

Leviticus II

“Clean and Unclean Meats”

“The LORD spoke again to Moses and to Aaron, saying to them, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, “These are the creatures which you may eat from all the animals that are on the earth. Whatever divides a hoof, thus making split hoofs, *and* chews the cud, among the animals, that you may eat. Nevertheless, you are not to eat of these, among those which chew the cud, or among those which divide the hoof: the camel, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you. Likewise, the shaphan, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; the rabbit also, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; and the pig, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, it is unclean to you. You shall not eat of their flesh nor touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you. These you may eat, whatever is in the water: all that have fins and scales, those in the water, in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat. But whatever is in the seas and in the rivers that does not have fins and scales among all the teeming life of the water, and among all the living creatures that are in the water, they are detestable things to you, and they shall be abhorrent to you; you may not eat of their flesh, and their carcasses you shall detest. Whatever in the water does not have fins and scales is abhorrent to you. These, moreover, you shall detest among the birds; they are abhorrent, not to be eaten: the eagle and the vulture and the buzzard, and the kite and the falcon in its kind, every raven in its kind, and the ostrich and the owl and the sea gull and the hawk in its kind, and the little owl and the cormorant and the great owl, and the white owl and the pelican and the carrion vulture, and the stork, the heron in its kinds, and the hoopoe, and the bat. All the winged insects that walk on *all* fours are detestable to you. Yet these you may eat among all the winged insects which walk on *all* fours: those which have above their feet jointed legs with which to jump on the earth. These of them you may eat: the locust in its kinds, and the devastating locust in its kinds, and the cricket in its kinds, and the grasshopper in its kinds. But all other winged insects which are four-footed are detestable to you. By these, moreover, you will be made unclean: whoever touches their carcasses becomes unclean until evening, and whoever picks up any of their carcasses shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. Concerning all the animals which divide the hoof but do not make a split *hoof*, or which do not chew cud, they are unclean to you: whoever touches them becomes unclean. Also whatever walks on its paws, among all the creatures that walk on *all* fours, are unclean to you; whoever touches their carcasses becomes unclean until evening, and the one who picks up their carcasses shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening; they are unclean to you. Now these are to you the unclean among the swarming things which swarm on the earth: the mole, and the mouse, and the great lizard in its kinds, and the gecko, and the crocodile, and the lizard, and the sand reptile, and the chameleon. These are to you the unclean among all the swarming things; whoever touches them when they are dead becomes unclean until evening. Also anything on which one of them may fall when they are dead becomes unclean, including any wooden article, or clothing, or a skin, or a sack—any article of which use is made—it shall be put in the water and be unclean until evening, then it becomes clean. As for any earthenware vessel into which one of them may fall, whatever is in it becomes unclean and you shall break the vessel. Any of the food which may be

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eaten, on which water comes, shall become unclean, and any liquid which may be drunk in every vessel shall become unclean. Everything, moreover, on which part of their carcass may fall becomes unclean; an oven or a stove shall be smashed; they are unclean and shall continue as unclean to you. Nevertheless a spring or a cistern collecting water shall be clean, though the one who touches their carcass shall be unclean. If a part of their carcass falls on any seed for sowing which is to be sown, it is clean. Though if water is put on the seed and a part of their carcass falls on it, it is unclean to you. Also if one of the animals dies which you have for food, the one who touches its carcass becomes unclean until evening. He too, who eats some of its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening, and the one who picks up its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. Now every swarming thing that swarms on the earth is detestable, not to be eaten. Whatever crawls on its belly, and whatever walks on *all* fours, whatever has many feet, in respect to every swarming thing that swarms on the earth, you shall not eat them, for they are detestable. Do not render yourselves detestable through any of the swarming things that swarm; and you shall not make yourselves unclean with them so that you become unclean. For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy.” This is the law regarding the animal and the bird, and every living thing that moves in the waters and everything that swarms on the earth, to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten.”

In the canonical order of the Pentateuch, the first comprehensive list of the dietary instructions for Israel appears in Leviticus ch. 11, with a second comprehensive list appearing later in Deuteronomy ch. 14. Advocates of the critical tradition will often argue that the Deuteronomy 14 list is older, and that much of the information from D or the Deuteronomist has been reflected in P or the younger Priestly materials.¹ Those who adhere to Mosaic origin of the Torah—which includes the majority of evangelical Christian examiners and today’s Messianic people—would instead have to consider how the Leviticus 11 instructions were given by Moses to Ancient Israel in the wilderness, and then the later Deuteronomy 14 instructions, amended a little, would represent the setting of Ancient Israel getting ready to enter into Canaan.

While reflecting some opinions of the critical tradition, Baruch A. Levine has nonetheless offered an appropriate comparison and contrast of the two major lists of dietary instructions in the Torah in the following chart:

¹ For an appropriate summary, consult the entries for the Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy in the workbook *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*.

The Dietary Laws: Two Collections²	
Deuteronomy 14	Leviticus II
<p>1 <i>Permitted land animals</i> A list of ten animals, domesticated and hunted.</p> <p>Criteria: Fully cleft hoofs and chew their cud.</p> <p><i>Prohibited land animals</i> The camel, hare, daman, and swine (vs. 3-8).</p>	<p>1 The same two criteria, and the same list of prohibited land animals (vs. 3-8).</p>
<p>2 <i>Water creatures</i> Criteria: Both fins and scales (vs. 9-10).</p>	<p>2 The same two criteria, stated both positively and negatively (vs. 9-12).</p>
<p>3 <i>Birds</i> A list of prohibited birds. No general criteria stated (vs. 11-18).</p>	<p>3 Essentially the same list of prohibited birds. No general criteria stated (vs. 13-19).</p>
<p>4 <i>Winged, swarming creatures</i> A general statement prohibiting all creatures of this type (vs. 19-20).</p>	<p>4 The same general statement. However, four types of permitted locusts are listed.</p> <p>Criterion: Jointed legs (vs. 20-23).</p>
<p>5 <i>Prohibited</i> Eating the dead body of any animal (v. 21).</p>	<p>5 This prohibition is not explicitly stated, but it may be inferred from other provisions of the law.</p>
<p>6 <i>Prohibited</i> Seething a kid in its mother's milk (v. 21).</p>	<p>6 No such prohibition is stated.</p>
<p>7 Not specifically stated.</p>	<p>7 <i>Prohibited</i> Consumption or tactile contact with the dead bodies of land and amphibious creatures. Eight creatures are listed, including several types of lizards (vs. 29-31).</p>
<p>8 Not specifically stated.</p>	<p>8 <i>Prohibited</i> (a) All creatures that walk on their bellies; (b) all four-legged creatures that walk on paws; (c) all many-legged creatures (vs. 41-43).</p>

