

## **THE OUT-OF-EGYPT-BE-YE-HOLY DIET**

### **Leviticus 11**

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Leviticus 11:1–3,9,13,20,24–25 (NIV)

“The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Say to the Israelites: “Of all the animals that live on land, these are the ones you may eat: You may eat any animal that has a split hoof completely divided and that chews the cud...Of all the creatures living in the water of the seas and the streams, you may eat any that have fins and scales...These are the birds you are to detest and not eat because they are detestable: the eagle, the vulture...All flying insects that walk on all fours are to be detestable to you...You will make yourselves unclean by these; whoever touches their carcasses will be unclean till evening. Whoever picks up one of their carcasses must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean till evening.””

Then there are instructions if one of these animals crawls into a cooking utensil. Then finally we come to the ending of the chapter, “Do not defile yourselves by any of these creatures. Do not make yourselves unclean by means of them or be made unclean by them. 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 about on the ground. I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy. These are the regulations concerning animals, birds, every living thing that moves in the water and every creature that moves about on the ground” (verses 43–46, NIV).

We have all kinds of diet plans out. A lot of best selling books in the nonfiction category are diet books. Leviticus 11 is also a diet plan. I’ve called this diet plan “the Out-of-Egypt-Be-Ye-Holy Diet” plan. Proverbs 23:2, when taken out of context, says something like this: “Put a knife to

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your throat if you are given to gluttony.” Leviticus 11 is about a diet plan. Actually Leviticus 11, when you’re looking at the Book of Leviticus, begins the third major section of Leviticus. The first major section is chapters 1–7; that has to deal with the five sacrifices of the Old Testament system. Chapters 8–10 have to do with the priesthood. They’re a window through which we see our own priesthood. We noticed the last three Sundays those chapters. Chapters 11–15 deal with things like purification. Chapter 11 talks about food, clean and unclean food. Chapter 12, childbirth. Chapter 13, leprosy. Chapter 14, leprosy and the house of the leper. And chapter 15, various bodily discharges. All of these are what are called purification laws. They will relate to our Christian experience and to our life as well.

Today we concentrate on Leviticus 11, God’s diet plan. Leviticus 11 is actually divided into two main parts. Verses 1–23 relate to unclean and clean animals and the definitions for these animals. Then verses 24–47 speak of being polluted by these animals, coming into bodily contact with them, and how to be cleansed of the defilement.

So that we can treat this chapter in some kind of meaningful way, lets look at the content of this chapter. We need to see the content before we get to the application. If you miss the content then our application might be off.

#### **I. What was God’s diet plan for His people, the people of Israel?**

The first part, clean or unclean animals, verses 1–23, are divided into three major categories.

**A.** Verses 1–8 speak of land animals. Any animal was clean that chewed the cud and had a split hoof. That was the general rule of thumb. A list of animals are given then which don’t have those qualities, maybe some of them chew the cud but don’t split the hoof, some split the hoof but don’t chew the cud, and therefore they’d be unclean, like pigs, camels, dogs, lions, and the like.

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A good many of the unclean land animals are carnivorous animals, flesh eating animals. Whereas the clean animals are grain eating animals.

**B.** The second category of clean and unclean animals has to do with water creatures, verses 9–12. The clean ones are ones that have fins and scales. The unclean ones are those that don't have fins and scales.

**C.** The third category of animals have to do with creatures in the air, birds and insects, verses 13–23. Inedible birds are basically birds that are also flesh eating or carnivorous. For insects, hopping insects are ok. Like grasshoppers, crickets and beetles. But those insects that either fly or crawl but do not hop are unclean insects. Those would include everything from flies to cockroaches.

Three types of creatures—creatures on the land, creatures in the water, creatures in the air.

**D.** Then there's the pollution by animals and the treatment of pollution. Verses 24–28 speak of pollution by land creatures. This would be having to do with coming into contact with carcasses of dead animals whether they were clean or unclean animals. Defilement would come as a result of that.

Then verses 29–45 had to do with what are called swarming creatures. Creatures who move kind of along the ground. The laws had to do with them falling into cooking utensils like an earthen oven or a pot, a vessel of some kind. If they fell into something that was a cooking utensil that cooking utensil was unclean and depending upon its constitution it was generally broken. If an animal fell into a well or a cistern, a cistern is a large holding supply for water, the animal itself would be unclean but the water supply itself would not be regarded as unclean. Of course water was very rare and there had to be some preservation of water.

