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“Leviticus 11”

Dr. Michael S. Heiser

With

**Residential Layman
Trey Stricklin**

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Leviticus 11

This chapter of Leviticus describes the categories of clean and unclean animals allowed or disallowed for food. The Israelite “food laws” have long puzzled scholars. This episode overviews the various approaches to discovering a coherent rationale for these laws.

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 74, Leviticus 11. I'm your layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you doing this week?

MSH: Very good. Well, we get to do clean and unclean animals and foods today.

TS: Yeah I've got some questions about this one so I'll be anxious to hear what you have to say.

MSH: Yeah, this is something that doesn't have any neat explanation. I'm going to basically go through sort of the explanations you'll run into in the academic literature and how they're argued and some of the problems associated with them. My own sort of response to this is that hey, if one explanation doesn't work for everything, maybe the right thing to do would just be to just say well, maybe it's a little bit of a couple of these things that are behind this. Is there some rule in Bible interpretation for Leviticus 11 that says we have to have one unifying theory? Why can't the rules emerge out of a couple of ideas? So that's the way I'm going to approach the topic. Leviticus 11, I am not going to read through all of this about the clean and the unclean and the cloven hooves and the bald locusts.

It sort of is what it is. I'm not going to read through the whole thing but I'll read through some parts here to get us started. But just generally speaking here, the food rules, the clean and unclean animal rules here in Leviticus 11 and in another passages, like Deuteronomy 14 you get a restatement of some of this, they're concerned with food derived typically from animals, that is flesh or meat, and it's not really concerned with other food that isn't meat, like let's just take leaven. Okay so the whole issue of leaven is not addressed in Leviticus 11, its flesh and meat, the consummation of different animals. It's also not concerned with food made unclean by contact with something else unclean. So the focus here in this chapter are animals that are clean or unclean, fit for consumption or allowed for consumption or not. Leviticus 11 is the most thorough treatment of this in the Old Testament. As I mentioned before, you get a little bit of this in Deuteronomy 14. It's more concise there, not as lengthy and detailed as this one. So we may mention Deuteronomy a little bit but we're going to try to focus here on Leviticus 11. So let's just read a few lines here and there so people will get the feel for it. Leviticus 11 opens this way.

And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them, ²“Speak to the people of Israel, saying, These are the living things that you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth. ³Whatever parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat. ⁴Nevertheless, among those that chew the cud or part the hoof, you shall not eat these: The camel, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. ⁵And the rock badger, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. ⁶And the hare, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. ⁷And the pig, because it parts the hoof and is cloven-footed but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. ⁸You shall not eat any of their flesh, and you shall not touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you.

MSH: Now, you'll notice in that section, its first eight verses, that the pig isn't viewed any more negatively than the other ones. So this whole thing with pork has somehow become more

pronounced in the popular conception of Jews and Judaism. I don't really know why. There might be a clue in terms of antiquity why this was the case. We'll get to that a little bit later. But even that is going to have problems as we'll see. But the news flash here is to start with is that pork is not specifically singled out as more abominable than these other things that are forbidden. The pigs are right in there with the list of these animals. Both conditions have to be met, cloven footed and chew the cud, so there's no special abhorrence there in that section. So then goes on,

⁹ "These you may eat, of all that are in the waters. Everything in the waters that has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat.

¹⁰ But anything in the seas or the rivers that does not have fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and of the living creatures that are in the waters, is detestable to you.

MSH: So this is how the whole chapter goes through. I think most people who have attempted to read Leviticus have run into this or any culturally, just familiarity with Judaism, either through friends or TV or discussions you may have had, you run into this on a more popular level. So this is the chapter though that all of this stuff sort emerges from. By way of general observation, let's just make a few observations here. This chapter is addressed to all Israelites and the laws in here are applicable at all times. In other words, you're not going to have an exception made of an exception at some point under some condition. And when it comes to land animals you have those that may be eaten are distinguished by three criteria. They have hooves. The hooves are cloven in two, and they chew the cud. So this broadly actually describes sort of a zoological suborder.