While Leviticus ch. 11 will issue various instructions regarding clean and unclean meats, what is permitted to be eaten, and how the Ancient Israelites were to cleanse themselves had they come into contact with any of these, in various degrees—it has to be

² Baruch A. Levine, *JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), pp 64-65.

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steadfastly recognized how **there is no capital punishment** associated, at all, with either the consumption of unclean meat, or touching the carcass of an unclean animal.

The term *tamei* (טָמֵא) or “unclean” appears in some notable places throughout this instruction (vs. 4, 5, 6, 7), and can relate to being “**unclean**,” specifically in terms of “**ceremonially unclean: animals**” (*HALOT*).³ While there are many dimensions of uncleanness, some of which do relate to sin in the Scriptures, that is not what is emphasized either here in Leviticus ch. 11, or in much of the surrounding chapters of Leviticus 11-16. In much of this section, “unclean” is widely used as a synonym for “unholy.” *TWOT* details,

“Certain elements of impurity were associated with contagious disease and death. The laws of uncleanness gave Israel a very effective quarantine for public health. Some matters of impurity were aesthetically repulsive. Other elements may originally have been associated with idolatry.

“Whatever theories are adduced to explain the laws of uncleanness, the Scriptures themselves emphatically associate them with the holiness of God. The so-called Law of Purity (Lev 11-16) was placed side by side with the Law of Holiness (Lev 17-26). In the passages which list unclean foods, the holiness of Yahweh is emphasized as the reason for avoiding unclean foods.”⁴

Another term of note, *sheqetz* (שֶׁקֶץ), “detestation, detestable thing” (*BDB*),⁵ appears multiple places (vs. 10, 11, 12), and is invariably rendered as “abhorrent” (*NASU*) or “abomination” (*RSV*). (This does differ slightly, given how Deuteronomy 14:3 will use *toei'vah*, תוֹעֵבָה). *TWOT* directs us,

Detestable thing. In contrast to *shiqquš* [שִׁקְּוֹשׁ], *sheqes* [שֶׁקֶץ] is not necessarily related to idolatry, but rather is mostly used in reference to unclean and forbidden foods. Thus in Lev 11:10-12, it refers to forbidden sea creatures generally characterized as having no fins or scales. In Lev 11:13 it refers to various unclean birds, in Lev 11:20, 23 to winged insects (cf. *sheres*, and in Lev 11:41-42 to animals crawling on their belly (*sheres*)).

Relegating certain animals to the category of “unclean” and “abominable” may in a number of instances involve considerations of health. Yet the main consideration here must be that, whatever the reason, or however much or little it was understandable to the Israelites, certain foods were forbidden and regarded as detested. This was to be accepted on the simple basis of trust in, and obedience to, God.⁶

There have been, to be sure, multiple explanations issued by examiners for the reasoning of the dietary instructions of Leviticus 11, which are worthy of exploration (discussed further). Yet the main, overriding reason, as the text communicates, will be holiness for God’s people. While modern people may not completely understand it, the Lord does take the time to communicate instructions where He wants the diet of His own, to be something sanctified unto Him.

³ *HALOT*, 1:376.

⁴ Edwin Yamauchi, “*šāmē*,” in *TWOT*, 1:349.

⁵ *BDB*, 1054.

⁶ Hermann J. Austel, “*sheqes*,” in *TWOT*, 2:955.

11:1-2a The Leviticus 11 dietary instructions open with the word, “Speak to the sons of Israel.” How are readers to view *b’nei Yisrael* (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), “people of Israel” (RSV/NRSV/ESV), “Children of Israel” (ATS), or “Israelites” (NIV, NJPS, HCSB)? This is obviously instruction intended for the wide community of Israel. Jewish examination of Leviticus 11 widely views the kosher dietary laws as only applying to ethnic Israelites.⁷

Those of the (legalistic) One Law/One Torah sub-movement—which places significant importance upon Torah passages such as Exodus 12:48-49; Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 9:14; 15:15-16, 29-30—would especially argue here that not only the native, but also the sojourner or *ger* (גֵּר) in Ancient Israel, would have been expected to follow such instructions.⁸ Contrary to this, in his 2012 book *Biblically Kosher*, Aaron Eby asserts, “We...find no indication in the texts of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 that a *ger* would be required to observe the laws that prohibit eating certain species.”⁹ However, much of whether the *ger* was expected to observe the dietary laws here is contingent on how limited or how broad *b’nei Yisrael* is intended, which is obviously not limited to only native, male Israelites. The presence of further instructions like Leviticus 17:13, which speak of a “native Israelite or foreigner living among you [who] goes hunting and kills an animal or bird that is approved for eating” (NLT), would apparently limit the *ger* or sojourner to the approved animals in Leviticus 11. It is safe to deduce that the *ger* or sojourner in Ancient Israel was, in fact, to eat only from the clean animals.

11:2b-8 The first category of creatures to be eaten, and not eaten, are the land animals (v. 2b). The main qualification for the land animals to be eaten is, “any animal that has true hoofs, with clefts through the hoofs, and that chews the cud—such you may eat” (v. 3, NJPS). The main land animals to be regarded as clean would have included sheep, goats, and cattle, which would have been largely domesticated, and then beyond this various types of wild game such as deer (cf. Deuteronomy 14:4-5).¹⁰ These are animals which have “split hooves, bringing up the cud” (Alter), such dual qualifications possibly being rooted not only in some degree of physical cleanliness but also digestive quality. It is further specified, though, that there are a variety of animals regarded as unclean, notably among those which would have had only *one* of these *two* qualifications:

“But this is what you shall not eat from among those that bring up their cud or that have split hooves: the camel, for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split—it is unclean to you; and the hyrax [or, rock badger, RSV/NASB/NRSV/ESV], for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split—it is unclean to you; and the hare [or, rabbit], for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split—it is unclean to you” (vs. 4-6, ATS).

Of all the land animals that are unclean, none has received as much vilification in Biblical history, or throughout Jewish history, as the pig or the swine (Heb. *chazir*, חֲזִיר). In the text of v. 7, what is mainly communicated is, “the pig, for its hoof is split and its

⁷ Baruch J. Schwartz, “Leviticus,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, 229.

⁸ For a further examination of this and related issues, consult the relevant sections of the *Messianic Torah Helper*.

⁹ Aaron Eby, *Biblically Kosher: A Messianic Jewish Perspective on Kashrut* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2012), 147.

¹⁰ “These are the animals which you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope and the mountain sheep” (Deuteronomy 14:4-5).

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hoof is completely separated, but it does not chew its cud—it is unclean to you” (ATS). Why is the pig prohibited from eating? While in later Jewish history, aversion to pork is intensified by the fallout of the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E., and Jews being forced to eat pork on threat of death (1 Maccabees 1:12-63), there are likely some other reasons in view for the prohibition on Ancient Israel. J.H. Hertz interjects, “The primary abhorrence was caused, in all probability, by [the pig’s] loathsome appearance and mode of living,”¹¹ which would involve the low hygiene of the pig and its tendency to eat just about anything set before it. Various religious reasons for God wanting Ancient Israel not to associate itself with eating pork are likely involved with pork being a part of Ancient Canaanite religious rituals (cf. Isaiah 65:4; 66:3, 17),¹² or an association with the worship of the dead.¹³ Egyptian coffin texts do record how pigs were sacrificed to Horus:

“Re then said ‘Look at that black pig.’ Then Horus looked at that black pig. Then Horus cried out over the condition of the throbbing (‘raging’) eye, saying: ‘Behold, my eye feels as at that first wound which Seth inflicted against my eye.’

“Then Horus lost consciousness (‘swallowed his heart’) before him. Re then said: ‘Place him on his bed until he is well.’ It was the case that Seth made transformations against him as that black pig. Then he cast a wound into his eye. Re then said: ‘Abominate the pig for Horus.’ ‘Would that he be well,’ SO SAID THE GODS. THAT IS HOW THE ABOMINATION OF THE PIG CAME TO BE FOR HORUS BY THE GODS AND THEIR FOLLOWERS.

“NOW when Horus was in his childhood, his sacrificial animal came to be a pig though his eye had not yet suffered. As for Imsety, Hapy, Duamutef, and Qebehsenuf, their father is Horus the elder and their mother is Isis. It was the case that Horus said to Re: ‘Give to me two in Pe and two in Hierakonpolis from this corpus of brethren to be with me in eternal assignment so that the earth might flourish and disturbance be extinguished in this my name of Horus upon his papyrus column.’”¹⁴

The Greek historian Herodotus does record how the pig was sacrificed to Horus in Egypt:

“Pigs are considered unclean. If anyone touches a pig accidentally in passing, he will at once plunge into the river, clothes and all, to wash himself; and swineherds, though of pure Egyptian blood, are the only people in the country who never enter a temple, nor is there any intermarriage between them and the rest of the community, swineherds marrying their daughters and taking their wives only from amongst themselves.

“The only deities to whom the Egyptians consider it proper to sacrifice pigs are Dionysus and the Moon. To both of these they offer pigs at the same time, at the same full moon, and afterwards eat the flesh. To explain the reason why they abhor the notion of sacrificing swine at any festival except this one, there is a legend current amongst them, which I know but think it seemly not to mention it. The method of sacrificing a pig to the Moon is to slaughter the animal, put together the tip of the tail, the spleen, and the

¹¹ Hertz, 450.

¹² Gordon J. Wenham, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 167.

¹³ John E. Hartley, *Word Biblical Commentary: Leviticus*, Vol 4 (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 158.

¹⁴ Robert K. Ritner, trans., “Coffin Text 157 (1.1)—‘Cultic Abomination of the Pig,’” in William W. Hallo, ed. et. al., *The Context of Scripture, Volume I: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp 30-31.

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caul, cover them with all the fat found in the belly, and burn them; the rest of the meat is eaten on the same day as the sacrifice is offered—the day of the full moon; on no other day would they consent to taste it. People of slender means make models of pigs out of dough, which they bake and offer in sacrifice instead of real ones” (*Histories* 2.46-48).¹⁵

Of the unclean animals it is asserted, “From their flesh you are not to eat, their carcasses you are not to touch, they are *tamei* for you [*tamei hu l'khem*, טָמֵא הוּא לְכֶם]!” (v. 8 , Fox).¹⁶ While unclean for consumption, the prohibited land animals are not stated to carry uncleanness to people who touch them while they are living.

11:9-12 The second category of creatures to be eaten, and not eaten, involves those “in the water of the seas and the streams” (v. 9b, NIV). The succinct requirement for marine life that may be eaten is: “everything that has fins and scales” (v. 9a, ATS). Marine creatures which do not have fins and scales, may not be eaten (v. 10), and as it is asserted, “you shall not eat of their flesh and you shall abominate their carcasses” (v. 11, NJPS; also v. 12). From these requirements regarding marine creatures that may and may not be eaten, shellfish would obviously be unclean and considered unacceptable for consumption, as would be various other fish that would not have fins and/or scales.

