is now extinct but was alive at the time of Moses. Its only other mention is in (Deut. 14:7).

Leviticus 11:7 "And the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be clovenfooted, yet he cheweth not the cud; he [is] unclean to you."

"The swine": Though he divide the hoof, and be clovenfooted. Here, again, the description is not according to anatomical analysis, but to ordinary appearance. The pig appears to be cloven-footed, and it would be misleading to give any other account of his foot in ordinary speech. But scientifically speaking, he has four toes. The prohibition of the use of swine's flesh does not arise from the fear of trichinosis or other disease, but from the disgust caused by the carnivorous and filthy habits of the Eastern pig.

Pork is very dangerous to eat, if it is not thoroughly cooked. At the time these ordinances were given, there was not nearly as good a way to cook meat as we have today. There was no refrigeration at all. I am sure God took all of this into account when He said do not eat swine. The swine has always been thought of as dirty, not only on the outside, but because of the food it ate as well.

Leviticus 11:8 "Of their flesh shall ye not eat, and their carcase shall ye not touch; they [are] unclean to you."

Meaning, not of swine only, but of the camel, coney, and hare.

"And their carcass shall ye not touch": Which must not be understood of touching them in any sense. For then it would have been unlawful for a Jew to have rode upon a camel, or to take out and make use of hog's lard in medicine. But of touching them in order to kill them, and prepare them for food, and eat them. And indeed, all unnecessary touching of them is forbidden, lest it should bring them to the eating of them. Though perhaps it may chiefly respect the touching of them dead.

"They are unclean to you": One and all of them. For as this was said of each of them in particular, so now of all of them together. And which holds good of all wild creatures not named, to whom the description above belongs, and which used to be eaten by other nations.

The carcase of any dead animal should not be touched, because you have no idea what killed it, and many diseases can be spread by carelessly touching them. A swine wallows in the mud and from the physical point would certainly be unclean. This however, is speaking more of a defilement than a physical touch.

Leviticus 11:9 "These shall ye eat of all that [are] in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat."

“Fins ... scales”: Much like the cud and hoof characteristics, the “no fins and scales” guidelines ruled out a segment of water life commonly consumed by ancient people.

Leviticus 11:10 "And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers, of all that move in the waters, and of any living thing which [is] in the waters, they [shall be] an abomination unto you:"

Such as eels, lampreys, etc.

"Of all that move in the waters, and of any living thing which is in the waters": The former of these are interpreted by Aben Ezra and Ben Gersom of little fishes that have but a small body, and such as are created out of the waters. And the latter, of such as are produced of a male and female; or, as Maimonides explains it, the one signifies the lesser creatures, such as worms and horse leeches. The other greater ones, sea beasts, as sea dogs, etc.

"They shall be an abomination to you": Not only unclean, and so unfit to eat, but to be had in abhorrence and detestation, as being exceeding disagreeable and unwholesome. And, as a learned man observes, to these prohibited in general belong all those animals in lakes, rivers, or seas, which are of a slow motion. And which, because of the slow motion of their bodies, do not so well digest their food. And for that may be compared with four footed beasts that have but one belly, and so unwholesome as they.

Fish, such as bass and crappie (which have scales), prefer live bait when you are trying to catch them. On the other hand, catfish are scavengers and will eat anything. The slick skin fish, all are the fish who eat the garbage in the waters. I believe God made each fish for its own purpose. Now there are fish farms, where catfish are raised just for food and they are fed well and do not have to live like a scavenger. Perhaps in the restrictions of animals, fish, and fowl that God said was okay to eat, was so that we would not be eating things that would make us sick.

Leviticus 11:11 "They shall be even an abomination unto you; ye shall not eat of their flesh, but ye shall have their carcasses in abomination."

This is repeated again and again, to deter from the eating of such fishes, lest there should be any desire after them.

"Ye shall not eat of their flesh": Here mention is made of the flesh of fishes, as is by the apostle (1 Cor. 15:39). Aben Ezra observes, that their wise men say, this is according to the usage of words in those ages.

"But you shall have their carcasses in abomination": Not only abstain from eating them and touching them, but to express the utmost aversion to them.

Leviticus 11:12 "Whatsoever hath no fins nor scales in the waters, that [shall be] an abomination unto you."

Which is repeated that they might take particular notice of this law, and be careful to observe it, this being the only sign given.

