

Leviticus 11 (Clean Before the Lord)

Clean and Unclean Animals

Lev 11:1 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron,

Lev 11:2 "Say to the Israelites: 'Of all the animals that live on land, these are the ones you may eat:

Lev 11:3 You may eat any animal that has a divided hoof and that chews the cud.

Lev 11:4 "'There are some that only chew the cud or only have a divided hoof, but you must not eat them. The camel, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof; it is ceremonially unclean for you.

Lev 11:5 The hyrax, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof; it is unclean for you.

Lev 11:6 The rabbit, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof; it is unclean for you.

Lev 11:7 And the pig, though it has a divided hoof, does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you.

Lev 11:8 You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you.

Lev 11:9 "'Of all the creatures living in the water of the seas and the streams you may eat any that have fins and scales.

Lev 11:10 But all creatures in the seas or streams that do not have fins and scales--whether among all the swarming things or among all the other living creatures in the water--you are to regard as unclean.

Lev 11:11 And since you are to regard them as unclean, you must not eat their meat; you must regard their carcasses as unclean.

Lev 11:12 Anything living in the water that does not have fins and scales is to be regarded as unclean by you.

Lev 11:13 "'These are the birds you are to regard as unclean and not eat because they are unclean: the eagle, the vulture, the black vulture,

Lev 11:14 the red kite, any kind of black kite,

Lev 11:15 any kind of raven,

Lev 11:16 the horned owl, the screech owl, the gull, any kind of hawk,

Lev 11:17 the little owl, the cormorant, the great owl,

Lev 11:18 the white owl, the desert owl, the osprey,

Lev 11:19 the stork, any kind of heron, the hoopoe and the bat.

Lev 11:20 "'All flying insects that walk on all fours are to be regarded as unclean by you.

Lev 11:21 There are, however, some flying insects that walk on all fours that you may eat: those that have jointed legs for hopping on the ground.

Lev 11:22 Of these you may eat any kind of locust, katydid, cricket or grasshopper.

Lev 11:23 But all other flying insects that have four legs you are to regard as unclean.

Lev 11:24 "You will make yourselves unclean by these; whoever touches their carcasses will be unclean till evening.

Lev 11:25 Whoever picks up one of their carcasses must wash their clothes, and they will be unclean till evening.

Lev 11:26 "Every animal that does not have a divided hoof or that does not chew the cud is unclean for you; whoever touches the carcass of any of them will be unclean.

Lev 11:27 Of all the animals that walk on all fours, those that walk on their paws are unclean for you; whoever touches their carcasses will be unclean till evening.

Lev 11:28 Anyone who picks up their carcasses must wash their clothes, and they will be unclean till evening. These animals are unclean for you.

Lev 11:29 "Of the animals that move along the ground, these are unclean for you: the weasel, the rat, any kind of great lizard,

Lev 11:30 the gecko, the monitor lizard, the wall lizard, the skink and the chameleon.

Lev 11:31 Of all those that move along the ground, these are unclean for you. Whoever touches them when they are dead will be unclean till evening.

Lev 11:32 When one of them dies and falls on something, that article, whatever its use, will be unclean, whether it is made of wood, cloth, hide or sackcloth. Put it in water; it will be unclean till evening, and then it will be clean.

Lev 11:33 If one of them falls into a clay pot, everything in it will be unclean, and you must break the pot.

Lev 11:34 Any food you are allowed to eat that has come into contact with water from any such pot is unclean, and any liquid that is drunk from such a pot is unclean.

Lev 11:35 Anything that one of their carcasses falls on becomes unclean; an oven or cooking pot must be broken up. They are unclean, and you are to regard them as unclean.

Lev 11:36 A spring, however, or a cistern for collecting water remains clean, but anyone who touches one of these carcasses is unclean.

Lev 11:37 If a carcass falls on any seeds that are to be planted, they remain clean.

Lev 11:38 But if water has been put on the seed and a carcass falls on it, it is unclean for you.

Lev 11:39 "If an animal that you are allowed to eat dies, anyone who touches its carcass will be unclean till evening.

Lev 11:40 Anyone who eats some of its carcass must wash their clothes, and they will be unclean till evening. Anyone who picks up the carcass must wash their clothes, and they will be unclean till evening.

Lev 11:41 "Every creature that moves along the ground is to be regarded as unclean; it is not to be eaten.

Lev 11:42 You are not to eat any creature that moves along the ground, whether it moves on its belly or walks on all fours or on many feet; it is unclean.

Lev 11:43 Do not defile yourselves by any of these creatures. Do not make yourselves unclean by means of them or be made unclean by them.

Lev 11:44 I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves along the ground.

Lev 11:45 I am the LORD, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.

Lev 11:46 "These are the regulations concerning animals, birds, every living thing that moves about in the water and every creature that moves along the ground.

Lev 11:47 You must distinguish between the unclean and the clean, between living creatures that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten."

