

Leviticus 11 - 16  
Laws of Cleanliness and Uncleaness  
December 30, 2018

Next Lesson: Leviticus 17-21

Proverbs 28:8. “He who increases his wealth by exorbitant interest amasses it for another, who will be kind to the poor.”

Wesley's Questions for Class Meetings. #21. “Is Christ real to me?”

What does the Bible Mean?

Leviticus Chapters 11 through 15 deal with the categories of edible (clean) and inedible (unclean) forms of animal life and with four sources of uncleaness or impurity: carcasses, childbirth, “leprous” diseases and genital discharge. Clean and unclean animals are further divided by habitat: land, water and air.

The scripture does not provide any rationale for declaring an animal clean or unclean. There have been many reasons suggested by scholars, but none are satisfactory.

- Medical Reasons. Some animals are disease carriers.
- Religious Interests. Animals used in pagan worship are unclean.
- Symbolism. A goal to teach one to “chew” on the law.
- Choice of Dominant Species. Most fish have scales and fins. Strangely, fish are not named in the Bible.
- Parallel to Worship. Only certain animals could be offered for sacrifice and they would be clean.

The common denominator for sources of impurity is that unclean sources stand for death. Blood and semen are sources of life. Their loss means death. The wasting of the body with skin disease represents the death process. Carcasses are the evidence of death. Impurity and holiness are opposites. Impurity, if not attended, might drive God from the midst of the community.

Wesley called us to be Holy. Holiness is not only inner experiences. They are also living to please God. Holiness involves all of our habits, manners and behaviors. We should be willing for our lives to show reverence to God. The kosher rules were a way for the Jews to show reverence.

Leviticus 11: 1-47.

One of the most important customs given by God to the Jewish people is the kosher dietary law. Chapter 11, is the most detailed account of the principles for kosher law. Mark 7:1-23, is an extensive New Testament passage dealing with both ceremonial washing and the observance of the Jewish laws (The Talmud, not the Torah or

commandments). In verse 15, Jesus states, “Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean.” In verse 19, Jesus continues, “For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods 'clean.’”

Some simplified rules of clean and unclean:

- Land four legged animals must have cleft hooves and must chew their cud. They are largely domestic, but deer and antelope fit the category.
- Touching the carcass of an inedible makes one unclean but prohibited animals do not cause uncleanness if touched when they are alive.
- Fish with scales and fins are edible. Shellfish and eels are not permitted food.
- Regarding birds, permitted species are not named. Only prohibited species are named. Some are the eagle, vulture, kites, ravens, owls, gulls, hawks, cormorant, osprey, stork, herons, hoopoe (curved bill and erectile crest) and bats. It seems like prohibited birds are scavengers, ones that regurgitate and carnivores.
- Flying insects that can jump – locusts, crickets, and grasshoppers – are allowed.
- Touching the carcass of an unclean animal makes one unclean and there are rules for washing and elapsed time required to make one clean.

Leviticus 12: 1-8.

Message in Chapter 12 is given to Moses for the congregation. It regards childbirth and days of impurity. Generally the birth of a male child makes the mother unclean for seven days. On the eighth day the boy is circumcised even if it is on the Sabbath. Thirty-three additional days of impurity follow. The mother is unclean because of her blood. A daughter is a potential mother. She has the potential to give birth and that causes a greater time of impurity.

When a female child is born, the mother is unclean for fourteen days. The process of childbirth – bringing new life into the world – is a delicate balance. The mother loses blood (life) to bring new life. The loss of blood causes impurity. When the days of purification are over sacrifices are offered.

Leviticus 13: 1 – 14: 32.

These passages in older translations refer to leprosy. The NIV refers to “Infectious Skin Diseases”. That is likely more accurate. The laws probably apply to Hansen’s disease, but also to many skin diseases.

There are reasons for the differences in references to the diseases.

- Fabrics and stone were subject to leprosy
- Symptoms do not always apply to Hansen’s disease.
- Recovery was expected.
- Archaeological and other data do not indicate widespread, if any, Hansen’s

disease in Palestine before the Christian era.

