

## **The Validity of the Levitical Food Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals: A Case Study of Biblical Hermeneutics**

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The Apostle Paul boldly declares that God’s kingdom does not consist of “eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17).<sup>1</sup> Seventh-day Adventist doctrines center on God, the redemption in Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19–20; Rom 5:1–5; 8:9–11; 1 Cor 12:3–6; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 1:13–14).<sup>2</sup> The person, deeds, and teachings of Jesus Christ lie at the heart of our faith. The proper lifestyle springs from this faith in Him. A true religion of love leads to right choices in the matter of eating and drinking, because we were not only created to enjoy food (Gen 1:31) but also to reflect God’s glory in our habits of eating (1 Cor 10:31; see also 1 Cor 6:19–20).

It is crucial to note that God’s first commandments to humans were related to eating (Gen 2:16–17; the Hebrew root *tsawah* “command” is used here for the first time), but unfortunately the fall into sin was connected with food too (Gen 3:6).<sup>3</sup> One can observe how important food is by the

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 2d ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 23–77.

<sup>3</sup> Jiří Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, and Rationale (An Intertextual Study)*, ATS Dissertation Series, vol. 4 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 2000), 199–200, 231–232, 300–303; Joel R. Soza, *Food and God: A Theological Approach to Eating, Diet, and Weight Control* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 1–10.

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fact that the first temptation of Jesus evolved around eating (Matt 4:1–4). The way of eating and its choices bring consequences. However, God’s legislation of Pentateuchal dietary laws, where certain food is prohibited for human consumption, was not given for the purpose of gaining salvation. Eating or fasting does not convey anyone into heaven, because biblical dietary laws do not “eat” the way into holiness. These regulations God gave to holy people! They were already saved, liberated from the bondage of slavery, and should maintain their holiness.<sup>4</sup> They received God’s gift of food legislation, because they were holy. In Deuteronomy it is aptly explained: “You are the children of the Lord your God. . . you are a people holy to the Lord your God. . . the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession” (14:1–2; ESV) and only then God commands: “Do not eat any detestable thing. These are the animals you may eat. . .” (Deut 14:3). This is the correct and the only proper sequence of things: first comes God’s grace and then He provides His instruction on how to live in holiness. People thus respond to this revelation in thankful recognition of His loving and unique leadership.<sup>5</sup>

In my native country of the Czech Republic, the national dish is dumplings, cabbage, and pork (served together with a beer)! My friends were curious why I did not eat this kind of meat (or drink beer). This led me to study this issue in depth in order to provide a good answer.<sup>6</sup> Our answer needs to be God-centered not law-centered. Jesus did not eat any unclean

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<sup>4</sup> J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 177: “In the matter of food, a holy people must refrain from eating any abominable thing.”

<sup>5</sup> This proper sequence can be clearly seen in the literary structures of Paul’s epistles to Romans and Ephesians. Romans 1–8 explains the indicative of the Gospel, and then Romans 12–16 speaks about the imperative of the Gospel. In Ephesians 1–3 Paul presents God’s rich mercy (theology), and in Ephesians 4–6 interprets how to walk/live according to His grace (ethics). Paul rightly declares: “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal 5:6).

<sup>6</sup> My friends asked me “why” questions, and I had no good satisfying answers, because I was pointing to the Mosaic dietary regulations or health aspects. Later when I studied at the Protestant Theological Faculty it was even more obvious. Today my first initial response to such a question is very straightforward (even though oversimplified): “Jesus never ate pork, so I do not eat pork. He is my example of faith and practice.” A Christ-centered answer! Jesus carefully observed the law He gave to His covenant people (Matt 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31; Mark 12:26; Acts 7:35–38; 1 Cor 10:1–4). After pointing to Jesus, we can engage in further details in a conversation if there is an interest.

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food (Matt 5:17-20; 15:16-20), and such an answer sets a Christocentric tone to our discussions with our friends or those who oppose our food choice. This makes us known as people who follow Jesus and are in love with Him.<sup>7</sup>

The Mosaic dietary laws as recorded in Leviticus 11 are very unique (see Lev 11:1–23, 41–45 and the main parallel passage in Deut 4:1–21; also Lev 20:22–26). No such list of clean and unclean animals is known in the Bible outside of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, or in the Near Eastern Ancient Literature.<sup>8</sup> This legislation is not only about eating or restraining from consuming pork. This list is very comprehensive and broad and includes all categories of living creatures as it is seen in the detailed literary structure of Leviticus 11 where sections A and A' deal with the universal division of animals for human consumption. On the basis of the terminological, phraseological, and structural study, Leviticus 11 can be divided in the following way:

#### Introduction, vss. 1–2a

1. Formula of divine speech, vs. 1
  2. Specific living creatures may be eaten, vs. 2a
- A. Edible and Inedible Living Creatures, vss. 2b–23
1. Land living creatures, vss. 2b–8
    - a. Edible land creatures, vss. 2b–3
    - b. Inedible land creatures, vss. 4–8
  2. Water living creatures, vss. 9–12
    - a. Edible water animals, vs. 9
    - b. Inedible water animals, vss. 10–12

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<sup>7</sup> See Ellen G. White's strong admonitions: "The Sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the Cross of Calvary. I present before you the great, grand monument of mercy and regeneration, Salvation and redemption—the Son of God uplifted on the cross. This is to be the foundation of every discourse given by our ministers" (*Gospel Workers*, rev. and enl. ed. [Washington, DC: Review & Herald Publishing, 1948], 315). "Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world" (*ibid.*, 156).

<sup>8</sup> See R. K. Harrison, "Heal," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley et al., fully rev., vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 644.

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3. Air living creatures, vss. 13–23
  - a. Inedible birds, vss. 13–19
  - b. Winged insects, vss. 20–23
    - I. Inedible winged insects, vs. 20
    - ii. Edible winged insects, vss. 21–22
    - iii. Inedible winged insects, vs. 23
- B. Acquired Uncleanness Resulting from Contact with Carcasses and its Elimination, vss. 24–40
  1. Unclean dead land creatures, vss. 24–28
    - a. Introducing the principle, vss. 24–25
    - b. Carcasses of land creatures, vss. 26–28
  2. Swarming dead creatures, vss. 29–38
  3. Clean dead land creatures, vss. 39–40
- A'. Inedible Swarming Living Creatures, vss. 41–43
- Conclusion, vss. 44–47
  1. Basic rationale: Be Holy for I am Holy, vss. 44–45
  2. Final summary, vss. 46–47<sup>9</sup>

Scholars usually treat the laws of clean/unclean animals/food in the narrow context of Leviticus 11–15. Jacob Milgrom, however, rightly claims that “the diet laws of Leviticus 11 cannot be comprehended in isolation” and that “they form part of a larger dietary system. . . . Only when the system is viewed in its totality does the significance of Lev11 become clear.”<sup>10</sup> This is why he starts the exploration of the subject with Gen 9:3–4.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, I hold that this move is not sufficient. It is my conviction, supported by the early stand of Mary Douglas,<sup>12</sup> that the starting

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Jiří Moskala, “The Literary Structure of Leviticus 11,” *Hermenêutica* 2 (2002): 81–97. See also John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 249–252; Lloyd R. Bailey, *Leviticus-Numbers*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc., 2005), 129, 140–142.