While there is variance among the different branches of modern Judaism, both the Orthodox¹⁷ and Conservative¹⁸ movements have more-or-less similar lists on which fish may be eaten for Twentieth and Twenty-First Century people, accounting for the wide geographical areas where Jews have spread.

11:13-19 The third category of creatures to be eaten, and not eaten, involves various birds. This instruction opens with the directive, “These shall you abominate from among the birds, they may not be eaten—they are an abomination” (v. 13a, ATS). Surveying through vs. 13b-19, one can see that the various unclean birds listed are mainly carrion eaters and birds of prey (although the bat, v. 19, is scientifically classified today as a rodent; Ger. *Fledermaus* or “flying mouse”).

It cannot go unnoticed, though, that unlike the qualifications listed for clean land animals and marine creatures, that there are no qualifications listed for what would constitute clean birds. Instead, a variety of examples of unclean birds are offered. To further add to potential confusion, some of the Hebrew names of these birds offered in the text, might involve various species that are either unknown or extinct. As is summarized by the *ArtScroll Chumash*, birds that are considered kosher and acceptable for consumption have been derived almost entirely by Jewish tradition:

“Unlike the kosher animals and fish, which are identified not by name but by characteristics so that their identities are clear, the identities of the permissible birds are very cloudy. The Torah names the twenty non-kosher species, which means that all others are kosher. However, as a result of the various exiles and dispersions, the language of the Torah fell into relative disuse, with the result that the exact identities of

¹⁵ Herodotus: *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (London: Penguin Books, 1954), pp 148-149.

¹⁶ Everett Fox, trans., *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 559.

¹⁷ Yacov Lipschutz, *Kashruth: A comprehensive background and reference guide to the principles of Kashruth* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd, 1989), pp 139-160.

¹⁸ Samuel H. Dresner, *The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning for Our Time* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly of America, 1982), pp 82-93.

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the non-kosher birds became doubtful. Therefore, the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh Deah* 82:2) rules that it is forbidden to eat any species of bird unless there is a well-established tradition that it is kosher. Since the Halachah rules that we do not know the accurate translations of the fowl in the Torah's list, we follow the lead of *R'Hirsch* in transliterating rather than conjecturing translations."¹⁹

The Orthodox Jewish ArtScroll Tanach is unique among English versions, as it does transliterate (in an Ashkenazic style) the names of the unclean birds listed in vs. 13b-19:

"the neshet, the peres, the ozniyah; the daah and the ayah according to its kind; every orev according to its kind; the has hayaanah, the tachnios, the shachaf, and the netz according to its kind; the kos, the shalach, and the yanshuf; the tinschemes, the kaas, and the racham; the chasidah, the anafah according to its kind, the duchifas, and the atalef" (vs. 13b-19, ATS).

The NJPS Tanakh (1985/1999) includes English renderings consistent with what would be widely seen in various Christian versions (i.e., RSV/NRSV/ESV, NASU, NIV, etc.):

"the eagle, the vulture, and the black vulture; the kite, falcons of every variety; all varieties of raven; the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull; hawks of every variety; the little owl, the cormorant, and the great owl; the white owl, the pelican, and the bustard; the stork; herons of every variety; the hoopoe, and the bat" (vs. 13b-19, NJPS).

What constitutes clean birds for consumption has been determined entirely by Jewish tradition. One of the main rules for determining whether a bird is kosher or not, as witnessed in the Mishnah, is that "Any fowl which seizes is unclean. Any [fowl] which has an extra talon [the hallux] and a claw, and the skin of the stomach of which [can] be stripped off is clean" (m.*Chullin* 3:6).²⁰ The major birds which are considered kosher today mainly include chicken, turkey, goose, and duck, among others. Chicken and turkey would have had to especially be decided as "kosher" by later Jewish religious authorities, as chicken was not native to the Near East during the time of Moses, and turkey for certain was a New World bird introduced into Europe from North America.

The identity of at least one of the unclean birds, *ya'anah* (יֵאָנָה; v. 16), widely identified in various versions as being an "ostrich" (RSV/NRSV/ESV, NASU, HCSB, NJPS, CJB, et. al.), has been disputed in recent scholarship. Among lexicons, *CHALOT* indicates that *ya'anah* is "trad.: **ostrich**, *Struthio camelus*, but more prob. a kind of owl."²¹ Richard Elliot Friedman notes in his *Commentary on the Torah* how "It has usually been identified as an ostrich. [Jacob] Milgrom has thrown that identification into doubt. I agree. Moreover, ostriches are primarily plant-eating, like the permitted birds. Therefore: the ostrich is not necessarily forbidden for food."²² Various other versions render *ha'ya'anah* (הַיֵּאָנָה) as "the horned owl" (NIV), "the eagle owl" (NLT), "the desert owl" (Fox),²³ and "the

¹⁹ Scherman, *Chumash*, 599; also consult Edwin Firmage, "Zoology (Animal Profiles/Animal Names in the Bible)," in *ABD*, 6:1119-1158.

²⁰ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 772.

²¹ *CHALOT*, 138.

²² Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah*, 349.

²³ Fox, *Five Books of Moses*, 560.

little owl” (Friedman).²⁴ While it would seem doubtful in either Orthodox or Conservative Judaism, or even in the contemporary Messianic movement, for there to be a shift toward at least considering a kosher status for the ostrich, there might actually be some in the future, with ostrich as a growing, popular alternative in the Twentieth Century to beef, who challenge old *halachah*.

11:20-23 The fourth category regarding creatures to be eaten, and not to be eaten, concerns *sheretz ha'of ha'holeikh* (שָׂרֵץ הַעוֹף הַהֹלֵךְ), a “flying swarming creature” (v. 20, LITV), “swarming things that fly” (Jerusalem Bible-Koren), or “winged swarming things” (Alter),²⁵ commonly extrapolated as “winged insects” (RSV/NRSV/ESV, NASU) or “flying insects” (NIV). English versions that will commonly employ “insects” in vs. 20-23 should not be viewed from a modern scientific standpoint, where creatures classified as “insects” technically only have three sets of legs. The list of acceptable swarming creatures, “insects” as it were, is very short:

“But these you may eat among all the winged swarming things that walk on fours: all that have, above their feet, jointed legs to leap with on the ground—of these you may eat the following: locusts of every variety; all varieties of bald locust; crickets of every variety; and all varieties of grasshopper. But all other winged swarming things that have four legs shall be an abomination for you” (vs. 21-23, NJPS).