These are what biologists and zoologists would call the ruminants which includes among others all the animals bred for food by Israelites, cattle, sheep, goats. They're all ruminants. Now Deuteronomy 14:5 lists these domesticated ruminants along with some wild species that are also ruminants and also acceptable, deer and the gazelle. But other large animals that don't meet these criteria are forbidden. And specifically, you have certain animals, including the pig but not exclusive to the pig, which are said to either chew the cud or have cloven hooves but not both. So you need all the conditions. Now, one note here. The expression chew the cud implies, this is a good example that Scripture's not doing science, the "science" and it is based upon the language of experience, phenomenological language. The expression to chew the cud implies that these animals have multiple stomachs which the ruminants would but that's actually inaccurate when it comes to the rock badger and the hare or the rabbit which are forbidden. They're not true ruminants.

So this would be a scientifically incorrect statement if the point was science. If the point was actually to observe the ruminant class and determine that class by multiple stomachs because that's technically what chewing the cud has to have. But this is not a scientific statement. It's based upon the appearance and in this case with the rock badger and the hare, they give the appearance of chewing their food for a long time like a ruminant would, but they actually don't. But they're still unclean anyway, even though they're classified like ruminants are, there still unclean because they lack the cloven hoof. But again, it's just another example of nonscientific, scientifically imprecise language that, in my mind, that's fine because we let Scripture be what it is. We let the Bible be what it is. This sort of description is very clearly based

on visual observation and not something more scientific. When it gets to creatures of the water, those that are permitted have fins and scales. Now that covers most but not all fish and it excludes mollusks and crustaceans, in other words, shellfish. So those would be unacceptable. When it comes to creatures of the air, birds or larger flying creatures, like bats would be included here, and flying insects, they're treated separately. There's no criteria actually given for birds, which ones are clean and unclean.

There's only a list of the ones that you shouldn't eat. And typically, the ones that are eliminated are carrion eaters, in other words, they eat dead flesh. So there's a little bit of imprecision here broadly because there's no criterion. Some of the terminology is used for the birds that are forbidden scholars aren't quite sure which specific species today, in today's parlance, would be in view. So there's a little bit of ambiguity but generally speaking, they're sort of eliminated because they tend to eat dead flesh. That makes them off-limits. All birds not in this list, in other words, when you look at Leviticus 11 and you read the list of forbidden birds, even though you don't have criteria for why they're forbidden other than it seems like they're carrion eaters. When you look at that list, if you're looking for a birds that isn't in the list, most scholars as would say that you can presume that that bird was acceptable to eat., in other words, they take the list as being, I don't want to say sacrosanct.

That's the wrong word but they take the list as definitive as to what you couldn't eat. Now all flying insects, interestingly enough, are prohibited in Deuteronomy. Leviticus though uses a criterion though. Leviticus uses the criterion of the possession of hindlegs for hopping to permit four kinds of Locust, which we in our scientific biology can't quite identify based on the Hebrew terminology, in other words, specifically which ones are in view here. But Leviticus and Deuteronomy have a bit of a difference here. Leviticus is more precise in its language, allowing for certain insects that can fly to be eaten and specifically, they have to have hindlegs for hopping. That puts the Locust in that category. Then you have swarming things of the ground in the way the ESV renders this language. Small animals, this would be that run or crawl, close to the ground, things like rodents or lizards, and insects that aren't in the flying variety, that kind of thing, those are the swarming things of the ground. Between them, rodents, lizards, and insects, these categories sort of exhaust all animal life in this subgroup and then also when you combine this suburb with the other subgroups.

The implication is that these are the animals, the living things known to the people of Israel, and the list is sort of intended to be comprehensive as much as is possible given their experience, their life experience, their environment, their geography, what not. All swarming creatures, incidentally, going back to that point are forbidden without exception, so rodents, lizards, and the crawling insects, that sort of thing. Now in the language of appearance, judging it by geography and then the experience of the Israelites, the animals they would've run into or would've known, called that part of the world home, the list is pretty exhaustive and frankly intended to be exhaustive. So how do we explain this? You get a lot of explanations. If people are interested in real detail here, I think one of the scholars known in this area is named WJ Houston. He has a pretty thorough article in the dictionary of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch volume. But he also has a monograph, a whole book, specifically on this kind of thing.

