Refreshed IN THE WORD
For thy word hath quickened me
PSALM 119:50

Torah Studies

Connecting the Torah and Jesus

STUDY 12

Belonging to God in Everyday Life

Day Twelve · Leviticus 11

Read Leviticus 11 in small portions. Understand Israel’s clean and unclean distinctions, then follow Jesus and the apostles into a life of holiness, faith, and love.

For personal reading and study with friends

King James Version · Complete Scripture passages

Read and share online

Read one section at a time. Take turns reading the verses aloud, discuss the questions, and choose one practical response. Every passage referenced in the teaching is included in full.

Let’s begin together

Let’s pray: Father, thank You for inviting us to know You through Your Word. Help us understand Your instructions to Israel and follow Jesus with honest hearts. Teach us to honor You in our daily choices and treat others with love. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Study 11 showed the priests’ responsibility to distinguish between clean and unclean and teach the people. Leviticus 11 now gives detailed instructions about animals, food, and contact with dead creatures. We will read the whole chapter in small portions, with explanations as we go.

Torah means instruction. We begin with God's covenant with Israel, a relationship with promises and responsibilities. Then we listen to Jesus and the apostles. The goal is to understand the text and learn how belonging to God shapes everyday life.

Our main truth: God calls His people to reflect His holiness. Through Jesus, we learn to honor Him with our hearts, our choices, and our love for others.

1. God's instruction reached the dinner table

Leviticus 11:1-3

1 And the LORD spake unto Moses and to Aaron, saying unto them,

2 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, These are the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth.

3 Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat.

God spoke to Moses and Aaron for the people of Israel. The instructions began with land animals. An animal allowed for food needed both a divided hoof and the habit described as chewing the cud. The chapter gave Israel clear distinctions to follow.

Leviticus 11:4-8

4 Nevertheless these shall ye not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the hoof: as the camel, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you.

5 And the coney, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you.

6 And the hare, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you.

7 And the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be clovenfooted, yet he cheweth not the cud; he is unclean to you.

8 Of their flesh shall ye not eat, and their carcase shall ye not touch; they are unclean to you.

The examples show that meeting only one condition was not enough. “Swine” means pigs, and “carcase” means a dead body. The chapter uses the animal names and descriptions of its ancient setting. We read these instructions first as part of Israel’s covenant life.

“Unclean” here is a category in the laws about food and worship. It does not mean an animal is morally wicked. These distinctions helped Israel practice obedience in ordinary activities, including choosing a meal.

2. Notice the different groups

Leviticus 11:9-12

9 These shall ye eat of all that are in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat.

10 And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers, of all that move in the waters, and of any living thing which is in the waters, they shall be an abomination unto you:

11 They shall be even an abomination unto you; ye shall not eat of their flesh, but ye shall have their carcases in abomination.

12 Whatsoever hath no fins nor scales in the waters, that shall be an abomination unto you.

For creatures living in water, the instructions named fins and scales. “Abomination” is strong language for what Israel was required to reject as food in this setting. We should keep the word connected to what this passage is discussing.

Leviticus 11:13-19

13 And these are they which ye shall have in abomination among the fowls; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, and the ossifrage, and the ospray,

14 And the vulture, and the kite after his kind;

15 Every raven after his kind;

16 And the owl, and the night hawk, and the cuckow, and the hawk after his kind,

17 And the little owl, and the cormorant, and the great owl,

18 And the swan, and the pelican, and the gier eagle,

19 And the stork, the heron after her kind, and the lapwing, and the bat.

The next list names flying creatures that Israel was not to eat. Some names in these older Bible editions sound unfamiliar today. We keep the complete wording and follow the main instruction: the people were to recognize the distinctions God gave them.

Leviticus 11:20-23

20 All fowls that creep, going upon all four, shall be an abomination unto you.

21 Yet these may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon all four, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth;

22 Even these of them ye may eat; the locust after his kind, and the bald locust after his kind, and the beetle after his kind, and the grasshopper after his kind.

23 But all other flying creeping things, which have four feet, shall be an abomination unto you.

This section describes winged creeping creatures and permitted kinds that leap, such as locusts. “After his kind” means according to its kind. These are the passage’s own groupings. We do not need to invent a hidden spiritual meaning for every animal to learn from the chapter.

What can repeated, everyday choices teach a person about listening to God?

3. Unclean did not always mean sinful

Leviticus 11:24-28

24 And for these ye shall be unclean: whosoever toucheth the carcase of them shall be unclean until the even.

25 And whosoever beareth ought of the carcase of them shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even.

26 The carcases of every beast which divideth the hoof, and is not clovenfooted, nor cheweth the cud, are unclean unto you: every one that toucheth them shall be unclean.

