

# CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

## DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 6

### LEVITICUS

#### CHAPTERS 11 & 12

#### INTRODUCTION

We have come to the third section of the book of Leviticus comprising chapters 11-15. This section focuses on the clean and unclean, and the holy and unholy. Chapter 11 deals with laws concerning clean and unclean foods. Chapter 12 deals with matters relating to childbirth. Chapters 13 and 14 deal with skin and fungal diseases. Chapter 15 deals with bodily discharges.

In Judaism, the term “kosher” (proper or fit for use) means ritually correct and is usually applied to food. Kosher foods are those that may be eaten and non-kosher foods are those that may not be eaten. The majority of Jews still observe these kosher laws. Their dietary laws are based on Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

While our study of Leviticus 11 will help us to understand their kosher laws, what is more important is that we, as New Testament Christians, may understand the purpose of these laws.

The key verses in this section are found in chapter 11:44-45,

**For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with**

*any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: **ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.***

In chapter 10:10, God told Aaron that one of his duties was to differentiate between holy and unholy, and between clean and unclean. Another was to teach the people of Israel the laws that God would give to Moses concerning these matters. The following five chapters describe the laws that deal with the clean and unclean, the holy and the unholy.

#### OUTLINE

- A. The Laws Governing the Eating of Animals (11:1-8).
  - 1. The Word of the LORD through Moses and Aaron to the people of Israel concerning the animals that they were permitted to eat (vv.1, 2).
  - 2. They were permitted to eat all animals that have parted hoofs and chew the cud (v.3).
  - 3. They were not permitted to eat animals that do not chew the cud or do not have parted hoofs (vv.3-8).
- B. The Laws Governing the Eating of Fish (11:9-12).
  - 1. They were permitted to eat fish that have fins and scales (v.9).
  - 2. They were not permitted to eat fish that do not have fins and scales.

- C. The Laws Governing the Eating of Fowls and Birds (11:13-23).
1. They were not permitted to eat the birds listed (vv.13-19, 23).
  2. They were not permitted to eat the insects listed (v.20).
  3. They were permitted to eat the insects listed (vv.21, 22).
- D. The Laws Governing Pollution By Animals and their Treatment (11:24-40).
1. Contact with the dead carcass of an unclean animal rendered a person unclean. He must wash himself (vv.24-28).
  2. Contact with the dead carcasses of creeping creatures rendered a person or a thing unclean. The person or thing must be cleansed (vv.29-38).
  3. Contact with the dead carcass of a clean animal or eating its meat was prohibited (vv.39, 40)
- E. The Concluding Word (11:41-47).
1. The concluding exhortation (vv.41-43).
  2. The reason (vv.44-47).
- F. The Laws Governing Childbirth (12:1-8).
1. The Word of the LORD through Moses to the Israelites (v.1).
  2. Birth of a male child (vv.2-4).
    - a. The mother would be unclean for 7 days (v.2).
    - b. On the eighth day the child must be circumcised (v.3).
    - c. She continued her purification for the next 33 days (v.4).
  3. Birth of a female child (12:5).
    - a. The mother would be unclean 14 days.
    - b. She continued her purification for the next 66 days.
  4. Offering of sacrifices after her period of purification (12:6-8).
    - a. She must bring a one-year old lamb for a burnt offering.
    - b. She must bring a young pigeon or turtledove for a sin offering.
    - c. She must bring to the priest at the entrance of the tabernacle.
    - d. The priest to offer the sacrifices on her behalf for an atonement and she would be cleansed.
    - e. If she was poor, she could bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one for the burnt offering, one for the sin offering.

## COMMENTARY

### The Dietary Laws

The ritualistic laws relating to foods fell into four groups. These four groups were meat, fish, fowls and insects. Some of them could be easily identified like the swine, the owl and the grasshopper. But many other varieties were not as easily identified. However, the identification of these animals was not a problem for the people of Israel at that time. What was God's purpose in imposing these dietary laws on His people?

God clearly stated that the strict observance of these dietary laws was an act of sanctification (Leviticus 11:44, 45). God was setting His people apart from the other nation unto Himself. Israel was to be a special and unique people of God. God's people were to be holy as God is holy.

We see that New Testament Christians do not practise many of these laws. For example, Paul in his exhortation to the Christians in Rome declared that meat was not unclean in itself (14:14-15). Similarly, Peter saw in a vision a great blanket wherein were "all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air" (Acts 10:12), and God told him to kill and eat. So, are those who ate beef (cows chew the cud, have parted hoof and are clovenfooted) more holy than those who ate pork (pigs have parted hoof, are clovenfooted but do not chew the cud)?

