

# Clean and Unclean Animals (Leviticus 11)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Leviticus

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## I. Review from Prior Lessons

- a. In **Leviticus 1-7**, we discussed the rules and regulations regarding five different types of sacrificial offerings that the priests would make.
- b. In **Leviticus 8-9**, we learned about the process of ordaining Aaron (the high priest) and his four sons (the priests), the beginning of their ministry of service, and the consecration of the tabernacle. This culminated with the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle and fire from the Lord consuming the offerings.
- c. While we are no longer under the Levitical rules (which were abolished at the cross, with the death of Christ), all of these things still have significance for us, since they foreshadowed things that were yet to come.
  - i. The High Priest, Aaron, foreshadowed Jesus, as explained in **Hebrews 8-10**.
  - ii. His sons, the priests, foreshadowed us, the Christians. As Peter stated in **1 Peter 2:1-10**, we have become the new priesthood.
  - iii. The ordination and ministry of the sons of Aaron (**Leviticus 8**) foreshadowed the markings of our own priesthood. We, like they, have been:
    1. *Washed* (foreshadowing baptism),
    2. *Clothed* with special clothing (foreshadowing our being clothed with Christ, with humility, etc.)
    3. *Anointed* (foreshadowing our being anointed with the Holy Spirit);
      - a. The Christ is *the* Anointed One; and we as Christians have become the *anointed ones of God*, as well.
    4. *Offer sacrifices and prayers* to the Lord (foreshadowing how we, as Christians, now offer ourselves as living sacrifices, as Paul said in **Romans 12:1**).

- d. In **Leviticus 10**, the priests Nadab and Abihu, the two oldest sons of Aaron, are struck dead by the Lord for offering “strange fire” while they were burning incense.
- e. From this point, the book transitions to the Lord providing Moses with additional rules for the people to follow, starting with the famous dietary restrictions.

## II. Designation of Clean and Unclean Animals

- a. Recall that after Nadab and Abihu were struck dead, the Lord gave additional instructions to the priests. This included a reference to “clean and unclean” things.
  - i. Aaron was told, “Do not drink wine and strong drink, you nor your sons with you when you approach the tabernacle of testimony, or when you approach the altar, lest you die... that you may distinguish *between holy and unholy*, and *between unclean and clean*, and that you may teach the children of Israel all the ordinances which the Lord spoke to them by the hand of Moses.” (**Leviticus 10:9-12**, LXX, OSB)
- b. **Question:** Prior to **Leviticus 11**, is there anywhere in the Old Testament where it speaks of different types of animals being ‘clean’ or ‘unclean’?
  - i. The only prior reference in the Scriptures to clean versus unclean animals (that I am aware of) was in the story of the Flood of Noah.
  - ii. Recall that Noah was told to take onto the ark seven of each type of ‘*clean*’ cattle and two of every type of ‘*unclean*’ cattle. (**Genesis 7:1-2**)
    1. However, no explanation was given in **Genesis** regarding which animals were considered *clean* versus *unclean*.
    2. My impression is that before the Flood of Noah, people were vegetarians (based on **Genesis 1:29**).
    3. Furthermore, it is my impression that the Lord gave animals as food to man *after the Flood*, based on **Genesis 9:1-7**.
      - a. Men could eat any type of animal, but not with the blood of the animal in it. They were prohibited from eating or drinking blood from any animal. There was something very special and off-limits regarding blood.
      - b. It seems to me that in **Genesis 7**, the reference to clean versus unclean animals may only have referred to animals that could be sacrificed to the Lord (see **Genesis 8:18-21**).

- c. In **Leviticus 11**, the animals are addressed in four groupings:
  - i. Land animals (perhaps referring to mammals);
  - ii. Animals that live in the water (including fish);
  - iii. Winged animals (including birds);
  - iv. Insects; and
  - v. 'Creeping things' (such as snakes and other reptiles).
- d. The land animals: clean vs. unclean.
  - i. Read **Leviticus 11:1-8**.
  - ii. Since birds, reptiles, sea creatures and insects are dealt with later, I assume this part covers the *land-based mammals*.
  - iii. The clean must meet ***BOTH*** of the following two criteria:
    - 1. Chews the cud, and
    - 2. Has split (cloven) hooves.
  - iv. About chewing the cud.
    - 1. Grasses are plentiful over much of the earth, but it is hard to extract nutrients from grasses.
    - 2. Some animals are designed with multiple stomachs. They eat grasses, store them up, then regurgitate them (cough them up later) and chew again and again to extract the nutrients.
  - v. About split hooves.
    - 1. Horses and camels have a single *hoof* (a single hard, bone-like structure at the bottom of each leg).
    - 2. Pigs, sheep and goats have split hooves (bisected, with left and right halves) that make them more sure-footed on uneven terrain.
    - 3. Most mammals (dogs, cats, foxes, bears, people, etc.) have no hooves at all. They may have feet or paws instead.
  - vi. One out of two is ***NOT GOOD ENOUGH!***
    - 1. Horses, camels and rabbits chew the cud, but do not have split hooves. Therefore, they are unclean.