27 And whatsoever goeth upon his paws, among all manner of beasts that go on all four, those are unclean unto you: whoso toucheth their carcase shall be unclean until the even.

28 And he that beareth the carcase of them shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: they are unclean unto you.

The focus now includes touching or carrying dead animals. The person could become unclean until evening, and someone who carried a carcass had to wash their clothes. “Until the even” means until evening. Notice that this condition had a stated ending.

Leviticus 11:29-32

29 These also shall be unclean unto you among the creeping things that creep upon the earth; the weasel, and the mouse, and the tortoise after his kind,

30 And the ferret, and the chameleon, and the lizard, and the snail, and the mole.

31 These are unclean to you among all that creep: whosoever doth touch them, when they be dead, shall be unclean until the even.

32 And upon whatsoever any of them, when they are dead, doth fall, it shall be unclean; whether it be any vessel of wood, or raiment, or skin, or sack, whatsoever vessel it be, wherein any work is done, it must be put into water, and it shall be unclean until the even; so it shall be cleansed.

The same concern extends to smaller creatures and objects they touched after death. Certain objects had to be placed in water and remained unclean until evening. The rules explained both how uncleanness spread and how an object could become clean again.

Being ritually unclean was not automatically the same as committing a moral wrong. A person could encounter a dead animal during ordinary work. Yet God still gave instructions to follow. Ritual uncleanness, physical dirt, and sinful behavior are related to different questions; we should not treat them as identical.

4. God gave specific directions for daily life

Leviticus 11:33-35

33 And every earthen vessel, whereinto any of them falleth, whatsoever is in it shall be unclean; and ye shall break it.

34 Of all meat which may be eaten, that on which such water cometh shall be unclean: and all drink that may be drunk in every such vessel shall be unclean.

35 And every thing whereupon any part of their carcase falleth shall be unclean; whether it be oven, or ranges for pots, they shall be broken down: for they are unclean, and shall be unclean unto you.

Clay containers and some cooking equipment were treated differently from objects that could be washed. “Earthen vessel” means a container made from clay, and “meat” here means food. Israel had to pay attention to the instruction for each situation.

Leviticus 11:36-38

36 Nevertheless a fountain or pit, wherein there is plenty of water, shall be clean: but that which toucheth their carcase shall be unclean.

37 And if any part of their carcase fall upon any sowing seed which is to be sown, it shall be clean.

38 But if any water be put upon the seed, and any part of their carcase fall thereon, it shall be unclean unto you.

A spring or water reservoir remained clean, and dry seed for planting was treated differently from seed that had been wet. The text carefully makes these distinctions. Its stated concern is Israel’s cleanness before God; it does not explain every rule as a medical or scientific lesson.

Leviticus 11:39-40

39 And if any beast, of which ye may eat, die; he that toucheth the carcase thereof shall be unclean until the even.

40 And he that eateth of the carcase of it shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: he also that beareth the carcase of it shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even.

Even an animal from an allowed food category could cause uncleanness when it died. These verses give instructions for touching, eating from, or carrying its dead body. They show why “allowed animal” and “clean in every circumstance” were not the same thing.

5. The reason was belonging to a holy God

Leviticus 11:41-43

41 And every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth shall be an abomination; it shall not be eaten.

42 Whatsoever goeth upon the belly, and whatsoever goeth upon all four, or whatsoever hath more feet among all creeping things that creep upon the earth, them ye shall not eat; for they are an abomination.

43 Ye shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creepeth, neither shall ye make yourselves unclean with them, that ye should be defiled thereby.

The chapter returns to creatures that move along the ground and tells Israel to avoid becoming unclean through them. These directions belonged to a larger calling: living as the people of the Lord. The next verses explain that calling clearly.

Leviticus 11:44-47

44 For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

45 For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.

46 This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth:

47 To make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten.

God says, “I am the LORD your God,” and reminds Israel that He brought them out of Egypt. He had rescued them and called them to belong to Him. Their daily obedience was to reflect the holiness of the God who had delivered them.

“Sanctify yourselves” means set yourselves apart for God. Holiness involves belonging to Him and honoring His character. The chapter ends by repeating its purpose: distinguishing between clean and unclean, and between animals that could and could not be eaten.

1 Peter 1:14-16

14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

Peter repeats God’s call to holiness when teaching followers of Jesus. “Conversation” in this older wording means our whole way of life. Peter calls believers obedient children and tells them to leave their former evil desires behind. Belonging to our Father should shape how we live.