<sup>10</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 704.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 704–742.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1966), 51–57, but unfortunately she lately has abandoned this approach. See her latest interpretation of the Mosaic dietary laws in M. Douglas, “The Forbidden Animals in Leviticus,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 59 (1993):

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point for the explanation of the dietary code regarding permitted and forbidden animals has to be put within an even larger context, namely Creation itself.<sup>13</sup> Her claim was done on anthropological grounds and built on Genesis cosmology. My interpretation has broader connotations and is made on exegetical, stylistic, structural, conceptual, and theological grounds. In addition, there is clear intertextual dependency among key texts dealing with the dietary laws, namely Genesis 1–2; Genesis 3; Genesis 6–9; Leviticus 11; and Deuteronomy 14.<sup>14</sup>

There were many attempts to explain the rationale behind the distinction of clean and unclean animals/food. At least 14 theories/hypotheses were suggested by scholars: the arbitrary command explanation; the cultic explanation; the sociological explanation; the symbolic explanation; the didactic explanation; the psychological/repulsiveness explanation; the taboo and totemism explanation; the death-life antithesis explanation; the anthropological explanation; the nature/culture boundary explanation; the ethical/moral explanation; the sacrificial paradigm explanation; the economic explanation; and the hygienic/health explanation.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, there is no consensus reached in that regard even until today.

Two main objections are given against the observance of the Mosaic dietary laws regarding clean and unclean food: (1) selectivity—choosing

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3–23; idem, “Sacred Contagion,” in *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas*, ed. John F. A. Sawyer (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 86–106. Some scholars have pursued her initial promising avenue. For the in-depth discussion about those scholars and Mary Douglas’s views, see my Ph.D. dissertation, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11*, 90–94, 107–111.

<sup>13</sup>“Dietary Laws of Leviticus 11 and Creation” in *Creation, Life, and Hope*, ed. Jiří Moskala (Berrien Springs, MI: Old Testament Department, SDA Theological Seminary, 2000), 17–29.

Everywhere in this article the word “creation” is capitalized when it refers to the biblical Creation story in order to differentiate the biblical account from the extra-biblical creation stories.

<sup>14</sup> Intertextuality of the key texts related to the biblical dietary laws of clean and unclean animals is not treated in this article. For details see my dissertation, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11*, 199–280.

<sup>15</sup> For details, see Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11*, 112–149; Jiří Moskala, “Categorization and Evaluation of Different Kinds of Interpretation of the Law of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11,” *Biblical Research* 46 (2001): 5–41.

only one Pentateuchal uncleanness, namely uncleanness of animals, and neglecting others, is arbitrary; (2) the New Testament explicitly abolishes laws of clean and unclean dietary regulations.<sup>16</sup> Thus, many Christians claim that they are under no obligation to observe these obsolete food regulations. Are the laws regarding clean and unclean animals of Leviticus 11 still valid?

Response to these objections involves reasoning from different angles in order to demonstrate the validity of these dietary instructions. Here are the main arguments for maintaining their relevancy.<sup>17</sup>

### **I. Respect for The Creator God**

The principal rationale behind the distinction between clean and unclean food is respect for the Creator God. This theological concept of respecting the Creator is also strongly present in the New Testament (John 1:1–3; Col 1:16–17; Rev 14:7). There are at least ten close connections between the first Creation Genesis story and Leviticus 11, and another three links to Gen 2.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Links Between Leviticus 11 and Genesis 1**

The parallelism between Creation and the Mosaic dietary laws will enable us to see a literary design and main rationale behind these laws.

##### *First Link: Key Terminology*

Key lexicography occurs in both chapters in the forms of nouns (e.g., earth, water, seas, animals, birds, kind), demonstrative pronouns (e.g., these, all), Divine name (e.g., God) and verbs (e.g., eat, separate, be holy).

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<sup>16</sup> See for example, Gordon J. Wenham, “The Theology of Unclean Food,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 53 (1981): 6-15; John Brunt, “Unclean or Unhealthful? An Adventist Perspective,” *Spectrum* 11, no. 3 (1981): 17–23; Kleinig, 261-262. The following New Testament texts are particularly quoted to substantiate the claim: Mark 7:19; Acts 10:9–15; 15:28–29; Rom 14:14; 1 Cor 8:8; 10:25–27; and 1 Tim 4:1–5.

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed study of the Mosaic dietary laws of clean and unclean food, see Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11*.

<sup>18</sup> For details, see Jiří Moskala, “Dietary Laws of Leviticus 11 and Creation,” 17–29. For the sake of convenience I refer to the first Creation account (Gen 1:1–2:4a) as “Genesis 1” although it also includes Gen 2:1–4a, and to the second Creation account (Gen 2:4b–25) as “Genesis 2.”

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### *Second Link: Universal Taxonomy*

The universal taxonomy of the animal kingdom (Leviticus 11) is built on the universal view of Creation (Genesis 1). In Leviticus 11 the Hebrew word כָּל “all,” “everything,” “everyone” occurs 36 times.<sup>19</sup> These occurrences testify to the universal view of the author of the chapter who sees the animal kingdom as a whole and classifies it comprehensively. This points back to Creation where the word כָּל is used 29 times.<sup>20</sup> God’s whole creation is finished and classified as very good (Gen 1:31).

### *Third Link: Three Habitats for the Living Creatures*

According to the first Creation story God created three habitats for the living creatures: land (vv. 2, 9–10), water (vv. 2, 6–7, 9–10), and air/sky/firmament (vv. 6–8). In Leviticus 11 the same three habitats are implemented for living creatures (land—vv. 1–8, 41–43; water—vv. 9–12; air—13–23). This threefold division of the created world is the foundation of biblical cosmology, and it is significant that they are mentioned in the same sequence.

### *Fourth Link: Four Categories of Living Creatures*

Living creatures were created to fill space—the land, water, and air (Gen 1:20–21, 24–25). Four different categories of living creatures were made: animals, fish, birds, and swarms. This Creation scheme is reflected in Leviticus 11 in its classification of the whole animal kingdom into four categories of living creatures, although with slightly different terminology. Careful comparative analysis of different categories of Leviticus 11 and Genesis 1 reveals that both chapters describe the same four categories of living creatures. This can be demonstrated by drawing parallels between these two chapters and their use of terms in regard to living creatures as seen in the table below.

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<sup>19</sup> In Leviticus 11 the term כָּל occurs in vv. 2, 3, 9 (twice), 10, 12, 15, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26 (twice), 27 (3 times), 31 (twice), 32 (3 times), 33 (twice), 34 (3 times), 35, 37, 41, 42 (4 times), 44, 46 (twice).

