

## 7. To do and not to do

February 26, 2009

We now are into the third division of the Book of Leviticus. First, we learned about the various sacrifices chapter 1 through 7. Then we learned about priestly duty in worship chapter 8 through 10. In next few chapters, it becomes rather personal – what to eat or not to eat, what to touch or not to touch, the ritual after childbirth, the law concerning leprosy, healed lepers, and bodily discharges.

We may wonder why it is necessary for God to instruct Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness. It is because the Lord wanted them to be separate from other heathen nations and not be killed in diseases that came with their heathen religious practices. Not only that, but also God wanted to be every part of their lives. He didn't want to be left out from them.

### A. TO EAT AND NOT TO EAT *Leviticus 11:1-23*

For some of the animals that were mentioned in this chapter, we might enjoy eating them. But for others, we may say, "Yike, no thanks. We'll pass." Or for the rest, we don't even know what they are.

Whether a creature was "clean" or "unclean" had nothing to do with the quality of the animal. It all depended on what God said about the animal. When He gave these laws, no doubt the Lord had the health of His people in mind, but the main purpose of the dietary code, I am repeating what I just said, was to remind the Israelites that they belonged to God and were obligated to keep themselves separated from everything that would defile them.

The spiritual principle of separation from any defilement still applies to the people of God today. God hasn't given His church a list of things that are clean and unclean, but He's revealed enough to us in His Word to help us know what pleases Him and what grieves Him.

Does it mean that we can maintain separation all the time? Wouldn't it be great so that we don't sin at all? No, we cannot sin at all for the rest of our lives unfortunately. But when we come to Him with broken spirits and contrite hearts, He graciously forgives us for our sins.

Three things we must note regarding the dietary laws:

- 1) **God gave these laws only to the Jewish nation.**
- 2) **Obeying them guaranteed ceremonial purity but didn't automatically make the person holy in character.**
- 3) **The laws were temporary and were ended on the cross of Christ.**

*Colossians 2:14 having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.*

Jesus made it clear to His disciples that all foods were clean. And God taught this lesson again to Peter before He sent him to minister to the "unclean" Gentiles in Acts 10. A couple of weeks ago, we learned that apostle Paul affirmed that special days and diets must not be considered either the means or the measure of a person's spirituality in Romans 14.

I am sure that you remember how apostle Paul confronted Peter who distanced himself from the Gentile Christians in Antioch when certain legalistic people came from Jerusalem.

*Galatians 2:11-14* Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; 12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

Apostle Paul probably said to Peter, "I smell a ham sandwich in your breath, Pete."

## **B. DISPOSAL OF THE CARCASSES OF UNCLEAN ANIMALS**

*Leviticus 11:24-28* 'By these you shall become unclean; whoever touches the carcass of any of them shall be unclean until evening; 25 whoever carries part of the carcass of any of them shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening: 26 The carcass of any animal which divides the foot, but is not cloven-hoofed or does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. Everyone who touches it shall be unclean. 27 And whatever goes on its paws, among all kinds of animals that go on all fours, those are unclean to you. Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean until evening. 28 Whoever carries any such carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. It is unclean to you.

In Judges 14, when Samson ate the honey from the carcass of the lion, he defiled himself and ceased to be a Nazarite. People who became defiled from touching a carcass were considered unclean until the end of the day.

If a dead rat was found in an Israelite village, it would be carefully and promptly disposed of, and the one disposing of it would wash afterward. This would help prevent disease in a significant way.

Around 1350 in Europe, the Black Death – Bubonic plague – killed one quarter of its population. But Jewish communities were largely spared because they followed these hygienic regulations. Sadly, because they were often largely preserved, they were often accused and punished for being "masterminds" behind the plague.

## **C. WHAT GOD SAYS IS FINAL**

The commands in v29-43 were not meant to be negotiated between the Jewish people and God during that time. They were what the Lord said and the people were told to be obedient for their own hygienic standpoint.

32 times in Leviticus 11, you find the word 'unclean', and eight times you find the word 'abomination'. What God says is unclean must be an abomination in our eyes.

