

September 27, 2020

Be Holy Because God is Holy

Leviticus 11

BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

Sept 20	Hosea 8-14	Sept 24	Obed, Jonah
Sept 21	Joel 1-3	Sept 25	Micah 1-7
Sept 22	Amos 1-5	Sept 26	Nahum 1-3
Sept 23	Amos 6-9	Sept 27	Hab - Zeph

Lesson Idea: Be holy because God is holy and calls His people to holiness.

Background: Read all of Leviticus 11-15.

Today's lesson focuses on the holiness of God. God is pure and unaffected by the things that bring impurity. He calls His people to be holy like Him. The laws and rituals that God prescribed in Leviticus 11-15 deal with ways for unclean people to be cleansed. The situations mentioned in these five chapters speak about ways that people become ritually impure or unclean by everyday life. God has dealt with their sin and moral impurity in earlier chapters and will address it more later in the book. In these chapters He focuses on physical situations by which people can become unfit for worship or for community with God's people. With each of these life situations, God, because of His great love and mercy, also offers a way for His people to be restored.

God told the people to be holy, for He is Holy, and gave them instructions to set them apart from other nations and people. In these five chapters the following areas are addressed...

Overview of Leviticus 11 – 15

- Lev 11 – Rules concerning clean and unclean animals
- Lev 12 – Procedures following childbirth
 - The poverty (and purity) of Jesus' parents can be seen by the way they followed the command for ritual purity of the poor after the birth of Jesus...
- Lev 13 – Identifying leprosy and other skin diseases...
- Lev 14 – Restoration of a cleansed leper...
 - Restoration of a diseased house (mold?)
- Lev 15 – Dealing with physical discharges

Leviticus 11-15 Questions to Ponder:

- **What is significance about the first verse of each chapter beginning with: "The Lord spoke again to Moses and to Aaron..."?**

- **Why are some animals declared clean for food and touching while others are called unclean?**
- **Should we abide by the dietary restrictions of the Law?**
- **What does it mean to "be holy as God is holy?"**
- **How do these rituals and commands lead to holiness?**
- **Why did God establish the rituals He did for people to receive cleansing of their impurity?**
- **Why does the Lord demand His people to go to the priest for examination of their cleanness?**
- **What makes us unclean nowadays?**

Section 1 : Leviticus 11:1-8

The Lord Declares Clean from Unclean

1 *The Lord spoke again to Moses and to Aaron, saying to them,* **2** *"Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'These are the creatures which you may eat from all the animals that are on the earth.* **3** *Whatever divides a hoof, thus making split hoofs, and chews the cud, among the animals, that you may eat.* **4** *Nevertheless, you are not to eat of these, among those which chew the cud, or among those which divide the hoof: the camel, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you.* **5** *Likewise, the shaphan, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you;* **6** *the rabbit also, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you;* **7** *and the pig, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, it is unclean to you.* **8** ***You shall not eat of their flesh nor touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you.***

NOTES:

- **What is significance about the first verse of each chapter beginning with: "The Lord spoke again to Moses and to Aaron..."?**

Each chapter begins with this phrase to emphasize that these commands are straight from the heart of God. These were not man-made rules but were given according to the infinite wisdom of God.

- **Why are some animals declared clean for food and touching while others are called unclean?**
- **Should we abide by the dietary restrictions of the Law?**

In this chapter, God's people were told to think of the animal world in two categories: those that may be eaten and those that are *abhorrent* (or *unclean* or *detestable*

[see vs 8, 11-13, 20, 24, 29, 35]). The following groups of animals are considered:

- v 1-8 Clean and unclean animals
- V 9-12 Clean and unclean fish
- V 13-19 Clean and unclean birds
- V 20-23 Clean and unclean insects

Notice that **Leviticus 11:24-40** also gave instructions concerning the uncleanness of the people for just coming into contact with anything unclean.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers explains:

... The dietary laws, which stand first in the general precepts about clean and unclean things, begin with the quadrupeds, or land animals, both domesticated and wild. This is in accordance with the Hebrew division of the animal kingdom into four principal classes :--(1) the land animals, (2) the water animals, (3) the birds of the air, and (4) the swarming animals.... (*Ellicott*, Leviticus 11:2)

God does not explain why some animals were considered clean and some were not. HE does not have to, because He is God. God's people should be obedient to God no matter whether they understand His motivations for what He says. With that established, there have been many plausible speculations as to why certain animals were prohibited in Israel's diet.