Spiritual and Social Identity

- **Cultural boundary:** The food rules created a visible wall between Israel and other nations. Eating differently made social mixing and adopting pagan customs harder.
- **Symbol of holiness:** God states at the end of the chapter, "Be holy, because I am holy." Restraint in diet mirrored restraint in morality.
- **Obedience in daily life:** Choosing food based on God's command rather than appetite turned an ordinary meal into an act of worship.

God restricted certain animals as "unclean" to separate Israel from surrounding nations, protect their health, and teach spiritual obedience. These dietary laws appear in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

Spiritual and Cultural Separation

- **Set Apart:** God wanted Israel to be holy and distinct from pagan cultures.
- **Daily Reminder:** Every meal reminded the Israelites of their special covenant with God.
- **Avoiding Idolatry:** Restrictions kept them from adopting foreign rituals tied to unclean animals.

Health and Hygiene

- **Physical Safety:** Many forbidden animals (like scavengers and carnivores) carry high risks of disease and parasites.
- **No Modern Refrigeration:** These rules provided practical food safety in an ancient desert environment.

Symbolic Lessons

- **Clean vs. Unclean:** The rules trained the people to recognize moral boundaries between right and wrong.
- **Wholeness:** Animals that fit the clean criteria (like ruminants with split hooves) represented order and completeness within creation.

Leviticus 11 outlines the biblical dietary and ceremonial laws given to ancient Israel, dividing animals into **clean (kosher)** and **unclean** categories. It establishes rules for eating land animals, water creatures, birds, and insects, while explaining that these distinctions define a holy lifestyle dedicated to God.

Categories of Animals

- **Land Animals:** Permitted animals must both chew the cud (ruminants) and have split hooves (like cows, sheep, and deer). Animals with only one of these traits—such as pigs (split hoof, no cud) or camels and rabbits (cud, no split hoof)—are unclean.
- **Water Creatures:** Only creatures with both fins and scales (such as salmon or trout) are clean. Shellfish and scaleless fish are forbidden.

- **Birds and Insects:** Specific birds (mostly carnivores or scavengers like eagles, owls, and vultures) are banned. Most crawling insects are unclean, except for specific jumping bugs like locusts and grasshoppers.

Meaning of "Clean" and "Unclean"

- **Not Moral Sins:** Being "unclean" in this context is not a moral failing or sin; rather, it represents a ceremonial state of being unfit to enter God's holy presence or the tabernacle.
- **National Identity:** These rules acted as a physical boundary line, keeping the Israelites culturally distinct from neighboring nations.

Relevance Today

- **Judaism:** Traditional Jewish communities continue to follow these kosher laws as an eternal commandment.

In the New Testament, the dietary and ritual laws of Leviticus 11 are treated as a temporary, physical shadow of a spiritual reality. Jesus and the apostles taught that these food restrictions were fulfilled and set aside, opening God's covenant family to all people.

The Shift in the New Testament

- **Jesus Declares Foods Clean:** Jesus taught that spiritual defilement comes from a sinful human heart, not from physical food entering the body, effectively ending the old dietary distinctions [[Mark 7:18-23](#)].

Mar 7:18 "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them?"

Mar 7:19 For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)

Mar 7:20 He went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them.

Mar 7:21 For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come--sexual immorality, theft, murder,

Mar 7:22 adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.

Mar 7:23 All these evils come from inside and defile a person."

- **Peter's Vision:** God gave the apostle Peter a vision of various animals from [Leviticus 11](#) on a sheet, telling him to eat and declaring that nothing God has made clean should be called impure ([Acts 10:9-15](#)). This signaled that the gospel was now for both Jews and Gentiles alike.

Act 10:9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.

Act 10:10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.

Act 10:11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners.

Act 10:12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds.

Act 10:13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

Act 10:14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

Act 10:15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

Act 10:16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

- **Apostolic Teaching:** The New Testament epistles confirm that believers are no longer bound by these food rules ([Colossians 2:16-17](#)), noting that every creature of God is good and received with thanksgiving ([1 Timothy 4:4-5](#)).

Col 2:16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.

Col 2:17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

1Ti 4:4 For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,

1Ti 4:5 because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

Core Theological Purpose

- **Symbolic Separation:** The original laws in Leviticus 11 physically separated Israel from neighboring nations to teach them holiness and obedience.
- **Fulfillment in Christ:** The external rules pointed forward to the inner spiritual transformation and permanent cleansing accomplished by Jesus under the New Covenant.

Mark 7:18–19

- **The Context:** Jesus confronts religious leaders about washing hands before eating.
- **The Teaching:** He explains that food only enters the stomach, not the heart.
- **The Verdict:** The text explicitly notes that Jesus "declared all foods clean."

• **Acts 10:9–16**

- **The Context:** The Apostle Peter receives a vision of a sheet filled with unclean animals.
- **The Command:** A voice from heaven commands Peter to kill and eat them.
- **The Meaning:** God tells him, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."
- **The Result:** This officially opened the door for non-Jewish people to enter the church.

• **Romans 14:14**

Rom 14:14 I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.

- **The Context:** Paul writes to a mixed church of Jewish and non-Jewish believers.
- **The Teaching:** Paul states he is fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself.