

BIBLE BRIEFING

LEVITICUS Chapter 11-12

“Cleanliness & Godliness”

Introduction

“Cleanliness is next to godliness.”

John Wesley is credited with the saying; but it is likely it was a proverbial saying that was current before his time. He quoted it in a sermon titled “On Dress” in a way indicating his listeners were familiar with it.

Jews could definitely identify with the saying. From birth to burial, every aspect of their lives was submitted to God’s law to keep them ceremonially clean and free from defilement. Whether it was selecting their food, preparing their food, caring for a mother and a new baby, diagnosing a disease, or disposing of waste, nothing was left to chance in the camp of Israel.

We’re going to read many things about foods, animals, and behaviors that are either “clean” or “unclean.” What is it really about?

J. Vernon McGee – essentially moral laws, not really for health and hygiene:

“This present age is witnessing the dulling of man’s sensibilities to the sharp distinctions between right and wrong and good and bad. Man tries to put everything in life in the gray zone of amorality. God draws these distinctions to drive man to the altar and the shed blood of Christ for cleansing and for forgiveness.”

We are not obligated to follow these dietary regulations; but we are still called upon to remain separate from the surrounding world system. The fact we belong to God should make a difference in every aspect of our lives:

1 Corinthians 6:20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

1 Corinthians 10:31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Eating (11:1-23)

Noah already knew about clean and unclean animals.; it was part of ancient tradition. Whether an animal was clean or unclean had nothing to do with the quality of the animal. It was what God said about the animal. Some regulations probably had to do with health; but for the most part they were God's way of keeping His people separate from the surrounding cultures – set apart, holy.

We want to note three things about the dietary laws:

1. God gave them only to the Jews.
2. Obeying them did not make you holy; it only kept you in a place where you could participate in religious rituals.
3. The laws were temporary and ended on the Cross (Colossians 2:14).

For Israel, the distinction between the clean and unclean animals was part of God's plan to keep them separate from all nations. Even today *Kosher* has a particular meaning to everyone. They were constantly reminded that they lived in a world where choices had to be made.

Jesus made it clear to His disciples that all foods were clean (Mark 7:1ff). Peter received a vision showing him all foods were clean, just before God sent him to minister to the Gentiles (Acts 10:9-16). Paul taught that diets, days, and dress were neither a means or a measure of a person's spirituality.

One more thought before we read about the animals: These are representative, not a complete listing. They give general guidelines; the people needed to practice discernment. Questionable animals were to be rejected.

Land Animals (v1-8):

Leviticus 11:1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them,
Leviticus 11:2 “Speak to the children of Israel, saying, ‘These *are* the animals which you may eat among all the animals that *are* on the earth:
Leviticus 11:3 Among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves *and* chewing the cud—that you may eat.
Leviticus 11:4 Nevertheless these you shall not eat among those that chew the cud or those that have cloven hooves: the camel, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, is unclean to you;
Leviticus 11:5 the rock hyrax, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, *is* unclean to you;
Leviticus 11:6 the hare, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, *is* unclean to you;
Leviticus 11:7 and the swine, though it divides the hoof, having cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud, *is* unclean to you.
Leviticus 11:8 Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch. They *are* unclean to you.

The “hare” is not what we think of as a rabbit; we’re not sure what it is! God warned about eating a camel. The reaction would be, “Who would want to?” Don’t you think this adds a note of humor to the words of our Lord when He accused the Pharisees of straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel? The camel wasn’t only lumpy; he was unclean.

Land animals must chew the cud and have split hooves. For the Christian there are some spiritual applications. We have already shown that there is no merit in following a ritual regarding meat. But it is interesting to note that “to meditate” is a figurative expression of a cow chewing the cud. “But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psalm 1:2). Meditating is a valid application for the chewing of the cud for the spiritual benefit of believers. Likewise, the parting of the hoof speaks of the walk of the believer in separation. “I therefore, the prisoner of the LORD, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Ephesians 4:1). “And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise” (Ephesians 5:2, 15). The relationship between the study of the Word of God and the walk of the believer is intimately tied together. “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2

Timothy 3:14–15). “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22).