So in places here I have used him as a touch point for what he's saying but I'll depart here and there as well. But if you're really into this, I'd recommend Houston's article to get you started and then his whole book on the subject, And of course, he's not the only one who writes

on this, but it's pretty accessible. Now textually, let's talk about some explanations. On the level of the text, we're actually given an explanation. These prohibitions are about "the holiness of the people of Israel." They are about being distinguished from and distinct from the other nations around them. You go down all the way to the end of Leviticus 11, it says in verse 43,

⁴³ You shall not make yourselves detestable with any swarming thing that swarms, and you shall not defile yourselves with them, and become unclean through them. ⁴⁴ For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. ⁴⁵ For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy."

⁴⁶ This is the law about beast and bird and every living creature that moves through the waters and every creature that swarms on the ground, ⁴⁷ to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean and between the living creature that may be eaten and the living creature that may not be eaten.

MSH: So you get to the end of the chapter and it's about being set apart. It's about being sanctified or being consecrated. If you think back to Leviticus, the consecration talk, the sanctification talk, the holiness talk we've had in previous episodes is about, the easiest place to see it is in sacred space. There are things that are sanctified because they are only to be used in the service for Yahweh by the priests. And there's only certain people that can do that. They are sanctified. They are set apart for that duty, and there's only certain places where these things happen, sacred space. The space has to be "sanctified." The verbiage is always the same whether it's a person, an object, or a place. And here you get with reference to the Israelites collectively that you observe these clean and unclean laws about food, why, to make yourself sanctified, set apart for Yahweh, marked as people of Yahweh as opposed to people of other gods, people of other nations.

That's the textual rationale. That's pretty clear. What isn't clear is how our holiness, how is the sanctified idea and purity connected with diet. Why food? What's the rationale here? Now according to Deuteronomy 14, the parallel passage, the more concise version of this listing, that verse adds an interesting detail. It says, 'you shall not eat any abomination.' So in other words, Yahweh's people are not to eat things that were considered abominable, things that were considered disgusting. But of course, the problem with that is that it implies some pre-existing sense of what is disgusting, specifically, to eat. So now I want you to hang onto this idea because here's the point with this. I'm going to return to this at the end when we go through all these different theories. Part, at least part of the rationale for how food, how diet is connected with being set apart has to do with culture. It has to do with a people's opinion collectively in Semitic cultures that they already have, in other words, their opinion about what is abhorrent to eat is not given to them by God.

You don't get some sort of mental zap that oh, yesterday I used to like bacon and today I hate it. Today I think it's abominable. No, there are parts of this that are already within the

cultural context of what people think is disgusting to eat, so that's at least part of the rationale. It's a cultural thing. It's a Semitic thing. It's a second millennium BC Semitic Eastern Mediterranean kind of thing. It's part of their world, part of their worldview, part of their frame of reference. So that's at least part of the explanation but let's go through some of the approaches to answering this question, how the sanctification, how is this holiness thing connected to diet. These are theories which you are bound to run into if you do any serious reading on the subject. So the first one we should sort of get out of the way right away that is probably in the mind of many listeners is what we'll call the hygienic theory. Now this is the idea that well, the things that are prohibited here are prohibited because of some hygienic reason, either the food that is pointed out is not good for you. It'll make you sick. It carries parasites or something like that.

It doesn't cook well, in other words, there's this hygienic/medical rationale. I've heard this a lot, sort of assuming that God is the great nutritionist in the sky or the great biologist in the sky. He's the great microbiologist in the sky, and of course, God knows all these things but the whole point of it and why I'm putting it that way is that God is sort of dispensing, without even the Israelites knowing it, dispensing advanced medical knowledge that they alone had and that's part of what made them distinct and this is why they did it and also it's used to argue this. That's also why we shouldn't eat these things, because there's this intrinsic hygienic point to all of it. Now this notion goes back at least to Maimonides, a famous Jewish thinker, philosopher, writer in the 12th century A.D.