Christopher Wright in the *Tyndale Commentary on Leviticus* writes:

Four questions may be asked in relation to these laws:

1. Is there a rationale behind the categories?

Many attempts have been made to explain why certain species were clean and others unclean. Some regard the distinctions as purely arbitrary and intended, therefore, as a **test of pure obedience**. Some suggest that animals associated with **pagan cults** were unclean, but this does not hold in many cases, e.g. bulls were sacred in Canaanite Baal worship. A popular view regards **hygiene and health** as a major factor. It is true that some of the unclean animals (e.g. pigs and carrion birds) have a greater likelihood of conveying contaminations and parasites. It is also true that many of the precautions in relation to dead flesh (especially thorough washing) make good sense (as do many of the public health requirements in chs. 13-15). However, while we may honour the wisdom of the Creator in such details, this theory is far from explaining many of the distinctions and is not even hinted at in the text itself. . .

2. Why did God make such restrictions on food?

We have already noted the importance of 11:44-47 in its call for community holiness. The distinct food laws of Israel were to be a mark or symbol of their distinctiveness as a nation (cf. Dt. 14:2, 21). Just as God had limited his choice among the nations of the earth to Israel alone, so they must limit their choice among the animals. The distinction between unclean and clean animals thus mirrored symbolically the distinction between the rest of the nations and Israel. The food laws, therefore, acted as a constant reminder to Israel of the **importance of holiness and the call to be different**. It was not a matter of superiority (any more than clean animals were 'superior' to the rest), but because of **God's redemptive work in Israel's history and redemptive purpose for their future**. And since the food laws were only a part of the whole law, which, even in Leviticus, included the whole range of moral and spiritual, personal and social requirements, they were like a badge or uniform which makes a statement about the wearer and commits him or her to **certain expected standards of behaviour**. **Holiness was thus woven into everyday life**. Every meal and every encounter with the ordinary world of work reminded the Israelite family of God's redemption of his people and the moral values they were committed to.

3. Are the food laws still binding on Christians? The simple answer is No, but it is important to understand why. Jesus explicitly abrogated the validity of the distinction between clean and unclean food by declaring that it was **the moral distinction, which the law signified, that really counted**. Thus, 'cleanness' and 'uncleanness' are no longer a matter of what goes into the stomach, but of what comes out of the heart (Mk. 7:14-23). **The greater importance of the moral over the merely ritual** was, of course, something that the OT itself taught, so it was not merely that perception which led to the abrogation of the food laws in the NT.

Immediately after this saying about 'clean' and 'unclean' Jesus went to Tyre, encountered a Gentile woman and healed her daughter. This points to the major reason for the removal of the distinction between clean and unclean food, namely the removal of the distinction between Jew and Gentile, which Jesus' action (an exception to his normal practice in his lifetime) prefigured. This meaning is sealed in Acts 10, where Peter's vision, by which he was taught that the division of the animal kingdom was no longer valid, was to prepare him for his visit to the Gentile

Cornelius. The epochmaking abolition of the barrier between Jew and Gentile... through Christ meant that the distinctive badge of Jewish separateness had no further theological significance in the new, multiracial people of God (Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 2:11-22). The division of the animal kingdom that had mirrored it was, therefore, also abolished.

4. What can Christians learn from these laws?

First, the importance of the distinctiveness of being the people of God in the midst of the world. Even for OT Israel, ritual cleanness, from the kitchen to the sanctuary, was meant to symbolize God's greater requirement of moral integrity, social justice and covenant loyalty. In fact, as the prophets (and Jesus) vigorously pointed out, if these latter things were lacking, then ritual cleanness of the most scrupulous kind at every level was worthless. If Christians were as serious about moral distinctiveness as Israel was about ritual cleanness, then our 'salt' and 'light' might have greater power in the world.

Secondly, that food is still a matter of moral importance. What, how, where and with whom you eat are all still significant parts of our wider cultural customs. As such, along with all factors in any given culture, they can be open to dispute, offence and misunderstanding. Thus, Paul's detailed discussions of questions related to food (Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8), though primarily in a Jew-Gentile context, have powerful moral force on the whole range of issues over which Christians disagree. **The abolition of the law about food does not abolish the need for love, acceptance and sensitivity.** While a Christian may eat anything, there are circumstances where he should not eat some things (Rom. 14:14-21). **Is a Christian bound by the law of Leviticus about food? Yes! Not by the law of ch. 11, but rather by 19:18, 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (cf. Rom. 13:9-10).**

(Wright, "Leviticus," Tyndale Commentary)

Section 2 : Leviticus 11:43-47

Consecrate Yourselves and Be Holy

43 Do not render yourselves detestable through any of the swarming things that swarm; and you shall not make yourselves unclean with them so that you become unclean. 44 For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. 45 For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy."