2. Pigs have split hooves but do not chew the cud. Therefore, they are unclean.
  3. Animals that *BOTH* chew the cud and have split hooves, and therefore are 'clean', include sheep, goats, deer and cows (cattle).
- vii. 'Unclean' animals could not be eaten by the Jews, nor could they touch their dead carcasses.
- e. The water animals: clean versus unclean.
- i. Read **Leviticus 11:9-12**.
  - ii. Whatever lives in the water and has BOTH fins and scales could be eaten.
  - iii. Things in the water that do not have fins and scales, and therefore would be considered *unclean* and *could not be eaten*, include:
    1. Lobsters and crabs
    2. Clams and oysters
    3. Eels
    4. Catfish
    5. Sharks
    6. Stingrays
    7. Squid (calamari) and octopus
    8. Sea turtles
    9. Dolphins, whales and porpoises
  - iv. In general, fin-type fish from the ocean, lakes or rivers are considered clean and can be eaten.
- f. Birds (winged creatures): clean versus unclean.
- i. Read **Leviticus 11:13-19**.
  - ii. In the Septuagint, the Greek word often translated 'birds' can also be translated 'winged creatures'. Note that bats are at the end of the list. While bats are not included with 'birds' in the modern biological classification system, they are nonetheless 'winged creatures'.
  - iii. There are no specific *criteria* for distinguishing between 'clean' and 'unclean' among the winged creatures. Therefore, any winged creature

(bird or other flying animal) that is not listed among the 'unclean' creatures could be considered 'clean'.

- iv. Winged creatures that are listed as being unclean include predatory birds (eagles, falcons), carrion-eating birds (like vultures), certain other wild birds. Bats, which are also "winged creatures", are included here too.
- v. Birds considered to be 'clean' (not on the 'unclean' list) include chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, pigeons and other domesticated birds. Jews today generally consider that any bird not mentioned on this list of unclean birds is acceptable to eat.
- g. Insects (creeping things): clean versus unclean.
  - i. Read **Leviticus 11:20-23**.
  - ii. The word translated "insects" in the OSB is literally, in the Greek of the LXX, 'creeping things'.
  - iii. The only 'creeping things' that fly which may be eaten are those that *have jointed legs, which can leap* (such as grasshoppers, crickets and locusts).
- h. Other 'creeping things': clean versus unclean.
  - i. Read **Leviticus 11:29-31** and **11:41-47**.
- i. **Question:** Why can't you eat these things?
  - i. Eating unclean things will defile a person.
  - ii. God is a holy God; His people must be holy (= *set apart*) because He is holy (**Leviticus 11:44-45**).
    - 1. This is the first place in **Leviticus** that this important statement is made, "Be holy because I am holy."
    - 2. Peter quotes this in his first epistle, to make a very important point that applies to Christians.
      - a. "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, '*Be holy, for I am holy.*'" (**1 Peter 1:13-16**, NKJV)

iii. This law is given to help them “to *distinguish between* the unclean and the clean” (**Leviticus 11:46-47**).

1. **Suggestion:** Think about that line; there may be more in it than what first appears!

### III. Restatement of Dietary Laws and More Details

a. Read **Deuteronomy 14:1-22**.

- i. More specifically, this passage mentions some of the animals that may or may not be eaten.
- ii. The Jews were forbidden to eat anything that dies by itself. However, they may give it to the alien or even *sell it to a foreigner!*
- iii. Here is found the statement, “Don’t boil a lamb in its mother’s milk.”
  1. This is the basis for having one set of dishes for meat and another set for dairy-type foods in kosher households that are still striving to follow these laws.