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The summary then is given in verses 46–47. That’s basically the diet plan. Things are divided into things you can’t eat and can eat. And what you can touch and you can’t touch. You can’t touch anything that’s dead and if anything dead falls in anything that’s used for cooking or water supply there are special rules that then apply.

That’s a quickie summary. I think we ought to be concerned more with second question, not just a question of what was God’s diet plan but why did God give this diet plan.

### **II. Why did God give this diet plan?**

There’s basically five positions on why we have these Old Testament dietary laws. We see the New Testament Early Church begin to move out of this setting of Judaism into the Gentile world. The Jewish Christians had a real problem moving over into a different kind of a diet or allowing a different kind of diet. Why did God give this diet plan?

**A.** One view is what is called the spiritual or the allegorical view. That is to say, that we ought to read spiritual meanings into the dietary laws. For example, the reason why God allows us to eat animals that chew the cud and part the hoof is because animals that chew the cud teach us that we are to chew on the Word of God; we’re to reflect upon the Word. The parted hoof means they have a good walk. So we are to cogitate on the Word of God, meditate on it, and have a good walk.

Fish that have fins and scales—fins give us the ability to move through our environment.

Christians need to move through their environment. Scales gives protective ability from the adversity of the environment.

Insects—only those that leap. They don’t simply fly or crawl. They must leap. Therefore this is the model of a Christian’s life who has heaven and earth tied together. They bounce between the two.

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Swarming things are off limits because anything that's along the ground is wholly of the earth and therefore off limits to the Christian.

**B.** Another view is these were given for physical health or hygienic reasons. They were given for the care of the body. Here you have the community of Israel out in the wilderness, several million people with no doctors, no hospitals, no nurses, no medicine, and there must be some kind of protection of what they take into their system. And indeed some of the food that is off limits is potentially dangerous.

Animals that were allowed were basically clean feeders like beef and sheep and goats. Fish with fins and scales are normally free swimming whereas fish without fins and scales such as eels are usually mud crawlers and therefore host to a great many more parasites than free-swimming fish. So the possible hygienic reason for the fish—they were free swimming.

Birds of prey were also potential carriers of parasites. They fed on carrion or dead animals or living animals.

Hygienic reasons also could be advanced for not touching dead carcasses. It was ok for you to touch a living unclean animal—like a dog or a camel—but you could not touch a dead animal whether the dead animal was clean or unclean. Associated with that is if you did touch it your clothes must be washed and you must remain in temporary isolation until evening. Cooking utensils must be broken and the like. What of course was being protected was the contagion of disease. Not every one of the unclean animals was a disease carrier.

The health and hygienic reason may be one reason why God gave these rules.

**C.** A third reason given is to preserve the national identity of Israel. God wanted obedience not only at the altar, but He wanted obedience in the everyday routines of life. He wanted every Israelite to know Him and to remember Him every time he sat down to eat. God's ancient people

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were out there without a Bible. They had no Scriptures to have family or personal devotions. Whatever they knew about God must come to them in the form of ritual, something they do to remember Him. So God simply put a clockwork within their daily routine to cause them in the most common things of life to remember Him and to have regard for His holiness. He was a God with whom some things were acceptable and with whom some things were not acceptable. In fact, these dietary laws turned out to mold the distinctiveness. One of the reasons why we still have the Jewish people is because of these laws. Others passed from the scene but the Jewish people have kept their ethnicity. All this was part of God's plan.

**D.** Another view as to why God gave these dietary laws is the arbitrary view. In other words, God has His own reasons and He doesn't need to disclose them so don't ask. Indeed God does have reasons for doing things and we don't necessarily always have the answer to why He does things the way He does. They are simply a test of the obedience of man, whether man would obey God.

**E.** Perhaps the most satisfying viewpoint (and some of these have their own validity to them) is the symbolic view, staying away from the overly allegoric view but just treating these as symbols. The behavior and the habits of clean animals are living illustration of how the righteous should live.

For example, by making regard for clean and unclean animals there is a distinction between those animals that feed off other animals and those animals that are vegetative feeders. Those animals that feed off other animals are, by and large, out. There was a respect for life being taught there. Even in clean animals that were killed, they had to be killed in a kosher way. The jugular vein had to be split. An animal couldn't be strangled. And as much blood as possible was drained out.