Today there are many suggestions of what the skin diseases were. Reference may be to boils or blemishes, loss of skin pigment in patches, psoriasis or other diseases. The diseases could not be determined and it was thought that God touched the person. The priest determined if the person was infected or not. The priest didn't heal; they were authorities on ritual and holiness.

Unclean persons were required to follow specific rules. They must wear torn clothes, have disheveled hair, cover their upper lip and cry, "Unclean, Unclean". The person lived outside the camp, a form of social death.

Just as specific rules applied to the unclean, they also applied to recovered persons. The priest declared one as clean. There was sacrifice of birds. The person shaves, launders his/her clothing and bathes. The ritual requires eight days.

Jewish tradition ties leprosy to the tongue – gossip. In Numbers 12, Miriam and Aaron talked against Moses. The "anger of the Lord burned against them." When the cloud lifted (God had left), "there stood Miriam leprous, like snow." Moses prayed for her healing and the prayer was answered. James 1:26, reads, "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight tongue, he deceives himself and his religion." Further, Luke 6:45 says, "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks." These are not a direct cross reference, but The Complete Jewish Study Bible cites a relationship to their tradition.

Leviticus 14: 33-57.

Leprosy made people unclean. Likewise fungus, mold or mildew made a house unclean. An unclean house that couldn't be cleaned was demolished. A house could be declared unclean by the priest. The cleaning and declaring cleaned rituals parallel the cleaning and declaring unclean of an unclean person.

Leviticus 15: 1-33.

The chapter discusses bodily discharges or flows. Impurity from normal discharges was removed by simple washing and laundering. Irregular discharges were considered abnormal and serious and they required sacrificial ritual.

Uncleanness from male bodily discharge spread to beds, chairs, saddles, pottery and other persons by contact or spittle. Usually washing cleaned but in extended cases eight days and sacrifices and priests were required. A woman's impurity from menstruation lasted seven days. Purification was similar to purification for the unclean male.

Leviticus 16: 1-34.

This chapter deals with Yom Kippur: The Day of Atonement or Purification. The deaths and atonement for the sons of Aaron is discussed, but the ritual was likely in general use. The Day of Purification focused on cleansing the sanctuary of accumulated contaminants (uncleanness and sin) that had not been rectified in the course of the year.

The sacrificial bull, two goats and a ram are gathered. Lots are cast over the goats. The bull and goat chosen for Yahweh are purification offerings. Their blood is brought into the Holy of Holies. The ram is a burnt offering. The goat chosen for Azazel (the scapegoat, the act of sending the goat away or a demon in the wilderness) bears the sins of the Israelites into the wilderness.

Aaron follows an exact ritual of bathing, dressing, slaughter of the animals and washing again. Blood is taken into the Holy of Holies to purify and is placed on the goat to ritually transfer the people's sins to the goat. The goat is then led away to an inaccessible region in the wilderness. In later times the goat was pushed over a hill to ensure death and permanent removal of the people's sins.

The chapter ends with the charge that Yom Kippur is a lasting ordinance. It is a Sabbath day on the tenth day of the seventh month. Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites.

What does the Bible mean to me?

1. Would God's cause be better served today if we followed dietary food laws in a self-indulgent culture?
2. Why do you think Jesus lifted the dietary regulations?
3. How do the various purification regulations make you feel?
4. Does maintaining good health promote your spiritual vitality?
5. Do you see sickness or ill health in someone as a sign that something is wrong "spiritually"?
6. What objects have high value to you? Does the section on mildew give you insight into Jesus' teaching on "treasures that moth and rust destroy?"
7. Lepers were ostracized. Who are the "lepers" of our society?
8. How can we as the Aldersgate Class begin to re-incorporate people into the church?
9. Does our "uncleanness" ever make us feel unworthy to approach God?
10. What, who are our "scapegoats"?
11. Are humans much different today than at the time of Moses?
12. Is God's character much different today than at the time of Moses?
13. Do these passages help us to better understand God's desire for a right relationship with us?
14. What do we and our church do to restore ourselves to God?