<sup>20</sup> In Genesis 1 the term כָּל occurs in vv. 21 (twice), 25, 26 (twice), 28, 29 (3 times), 30 (4 times), 31; 2:1, 2, 3, 5 (twice), 6, 9, 11, 13, 16, 19 (3 times), 20 (twice).

Comparison of Categories of the Living Creatures  
Between Leviticus 11 and Genesis 1

Categories of Living Creatures	Genesis 1	Leviticus 11
land animals (quadrupeds)	בְּהֵמָה OR חַיָּה	בְּהֵמָה OR חַיָּה
fish	נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה . . . הַמַּיִם	נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה . . . בַּמַּיִם
birds	עוֹף	עוֹף
swarmers (reptiles, rodents)	רֶמֶשׂ	שָׂרְיָן

Carmichael acknowledges the connection between Leviticus 11 and the Creation story: “The clean and unclean water creatures and the birds of the sacrificial and dietary rules in Lev 11:9–19 and Deut 14:9–20 have a fundamental link to day five of creation.”<sup>21</sup>

*Fifth Link: The Same Rules for Reproduction*

According to the first Creation story, reproduction must be done “according to its kind.” The Hebrew term מִיִּן “kind,” with its various forms, is a keyword of Genesis 1 where this word occurs ten times out of the 31 times that it is used in the Hebrew Bible. The expression (always used with the inseparable preposition לְ and pronominal suffixes) also occurs in Genesis 6–7 (7 times), Leviticus 11 (9 times) and Deuteronomy 14 (4 times).<sup>22</sup> Creation is about the establishment of order. God sets boundaries,

<sup>21</sup> Calum Carmichael, *The Story of Creation: Its Origin and Its Interpretation in Philo and the Fourth Gospel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 96.

<sup>22</sup> The Hebrew word “מִיִּן” occurs 30 times in the Pentateuch and only once in the rest of the whole Hebrew Bible, i.e., Ezek 47:10, but the form used there “לְמִינָהּ” is a hapax legomenon. Various forms occur in the Pentateuch in the following way:

לְמִינֵוּ	Gen 1:11; Lev 11:15, 22; Deut 14:14
לְמִינֵהוּ	Gen 1:12 (twice), 21, 25; 6:20 (twice); 7:14 (twice); Lev 11:16, 22 (3 times), 29; Deut 14:15
לְמִינֵהֶם	Gen 1:21



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and living creatures of different species and of different kinds are expected to keep them. Leviticus 11 preserves that Creation order and respects these boundaries.

#### *Sixth Link: The Concept of Separation*

Creation is a process of separation, division, and distinction.<sup>23</sup> The word *בָּרַל* is used five times in the Creation story itself (Gen 1:4, 6, 7, 14, and 18; outside of Genesis 1 this word is used 37 times in the Hebrew text). God separated light from darkness, day from night, the heavens from the waters (sea), land from water, the Sabbath from the other six days, etc.

The idea of separation or division explicitly connects the Creation account with the dietary laws. This term is also used in Lev 10:10 (once); Lev 11:47 (once); and Lev 20:24–26 (4 times), thus occurring eleven times in the passages under scrutiny. This phenomenon is very important when we take into consideration that in the Pentateuch itself this expression is used only twenty times. This means that more than half of these occurrences are related to our key texts. It is crucial to notice that this word is not used elsewhere in Leviticus 11–15 or in the Holiness Code. This does not appear to be the result of chance; it reflects intentionality and design. This link shows that the same Creation activity (i.e., separation) must be involved in the decision-making process when God intervenes (it is significant to note that all these occurrences of the verb *badal* are in the Hifil, i.e., causative form which testifies of God's activity of separation) and separates/distinguishes between clean and unclean food. It is His ultimate decision. When humans distinguish between clean and unclean food they are participating in God's creative activity. Thus the dietary laws teach their observers the ability to choose in everyday matters of life what is right, and help them to make right decisions.

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*לְמִינָהּ* Gen 1:24 (twice), 25 (twice); 6:20; 7:14 (twice); Lev 11:14, 19; Deut 14:13, 18.

It is very important to note that the syntactical elements mentioned above are used only in the key texts dealing with the Creation, Flood, and dietary rules. These texts are thus strongly linked together.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Beauchamp, *Création et Séparation: Etude exégétique du chapitre premier de la Genèse*, Bibliothèque de Sciences Religieuses (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1969).

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*Seventh Link: The Concept of Locomotion*

Created life is not static; motion is involved. Each species has its own sphere and can move in that realm. This is stressed in the second couplet of God's creative activity—on the fourth, fifth, and sixth days. God brings forth entities that have locomotion: first sun and moon, then birds, fish, animals, and finally humans. The feature of motion in the Creation story is stressed by the notion of separation (which is also a kind of motion). The element of locomotion is reflected in Leviticus 11. This is a feature of the Creation account which Mary Douglas stresses in her interpretation of the Mosaic dietary laws. Her dictum that “any class of creatures which is not equipped for the right kind of locomotion in its element is contrary to holiness”<sup>24</sup> may go too far; nevertheless, it is important to observe that locomotion plays a specific role in the identification of clean living creatures according to Leviticus 11. Dietary laws thus stress motion as one of the specific signs in the enumeration of clean animals, such as split hoofs for quadrupeds, fins for fish, and hopping for edible locusts.

*Eighth Link: The Concept of Eating*

God provides food for humans. Even though the diet was changed, the same principle remains—God as the Creator points out what is good and proper for human consumption (Gen 1:29; Lev 11:1–23, 41–47). God's given diet for the whole created primeval world was vegetarian. Humans and animals were given עֵשֶׂב “herbage,” “herb,” “plant” as food (Gen 1:29–30).

*Ninth Link: God as the Subject of Creation and of the Dietary Laws*

God is the subject of Creation; therefore, He determines what is clean and unclean (Gen 1:1; Lev 11:1). God is the Creator and the Giver of life. He is also the Giver of the dietary regulations. The goal for the act of eating is the sustaining of life. His Sovereignty is stressed by this observation.

*Tenth Link: The Concept of Holiness and Imitatio Dei*

The concept of holiness is at the conclusion of the first Creation account as well as at the conclusion of the dietary laws (Gen 2:3; Lev

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<sup>24</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 55.

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11:44–45), and functions as a climax to these two chapters. Humans were created in the image of God (Gen 1:26, 27); and according to Lev 11:44, 45, they must imitate God, i.e., be holy as He is holy.<sup>25</sup> Milgrom aptly says: “Holiness means *imitatio Dei*—the life of godliness.”<sup>26</sup>

### The Second Creation Account and Leviticus 11

There are at least three important links between the dietary laws of Leviticus 11 and Genesis 2. Besides the key terminology used in these two chapters,<sup>27</sup> there is a very significant concept expressed in relation to eating in Genesis 2 which is later repeated in Leviticus 11. God’s first positive and negative commands are given in relationship to eating (Gen 2:16, 17). In Leviticus 11 there is also first a positive command (v. 3) and then a negative one (v. 4). These commands have in both cases exactly the same idea: what you may and what you may not eat.

