

## 18.

### MESSAGE 14

#### UNCLEANNES FROM UNCLEAN CREATURES AND ITS CLEANSING

Leviticus 11:1-47

##### Introduction

This message begins a series of MESSAGES that dealt with the concepts of “clean” and “unclean.” These practices were religious ceremonies, just as the fire-offerings were. Like the offerings, they were symbols of spiritual truths. The concept of “clean” and “unclean” had already been referred to in previous MESSAGES from The Tabernacle (see comments on Lev. 4:12; 5:2,3 in MESSAGE 2; on Lev. 6:11 in MESSAGE 5; on Lev. 7:19-21 in MESSAGE 7; and on Lev. 10:10 in MESSAGE 12). In the next six MESSAGES, that concept is fully explained.

The priests spent six days in the sanctuary after the day of their anointing (see comments on Lev. 8:33-36 in MESSAGE 10). Very likely these six MESSAGES in Leviticus 11-15 were given one each day during that six day period. This conclusion is supported by the fact that four of the six MESSAGES were spoken to Moses and Aaron, which would have been logical if Aaron was confined to the sanctuary and, therefore, present when the MESSAGES were given (see comments on Lev. 11:1 below, on Lev. 13:1 in MESSAGE 16; on Lev. 14:33 in MESSAGE 18, and on Lev. 15:1 in MESSAGE 19). Also MESSAGE 20 in Leviticus 16:1 says that it was given “after the death of Aaron’s two sons,” an event that is described in Leviticus 10. The statement is strange unless the MESSAGES in Leviticus 11-15 were given before the sin of Nadab and Abihu, in other words during the seven “days of fillings” (the day of their anointing and the next six days of prayer and study). The death of Nadab and Abihu occurred on “the eighth day,” the day following the seven days of fillings (compare Lev. 9:1 and Lev. 10:1).

The first of the MESSAGES in this group deals with clean and unclean creatures. The practice of distinguishing between clean and unclean creatures was at least as old as Noah (Gen. 7:2,8; 8:20). It had been mentioned twice in previous MESSAGES at Sinai (see comments on Lev. 5:2 in MESSAGE 2; and on Lev. 7:21 in MESSAGE 7). Much scholarly thought has been given to defining the reason why certain creatures were considered to be clean while others were considered to be unclean. Some have tried to explain the distinctions as a carry-over of superstitions from the pagan background out of which Israelite worship supposedly developed. Reasons for rejecting this explanation of the origin of Israelite worship practices are stated in the INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS (see comments under the heading **Arguments for the development theory. (1) Comparison with other Semitic religions**). The claim of a pagan source for Israel’s practices of clean and unclean creatures is further weakened by the fact that other Semitic peoples who practiced distinctions between clean and unclean creatures did not follow the same customs as Israel. What was clean for Israel was often “taboo” for other nations. What was acceptable to other nations was often unclean for Israel. Those significant differences make this explanation most unlikely.

A second effort to explain the distinctions is based of health or rules of hygiene. It is held that unclean foods were generally hard to digest or susceptible to disease, while clean foods were generally more healthful. This explanation has never been proven except in the case of a few individual creatures. Those few are not sufficient to establish a general rule. The health view is undermined by two additional factors: (1) Israelites were forbidden to touch the carcasses of unclean creatures, while they were free to touch the carcasses of clean creatures (see comments on Lev. 11:8,24,26,27,31,36,39). It is impossible to find a reason why it was unhealthy to touch a dead unclean creature but not a dead clean creature. (2) If the principle of health is followed, it is necessary to apply it to unclean conditions described in Leviticus 12-15, as well as to unclean creatures described in Leviticus 11. Applying health reasons to the unclean conditions described in Leviticus

12-15 would mean that childbirth (Lev. 12:1-8), marital sex relations (Lev. 15:16-18), and menstruation (Lev. 15:19-30) should be avoided as unhealthy conditions. This position cannot be supported by medical or scientific evidence. While it is true that Jehovah was interested in the health of His followers, the Book of Leviticus deals with spiritual principles, rather than health principles. Explaining clean and unclean on the basis of health is inadequate to match the high moral tone of the book. A third effort to explain the distinctions is based on natural repulsiveness. It is said that unclean animals all had something about them that was naturally unattractive. This distinction does not fully hold. The pig was one of the unclean animals. The practice of other people of that day and of our own day does not reveal that a pig has anything about it that is intrinsically repulsive. Certain kinds of locusts were clean creatures. To most people, locusts are much more repulsive to eat and touch than many creatures that were classified as unclean. This theory will not stand up under close examination.