If you are going through this world, you will have to chew the cud, the Word of God, and you will need to have that separated walk that only the Word can produce. The Bible-studying believer, who puts into practice the teaching of the Word of God, identifies himself as a child of God by his work and his walk.

What kind of tracks are you making? The story is told of a man years ago when someone tried to hand him a tract. He asked what it was and was told it was a tract. He handed it back and said he couldn't read it. He said, “I'll just watch your tracks.”

Water creatures (v9-12):

Leviticus 11:9 ‘These you may eat of all that *are* in the water: whatever in the water has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers—that you may eat.

Leviticus 11:10 But all in the seas or in the rivers that do not have fins and scales, all that move in the water or any living thing which *is* in the water, they *are* an abomination to you.

Leviticus 11:11 They shall be an abomination to you; you shall not eat their flesh, but you shall regard their carcasses as an abomination.

Leviticus 11:12 Whatever in the water does not have fins or scales—that *shall be* an abomination to you.

Fins and scales – so no shellfish, catfish, or eels. There is some speculation that God was protecting them from the parasites picked-up by bottom feeders.

The important role of fishing in the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ is well known to the student of the New Testament. The first disciples our Lord called were fishermen. They were told that they were to become fishers of men.

Jesus told the parable that the kingdom of heaven is like a net which caught good fish and bad fish (Matthew 13:47–50). What was the method of determining the good from the bad fish? It is not whether the fish were large or small but would be according to the Levitical law. A fish that has both fins and scales is clean, or good. Now how is this like the judgment of the wicked from among the just? Well, the

believer is the one who is propelled by the Holy Spirit and who is clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Those are the two identifying marks. Those are the fins and the scales, if you please.

Fowl (v13-19):

Leviticus 11:13 'And these you shall regard as an abomination among the birds; they shall not be eaten, they *are* an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the buzzard,

Leviticus 11:14 the kite, and the falcon after its kind;

Leviticus 11:15 every raven after its kind,

Leviticus 11:16 the ostrich, the short-eared owl, the sea gull, and the hawk after its kind;

Leviticus 11:17 the little owl, the fisher owl, and the screech owl;

Leviticus 11:18 the white owl, the jackdaw, and the carrion vulture;

Leviticus 11:19 the stork, the heron after its kind, the hoopoe, and the bat.

Carrion-eating birds of prey were defiled by the dead carcasses of their victims as well as by eating blood still in the flesh.

This section throws some light on the experience of Elijah. He was fed by the ravens—dirty birds. Elijah did not eat the ravens, but they fed him. This was a humbling experience for this man of God who obeyed God in every detail.

Flying Insects (v20-23):

Leviticus 11:20 'All flying insects that creep on *all* fours *shall be* an abomination to you.

Leviticus 11:21 Yet these you may eat of every flying insect that creeps on *all* fours: those which have jointed legs above their feet with which to leap on the earth.

Leviticus 11:22 These you may eat: the locust after its kind, the destroying locust after its kind, the cricket after its kind, and the grasshopper after its kind.

Leviticus 11:23 But all *other* flying insects which have four feet *shall be* an abomination to you.

All insects were forbidden except those with jointed hind legs for jumping, such as locusts, crickets, and grasshoppers. John the Baptist...

Let me again emphasize: This was the God-diet for the Jews. They were to learn to like what God wanted them to eat, and to dislike the

rest. It was primarily a matter of pleasing God – not about the best diet for human beings.

Touching (11:24-43).

The emphasis in these next verses is on avoiding defilement by touching certain dead creatures, whether they were considered clean or unclean for food. If a Jew happened upon the carcass of even a clean animal, he knew it was defiled because the blood hadn't been drained out or the meat protected from contamination.

There is a very important principle set before us here. Cleanness or holiness is not transferred by contact. On the contrary, dirt, sin, and unholiness are transferred by contact. In other words, it is impossible to bring holiness out of the unholy. But the unclean can affect the clean. An unrighteous man cannot produce righteous works which are acceptable to God. You cannot bring righteousness out of unrighteousness.

There were hygienic reasons; but the big reason was to teach the people to appreciate cleanliness.