The third important issue in the second Creation story in connection with Leviticus 11 is the perspective of death or separation in relation to the forbidden. The transgression of the command “you may not eat” has as its ultimate end—death: explicitly stated in Gen 2:17 and implicitly included in connection with the dietary laws, separation from the holiness of God brings as a final result—death. God is life, and everything in relation to

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<sup>25</sup> To be created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27) means that humans have the capacity to relate to God. They can communicate with Him and build a relationship with Him based on love, respect, freedom, and truth. This also means that humans have the responsibility to be God’s representatives before His creation by taking care of the rest of creation. God holds us responsible for how we relate to others. This can be demonstrated by participating in the maintenance of God’s created order, and by respecting the boundaries of meat consumption. The concept of the *imitatio Dei* is at the core of human existence.

<sup>26</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 731.

<sup>27</sup> The key vocabulary is used in Genesis 2 and Leviticus 11 as follows: אָרֶץ (Gen 2:4b, 5 [twice], 6, 11, 12, 13; Lev 11:2, 21, 29, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46), אֲכַל (Gen 2:9, 16 [twice], 17 [twice]; Lev 11:2, 3, 4, 8, 9 [twice], 11, 13, 21, 22, 34 [twice], 40, 41, 42, 47 [twice]), חָיָה (Gen 2:19, 20; Lev 11:2, 27, 47 [twice]), נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה (Gen 2:7, 19; Lev 11:10, 46), בְּהֵמָה (Gen 2:20; Lev 11:2, 3, 26, 39, 46), עוֹף (Gen 2:19, 20; Lev 11:13, 20, 21, 23, 46), זָאֵחַ (Gen 2:23 [twice]; Lev 11:2, 46), יְהוּה (Gen 2:4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22; Lev 11:1, 44, 45), אֱלֹהִים (Gen 2:4b, 5, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22 [always as an expression יְהוּה אֱלֹהִים]; Lev 11:44, 45), אֶרֶבֶעַ (Gen 2:10; Lev 11:20, 21, 23, 27, 42), הַלֵּךְ (Gen 2:14; Lev 11:20, 21, 27), עֵץ (Gen 2:9 [twice], 16, 17; Lev 11:32), and מוֹת (Gen 2:17 [twice]; Lev 11:39).

Him has life. Disobedience always brings complications and death (Lev 7:26–27; Deut 7:12–15; 28:58–61).

Thus, on the basis of linguistic, stylistic, conceptual, and theological analysis of Leviticus 11 in relation to the Creation accounts of Genesis 1–2, I conclude that Creation is the overall umbrella for discovering a rationale behind the biblical dietary laws, and that the theme of Creation unites different factors of this rationale which may be discovered from the biblical text. Thus, behind the legislation of clean and unclean animals/food lies a deep theological reason, which is **the respect for the Creator, the Holy One**.

## II. Two Categories of Uncleannesses

I engaged in a comparative study among all different kinds of Pentateuchal uncleannesses in regard to their origin as stated in the biblical text, length, isolation, purification rites, and sacrifices in order that these factors help me to differentiate among them and to establish basic categories or types of uncleanness as is demonstrated in the table below:

Varieties of Uncleanness	Key Biblical References	Length of Uncleanness	Isolation	Purification Rites	Sacrifice	Categories of Uncleanness
1. Uncleanness of animals	Gen 7:2, 3 Lev 11:1–47 Lev 20:25, 26 Deut 14:3–21	Permanently unclean				Permanent (Natural)
2. Uncleanness by touching animal carcasses	Lev 5:2, 6 Lev 11:24–40	1 day		X	(X)	Temporary (Acquired)

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Varieties of Uncleanness	Key Biblical References	Length of Uncleanness	Isolation	Purification Rites	Sacrifice	Categories of Uncleanness
3. Uncleanness of a person whose impurity is accidentally prolonged	Lev 5:1–13	x day(s) of his original uncleanness + 1 day			X	Temporary (Acquired)
4. Uncleanness by eating a carcass of the clean animal	Lev 11:40 Lev 17:15 Lev 22:8	1 day		X		Temporary (Acquired)
5. Uncleanness after childbirth	Lev 12:1–8	7 + 33 days (boy) 14 + 66 days (girl)		X	X	Temporary (Acquired)
6. Uncleanness related to skin diseases	Lev 13:1–46 Lev 14:1–32 Num 5:2, 3	7 + 7 days till healing or till death	X	X	X	Temporary (Acquired)
7. Uncleanness related to the mildew in clothing or in a house	Lev 13:47–59 Lev 14:33–57	7 days + burn 7 + 7 days (+ burn or tear down)		X	X	Temporary (Acquired)
8. Sexual uncleanness	Lev 15:1–33 Lev 18:19 Lev 22:4 Num 5:2 Deut 23:11, 12	1 day 7 days till healing + 7 days	X	X	X	Temporary (Acquired)
9. Uncleanness of handlers of Red Cow, scapegoat or sin offering	Lev 16:26–28 Num 19:7–10	1 day		X		Temporary (Acquired)

Varieties of Uncleanness	Key Biblical References	Length of Uncleanness	Isolation	Purification Rites	Sacrifice	Categories of Uncleanness
10. Uncleanness of the land	Lev 18:24–30 Lev 20:22 Num 35:30–34 Deut 21:1–9	Till cleansing or vomiting (expelling from the land)		X	X	Temporary (Acquired)
11. Uncleanness by touching human corpses	Num 5:2–3 Num 19:11–22	7 days	X	X		Temporary (Acquired)

This comparative study indicates that the eleven different kinds of uncleannesses can be classified into two basic categories, one is temporary and the other one is a permanent uncleanness. These two types can be differentiated in the following way:

A. Permanent uncleanness uniquely characterizes the dietary laws. The type of uncleanness of the unclean animals is permanent, and thus natural, hereditary, non-cultic, and universal, while the other kind is acquired, temporary, and ritual/ceremonial. An unclean animal is born unclean and dies unclean. This uncleanness means that an unclean animal is not fit for human consumption. This definition is evident in the chiasmic parallelism of Lev 11:47 where unclean equals uneatable, and clean, edible: “You must distinguish between the unclean and the clean, between living creatures that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten.”

B. Impurity of living unclean animals is not contagious. There are six sources of uncleanness: carcasses, corpses, various skin diseases, mildew; and sexual discharges—blood or semen, but no living unclean animal belongs to this category of the “fathers” of uncleanness because they cannot cause uncleanness, transmit its impurity, or pollute someone or something.