Among the main insects/swarming creatures that would be considered clean, would have been the locusts that constituted a major part of the diet of John the Immerser/Baptist (Mark 1:6; Matthew 3:4).

11:24-28 While Leviticus 11 is often read from the perspective of it only pertaining to clean and unclean meats for eating, there is more that is communicated as it regards contact. There is specific instruction issued regarding what is to take place in terms of touching unclean animals, and what one was to do when coming into contact with the carcass of an unclean animal. As Fox renders vs. 24-28,

“Now from these you can become *tamei*—whoever touches their carcass shall be *tamei* until sunset, whoever carries (any part) of their carcass is to scrub his garments, and remain-*tamei* until sunset: every animal that divides a divided-hoof, but cleaving does not cleave it through, and its cud does not bring up; they are *tamei* for you, whoever touches them is *tamei*! And anyone that goes about on its paws, among all animals that go about on all fours, they are *tamei* for you, whoever touches their carcass is *tamei* until sunset; one who carries their carcass is to scrub one’s garments and be *tamei* until sunset, they are *tamei* for you.”²⁶

Note the complications that could occur by only reading an instruction like v. 27a: “all animals that walk on paws, among those that walk on fours, are unclean for you” (NJPS). Does this mean that by petting a dog, for example, one is automatically rendered “unclean,” and must wash before evening to be “clean” once again? The presence of the

²⁴ Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah*, 349.

²⁵ “insect-of the-flyer the-one-walking” (Kohlenberger, 1:296).

²⁶ Fox, *Five Books of Moses*, 561.

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term *neveilah* (נֶבִילָה), “carcass, corpse” (BDB),²⁷ in multiple places throughout vs. 24-28, should not go unnoticed. Petting a dog or a cat in general does not automatically make one ritually unclean; handling a dead dog or cat, among many other animals, will make one ritually unclean. The *Soncino Chumash* points out how “the Karaites...held that even if one touches a living unclean beast one became levitically impure. This opinion is excluded by the inclusion of the word *carcass* in verse 24.”²⁸ And such ritual uncleanness would have mainly prevented those in Ancient Israel access to the Tabernacle and Temple; ritual uncleanness did not always equate to moral or ethical unholiness.

11:29-31 Physical contact with the carcasses of some additional land creatures, mainly reptiles, will render one ritually unclean:

“Now these are for you (the) ones *tamei* among the swarming-creatures that swarm on the earth: the weasel, the mouse, and the great-lizard according to its kind; the gecko, the monitor and the lizard, the sand-lizard and the chameleon. These are (the) ones *tamei* for you among all the swarming-creatures; whoever touches them when they are dead shall be *tamei* until sunset” (vs. 29-31, Fox).

Similar to the instruction on birds (vs. 13b-19), the Orthodox Jewish ArtScroll Tanach lists these unclean animals with Ashkenazic Hebrew terms:

“These are the contaminated ones among the teeming animals that teem upon the earth: the choled, the achbar, and the tzav according to its variety; the anakah, the koach, and the letaah; and the chomet and the tinschemes” (vs. 29-30, ATS).

11:32-35 While tactile contact with the carcasses of unclean animals will render one ritually unclean (vs. 24-28), contact of these carcasses with various items will render these items unclean, and require them to be thoroughly washed. “[A]nything on which one of them falls when dead shall be unclean: be it any article of wood, or a cloth, or a skin, or a sack—any such article that can be put to use shall be dipped in water, and it shall remain unclean until evening; then it shall be clean” (v. 32, NJPS). The Mishnah details how it is principally internal, and not external contact, with these specified items, which would render them unclean: “Vessels of wood, and vessels of leather, and vessels of bone, and vessels of glass: when they are flat, they are clean, and when they form receptacles, they are [susceptible of becoming] unclean” (m.*Kelim* 2:1).²⁹

Pottery items become unclean when part of a dead, unclean animal touches them, requiring them to be broken: “Any earthenware utensil into whose interior one of them will fall, everything in it shall become contaminated—and you shall break it” (v. 33, ATS). This is why the Mishnah highly advises that such ceramic vessels require a lid or cover of some sort (m.*Kelim* 10:1).

Permitted food, encountering water that has been contaminated by the carcass of an unclean animal, is to be regarded as unclean and not eaten (v. 34a), along with how any liquid that has encountered the carcass of an unclean animal shall be regarded as unclean (v. 34b). Ovens that the carcass of an unclean animal has touched are to be smashed:

²⁷ BDB, 615.

²⁸ Cohen, *Soncino Chumash*, 664.

²⁹ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 895.

“Everything on which the carcass of any of them falls shall be unclean: an oven or stove shall be smashed. They are unclean and unclean they shall remain for you” (v. 35, NJPS).

In reviewing vs. 32-25, which widely details the pots, plates, cups, and ovens used for the storing, preparation, serving, and eating of food—it is easy to deduce that there are various hygienic issues detailed. God does not want His people to be in contact with the carcasses of unclean animals. There are questions regarding the application of these instructions in more modern settings today, to be sure, where value judgments will have to be made involving various pottery items, or the types of cooking ovens, people would have had in the Ancient Near East—to the type and/or quality of ceramic items and ovens people would have today in the Twenty-First Century. The common Orthodox Jewish practice of koshering an electric oven at high heat with a blowtorch, at least needs to be recognized as an innovation where any non-kosher food particles can be eliminated via intense heat, and a new oven does not need to be procured for one’s kitchen, as metal vessels may be purified in fire (cf. Numbers 31:22).