*Isaiah 5:20* Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

The first step toward disobedience is often "reclassifying" sin and making it look acceptable instead of abominable.

Today, we live in a society that rejects moral absolutes and promotes moral relativism that isn't morality at all. Like the people described in the Book of Judges, everybody is doing what is right in their own eyes. Society's reclassifying of sin hasn't changed anything. God still calls sin an abomination and still judges it.

Why do people come up with moral relativism? Because the human heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked and people love darkness rather than light since their deeds are evil.

I like what Evangelist Billy Sunday said, "A sinner can't find God for the same reason a criminal can't find a police officer."

What God says in the Bible is final and cannot be negotiated.

#### **D. BE HOLY BECAUSE HE IS HOLY**

*Leviticus 11:44-45 For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth.*

If the Jewish people were to keep themselves clean and pleasing to the Lord, they had to exercise discernment. This meant knowing God's Word, respecting it, and obeying it. It was when the nation of Israel neglected the Word of God and refused to obey it that the people began to follow the abominable practices of the heathen nations around them, and this is what led to Israel's discipline and defeat.

The OT Jews and the NT Christians are not to walk in the way of other heathen people. It is our temptation to go along with others and bring destruction unto ourselves. Our country is doing the very thing.

Many of you remember Rob Bell from my teaching about the Emergent Church. Recently he commented about the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ. He said that according to the Hebrew custom it was a common to say a virgin having her first baby was called a virgin birth. In other words, Mary had sex with Joseph and they had baby Jesus. It may sound innocent and logical in the people who do not understand the Bible. It is a total absurdity. What Rob Bell is saying is that Jesus was no more than a common man. As a common man he could not be an atoning sacrifice for mankind. This is nothing more than undermining the basics of Christianity.

Like the Jews in the Old Testament, believers today must not only walk worthy of their calling and walk in love, but also must walk circumspectly and understand what the will of the Lord is. We must keep our eyes open and look around carefully, otherwise we will defile ourselves. When we walk as children of light, we won't stumble over some spiritual carcass in the darkness, because God's Word is the light that directs us.

#### **E. THE RITUAL AFTER CHILDBIRTH**

*Leviticus 12:1-4 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean. 3 And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. 4 She shall then continue in the blood of her purification thirty-three days. She shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are fulfilled.*

The theme of this chapter is not personal holiness but ritual purification for the mother, without which she could not return to normal life in her home and in the camp.

We may not understand what the Jewish women and other nations' women during that time had to do as their daily chores. In many cases, they were the ones who

worked while husbands sat around and yack with one another all day. I believe that it was the Lord's way to give them a nice long break from hard work right after their child deliveries. And I do not know why the Lord allowed a mother to have 80 days before she goes back to normal life when she had a daughter. I am not even going there.

In ancient days, other nations practiced circumcision as well. But God gave this rite to Abraham as a special mark of the covenant He had with the people of Israel. Each male child became a "child of the covenant" when he was circumcised and named eight days after his birth.

The operation also symbolized the "spiritual surgery" that God wants to perform on the human heart. Unfortunately, the Jewish people ignored the spiritual aspect of the ceremony and considered the physical operation alone a guarantee that the Jews were saved and accepted by God.

Forty days after the birth of a son, or eighty days after the birth of a daughter, the mother and father were required to go to the sanctuary and offer the sacrifices for the mother's cleansing – a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a dove or pigeon for a sin offering. The burnt offering symbolized her dedication to God as she returned to her normal life, and the sin offering took care of the defilement involved in the birth process. It also reminded them that every child, no matter how beautiful or delightful he or she might be, is born in sin and must one day trust the Lord for salvation.

How gracious of God to make allowances for the poor who couldn't afford a lamb! Mary and Joseph took advantage of this provision when they brought Jesus to the temple in Luke 2.

## ***F. APPLICATIONS***

1) **God's commands are not to be negotiated, but to be obeyed.**

2) **We should never reclassify our sins as anything else other than ugly and horrifying sins.**