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The nontransferability of the natural uncleanness indicates that it is of a different nature than ritual/cultic impurity.<sup>28</sup>

C. Touching or carrying a living unclean animal does not result in exclusion from social or religious activities such as visiting the temple or worshipping in the sanctuary. One could ride a donkey or caress a dog, and then enter the temple without any offence to worship God.

D. There is no provision for making unclean animals clean. There is no remedy for the removal of this type of uncleanness. It is impossible to cleanse it or cure it. There is no purification rite capable of making an unclean animal clean. Cooking, slaughtering, or even the time element cannot change it.

E. There is no punishment for disobedience against these food prescriptions, no penalty for the actual eating of the meat of an unclean animal. However, it does not mean that these dietary laws are taken lightly. They belong to the category of sins which were not atoned by rituals in the sanctuary, such as the moral offenses of murder, marital unfaithfulness, or idolatry.<sup>29</sup>

F. The dietary laws are not related to the Old Testament earthly sanctuary services or to the visible presence of the Lord (so-called resident Shekinah) among God's people. No cultic ceremony is prescribed when transgression of these dietary laws occurs in contrast to other kinds of uncleannesses.

G. A comparison between Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 demonstrates that the repetition and abbreviation of the dietary code in Deuteronomy 14 is free from ceremonial or ritual regulations connected with the sanctuary, i.e., holy space.<sup>30</sup>

H. The origin of the dietary laws is presented in the Pentateuch as being much older than laws related to other kinds of uncleanness; they are pre-Mosaic. The distinction between clean and unclean animals was known in the antediluvian world in connection with Noah's flood (Gen 7:2–3) which

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<sup>28</sup> For details, see Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11*, 173–174.

<sup>29</sup> See, Gerhard F. Hasel, "Distinction between Clean and Unclean Animals in Lev 11," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 2, no 2 (Autumn 1991): 103.

<sup>30</sup> Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11*, 253–271.

is strong evidence that they form an integral part of universal law, and thus should form an integral part with the Noahide laws.<sup>31</sup>

I. The Pentateuchal dietary regulations are applicable to the “sojourner/alien.” From the whole corpus of uncleanness of Leviticus 11–15 only these laws are applicable to the *ger* (“alien sojourner”) via the law of hunting, which was binding on the Israelites as well as on aliens (Lev 17:13). Thus the universal-law aspect of the dietary code is stressed.

This comparison of internal evidences of different kinds of uncleannesses<sup>32</sup> in the Pentateuch clearly demonstrate that choosing the uncleanness of animals and rejecting others is not an arbitrary choice, because this impurity is of a different category.<sup>33</sup>

### **III. Call to Holiness**

The call to holiness, the dominant theme in the book of Leviticus, contains a strong emphasis and admonition for Christians in the New Testament writings. The *imitatio Dei* is an ongoing demand. It is significant that Peter’s reason for being holy (1 Pet 1:15–16) is substantiated by the text derived from the passage dealing with the Mosaic dietary laws (Lev 11:44–45).

### **IV. Abomination Practices**

The close connection between dietary prohibitions, warning against idolatry, and prohibition of all immoral sexual behavior (all three activities are called *to’ebah*, “abomination”) is a strong indication that this triune ordinance has to find continuity in the New Testament era. The moral

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<sup>31</sup> On seven Noahide laws, see *New World Encyclopedia*, entry “Noahide Laws.”

<sup>32</sup> For the insightful discussion on ritual and moral impurity, see Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: University Press, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> It does not mean that the principles behind different kinds of uncleanness are no more binding for Christians. All principles which lie behind these various regulations are valid even though not the detailed prescriptions which are mixed with different ceremonial/cultic particulars. For example, Christians should not include any sexual practices into their worship (behind the sexual uncleanness is a wall against infiltration of immoral pagan activities into true worship).



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aspect of the dietary law plays a crucial role in the Old Testament (Lev 11:44–45; Deut 14:3; Ezek 33:25–26).<sup>34</sup>

### V. Prohibition of Blood Consumption

In our consumptive society, it is important to cultivate respect for life. The Pentateuchal dietary regulations include this ethical dimension by stressing the prohibition of blood consumption in seven passages in the Pentateuch: Gen 9:4; Lev 3:17; 7:26–27; 17:10–14; 19:26; Deut 12:16, 23–25; 15:23. The prohibition of blood is explicitly given as a command after the flood (Gen 9:4) when God gives a new creation order and for the first time allows humans to eat the flesh of living creatures. The prohibition of eating blood in Lev 11 is implied by two factors: (1) eating blood is forbidden in the larger context, see especially Lev 7:26–27 and 17:10–14 where it is mentioned in connection to eating clean meat; and (2) clean animals that are permitted for human consumption are herbivorous (all carnivorous animals are excluded), thus the command of not eating blood is applied to the eating behavior of animals as well.<sup>35</sup>

Even though God permitted the eating of meat, man was still to have reverence for the life which he would be required to take. This is the reason for the command to “pour out blood” and the prohibition against eating it.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Especially Milgrom emphasizes the ethical dimension of the dietary laws. See Jacob Milgrom, “The Biblical Diet Laws as an Ethical System: Food and Faith,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 17 (1963): 288–301.

<sup>35</sup> It is true that some unclean animals also do not eat blood. In order to identify an animal as clean, it is not sufficient to point out this one feature—its herbivorous behavior—even though it is a significant issue. There are other specific characteristics for recognizing clean animals and distinguishing them from the unclean ones. See Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11*, 315–343, for more about this issue.

<sup>36</sup> Anti-pagan magic intention of this law as well as its hygienic benefit should not be overlooked. See Lloyd R. Bailey, *Leviticus–Numbers*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2005), 88–89; John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 88–93; Walter G. Clippinger, “Blood,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley et al., fully rev., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 526; Hope Egan, *Holy Cow: Does God Care about What we Eat?* (Littleton, CO: First Fruit of Zion, 2005), 61–63; Roland K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 596; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, The International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 314; Jacob Milgrom, “Blood,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: The MacMillan Company,

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In addition to this, the manner in which living creatures were to be slaughtered was also referred to (Deut 12:21), although the actual specifics of slaughtering were nowhere explained in the Torah.<sup>37</sup> Later in the Mosaic law a more detailed explanation of the prohibitions against the consumption of blood is given: the blood of animals and birds is prohibited (Lev 7:26), but not that of fish or clean locusts.

The removal of blood is a significant lesson for humanity. Blood is a symbol of life (Gen 9:4; Lev 17:11, 14) which belongs to the Creator. Reverence for life is thus codified. Human beings must be constantly aware of the concession that God has made in allowing them to take the life of another creature for the sake of food. They were also to be reminded of this responsibility as ones created in the image of God. Their humanness and humaneness must be maintained even in the act of killing. They need to keep in mind that they are not God. They must be reminded that they are dependent on their Creator who alone is the Giver of life.