In a much more hygiene-conscious modern world, where we have dishwashers, detergents, and other heavy duty cleaning agents—today’s kosher-friendly Messianic people, should feel free to view vs. 32-35 in line with the cleaning technology of our times, and not just go off and randomly destroy sets of dishes because they may have, at one time, served pork or shellfish on them.

11:36-40 While there are a variety of objects, when encountering the carcass of an unclean animal, that are rendered unclean and/or are to be smashed (vs. 33, 35), the carcass of an unclean animal that falls into a spring or cistern does not render the spring or cistern or the water unclean, but only the person who touches the carcass (v. 36) to remove it is rendered unclean. This might be a reflection on the Ancient Near Eastern desert conditions of these instructions given to Ancient Israel, and/or on how water is a basic element of life, and ultimately cannot be rendered unclean by any dead animal. Similar to this is how the carcass of an unclean animal, if it comes into contact with dry seed for farming, does not render the seed unclean (v. 37), unless an animal falls onto seed that has just been planted and watered (v. 38), which would seemingly transfer some of its uncleanness to the germination process.

Uncleanness does not only involve touching the carcasses of unclean animals, but clean animals as well: “If an animal that you are allowed to eat dies, anyone who touches the carcass will be unclean till evening” (v. 39, NIV). Those who eat from the carcass of a clean animal that has died, for whatever reason(s), and/or those who handle the carcass, are to wash their clothes, being unclean until the evening (v. 40; cf. 17:15-16).

11:41-43 A fifth and final category of prohibited creatures is given. While a perhaps a bit ambiguous to the English Bible reader, “every swarming thing” (v. 41, NASU) or “Any crawling creature” (Keter Crown Bible), *kol-ha’sheretz* (כָּל־הַשֶּׁרֶץ) was rendered by the Septuagint as *pan herpeton* (πᾶν ἕρπετόν) or “every reptile” (LXE). While *herpeton* does have a variety of contexts within the Septuagint and Apostolic Scriptures, the further description seen in vs. 42-43 would offer more categories of reptiles than those offered by vs. 29-31 preceding:

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"Anything going about on its belly, anything going about on all fours, up to anything with many legs, among all swarming-creatures that swarm upon the earth: you are not to eat them, for they are detestable-things! Do not make yourselves detestable through any swarming-thing that swarms; you are not to make yourselves *tamei* through them, becoming *tamei* through them!" (Fox).³⁰

11:44-47 While there have been many reasons proposed throughout religious history, by both Jewish and Christian examiners alike, to substantiate the logic of the kosher dietary laws—holiness unto God and Israel being separate from the world, are the actual reasons stated in the text of Leviticus ch. 11:

"For I am HASHEM your God—you are to sanctify yourselves and you shall become holy, for I am holy; and you shall not contaminate yourselves through any teeming thing that creeps on the earth. For I am HASHEM Who elevates you from the land of Egypt to be a God unto you; you shall be holy, for I am holy. This is the law of the animal, the bird, every living creature that swarms in the water, and for every creature that teems on the ground; to distinguish between the contaminated and the pure, and between the creature that may be eaten and the creature that may not be eaten" (vs. 44-47, ATS).

Leviticus 11:44-47 is not the only reference seen in the Book of Leviticus to God's holiness and/or the holiness of His people (19:2; 20:26; 21:8). But, Leviticus 11:44-47 and its emphasis on what is and what is not to be eaten, does stand out, to a degree, as it involves not just ethical or moral or even sexual purity, but a purity which is to encompass the entire being of a person in something as mundane as diet.³¹ In v. 45, God asserts, *v'he'yitem qadoshim ki qadosh ani* (וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי), "and you shall be holy, for I am holy." Regarding the term *qadosh* (קָדוֹשׁ) or "holy," we see that the Israelites "were to be separate from all that was unholy (Lev 11:44-45; Deut 14:21). Stipulations were imposed on them that they might not engage in practices common to other peoples (Lev 19:2; Lev 20:7; Num 15:40). Their call to holiness was based on the fact that they had become God's possession by virtue of his separating them from the nations (Lev 20:26; Deut 7:6; Deut 14:2; Deut 26:19)" (*TWOT*).³² While there are other useful proposals offered as reasons behind the kosher dietary laws, **holiness** is the main, overriding reason as stated by the text. The process of separating between animals that are clean or unclean is to undeniably impose upon the conscience the practice of people learning to separate between other objects or activities that are clean or unclean.

While Christian theology has traditionally tended to emphasize internal, spiritual purity, Leviticus 11:44-45 is notably quoted in 1 Peter 1:14-16, to direct an audience of First Century Jewish and non-Jewish Believers to be part of a holy and separated people unto God. One can certainly wonder *how many components* of holiness the Apostle Peter wanted these Messiah followers to practice in their lives:

³⁰ Fox, *Five Books of Moses*, 564.

³¹ Hertz, 453 notes how the traditional Jewish washing of the hands before meals is derived from the principle of sanctifying oneself.

³² Thomas E. McComiskey, "qādôsh," in *TWOT*, 2:788.

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“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY’ [Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7]” (1 Peter 1:14-16).

ch 11 application While the specific reason given by God for the kosher dietary laws, in Leviticus 11:44-45, is **holiness**, there have certainly been various reasons proposed *beyond that of holiness* for the dietary laws.³³ A rather general, albeit liberal resource, like the *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, summarizes some of the main reasons proposed by examiners:

“Scholars have suggested medical reasons (unclean animals are disease carriers), religious interests (animals used in pagan culture and worship are taboo), allegorical symbolism (e.g., to teach someone to chew and ruminate on the Law), congruence with the dominant characteristics of species in different arenas (e.g., most fish have both fins and scales), and parallels to the cult (only certain animals could be offered to God in sacrifice; the human diet should parallel the divine diet). None of these explanations are totally satisfactory. The text does not reflect the indispensable need for humans to classify and organize their existence.”³⁴