Leviticus 11:24 'By these you shall become unclean; whoever touches the carcass of any of them shall be unclean until evening;
Leviticus 11:25 whoever carries part of the carcass of any of them shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening:
Leviticus 11:26 *The carcass* of any animal which divides the foot, but is not cloven-hoofed or does not chew the cud, *is* unclean to you. Everyone who touches it shall be unclean.
Leviticus 11:27 And whatever goes on its paws, among all kinds of animals that go on *all* fours, those *are* unclean to you. Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean until evening.
Leviticus 11:28 Whoever carries *any such* carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. It *is* unclean to you.
Leviticus 11:29 'These also *shall be* unclean to you among the creeping things that creep on the earth: the mole, the mouse, and the large lizard after its kind;
Leviticus 11:30 the gecko, the monitor lizard, the sand reptile, the sand lizard, and the chameleon.
Leviticus 11:31 These *are* unclean to you among all that creep. Whoever touches them when they are dead shall be unclean until evening.

The carcass of a mole could contaminate him as much as the carcass of an elephant. So you are constantly reminded that you live

in a world of fallen creatures, and that little sins are as heinous in God's sight as big sins.

Now we go into the kitchen:

Leviticus 11:32 Anything on which *any* of them falls, when they are dead shall be unclean, whether *it is* any item of wood or clothing or skin or sack, whatever item *it is*, in which *any* work is done, it must be put in water. And it shall be unclean until evening; then it shall be clean.

Leviticus 11:33 Any earthen vessel into which *any* of them falls you shall break; and whatever *is* in it shall be unclean:

Leviticus 11:34 in such a vessel, any edible food upon which water falls becomes unclean, and any drink that may be drunk from it becomes unclean.

Leviticus 11:35 And everything on which *a part of any such* carcass falls shall be unclean; *whether it is* an oven or cooking stove, it shall be broken down; *for they are* unclean, and shall be unclean to you.

Leviticus 11:36 Nevertheless a spring or a cistern, *in which there is* plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass becomes unclean.

It must have been a commonplace experience for some rodent to get into the kitchen of that day and fall into one of the vessels and die. Any earthen vessel had to be broken and the water or grain or whatever was in it had to be thrown out. A bronze vessel was to be scoured clean. You see, God taught His people cleanliness in the preparation of food. And He was teaching them a lesson in holiness. *Every* vessel was holy to God and it was all to remain clean. In the Mosaic system, cleanliness was next to godliness and this applied to even the smallest detail in domestic situations. God guarded His people against contamination and pollution.

Now we leave the kitchen and go out into the field and the food production:

Leviticus 11:37 And if a part of *any such* carcass falls on any planting seed which is to be sown, it *remains* clean.

Leviticus 11:38 But if water is put on the seed, and if *a part of any such* carcass falls on it, it *becomes* unclean to you.

Dry seed that was to be sown could not be contaminated by contact with a carcass of the unclean. However, if the seed was wet, then its shell or armor had been penetrated and it was unclean.

This is why the child of God needs a shell or armor today. We are told, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11).

Leviticus 11:39 ‘And if any animal which you may eat dies, he who touches its carcass shall be unclean until evening.

Leviticus 11:40 He who eats of its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. He also who carries its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening.

Leviticus 11:41 ‘And every creeping thing that creeps on the earth *shall be* an abomination. It shall not be eaten.

Leviticus 11:42 Whatever crawls on its belly, whatever goes on *all* fours, or whatever has many feet among all creeping things that creep on the earth—these you shall not eat, for they *are* an abomination.

Leviticus 11:43 You shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creeps; nor shall you make yourselves unclean with them, lest you be defiled by them.

Thirty-two times, “unclean”; ten times, “abomination.” Whatever God says is unclean must be considered an abomination. For example: God said the tree in the midst of the Garden was off-limits... He said the spoil of Jericho was off-limits...

Discerning (11:44-47)

Leviticus 11:44 For I *am* the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I *am* holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

Leviticus 11:45 For I *am* the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I *am* holy.

Leviticus 11:46 ‘This *is* the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth,

Leviticus 11:47 to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.’”

NT, “Walk worthy of the calling in which you were called” (Ephesians 4:1). Privilege, not burden...

God had delivered them; they belonged to Him. True freedom is serving God...