From the fact that in the beginning a vegetarian diet is given to animals as well as to humans, and that in the future kingdom of God it will again be the same (Isa 11:7), we can conclude that the eating of blood is also not natural for animals and is a trespass on God's given order from Creation. This is why all carnivorous animals and carnivorous birds are excluded from the list of edible animals. It means that the preservation of the original sacred life (a main feature of creation) is envisaged by these dietary regulations. Firmage correctly observes: "Unlike the rest of the code of

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1971), 4:1115–1116; Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 192–193; John H. Walton, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 343; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 402.

<sup>37</sup> Jacob Milgrom defends the rabbinic position on slaughter. See Milgrom, "Profane Slaughter and a Formulaic Key to the Composition of Deuteronomy," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 47 (1976): 1–17. Animals prepared for food must be alive and properly slaughtered (blood must be poured out). This means that all naturally dead or torn animals (carcasses) even of clean animals are eliminated for eating (Gen 9:3; Exod 22:31; Lev 11:40; 17:15–16; Deut 14:21). By analogy, it seems that all animals who feed on dead and decaying matter, on carrion or carcasses, are excluded from human consumption; i.e., scavengers (hyena, jackals, vultures, some kinds of beetles and flies, etc.) are off the list of the clean animals.

impurities, the dietary laws place a value on behavior and so belong in the category of moral imperatives.”<sup>38</sup>

## VI. Health Aspect

The aspect of health should not be overlooked. Even though the primary purpose of the dietary laws is not health, this dimension is one factor which must be taken seriously, because it is a quality of life valid at any time.

Holiness means wholeness and completeness.<sup>39</sup> On that well-recognized basis I suggest that there is also a close relationship between holiness and health, that health is one important aspect of holiness.<sup>40</sup> It is significant to note that there is no specific word in biblical Hebrew for the English equivalent of “health.”<sup>41</sup> When God or biblical writers speak about health they use different language from what we would expect. In Hebrew thinking health expresses the totality of wellness of the human being. The physical, mental, spiritual, and social aspects are included. The psychosomatic approach can be discerned from the Hebrew Bible. In the words of Hasel: “Health in the biblical view is not one particular quality among many that pertain to the human being; it is the wholeness and completeness of being in itself, and in relation to God, to fellow humans, and to the world.”<sup>42</sup> Biblically speaking health is total well-being, a comprehensive wholeness.

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<sup>38</sup> Edwin Firmage, “Biblical Dietary Laws and the Concept of Holiness,” in *Studies in the Pentateuch*, ed. J. A. Emerton, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, no. 41 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 184.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 51–53; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 721.

<sup>40</sup> In modern Hebrew these words are used for expressing the idea of health: בְּרִיאָה “health,” בְּרִיאָה or בְּרִיאָה “healthful,” לְרַפֵּא “heal,” בְּרִיאָה “healthy,” חוֹסֵן or בְּרִיאָה “healthfulness, healthiness.” It is interesting that the biblical Hebrew word בְּרִיאָה “fat” (Gen 41:2, 4) means “healthy” in modern Hebrew.

<sup>41</sup> People usually understand health in the negative sense as “absence of sickness.” Negatively stated, a healthy person is one who is not sick. The World Health Organization defines health in deeper way: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” The opening paragraph of the WHO Constitution, 1948 (Albert Deutsch, *The World Health Organization—Its Global Battle Against Disease*, Public Affairs Pamphlet, no. 265 [New York: Public Affairs Committee, 1958], 5).

<sup>42</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, “Health and Healing in the Old Testament,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21, no 3 (Autumn 1983): 192.

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Even though in biblical Hebrew there is no specific word for health, nevertheless the idea is expressed by words we in our culture do not expect. The concept of health can be expressed by the following words: שְׁלוֹמִים “wholeness, well-being, peace” (Gen 37:14; 43:28; 1 Sam 25:6; 2 Sam 20:9; Isa 57:18–19) and קָדוֹשׁ “holy, complete, whole” (Lev 11:44–45; 21:23; Deut 14:21), and טָהוֹר “clean, pure, genuine” (Lev 13:17–20; 14:9; 2 Kgs 5:14).

The Hebrew Bible has a concern for health. God promised: “If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God . . . I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you” (Exod 15:26). God also stated that if the people would obey His laws, pay attention to His commandments, and keep covenant with Him, He would keep them “from every disease” (Deut 7:15), but if they would not obey, He would bring upon them “all the diseases of Egypt that you dreaded” (Deut 28:60). God’s blessing is described in such a way that it includes good health (often stated negatively), prosperity, and promise of long life (Gen 15:15; Exod 23:25–26; Deut 28:27, 35; Ps 32:3–5; Prov 3:8; 4:22; 12:18; 13:17; 16:24). God takes care of all our physical needs. It is God who heals (Gen 20:17; Exod 15:26; Deut 32:39; Ps 103:3).<sup>43</sup>

Man was created as a unit. Biblical anthropology states that a human being is a living soul. According to the Creation story, humans have no soul, they are a soul (Gen 2:7). This holistic view of humanity has something to do with holiness, because holiness also means wholeness. This fact emphasizes the unity of our nature. It follows that if we are to live to the glory of God we must do so in all dimensions of life—physical, emotional, spiritual, and social (1 Thess 5:23).

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<sup>43</sup> It is important to note that no Pentateuchal law has health as its specific motivation. On the topic of health and/or healing in the Bible, see especially Michael L. Brown, *Israel’s Divine Healer*, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 25–36, 67–118; R. K. Harrison, “Healing, Health,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick, vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 541; idem, “Heal,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. G. W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 642–644; P. E. Adolph, “Healing, Health,” *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. M. C. Tenney, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 57; Hasel, “Health and Healing in the Old Testament,” 191–202.

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A result of respecting the Mosaic dietary laws appears in the realm of hygiene. Although I agree with Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., that “observing salutary results is not necessarily the same as discerning the intent for issuing these dietary restrictions,”<sup>44</sup> yet I maintain that both aspects are here valid (health intent as well as health benefits). Some important scientific studies demonstrate that eating meat from clean animals is healthier for human consumption than eating the flesh of unclean ones.<sup>45</sup>

### VII. Distinction Given for Food or Sacrifice?

The origin of the regulations regarding laws of clean and unclean animals is connected with the pre-flood world. Noah had to make a distinction between clean and unclean animals (Gen 7:2–3; compare with 6:19–21), but for what reason?

*Noah knew the distinction between clean and unclean animals.* The biblical text gives no indication whether Adam had such knowledge after the entrance of sin, because it is not known when exactly this distinction originated. One can assume that it was revealed sometime after the Fall, most probably in connection with the Flood when a new creation order was presented. It is highly significant that at the first mention of sacrifice in the book of Genesis (Gen 4), there is no indication of the distinction between clean and unclean animals, but when permission to eat flesh is mentioned for the first time (Gen 9), the distinction between clean and unclean animals/food is understood.

*Offerings completely burnt till the time of Moses.* It seems that until the time of Moses (when the sacrificial system was fully developed) the meat of animal offerings was completely burnt (Gen 8:20; compare with Deut

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<sup>44</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, “The Book of Leviticus,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1:1075.

