



LEVITICUS 7–11 BIBLICAL FOOD LAWS FOR TODAY

As we enter the section of biblical health and food laws, it is good to remember this section is unfairly treated by critics as just a bunch of antiquated ritual and health laws. This is unfair to the true author of the book—God—who inspired to be said, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). So the health and food laws God has given us are “profitable” for us in many ways.

Are food laws abolished?

As Dr. Don Colbert writes in his book, *What Would Jesus Eat?*, “When we accept [Jesus’] sacrifice, we are freed from the bondage of sin in our lives, and we are empowered by God to enter into a new relationship with Him and live a new life. Accepting Jesus as our Savior and Lord, however, does not ‘free’ us from keeping the Ten Commandments. Rather, we are empowered to want to keep them and to actually keep them! The same is true for the other laws in the Old Testament that are not directly related to our spiritual salvation. Accepting Jesus empowers us to want to keep these laws and to actually keep them. The apostle Paul made it very clear in his letters that we are not freed from the law in order to sin further; we are freed by Christ in order to keep from sinning” (2002, p. 8).

Perhaps the greatest evidence that the food laws are still binding is the very example of Jesus Christ. Dr. Colbert says, “What we do know with certainty about the meat that Jesus ate is this: 1. Jesus did not eat pork or any other unclean meat. 2. Jesus did not eat meat fat. 3. Jesus did not eat the blood of slaughtered animals. 4. Jesus ate meat sparingly” (p. 49).

Nutritionist David Meinz adds, “Jesus certainly had the opportunity to break the dietary laws during his three-year ministry. He certainly took the opportunity of his ministry to correct misconceptions in other areas. He made a point of breaking the Jewish traditions...As far as we can tell, Jesus never broke the dietary laws” (*Eating by the Book*, 1999, pp. 217-118).

First food law – do not eat fat

Let’s study the first food law in Leviticus: “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying...‘*You shall not eat any fat*, of ox or sheep or goat. And the fat of an

animal that dies naturally, and the fat of what is torn by wild beasts, may be used in any other way, but you shall by no means eat it’” (Leviticus 7:22-25).

So God tells us we should not eat the fat of any clean animal. Fat in bovine meat (cow, sheep, and goat) is found around the meat, while bird fat is found mostly in the skin, and as much as possible should be removed.

Some years ago, two doctors received the Nobel Prize in Medicine for linking heart disease and harmful cholesterol found in animal fat. Yet, here in the Bible, we already have this correct conclusion 3500 years earlier!

David Meinz comments, “For every ten Americans, seven are dying from one of just two diseases. About 42 percent die from cardiovascular problems and about 25 percent from cancer...[Cardiovascular disease] is the number one killer. Nothing else comes close. Preventing atherosclerosis (what we used to call *hardening of the arteries*) should be your number one health goal. And the number one dietary contributor to the number one killer is *fat* in your food—especially animal fat” (p. 78).

One of the reasons God does not want us to eat pork is precisely because of the high fat content of the meat. Dr. Don Colbert mentions, “Aside from the diseases routinely carried by swine, pork is also a very fatty meat. The toxins in pork are held especially in the fat, which is not isolated from the meat as can be the case in lean beef, but rather, it is dispersed throughout the meat. Pork products—such as bologna, bacon, and lunch meats—are often very high in fat content. This reason alone is sufficient cause to avoid eating pork” (p. 50).

Second food law – do not eat blood

The next biblical food law prohibits eating blood. “Moreover *you shall not eat any blood* in any of your dwellings, whether of bird or beast. Whoever eats any blood, that person shall be cut off from his people” (Leviticus 7:26-27).

There are very good scientific and medical reasons to avoid eating or drinking blood. Here in the U.S. it might not be common to eat blood, but in Chile it is. They eat “blood sausages” or blutwurst, made mostly from blood. Blood is very dangerous to consume because it decomposes quickly and also

can easily transmit diseases such as influenza, hepatitis and AIDS. “Blood contains a concentrated amount of disease, wastes, and poisons. Blood found in meat that is insufficiently bled is harmful” (*Are the Food Laws Scientific?* p.1).

After the section where Aaron’s priesthood begins to serve the tabernacle, and the killing of both of his sons for offering “profane fire” apparently for having taken the sacrifice lightly and having been drinking on the job (Leviticus 10:8-10) God returns to the food laws.

Third food law – clean animals

“Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying, ‘These are the animals which you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth: Among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud—that you may eat. Nevertheless these you shall not eat among those that chew the cud or those that have cloven hooves: the camel, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves...the hare...the swine...their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch” (Leviticus 11:1-8).

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary says about the food laws, “In general it can be said that the laws protected Israel from bad diet, dangerous vermin, and communicable diseases. Only in recent days have better laws of health been possible with the advance of medicine. These were rule-of-thumb laws that God gave in his wisdom to a people who could not know the reason for the provision” (Vol. 2, 1990, p. 569).

What does the cloven hoof have to do with sanitation? “Hooved animals protect feet from abrasion and injury that are gateways for many germs, parasites and diseases to enter the body. Thus the flesh of hooved animals is freer from diseases and parasites because it is protected by a non-living sheath that encases the toe or foot---the point of the animal’s anatomy most likely to come in contact with parasites” (*Are the Food Laws Scientific?* p. 2).

Why does chewing the cud help sanitation? Dr. Colbert explains, “The two main characteristics identified here are that a clean animal has cloven hooves and chews its cud. A cloven hoof is a divided or split hoof. Animals that chew their cud are known as ruminants. A ruminant’s stomach consists of four chambers...These four chambers of

the stomach are analogous to a washing machine that has four cycles of washing and rinsing. By having these four chambers, ruminants are able to eliminate bacteria, toxins, parasites, and other vermin that might otherwise end up as part of the animal’s flesh” (p. 13).