He mentions this so it's not a new idea. It's not an idea that popped up just with modern knowledge of germs and microbial life and all that kind of stuff. It's older than that. In the modern form, people like to point to the dangers of inadequately cooking pork and shellfish and how this can harm you. The theory suffers from some sort of obvious inconsistencies and shortcomings. The theory doesn't really make medical or hygienic sense because all animal species can carry parasites that make their flesh dangerous when not properly cooked, every one of them. An egg can harm you if it's not properly cooked. It's not consistent to just say that these specific species, these specific animals have some sort of hygienic risk that God knew about and was magically transmitting this knowledge to the ancient Israelites, and boy, weren't they advanced without even knowing it. And we should obey these laws because of the same thing. It's not consistent because every flesh, everything you can eat that's an animal species can carry parasites that would be dangerous if you don't cook it properly, every one of them.

The other problem is there's really no notion in the Old Testament of any sort of public health program or public health sort of consciousness in other areas. You could look at some other things that make you sick. Is there a rule about not just washing your hands before you eat, is there a law about that and using a certain thing to make sure that the microbes are off your hands? Water's not just adequate. Doctors tell us this today. Microbiologists tell us this today. Water alone is not adequate. You need a cleansing agent that kills germs. Why don't we read that kind of stuff in the Old Testament about washing not being adequate and having something more "secretly" scientific that actually takes care of that problem? We just don't have things like that, drinking out of the same cup. They certainly do that because hey, we're out here living in the desert. We don't have a, I'm trying to remember, if my wife were here, she would remember what the furniture term is for this. Basically the big cabinet that has lots of settings and dishes and cups in them, you don't have that.

They're drinking out of the same bucket. They're drinking out of the same cup. They're not washing utensils in-between every use, in other words, there's no Old Testament laws about this. There's no public health systematic program in the Old Testament. There just isn't. And so if this is the point, that is really odd that those other things that very obviously we're sensitive to today, to not transmit germs and bacteria, we would think about that being in there if that was the point, but it's not. So I'm not real enthusiastic in any regard about the hygienic theory. Move on to another one. There's what scholars would call the cultic theory or the cult polemic theory, and this is the notion that the species that were forbidden from consumption were those that were prominent in pagan cults, in other words, prominent in terms of sacrifice. This can be found also really back in antiquity that some of the church fathers like Origen brought this up as sort of an explanation.

But in reality, the most common animals sacrificed in pagan religions, like Canaanite religion, Egyptian religion, were exactly the same as the one sacrificed by Israelites, goats, cattle, sheep. They're the same ones that are in the other systems. Now this is where you might get an exception with pigs though. It is probable that pigs were sacrificed in certain cultures, probable might even be a strong word, but let's just say this is certainly on the table because the archaeological record. It's somewhat likely that pigs were sacrificed in certain rituals carried out in honor of underworld deities in other cultures that would have been particularly forbidden or icky, repugnant to followers of Yahweh. That is a possibility. And it's not so much the case with other unclean species. So you can't say that all of the unclean species are unclean because pagans offered them. They're not offering mice, the rodents. They're not offering fish that don't have scales. But the pig seems to be at issue because of the archaeological record. You will find references to sacrificing pigs in Ancient Near Eastern literature in other ritual acts of other religions whereas in Israel, you don't find that, so there might be something to this. Pig bones have been found in pits in pre-Israelite sites in Canaan before the Israelites got there. Maybe the Canaanites offered pigs because apparently they were just offered and not eaten. There is some archaeological testimony to pigs being ritually slain in this part of the world so that might again be a rationale for them.

But it certainly doesn't work with the whole list of the forbidden species. That, you just can't make work, and even with that, you can't say there's any direct evidence that pig sacrifices occurred with any regularity in other religions, in Ancient Near Eastern religions. They do occur. There are scant references to it but they weren't apparently, as far as the textual record we have, from these other cultures and their rituals, and there are lots of those texts. You can't look at that material and say this was a routine offering, a pig was a routine offering because it wasn't. It was very occasional, but at least it does happen. Now I've read here, this is actually from Houston's book, not his article, that he talks about an archaeological site in southeast Spain that was affiliated with Punic and Phoenician people, which of course are the northern part of the coast to the holy land of the Phoenicians.