### IV. These Laws Were Meant to be Taken Seriously

- a. **Question:** Were there some health-related reasons why the Lord prohibited his people from eating certain foods?
  - i. **Perhaps.** Some people think so. I remember a friend who was a physician and medical missionary (and at the time pursuing a Master’s in Public Health degree) telling me years ago that he believed there were *good public health reasons* for the dietary restrictions in **Leviticus 11**. For example:
    1. A person can get a parasitic disease called trichinosis from eating undercooked pork (since pigs are susceptible to this parasite).
    2. Also, bear in mind that pigs will eat almost anything (including human garbage); in contrast, cows and sheep (clean animals) just eat grass.
    3. Shellfish, which are ‘filter feeders’, tend to concentrate in their bodies whatever pollutants (including bacteria) are present in their local marine environment. Eating clams, scallops, mussels, or oysters harvested from polluted waters can lead to a variety of illnesses.
- b. Whenever the Lord issues a command, it tests the hearts of people (whether they will follow His command or rebel). This can reveal the best (and worst)

of God's people. We see the same phenomenon of this test of hearts regarding the dietary commands of **Leviticus 11**.

- c. Many of the Jews would be punished severely for violating these laws.
  - i. Read **Isaiah 65:1-7**.
    - 1. The Lord *stretched out his hands all day long* to a people who rejected Him.
      - a. Many early Christians saw in this a prophecy about Jesus on the cross. For examples, see:
        - i. *Epistle of Barnabas*, chapter 12; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 145.
        - ii. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chapter 35; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 174.
        - iii. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 97; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 247.
        - iv. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 4, chapter 32; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 510.
    - 2. Recall that Paul in **Romans 10:20-21** applies **Isaiah 65:1** to the Gentiles (being found by those who did not seek Him), and what follows in **Isaiah 65:2** (rejected by a disobedient and contrary people) to the Jews.
    - 3. They eat the flesh of *swine* (= pigs).
    - 4. These people claim they are *clean*; but in reality, they are *defiled*.
    - 5. The Lord will repay them for their sins.
  - ii. Read **Isaiah 66:16-17**.
    - 1. The Lord will destroy these people who eat the flesh of pigs.
- d. In contrast, we also find heroic examples in Jewish history of those who would not compromise. They kept these dietary commands even when put to *the ultimate test*.
  - i. Read the heroic story of Eleazar in **2 Maccabees 6:18-31**.
    - 1. Note that the books of **1 and 2 Maccabees** were included in the Old Testaments of the Catholic and Orthodox Bibles. These

books also were in most King James Version (KJV) Bibles from the time they were first published in 1611 until about the year 1900.

2. The stories in **2 Maccabees** take place during the time when Israel was ruled by the Greeks and their successors, prior to the time when the Romans took over that part of the world.
  - a. The Greeks were trying to force the Jews to abandon their adherence to the Law of Moses, by abandoning the dietary requirements of the Law.
3. From the text of the story about Eleazar:
  - a. A 90-year-old Jewish man refuses to compromise and eat the flesh of pigs.
  - b. He will not even *pretend* to eat pig's flesh (as suggested by those who want to spare him from death).
  - c. He is concerned about the example he is setting for those who follow, the younger generation of Jews.
  - d. He feared God more than the rulers, and died a painful death as a result.
  - e. To me, he is a great example of a man who finished his spiritual race strong to the very end. He demonstrated a noble way to live and to die in one's advanced years!
4. Some of us may be wondering (or even *doubting*) if they would have the spiritual strength to remain righteous in the face of being threatened with torture and death. If so, recall the promise of God:
  - a. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but *God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able*, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." (**1 Corinthians 10:13**, NKJV)
  - b. Paul reminds us that God is faithful. That means *He ALWAYS keeps his promises*.
  - c. The Lord has promised us that *He will never let us be tempted beyond what we are able to bear*.
  - d. Therefore, if the Lord allows a trial or temptation to come into our lives, along with that will be the ability to

overcome or to righteously escape that temptation.  
*Whatever God allows to come into our lives, we will be able to bear.*

- ii. A similar heroic story follows in **2 Maccabees 7**, regarding seven brothers and their mother who refuse to eat swine's flesh. All die for their faithfulness to the Law of Moses.