Another source adds, “Animals with the ruminant type of digestive process get their nutrition only from plants, which means less disease or parasites. Most unclean animals are scavengers, eating dead and decayed flesh often of other unclean animals” (*Are Biblical Laws Scientific?*, p. 2).

Yet, there are some animals, such as the horse and rabbit, that are not scavengers, but do not have split hooves. Studies have shown that horse meat often contain viruses and parasites, while rabbits cause tularemia (an infectious disease) in humans.

Dr. Russell asks, “What is so good about ‘clean’ meats, and what is so bad about ‘unclean’? The flesh of clean animals such as beef, and fish that have scales and fins, is ideal for the health of humans—just as we would expect from the hand of a loving Creator...Many land animals God designed for food provide an additional benefit in that they generally eat grasses and grains that were also designed for food” (pp. 73-74).

Fourth food law – don’t eat pork

Why is pork prohibited? Dr. Colbert says, “Many people declare today that pork is a safe meat to eat in modern times. Pigs eat enormous amounts of food, and this dilutes the hydrochloric acid in a pig’s stomach. This in turn allows toxins, viruses, parasites, and bacteria to be absorbed into the animal’s flesh. Besides being gluttons, swine are also extremely filthy animals. They will eat garbage, feces, and even decaying flesh. All that is eaten usually becomes part of the pig’s own flesh. Pigs readily harbor parasites including *Trichinella*, the pork tapeworm, and toxoplasmosis...Swine is to the animal world what the glutton is to humanity. What they consume is to a great extent what we should not consume!” (p. 49).

Dr. Rex Russell adds, “As is well known, pigs will eat anything and everything. They were designed to clean up decaying flesh and pollution. Pigs have eaten Philadelphia’s garbage and sewage for more than 100 years, saving the city \$3 million a year in landfill costs. This is a wise use of hogs. They are designed to clean our environment...In the

U.S. *three of the six* most common food-borne parasitic diseases of humans are associated with pork consumption” (*What the Bible Says About Healthy Living*, 1999, pp. 14, 78).

Fifth food law – eat clean fish

Regarding fish, God says, “These you may eat of all that are in the water: whatever in the water has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers—that you may eat” (Leviticus 11:9).

Why do fins and scales help keep a fish clean? “One of the primary purposes of scales is to provide the fish with a coat of armor plating that protects them from abrasion, predators and parasites” (*Are the Food Laws Scientific?*). Fish either without fins or scales are mostly scavengers. Dr. Colbert says, “Catfish caught in fresh water are perhaps the most contaminated of all bottom-feeding fish because they are the first to ingest the industrial pollutants that sink to the bottoms of streams and rivers...Like shrimp, lobsters, and all other shellfish, catfish were initially created by God to act as cleansing agents for natural water sources. They have a great ability to absorb pollutants but not become sick by them. They can and do, however, pass on those pollutants to human beings who eat their flesh.

What about shellfish? Dr. Colbert continues, “Raw shellfish is a major source of food poisoning in our nation, and diseases commonly carried by shellfish include salmonella and the Hepatitis A virus. Shellfish have a unique ability to purify waters of pathogenic bacteria such as cholera; many of these toxins are associated with raw sewage. Clams and oysters can filter between twenty and fifty gallons of seawater a day. The toxins, however, remain in the flesh of shellfish...Shellfish can also concentrate ‘red tide’ leading to blood poisoning and death in high-risk patients...I personally regard shellfish as the “cockroaches of the sea”—they are miniature waste collectors for viruses, bacteria, parasites, and toxic waste products. We are not only told in Scripture to avoid them, but also that they are an ‘abomination’ to human beings (Lev. 11:12)” (pp. 38-39). It is sad that because so many oysters, clams, lobsters and shrimp are now eaten, the oceans don’t have enough of this clean-up crew left and so are becoming much more contaminated.

Sixth food law – eat clean birds

With respect to birds, God commands, “And these you shall regard as an abomination among the

birds, they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the buzzard...every raven, owl, stork and all flying insects that creep on all fours...These you may eat: the locust after its kind...and the grasshopper” (Leviticus 11:13-22).

The clean birds that God permits are the chicken, duck, and many others that can be found in our booklet on Clean and Unclean Meats. The chicken has a gizzard, which is a filter to remove any pollutants it might eat.

David Mienz summarizes the food laws quite well: “Why would God tell us not to eat something as tasty as lobster and shrimp? Do these unclean foods have something in common that might help explain this prohibition? Almost all of the creatures on the unclean list are scavengers. In many cases they don’t hunt for their own food; they eat the dead and decaying matter of our environment. A catfish does that at the bottom of a pond; lobsters and shrimp do it in the ocean. A pig will eat anything. Vultures, almost by definition, are known for their scavenger habits.

“Could it be that God, in His wisdom, created certain creatures whose sole purpose is to clean up after the others? Their entire ‘calling’ may be to act exclusively as the sanitation workers of our ecology. God may simply be telling us that it’s better for us believers not to consume the meat of these trash collectors...Much of the wisdom revealed in the Bible now makes sense to us from our modern perspective, but should that mean we won’t consider the areas that haven’t yet been scientifically proven? We’ve only discovered that animal fat is bad for us in the last 50 years. To the Christian a century ago, the directive in Lev. 3:17 to avoid animal fat made no sense at all. Yet it’s clear to us today. What if there’s something in lobster that’s harmful to our health? What if we don’t discover what it is until 50 years from now? Do we require scientific proof before we give the Bible the benefit of the doubt?” (p. 225-226).