There was a crematorium discovered there and on the sides of the crematorium, which is in a tower, there are pictures that maybe depict a pig. It's sort of a two headed monster seated in a chair in front of a table receiving a child in a bowl at his right hand. Phoenician Punic literature is familiar with child sacrifice so you've got this child in a bowl. A person in the picture, there's another person at the table prepares to slaughter a second child but what's significant is that at the monsters or the creatures left hand is a pig lying on it's back. So the assumption is, does that equate pig sacrifice with child sacrifice because we know from

Phoenician Punic material, Carthage especially, places like that, that children were sacrificed. So here we have this picture, and there's a pig in the picture that looks like its dead. So does that imply that the pig was used by the Phoenicians, for instance, in a ritual way? Well, it might. You could certainly build an argument on that but the question is, were they the only ones? Did they do it with mice?

Did they do it with fish that were unclean? Did they do it with hares and other ruminants that weren't really ruminants? You just can't make that argument. You can't say that all the prohibited animals are prohibited because they're part of some cult, some non-Yahweh cult. But the pig appears to have that association. So where do you go with that? I think that's just about really all you can say and the cultic polemic view doesn't really work, even though with pigs there might be something going on there, is about the best you can say. The interesting thing is, and we'll come back to this point, too, that since this is the case, since pigs were seldom sacrificed and these other unclean animals you can't find them being sacrificed in the pagan cultures and also the Israelite culture, is there a pattern there? In other words, is the pig and these other foods, these other animals, are they not fit for the gods? I'm going to come back to this point because we might be dealing with analogy. What's not fit for the gods we shouldn't eat either.

We'll come back to that idea. I want to get on to a third theory here. We'll call this one the anomaly theory and this is the idea, and this is largely based on the work of an anthropologist named Mary Douglas. You'll see Mary Douglas quoted it all the time when it comes to Leviticus. Now, what you need to realize though is that Mary Douglas changed her position on certain aspects that really, if you're dealing with a commentary in Leviticus that quotes Mary Douglas and it's not written in last about 15-20 years. I'm not sure she's alive still. She may be but chances are your information is out of date and Douglas herself would actually disagree with something she wrote earlier. On my blog I made reference to a book by Jonathan Klawans on purity and impurity. And he deals extensively with Douglas in that book and he goes through sort of the evolution of her thinking, the evolution of her views on purity and impurity and he does a good job of saying and showing well, here's what she used to think and here's what she thinks now and that kind of thing. That's a more recent book. A lot of the commentaries that pastors are going to use on Leviticus are much earlier. And if they quote Douglas, and they're bound to, the information might be out of date and something she'd actually deny now. Her general theory was about anomalies, and I'm going to quote here from Houston to explain her view.

“What accounts for the way in which permitted and forbidden animals are distinguished, all classification gives rise to anomalies. **[MSH: that's a problem because no matter what your classification scheme is, there's going to be some outlier somewhere.]** In Douglas's earlier thought, the anomalies are the key to understanding the Pentateuchal system, **[MSH: that was that was her initial view.]** for each of the three spheres of life, land, water, and air, land animals, water animals, air animals, the system propounds a model that expresses the mode of life, the mode, the movement of the living thing proper to that sphere **[MSH: In other words, land animals move a certain way. Water animals would move a certain way. Air animals would move a certain way.]** while the

criteria of cleanness in beasts are derived from the animals that the Israelites actually kept for food and sacrifice.

MSH: So you've got the way an animal moves, the way it transports itself and you have this issue of what was sort of normally at hand in food and sacrifice. So Houston, talking about Douglas, continues. He says,

“Animals that fail to conform to the model are rejected and the most emphatic rejection applies to the species that threaten the classification system by overlapping its boundaries. **[MSH: Here are the four animals of Leviticus 11:4-8 where you get the rock badger, the hare, and all that stuff, defy the classification in some way. They overlap the boundary because they're good in one way and bad in another so they're rejected because you have to have the whole system intact.]** Or Douglas would say that animals defy the classification altogether. An example is the swarming creatures that are found in each sphere but no way conform to its mode of life. **[MSH: That's a little sort of vague and odd but basically what Douglas was saying is look, in each sphere of being, land, water, and air, most animals propel themselves a certain way have the same set of characteristics but yet there are animals in each of those spheres that lacks something or that don't quite do something the way you most of the other ones do. They're outliers. They are misfits, if I could use that term. They don't fit completely in their category. And so Douglas's reasoning that there's something about the unclean animals that to the Israelites made them misfits in whatever group they belong to. This is how she was arguing about how certain animals were excluded. Houston continues, he says,]** However as Douglas later came to recognize, there is nothing to indicate any special degree of abhorrence for the group she had singled out as an anomalous or for the forbidden animals in general. Moreover, to find the source of the concept of unclean or unacceptable animals in the system of classification itself is circular reasoning. There is, for example, no reason why water creatures should have scales except that others are defined as unacceptable. But that's just what we're trying to explain. Wherever classifying criteria are given in the law, they serve to identify animals already regarded as acceptable or not. This is shown by the case of the birds where the task of finding criterion is left to the rabbinic period.