No one principle is adequate to explain all the different types of cleanness and uncleanness that are described in Leviticus 11-15. That fact should lead to the conclusion that the various types of uncleanness were chosen for their symbolic value, rather than for something intrinsic in their nature. Clean creatures and conditions were chosen to be symbols of righteousness, while unclean creatures and conditions were chosen to be symbols of sin. Understood in that manner, making distinctions between clean and unclean was a constant reminder to the Israelites that there are basic, fundamental differences between right and wrong. Actions that are right and actions that are wrong are defined by Jehovah, just as Jehovah defined creatures and conditions that were clean and unclean. Correctly understood, morals are based on the nature of Jehovah God. Since the Israelites were Jehovah's people, they were expected to live in the likeness of Jehovah's moral nature, as defined by His commandments. Clean and unclean creatures and conditions were symbols of those moral distinctions. Israel was to avoid unclean creatures and conditions as a constant reminder that they should avoid sinful deeds. They were to be comfortable with creatures and conditions that were clean to encourage them to keep their lives righteous and holy. The clean-unclean ceremonies symbolized the moral distinctions God gave in His commandments. This view is the only satisfactory and spiritually profitable explanation of the clean and unclean regulations that Jehovah gave to Israel.

This MESSAGE can be outlined as follows:

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**Interpretation**

## CHAPTER 11

## Introductory note (11:1)

**Verse 1. Then Jehovah spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them,**

These words introduce another MESSAGE spoken by Jehovah from The Tabernacle. It was spoken to Aaron as well as to Moses. Likely the MESSAGES from Jehovah continued during the days when Aaron and his sons were in The Holy Place for the seven days of fillings (see comments on Lev. 8:33-36 in MESSAGE 10). If this MESSAGE was spoken during that time, it is natural that it would have been spoken to Aaron along with Moses. It would have been unnatural for Jehovah to speak it to Moses, who then would have had to repeat it to Aaron, when Aaron was present when the MESSAGE was spoken.

- a. Uncleaness from unclean animals, water creatures, and flying creatures (11:2-28)

- (1) Identification of clean and unclean animals (11:2-7)

**Verse 2. Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, These are the living beings that you may eat from all the animals that [are] on the earth.**

Speak to the sons of Israel, saying. Moses and Aaron were instructed to teach and explain this MESSAGE to all the people of Israel. It concerned a practice that was to be observed by the whole nation. Though Jehovah worshipers had long been conscious of distinctions between clean and unclean animals, at Sinai Jehovah regulated the distinctions that were to be practiced in Israel. Jehovah defined practices that would help Israel keep their practices regarding clean and unclean free of pagan or erroneous ideas.

These are the living beings. The word translated “living beings” in this verse occurs previously in Leviticus 5:2 (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 2 under the heading whether a carcass of an unclean living being) The term applies to all creatures that possess animal life.

that you may eat. Leviticus 5:2 referred to becoming unclean by touching the carcass of an unclean animal. Touching a carcass would certainly include eating an unclean animal, since an animal that was eaten would certainly be dead. This verse speaks of animals that could be eaten, which means those animal would be clean animals. In other words, this verse identifies animals that were considered to be ceremonially clean. The next verse specifies that to be ceremonially clean an animal had to possess two characteristics.

from all the animals that [are] on the earth. The word translated “animals” is the word used in Leviticus 1:2, where it is properly translated “livestock” (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 1 under the heading from the livestock). Though the word usually referred to domestic animals, in this verse, it seems to have referred to all kinds of animals, domestic and wild. It is used here to designate all creatures that walk, in contrast to creatures that swim, fly, or crawl. Out of all the animals, some were unclean and were not to be eaten.

**Verse 3. Every one dividing the hoof, that is, dividing a division of hooves and bringing up a chew among the animals, you may eat.**

Every one dividing the hoof, that is, dividing a division of hooves. The first characteristic of a clean animal was that it had to have a completely divided hoof. “Dividing a division” meant a hoof divided in the front and in the back. The wording is emphatic. The animal had to have hooves, and the hooves could not be split only part way across the foot and be united at the heel. To be a clean animal, its hooves had to have two completely separate parts.