6. Jesus directs us to the heart

Mark 7:14-19

14 And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand:

15 There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.

16 If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

17 And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable.

18 And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him;

19 Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?

This conversation began with a disagreement about eating with hands that had not been washed according to religious tradition. Jesus called the people to listen and understand. He explained that food enters the stomach, while the heart is the inner place from which our choices come.

“Draught” refers to the place where bodily waste goes, and “meats” means foods. Jesus uses this simple description of digestion to teach about what defiles a person. His explanation continues with the actions that come from within.

Mark 7:20-23

20 And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.

21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,

22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:

23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

Jesus names real sins: dishonesty, stealing, sexual wrongdoing, envy, pride, and other evils. “Covetousness” is a greedy desire to have more, and an “evil eye” points to envy. The problem reaches deeper than what is on a plate. We need God’s truth and mercy to change our hearts and actions.

Many Christians understand this passage as showing that food restrictions do not define purity for followers of Jesus. Some believers continue biblical dietary practices out of conviction. Whatever our food choices, Jesus calls us to turn from the evil that comes from the heart.

Am I giving as much attention to my honesty, motives, and treatment of others as I give to outward practices?

7. Peter learns to welcome people

Acts 10:28

28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Peter spoke these words when he entered the home of Cornelius, a Gentile, meaning someone who was not Jewish. Earlier in the chapter, Peter had seen a vision involving animals. Here he explains a lesson God taught him: he should not call any person common or unclean.

Peter's statement describes the social boundary he had followed. Leviticus 11 itself does not command Israel to refuse every visit to a Gentile's home. We should not turn its animal categories into labels for the worth of human beings.

Acts 10:34-36

34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

“God is no respecter of persons” means He does not show favoritism because of someone’s nation or background. Peter announces peace through Jesus Christ, the Lord of all. The good news is reaching people beyond the boundaries Peter had expected.

Acts 10:43

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Peter makes the way of forgiveness clear: it comes through Jesus’ name to everyone who believes in Him. We should welcome people to hear about Jesus, whatever their background. Faith in Him, rather than someone’s nationality, is central to Peter’s message.

8. Let love guide life at the table

Romans 14:13-16

13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.

14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:

Paul writes to believers with different convictions about food. He says he is convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, while also taking seriously the conscience of the person who believes otherwise. He calls the church to stop judging one another and avoid causing a brother or sister to stumble.

A “stumblingblock” is something that leads another person toward sin, such as pressuring them to act against their conscience. Paul reminds us that Christ died for that person. Love takes their faith seriously. We can discuss Scripture with patience and keep learning together.

Romans 14:17-19

17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

God’s kingdom is marked by righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. “Edify” means build someone up in faith. Paul’s practical direction is to pursue what helps people follow Christ and live at peace.

If a friend avoids certain foods because of faith, make room for them at your table without teasing or pressure. If you avoid those foods, treat your friend with the same respect. We can seek God’s truth while showing love in a simple, everyday meal.

Talk about it with friends

1. What is the difference between ritual uncleanness and a sinful action?

2. Why does God remind Israel of their rescue from Egypt when He calls them to holiness?

3. According to Jesus, what comes from the heart and defiles a person?

4. What did Peter learn about people, and how did he say they receive forgiveness?

5. How could you honor another believer’s conscience during a shared meal?

Put it into practice today

Thank the Father that you can belong to Him through Jesus. Read one passage again and name one part of your daily life that needs His guidance: your words, your honesty, a relationship, or how you respond when someone differs from you.

Ask Him to help you turn from one wrong attitude or action. Then take a practical step: tell the truth, apologize, stop a hurtful comment, or include someone who has been left out. Let a meal become a chance to give thanks and show kindness.

A verse to remember

1 Peter 1:16

16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

Read this verse aloud. Being holy begins with belonging to the holy God and answering His call. Ask Him to help you reflect His character in one ordinary choice today.

Let’s pray together

Father, You are holy and good. Thank You for the forgiveness we receive through Jesus. Teach us to understand Your Word carefully. Cleanse our hearts from pride, envy, dishonesty, and selfishness. Holy Spirit, help us make choices that honor our Father and build others up. Let our homes and tables become places of gratitude, peace, and love. In Jesus’ name, amen.

I love you, my friends. You can honor the Father in the ordinary moments of today. Walk with Jesus, listen to His Word, and make room for others with love.

Scripture and sources

Scripture text was checked against the King James Version published by eBible.org. The complete verses are reproduced with their historical wording. Verse numbers and layout are adapted for reading; editorial footnotes are omitted. Tap any Scripture reference to view its source.

Bible edition and text