## V. God's People No Longer Need to Follow These Laws

- a. In the beginning, there was a struggle in the church regarding whether Christians still had to follow the Law of Moses (or just certain parts of it). This issue comes up prominently in **Acts** and in several of the letters.
- b. Paul addressed this issue decisively in **Colossians 2**.
  - i. Read **Colossians 2:8-23**.
  - ii. Our sins, as well as the "handwriting of requirements" (the Law of Moses), were *taken away and nailed to the cross* at the crucifixion of Jesus (**Colossians 2:14**).
  - iii. We are no longer to be judged by anyone regarding food or drink, sabbaths, festivals, etc.
  - iv. Those things were "a shadow of things to come".
    - 1. Paul had just explained how circumcision was a foreshadowing of baptism. The physical circumcision of the flesh foreshadowed the spiritual circumcision of the flesh.
      - a. I believe that Paul's comment, tying circumcision to being "buried with Him", is referring to a detail from the account of the burial of Joshua in the Septuagint (LXX) account, in **Joshua 24:30-32**. (In the LXX, those famous stone knives are also referenced in **Joshua 21:40-43**.)
        - i. Recall that when Paul is quoting from the Old Testament, he (as well as the other apostles) are generally quoting from the LXX.
        - ii. If you read the account of the burial of Joshua in the LXX, you will notice a detail that does not appear in the Masoretic Text. It says that the stone knives of the second circumcision were buried with Joshua.
        - iii. The Hebrew name 'Joshua' is, in the Greek language, 'Jesus' (Ιησοῦς). You can see

this for yourself in an interlinear Greek New Testament, in **Hebrews 4:8-14**, where both the Old Testament 'Joshua/Jesus' and the New Testament 'Jesus, the Son of God', are discussed.

- iv. Therefore, the *stone knives of Israel's 'second circumcision'* (after the new generation crossed the Jordan to enter the Promised Land, **Joshua 5:2-3**) were, literally, '*buried with Jesus*' according to what it says in the LXX version.
- b. This is one more example of a prophecy involving a stone that does something unusual (in this case, being used as a knife to circumcise men).
  - i. We have discussed the 'stone/rock' prophecies about Christ in prior lessons, including in the expository lesson: '*Christ the Living Stone*', on **1 Peter 2:4-8**.
2. Paul uses similar imagery in **Romans 6:1-10**, where he says that we were "buried with Him in baptism".
- c. The dietary laws of **Leviticus 11** were used to show Peter, through a vision, that the Gentiles would be acceptable to God *even without following these laws*.
  - i. Read **Acts 10:1-19**.
    1. Three times, while in a trance, Peter is told to "kill and eat" from an assortment of animals that included "all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things and birds of the air". From the description, this clearly included animals that were on the "unclean" list in **Leviticus 11**, animals which Jews were forbidden to eat.
    2. Peter protests these instructions, insisting, "I have *never* eaten anything common or unclean!" (**Acts 10:14**)
  - ii. Read **Acts 10:24-29**.
  - iii. Read **Acts 10:34-35**.
    1. God used the dietary laws and a vision to show that *all people* now can be acceptable to God.
    2. The animals (clean and unclean) were used to foreshadow different types of people (Jew and Gentile).

- iv. Peter testifies at the Council in Jerusalem, where the issue was whether the Gentiles believers also had to follow circumcision and the rest of the Law of Moses.
  - 1. Read **Acts 15:6-10**.
  - 2. Conclusion of the Council: letter to the Gentile believes. Read **Acts 15:28-29**.
    - a. The Gentiles must abstain from eating things offered to idols, things strangled, and blood. They also must abstain from sexual immorality.
    - b. However, Gentiles *would not* be bound to follow the commands related to circumcision, dietary rules or other parts of the Law of Moses.
- d. Jesus discusses what we *put into* our mouths, versus what *comes out* of our mouths.
  - i. Read **Mark 7:14-23**.
  - ii. Jesus addressed here:
    - 1. Don't create man-made rules to replace the word of God.
    - 2. Jesus said we are defiled by what comes *OUT* of our mouths (from our hearts), not by what goes *IN*.
      - a. Defilement comes from *within* the heart (evil thoughts, lust, murder, pride, etc.)
      - b. Things we eat pass through the body, and therefore do not defile us.
        - i. **Question:** How should **verse 19** be punctuated and understood? Consider, for example, how this is rendered in the ESV:
          - 1. "And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)" (**Mark 7:18-19**, ESV)

- ii. Jesus, as the prophet “like Moses” had the authority to change the laws (loving enemies, permanence of marriage, nonresistance, etc.)
- iii. **Question:** Did Jesus here replace the Law of Moses with what God always had intended, even though the apostles like Peter did not ‘get it’ until much later?