<sup>45</sup> David Israel Macht, “Scientific Appreciation of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14,” *Ministry*, September 1953, 26–28; idem, “Scientific Aspects of the Jewish Dietary Laws,” in *The Jewish Library*, ed. Leo Jung (New York: Bloch, 1930), 203–225; idem, “An Experimental Pharmacological Appreciation of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 27 (1953): 444–450; Roland K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Intersity Press, 1980), 124–127; E. A. Widmer, “Flesh of Swine: Scientific Evidence Supports the Biblical Prohibition,” *Ministry*, May 1988, 24–26; Winston J. Craig, “Pork and Shellfish—How Safe Are They?” *Health and Healing* 12, no. 1 (1988): 10–12.



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However, not all clean animals could be used in the sacrificial services. I hold therefore that the primary purpose of these laws was to regulate diet.

### VIII. Unclean Food and the New Testament

Unclean food legislation is not abrogated in the New Testament.

1. There is a basic continuity between the Old and New Covenants and this fundamental premise is supported by many scholars from a variety of interpretive approaches. It is true that the New Testament abolishes the ceremonial/sacrificial system of the Old Testament because it was typological and/or symbolic in nature. At the cross Jesus brought to an end the whole sanctuary system which pointed to Him as its ultimate fulfillment (Dan 9:27; Eph 2:15; Col 2:14; Heb 8:1–6; Matt 27:50–51; cf. 1 Cor 7:19). However, there is nothing typological or symbolic in the nature or rationale of the Mosaic dietary laws regarding clean and unclean animals/food which would point to the fulfillment in Christ, the church or the last events (the eschaton).

2. In order to interpret correctly many New Testament passages dealing with this subject, one must take into consideration the difference between two Greek words which represent two different concepts: *akathartos* (“unclean”) which reflects the Old Testament teaching, and *koinos* (“common, polluted”) which on the other hand points to the special rabbinical concept adopted sometime in the intertestamental period (most probably in the second century B.C.) and known as defilement by association.<sup>48</sup> It was believed that if something clean touched something unclean, it would become *koinos* (“defiled, polluted, common”).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See especially Colin House, “Defilement by Association: Some Insights from the Usage of *Koinós/Koinón* in Acts 10 and 11,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21 (1983): 143-153.

<sup>49</sup> For the discussion on purity in the New Testament and Early Christianity, see Susan Haber, “*They Shall Purify Themselves*”: *Essays on Purity in Early Judaism* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2008); Thomas Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah: Was Jesus Indifferent to Impurity?* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2002); Thomas Kazen, *Issues of Impurity in Early Judaism* (Eisenbrauns, 2010); Baruch J. Schwartz, ed. et al., *Perspectives on Purity and Purification in the Bible* (Sheffield Academic Press, 2008); Hyam Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple* (Oxford University Press, 2005); Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions* (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005); Hannah Harrington, *The Purity Texts* (T & T

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3. Jesus statement in Mark 7:19b *katharizon panta ta bromata* (“cleansing all the food”) can be understood as an irony.<sup>50</sup> Christ is contrasting the tradition of the elders with the biblical law and demonstrates the difference between spiritual and physical defilement.

Many scholars recognize today that Jesus and the apostles were not against the dietary laws, but against their misuse. Since their original intent was distorted He had to restore their true meaning. Jesus’ teaching does not diminish the validity of the dietary regulations. Danger to the purity of the mind and the heart is more important than what goes into the stomach.

Modern translators often fail to reflect that Jesus is referring in Mark 7 to food that is *koinos*—desecrated/polluted by association—and not to food that is *akathartos* (“unclean”), because the word “unclean” does not appear in this pericope. The same can be said about Matt 15:11, 17–20.<sup>51</sup>

4. When I ask my audience what kind of animals were in the sheet Peter saw in his vision according to Acts 10, the typical answer is a “variety of different kinds of unclean animals.” However, this answer is wrong, because the biblical text shows that in the sheet were unclean as well as clean animals. This observation leads to a crucial question: What was then the problem for Peter? He could pick up the clean animal and “kill and eat,” but he refused. Bruce is right when he asserts that Peter “was scandalized by the unholy mixture of clean animals with unclean; this is particularly important when we recall the practical way in which he had immediately to apply the lesson of the vision.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, the real problem for Peter was association of clean animals with the unclean animals otherwise he could pick up a cow, sheep, or goat from the shown creatures and prepare it for food. Peter felt he could not eat anything, because even the clean animals became unclean by association with the unclean animals, a concept which

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Clark, 2004).

<sup>50</sup> Such an interpretative possibility is mentioned by Petr Pokorný, *Výklad evangelia podle Marka*, 2d ed. (Praha: Kalich, 1981), 148. Herman Ridderboss, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962), 332, argues for only one correct translation of this phrase: “Some authors translate Mark 7:19b by ‘and thus he declared all meats to be pure’; but *katharizoon* must be taken as the continuation of *ekporeuetai*. The process of digestion is at the same time the purification of the food!”

<sup>51</sup> For more details, see David Merling, “Clean and Unclean Meat,” *Ministry* 72, June 1999, 28–30.

<sup>52</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 218.



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is not supported by the Hebrew Scriptures (a living unclean animal is not a source for uncleanness!), but only by rabbinic tradition.

God asked Peter to stop calling the clean animals *koinos*, i.e., defiled by association with the unclean animals. This meant that he (a Jew) had to stop considering himself unclean by associating with Gentiles. This goes along with a different concept which was also developed during the intertestamental period—the symbolic interpretation of animals into two categories: clean animals represented the Jews and unclean animals symbolized the Gentiles/pagans. This had tremendous implications for their social life, because they needed to be constantly watching not to become defiled by association with unclean pagans. If a Jew was in close contact with a pagan he thus became polluted. In the time of Jesus and the apostles, there were huge social barriers between Jews and Gentiles. They could not eat together or visit each other in their homes for a variety of reasons (food could have been offered to idols; connected with unclean animals; prejudices). Through the vision, Peter was taught that the social barriers between Jews and Gentiles had fallen down (he was now free to socialize with them and visit the house of a pagan Cornelius), and not that a biblical distinction between clean and unclean animals was no longer valid (see Acts 10:28; 11:12).<sup>53</sup>

5. Another confirmation of the validity of the Mosaic dietary laws may be seen in Acts 15 where the eating of blood is prohibited. This prohibition is included in the Levitical dietary legislation. Acts 15:29 affirms that the new non-Jewish believers should continue to “abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.” These four binding prohibitions of the so-called Apostolic Decree clearly reflect the universal laws of Leviticus 17–18.<sup>54</sup>

It is highly significant that the four issues decided at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:20, 29) are found in the same sequence in Leviticus 17–18, and all of them are related to the *ger* (“alien”)—Lev 17:8, 10, 12, 13, 15; 18:26: (1) food offered to idols (Lev 17:3–9); (2) prohibition of blood (Lev 17:10–14); (3) abstaining from the meat of strangled animals

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<sup>53</sup> For further study, see, Clinton Wahlen, “Peter’s Vision and Conflicting Definitions of Purity,” *New Testament Studies* 51 (2005): 505–518.