MSH: As we mentioned a few minutes ago, there is no criteria. There are no criteria for the birds. They just give a list. So there must have been some sense, and we actually get them in the list of why certain birds run clean even though we're never told why in Leviticus 11. So Houston's point is that it's nice to try to categorize the unclean ones as anomalous in some way, especially when you get to the birds. You're not told what that way is and that tells you, that proves that there's some sort of underlying cultural thing going on here that for whatever reason, because the anomaly with those birds is not really observable, may be they know at least some of them for sure are carrion eaters.

Maybe that was the logic but guess what, we can say that these birds were excluded because they ate dead flesh. Wouldn't it be nice if that was specifically spelled out in all cases? Wouldn't it be nice if that was just a little clearer? Well, that would be nice but it's not. So, what he's saying is that there's something else going on here other than the way an animal propels itself or that it's a misfit in some way against all the other ones. There's something cultural here as well. Let's go to another view. This will be the one I can conclude with, then I'll sort of give my spin on this, my take on the whole thing. Let's call this one the analogy approach, so another attempted explanation for what the rationale is. Now some scholars have suggested that the clean beasts in Israel were based on the paradigm of sacrificial animals, in other words, the table, a person's table, the average Israelite's table is in some way being viewed as parallel to the Lord's altar.

In other words, if the animal could be sacrificed, put on God's table, it could also be eaten on your table. So there's an analogy going on there. This can dovetail with at least the pig thing. There's scant evidence of pigs being sacrificed. But where this analogy sort of works with the pigs, well, the pigs are never sacrificed in the Levitical system, therefore, that's why pigs aren't to be eaten by normal people. Whatever's good for God is good for us. Well, that works with the pig in theory because other nations occasionally sacrificed pigs so maybe there's something going on there. But again, you don't have that said of the other forbidden species in other texts. In Ancient Near Eastern cultures and Israel, they didn't sacrifice pigs, got it, or at least it's very rare in Ancient Near Eastern cultures. But while Ancient Near Eastern people did eat animals not sacrificed to their deities, they did eat pigs. Egyptians ate pigs. Canaanites ate pigs. So the analogy breaks down there, but you can say well maybe the Israelites were just more consistent.

Maybe this is why they're doing what they're doing. So it's true that Ancient Near Eastern religions didn't really sacrifice pigs but they did eat them, but maybe they shouldn't have because maybe the whole idea is what's good for the deity is good for us, so the Israelites are just more consistent here. We don't sacrifice pigs so we don't eat pigs either. To make that argument coherent, to show that Israel alone is consistent and the other ancient peoples are not in their thinking, you'd have to have text that indicate that maybe some of these other unclean animals were occasionally offered. But you don't. There's an absence of data there, so who knows. If the table analogy is the point, why not just say that? Wouldn't it be nice if there was just a verse that says hey, here's why thou shall not eat these animals. Here's why thou shalt consider them unclean because the Lord doesn't want to eat them and sacrificed because the Lord doesn't want them sacrificed. Well, then you'd have it. Then this analogy approach should make sense. Why not just say that?