and raising a chew. The second characteristic of a clean animal has been considerably disputed. It has usually been interpreted to mean “chewing the cud,” but that interpretation may be mistaken. The word translated “raising of” has generally been translated “chew.” It is an active participle of the causative form of a common verb that means “to go up” or “to ascend.” In its causative form, the word means “to cause to go up” or “to raise.” The word translated “a chew” has customarily been translated “cud.” The word is used only as a part of the expression that occurs here, and it is found only in regulations concerning clean and unclean animals (Lev. 11:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 26; Deut. 14:6, 7, 8). It is a noun built on a root that means “to drag.” It seems to refer to the dragging motion of the mouth in chewing. It has been assumed that the word referred to the “cud”; however, it may have referred any characteristic chewing or dragging motion of the mouth. Animals that chew the cud have two stomachs. They swallow grass into the first stomach until they can be quiet and idle. Then they bring up the grass to chew thoroughly at great length before swallowing it again into the second stomach. Animals that chew the cud certainly are regularly seen contentedly chewing. However, other animals that do not have two stomachs and that do not chew the cud also have a characteristic chewing motion of the mouth. Examples are the “coney,” or “rock badger,” which is mentioned in verse 5, and the rabbit, which is mentioned in verse 6. It has been charged that the passage contains a scientific error, because the “coney” or “rock badger” and the rabbit do not literally chew the cud. The error may be in the translation of the word rather than in the listing of the animals. The correct meaning refers to any animal that is characterized by a regular chewing motion of its mouth. Therefore, in this writing, the expression is translated literally as “raising a chew.”

among the animals you may eat. The word translated “animals” was used to refer to all kinds of four footed animals, but not to reptiles, birds, or fish. Nothing in either of these two characteristics (dividing the hoof and a chewing motion of the mouth) or in the combination of them affects the value, usefulness, sanity, attractiveness, or

desirability of the animal in any way. They certainly have nothing to do with the healthiness or digestibility of eating their meat. Nothing about them would make the animal repulsive or unpleasant to see or touch. These two characteristics must have been chosen, not because of their inherent significance, but simply to identify animals that were to be used as symbols of righteousness. They were chosen, not because of some intrinsic worth of the animal itself, but in order to use the animal as a symbol of moral cleanness.

**Verse 4. However, you may not eat these among the ones raising of a chew and dividing the hoof: the camel, because it brings up a chew but does not divide the hoof. It is unclean to you.**

Examples of unclean animals were then listed. The first example was the camel, which “raises a chew” but does not completely divide the hoof. The hoof of a camel is divided in front but joined at the heel.

**Verse 5. And the rock badger, because it raises a chew but does not divide the hoof. It is unclean to you.**

The second example was an animal found only in the near East and in northern Africa. It does not have a name in the English language, because it is not found in English speaking countries. Neither “coney” nor “rock badger” is a correct translation. The animal does not have a divided hoof. In fact, it does not have hooves at all. It has paws. It does have the characteristics of almost constantly moving its mouth in a chewing fashion. It does not literally chew a cud, but it does move its mouth in a characteristic rotating fashion, much like a rabbit. Its not having a divided hoof classified it as unclean.

**Verse 6. And the rabbit, because it raises a chew but does not divide the hoof. It is unclean to you.**

The third example of an unclean animal was the rabbit. It also does not have hooves but paws, but it is characterized by an almost constant rotating

motion of the mouth. Its not have a divided hoof made it unclean.

Verse 7. **And the pig, because it divides the hoof and is cloven-footed but does raise a chew. It is unclean to you.**

The fourth example was the pig. It has a divided hoof, but it is not characterized by a constant chewing motion of the mouth. The lack of steady chewing motion of its mouth made it unclean.

(2) Uncleaness from unclean animals (11:8)

Verse 8. **Of their flesh you must not eat, and their carcasses you must not touch. They are unclean to you.**

Two prohibitions applied to unclean animals. The Israelites were not to eat them, and they were not to touch their carcasses. They were not forbidden to touch a live unclean animal but only its dead body. The prohibition was not unreasonably restrictive but enough so to be a constant reminder of what it symbolized. Though it is not stated, it is obvious that the meaning is that if an Israelite did touch the carcass or eat one of these unclean animals, he would become unclean himself.

(3) Identification of clean and unclean water creatures (11:9-10)

Verse 9. **These you may eat of all that are in the waters: everything in it that has fins and scales in the waters. Whether [they are] in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat them.**

A second class of clean and unclean creatures was creatures that lived in the water. They included not only fish but mammals, shellfish, and any other kind of creature that lived in the water. They included creatures that lived in salt water (seas) and in fresh water (rivers). To be clean these creatures also had to possess two characteristics. They had to have fins and scales.