"That shall be an abomination unto you": The Targum of Jonathan says, that not only the flesh of such fish, but the broth, and pickles made of them, were to be an abomination. This law of the Jews is taken notice of by Porphyry, who says, it is forbidden all the Jews to eat horse flesh, or fishes that lack scales, or any animal that has but one hoof.

I am thoroughly convinced that this is because they will eat just anything, and you might take a disease because of their practices of being a scavenger.

Leviticus 11:13 "And these [are they which] ye shall have in abomination among the fowls; they shall not be eaten, they [are] an abomination: the eagle, and the ossifrage, and the ospray,"

"Among the fowls": Rather than unifying characteristics as in the hoof-cud and no fin-scales descriptions, the forbidden birds were simply named.

The ossifrage here, is a bird of the eagle or vulture species. The ospray was a sea eagle. All of these eat dead things.

Leviticus 11:14 "And the vulture, and the kite after his kind;"

Perhaps it might be better if the version was inverted, and the words be read, "and the kite, and the vulture, after his kind". And the last word is by us rendered the vulture in (Job 28:7). And very rightly, since the kite is not remarkable for its sight, any other than all rapacious creatures are. Whereas the vulture is to a proverb. And besides, of the vulture there are two sorts, as Aristotle says, the one lesser and whiter, the other larger and more of an ash color. And there are some that are of the eagle kind, whereas there is but one sort of kites. Though Ainsworth makes mention of two, the greater of a ruddy color, common in England. And the lesser of a blacker color, known in Germany, but produces no authority for it. However, these are both ravenous creatures. And of vultures he reports, that they will watch a dying man, and follow armies going to battle, expecting prey (see notes on Matt. 24:28).

Leviticus 11:15 "Every raven after his kind;"

The red raven, night raven, the water raven, river raven, wood raven, etc. This also includes crows, rooks, pies, jays, and jackdaws. The raven was with the Heathens sacred to Apollo, is a voracious creature, and so reckoned among unclean ones, and unfit for food. Nor does the care that God takes of these creatures, or the use he has made of them, contradict this (see Job 38:41).

Leviticus 11:16 "And the owl, and the night hawk, and the cuckoo, and the hawk after his kind,"

It is generally supposed the ostrich is denoted by the original word.

"The nighthawk": A very small bird, with which, from its nocturnal habits, many superstitious ideas were associated.

"The cuckoo": Evidently some other bird is meant by the original term, from its being ranged among rapacious birds. Dr. Shaw thinks it is the sapsaf; but that, being a grass eater and gregarious bird, is equally objectionable. Others think that the sea mew, or some of the small sea fowl, is intended.

"The hawk": The Hebrew word includes every variety of the falcon family. As the goshawk, the jerhawk, the sparrow hawk, etc. Several species of hawks are found in Western Asia and Egypt, where they find inexhaustible prey in the immense numbers of pigeons and turtledoves that abound in those quarters. The hawk was held pre-eminently sacred among the Egyptians. And this, besides its rapacious disposition and gross habits, might have been a strong reason for its prohibition as an article of food to the Israelites.

Leviticus 11:17 "And the little owl, and the cormorant, and the great owl,"

Or horned owl, as some render it. The common barn owl, which is well known in the East. It is the only bird of its kind here referred to, although the word is thrice mentioned in our version.

"cormorant": Supposed to be the gull. (see on Deut. 14:17).

"The great owl": According to some, the Ibis of the Egyptians. It was well known to the Israelites, and so rendered by the Septuagint (Deut. 14:16; Isa 34:11). According to Parkhurst, the bittern, but not determined.

Leviticus 11:18 "And the swan, and the pelican, and the gier eagle,"

Found in great numbers in all the countries of the Levant. It frequents marshy places, the vicinity of rivers and lakes. It was held sacred by the Egyptians, and kept tame within the precincts of heathen temples. It was probably on this account chiefly that its use as food was prohibited. Michaelis considers it the goose.

"The pelican": Remarkable for the bag or pouch under its lower jaw which serves not only as a net to catch, but also as a receptacle of food. It is solitary in its habits and, like other large aquatic birds, often flies to a great distance from its favorite haunts.

"The gier eagle": Being here associated with waterfowl, it has been questioned whether any species of eagle is referred to. Some think, as the original name racham denotes "tenderness," "affection," the halcyon or kingfisher is intended. Others think that it is the bird now called the rachami, a kind of Egyptian vulture. Abundant in the streets of Cairo and popularly called "Pharaoh's fowl". It is white in color, The size like a raven, and feeds on carrion. It is one of the foulest and filthiest birds in the world. (see on Deut. 14:17).