“To distinguish...” Discern right from wrong; don’t blur the distinctions!

Purifying (12:1-8)

In the preceding chapter we saw the contamination of sin by contact. The external character of sin was emphasized - we live in a world surrounded by sin. This chapter places the emphasis on the internal character of sin. Not only do we become sinners by contact, but we are sinners by birth.

God graciously made provision for the cleansing of anyone who became defiled. Normally, washing themselves and their clothing and then remaining outside the camp until evening was sufficient. In certain things, additional cleansing was required. One was childbirth.

The very nature that we inherit is a fallen, sinful nature. David said, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). The world thinks of innocence, virtue, and goodness in the picture of a young mother holding a sweet, cuddly baby in her arms. But God paints a different picture, an opposite portrait, in this chapter. There's the young mother holding the precious baby, but he's not a picture of innocence and sinlessness. He is a picture of uncleanness and sin. Do you know what happened? That mother brought into the world a sinner. That's all she could bring into the world because she is a sinner - and papa's a sinner too.

The mother is unclean because she has brought a sinner into the world. Eve thought she had brought the Savior into the world when Cain was born, but she had brought into the world only a sinner - the first murderer. Now this Levitical ritual is to remind women that they were bringing into the world the same kind of a baby that Eve had brought into the world. They cannot do good. They can only sin.

Leviticus 12:1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
Leviticus 12:2 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean.
Leviticus 12:3 And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

Being born an Israelite did not include him in the covenant until the baby was circumcised. Each Israelite was first of all a son of Adam

and was born outside the covenant. Natural birth does not bring a man into a right relationship with God. Natural birth separates a man from God! God owes us nothing. He sent His Son out of His grace to us.

It is interesting to note that Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. Then Jesus was brought to the temple when the days of Mary's purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished (Luke 2:21–23). Mary was a sinner even though she brought the sinless Savior into the world. His birth did not save her. Only her new birth by accepting Jesus as her own Savior could save her. Jesus was circumcised to fulfill the law of Moses. He came to fulfill, not to destroy the Law. He was made (born) under the Law. Thus he identified Himself perfectly with His people.

Leviticus 12:4 She shall then continue in the blood of *her* purification thirty-three days. She shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are fulfilled.

Leviticus 12:5 'But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her customary impurity, and she shall continue in the blood of *her* purification sixty-six days.

In giving birth, the mother experiences bleeding as well as the secretion of other bodily fluids. This made her ceremonially unclean. She was not personally unclean; but she needed purification before she could return to the rituals of their religion.

Why twice the time for girls? No one knows! Grace brings us to a new day. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:27–29).

Circumcision is another one of those things that has hygienic value, but is really a matter more of separation. It had and has a spiritual application – the cutting away of the fleshly heart. It symbolized the putting off of the old life.

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Leviticus 12:5 'But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her customary impurity, and she shall continue in the blood of *her* purification sixty-six days.

Leviticus 12:6 'When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter, she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

Leviticus 12:7 Then he shall offer it before the LORD, and make atonement for her. And she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This *is* the law for her who has borne a male or a female.

Leviticus 12:8 'And if she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons—one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean.'"

The burnt offering meant total dedication to God as the mother returned to her daily life; the sin offering was for the defilement that occurred during birth.

The mother brought a burnt offering and a sin offering to God and the priest offered it for her. She certainly was not saved just by bringing children into the world, as some claim. She had to have a sacrifice. A mother must trust the Lord Jesus Christ. With that in mind, she is prepared to raise her child as a sinner who needs to accept Christ. Oh, how the home needs that today!

You remember that when the Lord Jesus was born, his mother brought turtle-doves because the poor could bring them as an offering. She had to have an offering because she was a sinner; she was not sinless. She brought an offering. But there was no offering for the Lord Jesus. No offering was ever made for Jesus or by Jesus. He is the sinless One. He was *the* offering for the sin of the world. He is the Lamb of God.

Conclusion

Cleanliness is not next to godliness if you mean by that you can become holy by keeping rules, rites, rituals, and regulations that govern diets, days, and dress. It is because you are holy – declared

righteous by God and set apart – that you make distinctions from the surrounding culture.