

Leviticus 11

Aaron Eime, Christ Church Jerusalem, 2022

With the ceremonial instructions in place, the following several chapters contain laws in Leviticus that touch on the everyday life of the Israelites. The Presence of God now resided in the Tabernacle, the Almighty was with us, now how shall we live? One of the principal duties of the priesthood was to distinguish between the holy and the common, the sacred and the profane, the clean and the unclean (Lev 10:10). Chapter 11 contains the instructions for foods that are permitted to be eaten and those considered unclean. Uncleaness was not considered a sin. An unclean animal still has value to both Man and God, unclean animals were worthy to be saved on the Ark, they just cannot be consumed as food for Jewish people.

God speaks to both Moses and Aaron, which is the first time the Lord does so in this way. Moses now functions as Prophet and Aaron as Priest. Both are now probably standing before the Lord in the Tent of Meeting. Henceforth the people of Israel are to receive the Word of the Lord through both prophet and priest.

The history, wealth or poverty, religion, and culture of every civilization play a role in defining the human diet. God calls these intrusions His ‘Torah of beasts and birds’, and we should not try to separate these instructions from God Himself. He is Holy and so there is something about holiness with these instructions. From the literal text itself, there is no obvious rationale for the distinctions between clean and unclean. Some commentators seek to find a health benefit through the consumption of clean animals. However, this fails to consider the health implications in the New Covenant where most foods are now permitted to Gentiles. God took care of your health in the Mosaic Covenant but now has complete disregard for blocked arteries after Jesus ... this doesn’t make sense! Are we comfortable enough in our trust in God to say that we do not always have to understand His ways, though we may honestly truly want to. Verse 44 declares that ‘I am the Lord your God’. God claims the right to speak into every aspect of our lives, including what we eat.

God teaches His people in antiquity to distinguish clean from unclean. Can we discern clean and unclean in our world today? We live in a culture that knows not the difference between good or evil, male or female. One of the gifts of the Spirit, given to the body of the Messiah, is the gift of discernment. The spiritual lesson we learn from Leviticus is the requirement for discernment. Once the discernment has been made then the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. If truth be told then much of our society lacks self-control. In terms of food, the WHO sites the biggest cause of death worldwide is heart disease, predominately brought about by diet. We know processed foods are unhealthy choices yet we choose them anyway, even when the ingredients are clearly written on the packet like a warning label. Interestingly, we are commanded to love the Lord our God with our whole heart, to circumcise our hearts and the heart is the leading cause of death worldwide.

The Lord reminds the people through Moses and Aaron that uncleaness is transferable, and particularly death is transferable. Touching the carcass of a dead animal causes all kinds of things to become impure: pots, vessels, food and people. Being in an unclean state is not a sin, thus sacrifices are not required to remove it. Simply washing the object, be that a vessel, clothing or a human in water and a brief quarantine period. Developing here is the basis for the Jewish *mikve* system and the process of baptism. Following the cleansing for water, a rare element in the desert environs of Canaan and the wilderness, the period of quarantine lasted until evening.

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Interestingly the time until evening would be different in each and every case. Removing a dead animal in the morning would mean you are in an unclean state for several hours longer than the person who removes the dead animal in the afternoon. Is this fair? Certainly, this is not the right question. The Bible does not discuss fairness or our rights. It discusses our obligations. The blood of Jesus covers a light sin as well as a heavy one. And the question is never, is this fair? The answer is simply thanks and praise! How wonderful is the love and mercy of God!

In our discussions regarding food laws for Gentiles, we noted that several passages in the New Testament engage this issue. In Mark 7:19 we see the Greek text in parenthesis ("Thus He declared all food clean"). All manuscripts of Mark have the parenthetical words and thus it is assumed not to be a late insertion, though it might be earlier one. The parallel verse in Mathew 15:17 does not have Mark's added comment. It could be a comment on what Jesus said by Mark and not what Jesus actually said. A lot has been written on this by some very good Greek scholars. In Matthew 5 Jesus tells us not to break, or teach to break, even the least of the commandments, thus I do not think Jesus is dismissing Torah so lightly. Jesus would not have broken Torah else He would then be able to have been condemned as a sinner, which He was not!

Acts 15 presents three food laws for Gentiles, and Paul discusses food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians. Gentiles are not bound to *kashrut* (Jewish food laws) but are limited from consuming food offered to idols. This causes an interesting discussion on halal foods and whether Christians can eat meat sacrificed to Allah. We should recall that uncleanness is not a sin. Eating pork is not a sin; it is forbidden, and there is a difference. Recall also that being in a state of uncleanness does not require a sacrifice.

In summary, the body of the Messiah should engage in the spiritual gift of discernment. We are in a relationship with a holy God and need to reflect His holiness through our own holiness. Having discernment with appropriate foods and self-control over diet is an aspect of this holiness. If our bodies are indeed temples of the Holy Spirit, then let us reflect that holy truth in our deeds and actions.