<sup>54</sup> R. Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles (Acts 15, 13–21),” in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. B. Witherington (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996), 172–178.

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(Lev 17:15–16); and (4) abstaining from sexual immorality (Lev 18:1–30). In light of Lev 17:10–14 these apostolic prohibitions implicitly include the clean and unclean food distinctions. It is plainly stated: “So when any man from the sons of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, in hunting catches a beast or a bird which may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth.” (Lev 17:13 NASB). It is important to observe that three of these four minimum requirements for the Gentile believers are related to food regulations.

6. In Romans 14 Paul is probably addressing problems relating to ascetics among the Essenes or is confronting the same issue as the Corinthian problem: meat offered to idols. In Rom 14:14–23, Paul explains that the most important law is the law of love. He declares that nothing is *koinos* (“common,” or “polluted”) in itself. He does not say that nothing is *akathartos* (“unclean”). The concept behind this assertion is pollution by association. Nothing becomes polluted by association with idols.

7. In 1 Cor 8:1–13 and 10:23–33, Paul explains the hot problem in the apostolic Church: “Is it permitted to eat meat offered to idols or not?” This question of conscience is dealing with an issue that has no clear-cut answer in Scripture. Paul holds that since idols are nothing more than human creations one is free to eat meat that has been offered to them on condition that this is done apart from the cultic setting. His concern is very pastoral. He wants to stress that love must prevent the misuse of this knowledge for the sake of the weaker brother.

8. In 1 Tim 4:1–5 it is stressed that food which was created for human consumption (reference to Gen 1:31) and sanctified by prayer is suitable for food. The author of that epistle is not advocating eating anything! He is in polemic with gnostic ascetics who despised God’s creation and had negative attitudes toward physical matter under the influence of Greek thinking and culture.

**Conclusion**

There is nothing in the New Testament when taken in its context to suggest that the distinction between clean and unclean food has been abolished. Professor Kilgallen aptly declares: “The simplest supposition, that Jesus faced the Leviticus statement, and directly and explicitly canceled it, is not verifiable.”<sup>55</sup> Heiki Sariola explains that Mark 7:1–23

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<sup>55</sup> John J. Kilgallen, “All Food Is Clean,” *The Bible Today* 19 (1981): 259–263.

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should not be understood in such a way that the author (Mark) “rejects the dietary laws.”<sup>56</sup> The same is attested by David Rudolph: “It is ‘historically unimaginable’ to an increasing number of NT scholars that Jesus taught against the Torah’s dietary laws.”<sup>57</sup> Péter-Contesse correctly states: “As for the notion of cleanness and uncleanness, it seems at first glance that the perspective of the New Testament is diametrically opposed to that of the Old Testament. . . . These texts [Mark 7:19; Acts 10:12–15; Rom 14:14; 1 Cor 8; 2 Cor 7:1; Phil 1:10; 1 Thess 4:7; Heb 9:13–14; James 4:8] do not deal with the distinction between what is clean and what is unclean as in the case of the Old Testament ritual (cultic) texts. The notions are spiritualized and the stress lies no longer on ritual purity, but on moral purity. . . . The break which Jesus brings is not demonstrated in relationship to the fundamental Old Testament doctrine, but in contrast to the formalism of the scribes and Pharisees of his time.”<sup>58</sup> Kleinig plainly argues when discussing Christ’s teaching on purity (Matt 15:1–20; Mark 7:1–23) that Jesus did not abolish dietary laws: “He [Jesus] did not ridicule their concern for purity and abolish the rules for purity in Leviticus. Instead, he reaffirmed them and deepened them. His teaching on purity presupposes that his disciples shared in his holiness with their hearts rather than just with their bodies.”<sup>59</sup>

The Mosaic laws form a mosaic. It would do great damage if we threw away the Mosaic laws simply because they are present in the Pentateuch. There are many examples of laws that Christians accept even though they are included in the Mosaic legislation like laws against idolatry, prostitution, homosexuality, bestiality, and incest (Leviticus 18–19). The two greatest commandments are also taken from the Pentateuch: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart” (Deut 6:5), and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18).

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<sup>56</sup> Heikki Sariola, *Markus und das Gesetz. Eine redaktionskritische Untersuchung*, *Annales academiae scientiarum Fennicae*, vol. 56 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1990), 242.

<sup>57</sup> David J. Rudolph, “Jesus and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Mark 7:19b,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (2002): 293.

<sup>58</sup> René Péter-Contesse, *Levitique 1–16*, *Commentaire de l’Ancien Testament*, vol. 3a (Geneva: Editions Labor& Fides, 1993), 178. (Translation is mine.)

<sup>59</sup> Kleinig, 260.

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By not eating things our Lord prohibited, humans exercise deep respect for their holy Creator and thus our tables become silent witnesses for our allegiance to our Creator God. By not eating certain food, Christians do not earn salvation or gain God's favor, because the observation of these dietary principles is not a way to heaven, but an expression of faithfulness to God. In this way we live to the glory of God in a more consistent way. Moses actually assures that these laws are for the saved people, and that it is a lifestyle of the children of God: "You are the children of the LORD your God, . . . You are a people holy to the LORD your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be his treasured possession. Do not eat any detestable thing" (Deut 14:1–3). Taking seriously His revelation is a celebration of God's gift of creation. The best way to know the benefits of God's dietary instruction is to follow them.

Rabbi Kushner put it well: "We sanctify the act of eating with the dietary laws."<sup>60</sup> The Talmud says: "A man's table is like the altar."<sup>61</sup> It matters not only what but especially how we eat as MacDonald expresses it appropriately in his outstanding study on food in the Old Testament: "You are how you eat."<sup>62</sup> Food is related to our identity.<sup>63</sup> Food should be taken as an expression of gratitude and thankfulness, because it is God who provides everything that we need. Thus a common thing such as eating becomes something special. The ordinary is made extraordinary. Our tables should be unspoken silent witnesses of our respect for our holy Creator. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31).

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<sup>60</sup> Harold Kushner, *To Life! A Celebration of Jewish Being and Thinking* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company, 1993), 55.

<sup>61</sup> *Hagigah* 27a.

<sup>62</sup> Nathan MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone: The Use of Food in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 196. See also Nathan MacDonald, *What did the Ancient Israelites Eat?: Diet in Biblical Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>63</sup> Cristiano Grottanelli and Lucio Milano, eds., *Food and Identity in the Ancient World* (Padova: S.A.R.G.O.N. Editrice e Libreria, 2004); Athalya Brenner and J. Willem van Henten, eds., *Food and Drinks in the Biblical Worlds* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2001).

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