Generally speaking, many interpreters of Leviticus ch. 11 cannot agree on why God issued the kosher dietary laws. Among the different proposals, though, **health and hygiene** has been one of the most significant made for additional reasons for the kosher dietary laws, and this is with some legitimate basis. Just surveying the material in Leviticus ch. 11, and its emphasis on washing when the carcass of an unclean animal touches a certain object (v. 32), breaking pottery (v. 33), not eating permitted food that comes into contact with the carcass of an unclean animal (v. 34), and watered seed that has come into contact with the carcass of an unclean animal becoming unclean (v. 38)—certainly bears some kind of hygienic purpose. Among Leviticus commentators, R. Laird Harris is one who specifically thinks,

“[T]he laws protected Israel’s diet. Some of the food forbidden was good some of the time, but not unless it was properly prepared. Pigs spread trichinosis; rabbits spread tularemia...Cows, goats, and sheep are safe to eat under all ordinary circumstances and are economical to raise. The horse and camel were too uneconomical to use for meat.”³⁵

³³ Derek Tidball, *The Message of Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), pp 150-154 does not fully decide which of the many reasons offered by contemporary scholars is the most explanatory.

³⁴ John H. Hayes, “Leviticus,” in Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 161; cf. Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah*, pp 346-348 who is especially negative toward any of the explanations.

³⁵ R. Laird Harris, “Leviticus,” in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:569.

Ibid., 2:572 where he further thinks, regarding the instruction on clean and unclean fish (Leviticus 11:9-12), “Fish that have fins and scales are free swimming and, in general, are free of parasites. Scaleless fish are more likely carriers of parasites since they are scavengers and mud-bottom dwellers. Clams in current times have carried hepatitis—though this may be due to modern pollution problems. Crabs are scavengers, and some of their meat is said not to be good. Snail fever from infested waters has been a curse in Egypt. The free-swimming fish were always good.”

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It is fair to conclude that given some of the surrounding issues in Leviticus (listed below), where uncleanness is associated with various sanitary conditions or settings, that adherence to dietary instructions in ch. 11 here would have some component of health and hygiene involved.³⁶ At the same time, though, as is witnessed in Leviticus 11:44-47, what is stressed by the text of these instructions is holiness. Walter C. Kaiser, recognizing how people will try to propose additional reasons behind the dietary instructions of Leviticus ch. 11, fairly concludes, "It may well be that in addition to any hygienic *results*, which may have been attached as secondary reasons for these distinctive laws, their main purpose was to forever mark Israel off from all the other nations. The purpose, then, was to demonstrate Israel's *separateness*."³⁷ Anything regarding health or hygiene, then, is secondary to the holiness aspect of the dietary laws. This would be no different than how the forbidden sexual unions of Leviticus ch. 18 were primarily not issued to prevent the spread of various sexually transmitted diseases, but instead were primarily issued to forbid the breach of proper marriage relationships and/or keep Ancient Israel away from Ancient Canaanite fertility rituals/temple prostitution.

The only reason any group of examiners of Leviticus ch. 11 can agree upon, for the reason God issued these clean and unclean instructions, is that which is stated explicitly in Leviticus 11:44-45. Interestingly enough, the *Letter of Aristeas*, a Hellenistic Jewish work from the Second Century B.C.E., takes the themes of separateness from the kosher dietary laws, and allegorizes the separation of clean and unclean animals in moralistic ways:

"Everything pertaining to conduct permitted us toward these creatures and toward beasts has been set out symbolically. Thus the cloven hoof, that is the separation of the claws of the hoof, is a sign of setting apart each of our actions for good, because the strength of the whole body with its actions rests upon its legs. The symbolism conveyed by these things compels us to make a distinction in the performance of all our acts, with righteousness as our aim. This moreover explains why we are distinct from all other men. The majority of other men defile themselves in their relationships, thereby committing a serious offense, and lands and whole cities take pride in it: they not only procure the males, they also defile mothers and daughters. We are quite separated from these practices" (*Letter of Aristeas* 151-152).³⁸

A Jewish examiner like Jacob Milgrom is especially critical toward those who would propose any sort of health or hygienic reason for the kosher dietary laws. But, he is correct in acknowledging that there are certainly some religious reasons behind the prohibition of eating certain meats as well. He states, "There is no evidence...of a broad nutritional or health-related basis for the specific dietary classifications of the Torah. It is more reasonable to assume a socioreligious basis for them."³⁹ If pigs, for example, were

³⁶ See especially R.K. Harrison, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), pp 124-128.

³⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, "The Book of Leviticus," in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 1:1076.

³⁸ R.J.H. Shutt, "Letter of Aristeas," trans., in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), pp 22-23.

³⁹ Jacob Milgrom, *JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 248.

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used in Ancient Canaanite religious rituals to honor the dead, then it would seem logical that God would not want Ancient Israel to even think about eating pork.

Even with holiness being the main reason given for the dietary instructions, and with there being some examiners of Leviticus ch. 11 dismissing any sort of health or hygienic reasons behind the clean and unclean distinctions, these reasons for kosher cannot be totally dismissed in view of the surrounding issues in Leviticus. Roy G. Gane, recognizing that the stated reason in Leviticus ch. 11 for the dietary instructions is holiness, does direct the attention of readers to the surrounding issues in Leviticus, and some other places in the Torah, which are indeed concerned about physical cleanliness. He fairly concludes that God was concerned with the *total well-being* of His people, which had both spiritual and physical components to it:

...If there is a category of "health laws" in the Pentateuch, it is a modern category based on our understanding of implications for health rather than on motivations for observance of specific laws explicitly supplied by the biblical text. Here is a summary of specific divine commands that can be understood to have health implications and the *stated* reasons for observing them.