Leviticus 11:19 "And the stork, the heron after her kind, and the lapwing, and the bat."

A bird of benevolent temper and held in the highest estimation in all Eastern countries. It was declared unclean, probably, from its feeding on serpents and other venomous reptiles, as well as rearing its young on the same food.

"The heron": The word so translated only occurs in the prohibited list of food and has been variously rendered; the crane, the plover, the woodcock, and the parrot. In this great diversity of opinion nothing certain can be affirmed regarding it. Judging from the group with which it is classified, it must be an aquatic bird that is meant. It may as well be the heron as any other bird, the more especially as herons abound in Egypt and in the Hauran of Palestine.

"The lapwing, or hoopoe. Found in warm regions, a very pretty but filthy species of bird. It was considered unclean, probably from its feeding on insects, worms, and snails.

"The bat": The great or Ternet bat, known in the East, noted for its voracity and filthiness.

If I would closely investigate, I would probably say that perhaps no civilized peoples of the earth eat these fowls. These are all in the class of the vulture in their choice of food. God thought of everything when He made the earth, and He made some of these fowl to eat the dead animals on the highway. They are our clean-up crew if you will. We always try to see the spiritual lesson in all the verses we read. I see in this, that God wants His people to abstain from any and everything that might connect them with worldliness in any way. We all want to live in divine health and these Israelites were no different from us on this point. They were to be a separated people. One of the things that set them apart, was the fact that they rigidly conformed to the wishes of God on the matter of clean and unclean. They never questioned why. God said it was an abomination, so they left it alone. We believers in Christ need to have that type of separation to our LORD today. If Jesus said don't do it, don't. We want to know the reason for everything. True faith in Jesus Christ is when we learn to trust the Lord in everything, even if we do not understand why right now.

Leviticus 11:20 "All fowls that creep, going upon [all] four, [shall be] an abomination unto you."

Or rather "every creeping thing that flies". For what are designed are not properly fowls, but, as the Jewish writers interpret them, flies, fleas, bees, wasps, hornets, locusts, etc. So the Targum of Jonathan, Jarchi, Ben Gersom, and Maimonides.

"Going upon all four": That is, upon their four feet, when they walk or creep.

"These shall be an abomination to you": Not used as food, but detested as such.

Leviticus 11:21 "Yet these may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon [all] four, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth;"

This describes the locust (verse 22), which was allowed for food.

Which are after described and named.

"Of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon all four": Even though it is a creeping thing that flies and goes upon four feet, provided they are such.

"Which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth": There is a double reading of this clause. The textual reading is, "which have not legs".

The main thing we need to learn from this, is that all of this was under the Mosaic law. All things are clean for Christians, if we pray over the food before we eat it. Some of the things in this lesson are not too good for your health. We need to take care of our body. Our flesh should be controlled by our spirit. If we would study these laws, and watch our diet and take care of the body God gave us for our use on this earth, we could do much more for God. We need to realize that we are not our own. We have been bought with a price (Jesus' blood). Our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost.

1 Corinthians 6:19 "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost [which is] in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"

Leviticus Chapter 11 Questions

1. In the beginning of this chapter, who did God speak to?
2. What laws are in this chapter?
3. In the Mosaic law, what 2 things were very important that were taught in this lesson?
4. What things are clean to eat under grace?
5. What 2 things sanctify our food?
6. Who did God tell to kill and eat things that were forbidden in the Mosaic law?
7. What God hath cleansed, call not thou _____.
8. What does clovenfooted mean?
9. In these ordinances, God was telling His people what about animals?
10. What was the camel obviously made for?
11. What, about the camel, tells us that was its purpose?
12. What were animals made for?
13. How did God prepare the earth for man?

14. What does coney mean?
15. What disease caused the people to become cautious about what time of the year they ate wild rabbit?
16. If pork is eaten, not thoroughly cooked, what can happen to you?
17. Why should you not touch the dead carcass of an animal?
18. Which fish are scavengers?
19. What is the ossifrage?
20. What do the eagle, ossifrage, and the ospray have in common?
21. All of the fowls mentioned in verses 14 through 19 could be classed as vulture in their choice of _____.
22. God wants His people to abstain from what?
23. What is true faith in Jesus Christ?
24. What is the main lesson, for the believer, to be learned in studying these dietary laws?
25. We are not our own, we have been _____.
26. Know ye not that your body is the _____.