## VI. Another Look at the Foreshadowing of the Dietary Laws

- a. Recall that in many places in Scripture, God uses *animals* to communicate things about humans. Some examples:
  - i. “Do not muzzle an *ox* while it is treading out the grain.” (**Deuteronomy 25:4**; repeated in **1 Corinthians 9:9** and **1 Timothy 5:18**)
  - ii. “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the *little dogs*.” (**Matthew 15:26**)
  - iii. “Go to the *ant*, you sluggard!” (**Proverbs 6:6**)
  - iv. “Go tell that *fox* (referring to King Herod) ...” (**Luke 13:32**)
  - v. “... I send you out as *sheep* in the midst of *wolves*. Therefore be wise as *serpents* and harmless as *doves*.” (**Matthew 10:16**)
  - vi. “You shall not plow with an *ox* and a *donkey together*.” (**Deuteronomy 22:10**; likely the passage in mind behind the admonition of **2 Corinthians 6:14** to not be “unequally yoked with unbelievers.”)
  - vii. As “... ‘a dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.’” (**2 Peter 2:22**)
- b. **Question:** Could the Lord be trying to communicate something to us in the distinction between clean and unclean animals? Let us take another look.
  - i. From Irenaeus, bishop of the church in Lyons, in Gaul, writing c. 180 AD (note that as a child he had learned from Polycarp, who in turn had learned from the apostle John):
    1. “Now the law has *figuratively* predicted all these, delineating man by the [various] animals: whatsoever of these, says [the Scripture], have a double hoof and ruminates, it proclaims as clean; but whatsoever of them do not possess one or other of these [properties], it sets aside by themselves as unclean.
    2. “Who then are the clean? Those who make their way by faith steadily towards *the Father and the Son*; for this is denoted by the steadiness of those which *divide the hoof*; and they

meditate day and night upon the words of God, that they may be adorned with good works: for this is the meaning of the ruminants.

3. “The unclean, however, are those which do neither divide the hoof nor ruminant; that is, those persons who have neither faith in God, nor do meditate on His words: and such is the abomination of the Gentiles. But as to those animals which do indeed chew the cud, but have not the double hoof, and are themselves unclean, we have in them a figurative description of the Jews, who certainly have the words of God in their mouth, but who do not fix their rooted steadfastness in the Father and in the Son; wherefore they are an unstable generation.
4. “For those animals which have the hoof all in one piece easily slip; but those which have it divided are more sure-footed, their cleft hoofs succeeding each other as they advance, and the one hoof supporting the other. In like manner, too, those are unclean which have the double hoof but do not ruminant: this is plainly an indication of all heretics, and of those who do not meditate on the words of God, neither are adorned with works of righteousness; to whom also the Lord says, ‘Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say to you?’
5. “For men of this stamp do indeed say that they believe in the Father and the Son, but they never meditate as they should upon the things of God, neither are they adorned with works of righteousness; but, as I have already observed, they have adopted the lives of swine and of dogs, giving themselves over to filthiness, to gluttony, and recklessness of all sorts.”
  - a. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 5, chapter 8; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 534)
  - b. Irenaeus saw the reference to ‘clean’ animals *chewing the cud* as referring to those who *meditate on the Word of God day and night*, as it says at the beginning of **Psalm 1**.
    - i. “Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; *But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night*. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not

wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.”  
(**Psalm 1:1-3**, NKJV)

- c. Irenaeus saw the animals with the split hooves (more sure-footed than animals with single, undivided hooves) as foreshadowing those who followed *both* the Father and the Son. That is unlike the Jews, who (even though they meditate on the Scriptures) believe in the Father *but reject the Son*.
  - i. “... He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has *both the Father and the Son*.” (**2 John 9**, NKJV)
  - ii. For similar insights from other early other Christian writers regarding the significance of the **Leviticus 11** distinction between clean and unclean animals, see also:
    - 1. Clement of Alexandria, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, pp. 289, 456 and 555-556.
    - 2. Novatian, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 647.