Reference(s)	Law	Reason
Lev. 3:16-17; 7:23-25	no eating suet/fat	belongs to God
Lev. 3:17; 7:26-27; 17:10-14	no eating meat with blood	respect for life
Lev. 7:15-18	no eating sacrificial meat that is too old	prevent desecration
Lev. 11; Deut. 14:3-21	no eating meat that defiles	ritual purity, holiness
Lev. 12; 15	remedy impure genital fluxes	ritual purity
Lev. 13-14	remedy scaly-skin disease	ritual purity
Lev. 18:19; 20:18	no sex during menstruation	prevent exposing source of blood
Num. 5:2-3	impure persons excluded from camp	ritual purity
Num. 19	remedy corpse contamination	ritual purity
Deut. 23:12-14	dispose of human excrement	prevent indecency

If God commanded the Israelites to do something for the sake of their health, it would make sense for us to observe that law for the same reason because our bodies function the same as theirs. However, the reasons given to the ancient Israelites are not health reasons. Nevertheless, in Deuteronomy 7:11-15 the Lord expresses concern for the health of the Israelites. Here total well-being results from his blessing within the context of the divine-human covenant when his people obey *all* his laws (cf. Lev. 18:5; Deut. 30:15-20; contrast 28:27, 35, 60-61). So physical health is part of a larger covenant package. Everything God's people do impacts their health one way or another. In this extended sense, all of God's commands are health laws.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Roy Gane, *NIV Application Commentary: Leviticus, Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), pp 209-210.

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Christian examiners of Leviticus ch. 11, and the surrounding issues of clean and unclean, will often argue that these instructions were only important for a pre-resurrection era Ancient Israel or Second Temple Jewish people to keep them distinct and separate from the pagans.⁴¹ Now with the arrival of the Messiah, it is widely asserted that these instructions should be regarded as abolished, with various passages in the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament commonly appealed to (i.e., Mark 7:19; Romans 14:14; Colossians 2:16-23; Hebrews 9:1-14; 10:1-18).⁴² It is often believed that given Yeshua's significant emphasis on the internal holiness of people (Matthew 15:17-20; 23:25-28), that external holiness does not matter as much anymore. Yet, while no one should ever doubt the fact that the internal, heart attitudes and mental thoughts of God's people *do matter much more* than what they put into their mouths—that there are perhaps some things lost by those who do not consider the intended value of the kosher dietary laws. Hertz, a Jewish commentator, is one who directs our attention,

"Among the laws of purity, first place is given to the subject of food, because the daily diet intimately affects man's whole being...Outward consecration was symbolically to express an inner sanctity."⁴³

The Orthodox Jewish *ArtScroll Chumash* also makes some intriguing observations on the importance of the kosher dietary laws:

"By observing these laws the Jew can pull himself up the ladder of holiness; by ignoring them, he not only contaminates himself, he gradually builds a barrier that blocks out his comprehension of holiness. Just as someone who is constantly exposed to loud music and harsh noise, slowly and imperceptibly, but surely, suffers a loss of his ability to hear fine sounds and detect subtle modulations, so too, the Torah informs us, a Jew's consumption of non-kosher food deadens his spiritual capacities and denies him the full opportunity to become holy."⁴⁴

A few Christian commentators, who in various degrees will conclude that the kosher dietary laws were a thing of the past, will still try to search for some significant thrust to communicate, in order that these instructions should not be at a total loss for Bible readers. Generally speaking, some emphasis on human wholeness with God being concerned for the well-being of the entire person, is something that will be emphasized. R.K. Harrison is one who describes,

"The scriptural correlation between physical and spiritual health is not always either noticed or followed by the Christian. To do God's work best, and to be an example of Christ's saving and healing power, the believer has to maximize the potential of body and spirit, and this requires careful attention to both aspects of the human personality."⁴⁵

Derek Tidball, perhaps also evaluating some of the chapters surrounding Leviticus 11, also usefully concludes,

"Holiness encompassed the whole of life. It impacted what went on in the kitchen, the maternity room, the sickroom and the bedroom as much as what went on in the sanctuary. A God whose presence was felt in the kitchen was not a God you could

⁴¹ Cf. Wenham, *Leviticus*, pp 183-185.

⁴² Gane, pp 214-215, being a Seventh-Day Adventist interpreter, is an exception to this.

⁴³ Hertz, 448.

⁴⁴ Scherman, *Chumash*, 597.

⁴⁵ Harrison, *Leviticus*, 131.

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marginalize, keep confined to a compartment of life marked 'spiritual', or serve only at special times designated for worship. He was a God who reigned over the totality of life and was to be served at all times and in all places."⁴⁶

The thrust of Leviticus 11:44 is, "For I am the LORD your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy" (NRSV). In Leviticus ch. 11, the Lord is concerned with the animals to be regarded as clean and unclean, acceptable for eating and unacceptable for eating. The Lord is actually concerned with the process of eating being something consecrated unto Him, where His people learn how to separate out between what is proper and improper.

Today in much of Judaism, there are surely extensive regulations and customs associated with the dietary laws that are traditional. Many of them are derived from the Torah and Tanach, others by necessary circumstance given Jewish history and dispersion, and then others by man-made innovation and/or burden. Many of the minute details of the Jewish traditions associated with *kashrut* can get the attention of many people, including various Messianic Jews who were raised with these traditions, off of the principal aims of holiness and consecration. Yet today in much of Christianity physical holiness and consecration of one's eating or diet, are not often considered too important. However, Christianity cannot at all be faulted for emphasizing one's inward heart attitude and motives as being the most important to Messiah followers.

Today's Messianic community finds itself sitting between the great religions of Judaism and Christianity, and is widely friendly to the kosher dietary laws having validity and relevance in the post-resurrection era. We have to make sure that in our obedience to these instructions that we do not forget their principal aim of holiness, that we are able to balance outward and inward sanctification, and that we are able to have a fully Biblical view of the kosher issue that does not ignore why Judaism has traditionally interpreted various instructions the way that it has, and why Christianity has traditionally relegated the dietary laws to the pre-resurrection era. As the Messiah's followers, in our quest to be kosher in our eating routines, we need to expel the even greater effort to be kosher in how we think, speak, and act toward our fellow human beings.

⁴⁶ Tidball, *Leviticus*, 142.