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God was teaching a respect for life. In fact, Leviticus 17:11 will say, “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness for sin.” God simply through making many of these animals off-limits was teaching His great concern for life and for the handling of blood. Blood was sacred. Blood was to be poured out upon an altar. Later we know that blood was to be poured out upon the cross. There is perhaps a living moving analogy there.

Another possibility may be too that the very look or motion, how these animals propelled themselves, may be a clue as to what they were teaching. Generally animals that flew normally and did not eat carrion, animals that moved normally, and insects that moved in the normal locomotive pattern rather than a crazy kind of quilt-work pattern—animals that moved normally were animals that were, by and large, in the clean area.

God throughout Israel’s experience was continuing to teach them the difference between normalcy and nonnormalcy. Between right attitudes and right habits and things that were abnormal and therefore less than God and less human.

It’s not enough to simply look at what the diet plan was and why God may have given it.

### **III. It’s important for us now to look specifically at what this diet plan is saying to us. What does it have to do with us?**

**A.** The first thing we can say is it’s showing us that our bodies are important to God and to us.

This is a continual teaching of the Scripture. “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your reasonable service.” “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?” (Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 6:19). You do not defile the temple of God.

Some religions have had the viewpoint that the body is simply a holding tank for the soul.

Unfortunately some Christians have had the view that the body is something inferior to the soul.

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We have a statement “How many souls got saved?” as though a person was a disembodied vague spirit floating around. I’m not so much interested in how many souls got saved. I want to know how many people came to the Lord. A person is a whole entity—soul, body, spirit. All wrapped up in one and you can’t subdivide them out. God is saying the body is important.

In the Old Testament that was the message that comes across as the principle true in the New Testament as well.

We as men and women do not *have* a body. We *are* a body. We do not *have* a spirit, we *are* a spirit. We do not *have* a soul, we *are* a soul. And all of that—body, spirit, and soul, are incorporated in all of God’s activity and ultimately even the body itself is embraced by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament is simply affirming, but the New Testament will later conclude that God has concern for the body.

**B.** A second thing that should be said by way of application is kind of a way of praising God for them. If there had been no dietary laws there would have been no Israel. If there had been no Israel there would have been no people prepared to birth the Messiah. If there were no Messiah or Christ there would be no salvation for us. So these very laws that God gave to Israel help preserve its identity and make it possible for ultimately Christ to come into the world—for Christ to come into the world for us.

God’s people in a time of testing when their identity was threatened, when they were being called upon to forsake their ways and become other than Jewish, they stood by that ethnicity, that law which God had given them and because they did we have a people in the land which were there in right positions so that the Messiah could be born. These laws are important yet in Israel’s existence today as a people, as we all know. It’s incredible to realize that people have died for

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carrying out Leviticus 11. Whole groups of people, thousands of people it would be safe to say, have died in order to preserve their identity as God's people from Leviticus 11.

You can see why some of the Early Church had such a great struggle over this question of eating things unclean.

C. The third application of the distinction between clean and unclean food (that can only affect our bodies) is that it illustrates the deeper distinction that Jesus makes between clean and unclean attitudes which affect our hearts. Peter had the problem with eating things unclean and the Lord showed him the sheet in Acts 10, that came down from heaven and was full of all manner of unclean meat and told him to rise, kill and eat. He had to show him the vision three times to get it through his head that things were changing. Jesus had earlier taught in Mark 7 that all foods were clean and that in this age, the age of the Messiah, what mattered not were the things you took into you, what mattered were the things that came out of you. What you took into you could not any more make you unclean but it was what came out of your central being, out of your heart, out of your human spirit, it was those things that would defile you and make you unclean. Jesus therefore lists "evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly" (Mark 7:21-22, NIV). These things, Jesus says now, are truly the unclean things that happen.