46 This is the law regarding the animal and the bird, and every living thing that moves in the waters and everything that swarms on the earth, 47 to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten.

NOTES:

- **What does it mean to "be holy as God is holy?"**
- **How do these rituals and commands lead to holiness?**

In verse 44, before God tells them to "*be holy*," He commands them to "*consecrate themselves*." Both "holy" and "consecrate" come from the same Hebrew word and are used almost 300 times in the Old Testament. The command to "consecrate" oneself means not just to avoid "detestable things" that would render someone unclean; but to dedicate oneself TO the commands and obedience of God. Holiness is a call both FROM and TO... from sin and self and to God and His righteousness. The rituals and commands that God prescribed were designed to lead the people to see His holiness and demonstrate where they fell short. To be perfectly holy as God commanded was impossible for man, because he would have to never violate any of the Law in word, deed, or thought. As believers, we thank God for grace; because that perfection of holiness can only be accomplished through a total dependence of the completed work of Christ in us.

The call to be holy like God can take several meanings, and they are all valid for our lives. When God says: ***Be holy, for I AM Holy***, it can mean...

- ***Be holy because God is Holy.*** HE deserves us to strive for holiness in all things, because He made us in His image and desires us to walk in His holiness. Without holiness, we cannot enter into God's presence and have intimate relationship with Him. Again, this can be found only in Christ. In verse 45 God also reminds the people that He was the One who rescued them from Egypt, so they should seek to be like their Deliverer.
- ***Be holy like God is Holy.*** We are to strive to imitate the holiness of God. In Christ Jesus we have been made separate from the world and consecrated to God. The standard for what is holy is found in God Himself. He makes the rules, because He alone knows what true holiness looks like.
- ***Be holy as much as God is Holy.*** God is completely holy. He calls for us to be separated out for Him all of the time and in all our ways. God does not allow

us to serve two masters—He calls for a total commitment to His Lordship over our lives.

Section 3 : Leviticus 12-15 God Gives Grace

- **Why did God establish the rituals He did for people to receive cleansing of their impurity?**
- **Why does the Lord demand His people to go to the priest for examination of their cleanness?**
- **What makes us unclean nowadays?**

NOTES:

In chapters 12-15, God commands the rituals, offerings, and timeframes that would be necessary for His unclean people to receive restoration. God demonstrates through these instructions that man cannot cleanse himself; he must depend on the procedures laid out by God in His Word. But note, that God gave grace, so that His people would not have to live in a perpetual state of uncleanness. In many cases, God required them to go to the priests for atonement or confirmation of their cleansing. The writer of Hebrews explains that this was a foreshadowing of the ministry that our Great High Priest would do on our behalf “once for all” (Hebrews 7-10). His blood is the only sacrifice which can bring us healing from the uncleanness of our sin and restore us to fellowship with God.

Hebrews 9:11-14 says:

*11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, **14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?***

Cross References: Here are some important New Testament passages that give more understanding for how Christians should view Leviticus 11-15, especially when it comes to the dietary restrictions of chapter 11. Read each of the passages and see how things are reframed around the beauty of grace instead of law.

Mark 7:14-22

Especially notice vs 15 and 18-19 where Jesus declared that:

15 there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. . .

*18 And He [Jesus] said to them, “Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” **(Thus He declared all foods clean.)***

**Notice, that last parenthesis was how the Gospel writer Mark understood what Jesus was saying.

Acts 10:9-16

This passage tells about Peter’s vision of clean and unclean animals. Peter resisted the command to eat anything unclean. Verse 15 says: ***Again a voice came to him a second time, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.***

**Peter learned that God wanted to break down the barriers that existed between Jews and Gentiles and bring them all together in Christ Jesus.

Romans 14

The Apostle Paul gives instruction on bearing with one another in love instead of judging one another based on what foods they eat. Paul says in vs 14: ***I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.***

Verse 17 sums up that ***“the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”***

And in verse 20, Paul says: ***“20 Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense.”***

Colossians 2:16-23

In Colossians, Paul emphasizes that the external commands were just a shadow of the substance of Christianity which was based on receiving grace through the holiness of Jesus Himself. In verse 16-17 he says: ***Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.***