Why did God give these laws to the people of Israel? There are four possible explanations. First, it was *arbitrary*. God gave it and that settled it. Only God knows the reason. Second, it was *cultic*. The unclean animals were used in pagan worship. Third, it had to do with *hygiene*. The unclean animals were carriers of diseases. Fourth, these laws were *symbolic*.<sup>1</sup>

Wenham remarks that there is no criterion for preferring one interpretation over another. Biblical exegesis without controls is apt to run away into total subjectivity.<sup>2</sup> It is a fact that God arbitrarily made a distinction between the animals. Whether it was for hygiene is debatable. But if hygiene was the

reason, then it will not be in congruence with the New Testament. More theologically correct is the symbolic interpretation of these dietary laws. Israel was to be sanctified and set apart from all the other nations. These dietary laws would single them out. The distinction of the foods as clean and unclean as well as holy and unholy was symbolic. God demanded that His people be holy as He is holy. The strict observance of these dietary laws would daily remind the people that they were God's people, that God brought them out of Egypt, and that they ought to live holy lives before Him. They would be constantly reminded of the need to be holy. The symbolic interpretation does not negate the importance of these dietary laws. At the time, the Jews implicitly accepted them as the commandments of God. We who live in the New Testament and have the whole revelation given to us can discern and understand more clearly and fully the intent and purpose of God—we must be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15, 16).

### **Uncleanness in Contact with Animal Carcass**

So far Leviticus 11 (vv.1-23) deals with clean and unclean animals. The following verses have to do with coming into contact with dead animals. Other unclean animals were mentioned. Four-legged animals that walked on paws and did not have hoofs were unclean, for example cats, dogs, bears, lions, tigers and leopards. Creeping creatures such as tortoise, lizard, snail and mole were unclean. Animals that moved on their belly like the snake were unclean. Animals that had many feet like the centipede were unclean. Any persons or objects that came into contact with these animals or their carcasses would be unclean until the evening (11:32, 35).

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of this subject, see Wenham, pp. 166-171.

<sup>2</sup> Wenham, 169.

Wooden utensils when contaminated could be cleansed by washing but earthenware had to be destroyed.

### **What Does All These Mean to New Testament Saints**

The Jews observed these laws even when they settled in foreign countries. Daniel and his three friends observed them when they were taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1). These laws distinguished the Jews from the non-Jews. They served to remind the Jews that they were the chosen people of God and a holy nation. Do Christians in the New Testament observe these laws?

We do not have to observe these laws today. But if by not observing we offend others, Paul instructed that we should show our Christian love by giving the matter due consideration (Romans 14:14, 15). Our Lord Jesus Christ put it plainly that cleanliness is not a matter of washing hands or utensils but is rather a matter of the heart. In a similar vein, Matthew 15: 11 says that it is not the food that goes into our mouths that make us unclean rather it is the words that come out of our mouths that defile us.

The issue of these ceremonial laws concerning food was discussed in the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). The decision of the Council was that the laws relating to circumcision and clean and unclean animals were peculiar to Israel as the covenant people of God. They would not be imposed upon the Gentile believers. But the Gentile believers were required to abstain from eating blood. This prohibition dated back to the time of Noah (Genesis 9:4). It was the laws that made Israel different from the other

nations, not the older moral principles that applied to all men<sup>3</sup>.

Finally there is another point to consider. It has been stated that we do not literally observe these dietary laws, but the fact that these laws set Israel apart from the other nations has a significant and important teaching for us. As New Testament believers, we are called “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9),<sup>4</sup> thus our conduct, behaviour and speech must reflect the character of God. Just as the Israelites are constantly reminded of their heritage, we must also constantly remind ourselves that we are God’s people. Let us do the things that please God, minding the things that are above, and shun the things and the thoughts of this world which is at enmity with God (James 4:4).<sup>5</sup>

### **The Laws on Childbirth**

Chapter 12 deals with the laws governing the birth of a child. This chapter must be carefully studied in order to avoid any erroneous views concerning women and childbirth. Simply stated, when a woman gave birth to a son, she would be ceremonially unclean for 7 days, and on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, the son would be circumcised. Then she had to continue with her period of purification until day 40. If she gave

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter 2:9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

<sup>5</sup> James 4:4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

birth to a daughter, she would be ceremonially unclean for 14 days, and she had to continue with her period of purification until day 80. When her period of purification was complete, whether she had given birth to a son or a daughter, she had to offer a burnt offering and a sin offering according to her means.

The law was simple and clear. But there are a number of troubling questions. Why was the purification period for a son half of that for a daughter? Did it mean that the birth of a daughter make the mother twice as unclean? Why was giving birth unclean? Didn't God ordain the institution of marriage and command that man should reproduce and replenish the earth (Genesis 1: 27, 28; 2:24, 25)? There is no convincing explanation but we do know from the text that it does not say that the mother or the baby *per se* is unclean. The text states that "according to the days of the separation for her infirmity" (v.2), "as in her separation" (v.5), "cleansed from the issue of her blood" (v.7).

The mother was declared unclean because of the issue of blood. The birth of a child resulted in the issue of blood from her body. This was compared to her period of menstruation which made a woman ceremonially unclean. This was explained more fully in chapter 15:19-24. For this reason each birth of a child, whether male or female, rendered the woman ceremonially or ritualistically unclean. The issue of blood from a person rendered that person less than healthy and complete. The loss of blood as a result of childbirth had rendered the woman weak and less than healthy and complete. She needed a period of rest in order to recuperate and regain her health and strength. So when an

Israelite woman had given birth, she was declared ceremonially unclean. After the period of her purification, she had to bring a burnt offering and a sin offering as required by God. The burnt offering brought by her to the priest was to obtain the forgiveness of sins, to express her thanksgiving for the gift of a child, and to renew her dedication to God. The sin offering was offered to atone for her sins.