As I look at that list and compare it to the list of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5, it strikes me how many of the things, almost all the things that were given relate to two things in life—first, the inability to be the sexual persons God has called us to be due to humankind's perversion of His goals for sex. And the second area, the predominance of anger which comes out in various forms like envy, malice, hatred, and the like. Jesus is saying principally, as well as the Apostle Paul carrying forth the testimony of the Lord, that the things which defile us most in life are the

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temptation, the sinful temptation, to handle sexuality and anger in wrongful manners. Sexuality in God's time and God's place with God's person in marriage is right. Anger when the sun does not go down upon our wrath, when expressed in a right way, when given for the cause of righteousness, is a right anger. But anger or sexuality in other ways is a defiling thing in our life because what it does is it leads us away from ourselves, it leads us away from other people, and it ultimately leads us away from God as well. I'm not sure which is first, whether we become first led away from God, and then from others, and then from ourselves. Or whether by being a wrong kind of person in our emotional life we first of all begin to have a distance from our real self—that's the peril of the fall of man—then we become disassociated from who we really were called to be in Christ, we begin to move away from who we really are and we sense that "I am not the person I want to be. This thing that's going on in my life—I don't want to be angry. I don't want to be doing what I'm doing. Why am I doing what I'm doing?" We become distant. It becomes unclean to us. We become removed from ourselves and our anger then begins to move us away from other people, moves us away from other people in our family and finally our anger too is seen as moving or distancing us from God.

How do we deal with these unclean things in our life? How do we deal with the fact that we may be extremely bitter or angry over something that has been in our life for quite a long time? You deal with the unclean thing by recognizing it. That was the Old Testament way. You first recognize something. When you apply new things like repentance, realization that you are not to touch, not to handle that which is unclean. That comes through repentance, saying, "God I don't want these things in my life. I will no longer embrace anger. I will no longer embrace sexual immorality. I will no longer embrace rage. I will no longer embrace bitterness."

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I have a very strong feeling the Lord gave me today for this message. One of the things that Christians have the most trouble with in regard to anger and rage is self-anger, anger directed against the self. I don't know specifically who this could apply to within this room. But it was like the Lord was saying, "Here you've heard a discourse on clean and unclean foods in the Old Testament but now I want you to look at clean and unclean attitudes in your own heart." What do you see toward yourself? Are you in a condition where you are so angry with yourself for reasons, which I do not know, God alone knows, but you're so angry with yourself that there is hatred directed against your body? In some way you are punishing your body? Maybe you do it physically. Maybe you do it in a psychological sense. But there is within your life a kind of a wall of feelings that do not permit you to love yourself. And to let God love you. That kind of attitude in your life is leading you down a road, away from God, to death. The Lord wants to bring you to a position of cleanness and wholeness in your life.

Search your heart and ask if that is the case with you or if there is some other area the Lord is putting His finger especially on in your life.

### **Closing Prayer**

Our Lord, we come to You now. We thank You that Your Scripture speaks to us here in this word "diets." It comes to us in an age when we're all consumed with diets. You've said You've got a diet plan for our life that was an "Out-of-Egypt-Be-Ye-Holy Diet" plan. Lord, we believe that's true of our own lives. Egypt represents for us the world and holiness for us represents Your health. The wholesomeness of Your emotional being. Lord Jesus, there may be some in this room who in their attitudes are living in Egypt and who do not yet have Your wholesomeness. A wholesomeness that has clean emotions and clean attitudes toward ourselves, toward others, toward You. You're here today Lord not to teach us the distinction between clean and unclean

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food. But You're here today to teach us the distinction through the clean and unclean food about clean and unclean attitudes. Clean attitudes that heal us and bind us up and make us whole and make us lovely and beautiful in Your sight and others' sights. Unclean attitudes which kill us and destroy us and totally bring us down. Lord, in the name of Jesus I rebuke the spirit that is in this age that has come to bring us hatred against ourselves. The attitude that has prevailed through our culture and through whatever associations that come that have sought to destroy us by making us feel angry with ourselves. That demands that we punish ourselves. Lord, You've borne all of our punishment on the cross. We bear it no more. Lord, I pray for people in this room that have been fixed on punishing themselves, maybe not even are that they've been doing it. But Your Spirit is making that alive in this moment. We punish and condemn ourselves and inflict injury upon ourselves. Lord, You want to come today with a whole new clean; wash and make us pure and fit us together in Your presence and deliver us out of the bondage of the unclean into the delight of the clean work of the Spirit which is love. Love for You and for one another and for self. Love and joy and peace and patience and goodness and gentleness and mercy and kindness and self-control. Cleanse our lives God, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.