But of course the text doesn't say that. You also have a little bit of circular reasoning here. If the table analogy seems circular, it kind of is. It sounds that way because it is. Can't the reverse be argued, in other words, if a food was unclean for people then it shouldn't be served to God as opposed to saying well, it's not fit for God so it's not fit for us. Well, why not reverse it? Hey, if it's not fit for us then it can't be fit for God. Flip it, turn it on its head. It's a chicken or egg problem because if it originated with people, what we don't eat, we're not going to sacrifice then we're going to write this Leviticus 11 thing that makes it sound like God's giving us this rule. Really the rule's because we don't eat this stuff. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense on that level. There are inconsistencies even in the Israelite system. You could say the Israelites are the most consistent because of the pig. They don't eat the pig and they don't sacrifice the pig so they win

on consistency. Actually, they don't. Israelites ate certain fish but you don't see fish sacrificed to the Lord, even acceptable fish aren't sacrificed to the Lord. So it's really not consistent. There's really not a complete analogy here. And then you have the camel. The camel was a domesticated ruminant but it was eliminated because it didn't divide the hoof. No matter what theory you have, all of the data, all the prohibitions and exceptions cannot really be explained by one approach.

That's the problem I'm getting at here. So if you're asking me what do you think is the rationale here, I would say that sometimes analogy can explain certain things but I think you also have cultural abhorrence that has to be part of why Leviticus 11 says what it says. So I think one approach is insufficient and so the coherent thing to do there is ask the question, why do we have to have just one approach that explains everything? Maybe a couple of different approaches, a couple of these ideas, maybe they were all in operation at different points and we're just not told clearly. So I think that the food laws are part cultural conditioning. There's a sense already among the Israelite people because of who they are, where they live, the time they live, and all that kind of stuff. There's already a cultural sense of certain things being abhorrent to eat and they, by definition, are not going to be clean.

They're not going to be acceptable. But you also have certain animals that are on the list because they will make you distinct from the other peoples and they are not fit for sacrifice to the Lord, so I think it's a combination of several of these things. If you're willing to just think outside one of these boxes, if you're willing to say well, they all have some things going for them so let's try to come up with a comprehensive way to look at this and say there's actually more than one explanation. Maybe two or three contribute to this. I just think you're a better ground and so that's how I approach the whole issue, the whole problem. In terms of wrapping up for what this means for us today, I think it's very clear this is a cultural setting. This is Israelite. This is Semitic culture. This is the Ancient Near East, the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean, that kind of thing. At least part of Leviticus 11 needs that culture to make sense. It's also a ritual setting. That takes us into the whole theocratic mentality, the theocratic rationale. And since we aren't living in ancient Semitic culture and we no longer have a theocracy, my view is that these food laws are not meant for us today.

They are culturally isolated and they are theologically isolated because of their attachment to the cult of Yahweh, the rituals of Yahweh. For those who missed earlier episodes cult is an academic way of referring to the sacrificial system, to the ritual system. So because it has to do with the tabernacle and temple and all that sort of thing, we don't have that by design, by divine design. I don't think there's an argument to be made that we should be following the food laws. And you've already known or already heard my opinion of the hygienic argument. I don't think it's coherent, and even if that was the point, stick that thing in a microwave and it kills, you could get around it if that was the point. But I don't think from the get-go that's the point because every animal, even the good ones and the ones that were clean, can have the same problem, bacteria and so on so forth, disease and whatnot. So I don't think that's coherent at all.

So I think this is a good example of look, why would we want to revert in our theology, in our theological way of life, the way we live our lives driven by things we believe, that's what I mean, way our theology propels our life, why would we want to go back to a system that very clearly in the book of Acts we were liberated from? And liberated might be the wrong word, it might be a harsh word, makes it sound bad and I don't mean to convey that thought because the Old Testament system wasn't bad. But in the sense of now we're not bound to geography, to

ethnicity, to culture. The gospel and our position as being the temple, we are the temple, these things, those truths transcend all these other things, the binding culture, the ritual setting. Where we're at today transcends all that. SO rather than have this romanticized notion of I wish we could do Jewish things with the food laws, if you want to do that, that's your privilege, but don't attach theology to it. That contradicts clear New Testament theology. In other words, treat it as a preference. It might be a good preference. It's fine if it's a preference, but let people know that this is a preference for you. It's not a theological statement and you're not going to try to bend the New Testament to conform to your preference. I think that's a simple sort of rule of thumb. If you want to follow the food laws, have at it. Go ahead. But theologically, do not bend the New Testament to your will, to your preference.