### PRACTICAL VALUE

This lesson helps us to understand and appreciate why our Jewish neighbours only eat kosher foods. God has a higher purpose in imposing these dietary laws on them. Israel was the chosen people of God. These laws set them apart from among the nations, holy unto God.

God demands that we who are His blood-bought children live holy lives, different from the standards of the world. It will single us out from the world because we mind the things above, offer our bodies a living sacrifice unto the Lord, pray for our enemies, believe in the resurrection of the dead, believe in an eternal home in heaven, and the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. All these make us distinct and different from the world.

We learn the principle that unholy things must be separated from holy things. This is reiterated in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness" (2 Corinthian 6:14)? In our personal life and service to the Lord, we must remember to observe this commandment because God is holy. It is His will that we know what is

holy and that we do not do anything to defile the things of God.

### DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### Daily Readings

**Monday:** Leviticus 11:1-8; Daniel 1:5-20.

**Tuesday:** Leviticus 11:9-23; Colossians 2:8-19.

**Wednesday:** Leviticus 11:24-40; Romans 14:14-21.

**Thursday:** Leviticus 11:41-47; Acts 10:9-28.

**Friday:** Leviticus 12:1-8; Luke 2:21-40.

#### Discussion Questions

1. Describe the animals that the Israelites were permitted to eat and those that they were not permitted to eat.

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2. Daniel and his friends were full of knowledge and wisdom because they did not eat the forbidden food. Is this true? Why?

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3. What were the fish that the Israelites were allowed to eat and those that they were not allowed to eat?

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4. What must an Israelite do to ensure that he and his possessions were not polluted?

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7. How does the passage in Acts help us to understand Leviticus 11?

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5. Why was cleanliness so important to the Israelites?

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8. What have you learned from Leviticus 11 about (a) faith and food; (b) things that were clean and unclean; and (3) things that were common and uncommon?

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6. What reason(s) did God give to the Israelites concerning the commands in chapter 11?

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9. Did the burnt offering precede the sin offering?

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10. What was God's intent in giving the laws governing childbirth?

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## TEACHING LESSON

Aims:

1. To **know** the dietary laws.
2. To **understand** why God gave the dietary laws to the children of Israel.
3. To **show** that these dietary laws are no longer applicable to New Testament saints except those stipulated in Acts 15.

1. To know the dietary laws.
  - a. Explain the dietary laws relating to the following:
    - animals
    - fish
    - fowls and birds
    - creeping creatures
    - cats and dogs
    - others such as the mouse and tortoise.
  - b. Explain the meaning of cloven-footed and chewing of the cud.
  - c. Name some of the common animals we know.
2. To understand why God gave these dietary laws.
  - a. No explicit reason was given.
  - b. One possible reason was found in 11:44, 45.
    - Link with 10:10-11.
    - We can surmise that God intended His children to remember that they ought to live holy lives because He is holy.



- And the most effective way is to daily remind them to differentiate what is clean and unclean.
  - The intended change is the inward man not the outward man.
  - Explain and make reference to passages in the New Testament where Christ and Paul both emphasised that the heart is more important than the outward display of cleanliness and spirituality.
3. That these dietary laws, applicable to Israel during that period of time, had been abrogated.
- a. These dietary laws are not literally applicable to New Testament saints.
  - b. But the principle of a holy walk before God still applies. Show from Scripture the need to live a holy life. Peter quoted Leviticus 11:44, 45.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, this lesson challenges the congregation to live holy lives and to walk upright in accordance with the commandments of God.

We should daily remind ourselves that we belong to God and that we should obey His commandments. This is so that we may know God experientially and receive His blessings. We should encourage those who have backslidden to renew their consecration to God.

P.S. Why did the mother have to offer a burnt offering and a sin offering?

1. The burnt offering was a “sweet savour offering”. Noordtzij explains that it expressed “a renewed dedication of life” ((Leviticus, 133). Wenham comments that it was “to secure forgiveness of sins and to express the mother’s gratitude for the birth of her child and to renew her dedication to God” (Leviticus, 187).
2. The sin offering was a purification offering. Why a sin offering? Surely the birth of a child was not a sin. It was the discharge (lochia) that followed childbirth that made the woman unclean (Wenham, 188).
3. There was no convincing explanation why the birth of a girl made the mother unclean for twice as long as the birth of a boy. (Hong: because the girl will menstruate later in life).
4. The burnt offering was larger than the sin offering because it was done on behalf of the mother and the baby.
5. Verses 6 & 7 reveal two interesting facts: (1) that a woman, like a man, had the privilege and the obligation of offering sacrifices at the sanctuary; (2) that the sacrifices were the same whether the mother bore a son or a daughter. In the eyes of God, they have the same value.