Verse 10. **But everything that does not have fins and scales in the seas or in the rivers, [whether] of the swarming creatures in the waters or of the [other] living creatures that are in the waters, is a detestable thing to you.**

“Swarming creatures” refers to creatures that nest or travel in groups. Among water creatures, it refers to creatures that travel in school. The words translated “living creatures” are literally “from any living breathing beings.” “Breathing” in this case must refer to receiving air through the gills, through osmosis, or through any other means by which a creature absorbs air from the water. Therefore, this phrase referred to any kind of living creature in the water. Any swarmer or other living creature of the water that did not have fins and scales was called a “detestable thing.” That word was used only to refer to unclean creatures. A water creature that Israelites were forbidden to eat is not called “unclean” in this MESSAGE. Instead it is called a “detestable thing.” “Detestable thing” must be considered to be a substitute word for “unclean thing.” Animals of which the Israelites were not to eat are called “unclean” in this MESSAGE, but they are called “detestable things” in Ezekiel 8:10. Further along in this MESSAGE, forbidden land swarmers are called both “detestable” (vs. 41,42) and “unclean” (vs. 29,31). In vs. 43, men who ate forbidden land swarmers are said to make themselves both “detestable” and “unclean.” The interchange of these two words indicates that “unclean thing” and “detestable thing” had the same meaning. The two words were synonyms for creatures that Jehovah had forbidden the Israelites to eat for symbolic reasons. “Detestable” did not mean that the creature was evil, ugly, or repulsive in and of itself any more than “unclean” did. It meant that the creature was classified as off limits for the Israelites for symbolic purposes.

(4) Uncleaness from unclean water creatures (11:11-12)

Verses 11-12. **11 A detestable thing they must be to you. From their meat you must not eat, and you must detest their carcasses.**

**12 Everything that does not have fins and scales in the waters [is] a detestable thing to you.**

The same prohibitions applied to detestable things of the water as to unclean animals. They were not to be eaten, and their carcasses were not to be touched. Breaking these prohibitions would make a person unclean.

(5) Identification of unclean and clean flying creatures (11:13-23)

Verses 13-19, **13 And these you must detest among the flying things. They must not be eaten. They [are] detestable things: the eagle and the vulture, and the osprey,**

**14 And the kite, and the falcon according to its kind,**

**15 Every raven according to its kind,**

**16 And the ostrich, and the nighthawk, and the sea gull, and the hawk according to its kind,**

**17 And the owl, and the cormorant, and the ibis,**

**18 And the water hen, and the pelican, and the swan,**

**19 And the stork, the heron according to its kind, and the lapwing, and the bat.**

A third type of unclean creature was an unclean creature that flew in the air. The word translated “flying things” applied to any kind of creature with wings. Some interpreters have taken the word to mean only birds and then have labored to explain why bats should have been included in the list, since they are mammals and not birds. These interpreters are forcing on the Hebrew word a modern distinction that was not inherent in the Hebrew word. “Flying things” included flying insects and bugs (vs. 20-23), which the Israelites certainly did not intend to designate as birds. “Flying things” included any creatures with wings, not just birds.

Detestable or unclean flying things were designated by name rather than by characteristics, except in the case of flying insects and bugs (vs. 20-23). The exact flying creatures that are indicated by some of the names is not clearly known, so considerable variety exists in translations. The words “after its kind” seems to include creatures of the same general type as the one that is named. The significance of the flying creatures in the list is not based on supposedly repulsive habits or qualities, as some interpreters suppose. They were selected by Jehovah, not because of what they were in themselves, but because of what they were made to symbolize.

Verse 20. **Every flying swarmer, the one going on all fours, [is] a detestable thing to you.**

This verse continues the discussion of unclean flying creatures by discussing another type, called “flying swarmers.” This term evidently was a designation for flying bugs and insects, which live in colonies and travel in swarms. Not all flying swarmers were detestable, but rather “the one going on all fours.” “Going on all fours” seems to mean that they ran or crawled in contrast to jumping. It does not seem to be limited to creatures that had only four legs, because in verse 22 the term includes such creatures as bees, roaches, and beetles, which are insects and have six legs. Therefore, this verse identifies three characteristics of unclean swarmers: (1) They traveled or nested in swarms. (2) They had wings, and (3) they crawled or ran when on the ground.

Verse 21. **However, these you may eat among the flying swarmers: the ones going on all fours that do not have legs above their feet with which to leap on the earth.**

This verse describes flying insects and bugs that were clean and could be eaten. The distinguishing factor was that they had long legs used for jumping. These included creatures such as grasshoppers and locusts.

Verse 22. **These of them you may eat: the locust according to its kind, and the katydid according its kind, and the cricket according to its kind, and the grasshopper according to its kind.**

Examples of clean flying bugs and insects are listed in this verse. The exact meanings of the names is not now known, but they seem to have designated four classes of grasshoppers or locusts.

Verse 23. **But every other flying swarmer that [goes] on four feet is a detestable thing to you.**

This verse reemphasizes the distinguishing characteristic of unclean insects and bugs that swarmed. They ran or crawled but did not leap. "On four feet" again probably did not designate the exact number of legs but the type of leg, a leg designed for running or crawling instead of jumping.

(6) Uncleaness from unclean flying creatures (11:24)

Verse 24. **And by these, you will become unclean: whoever touches their carcasses shall be unclean until the evening.**

This verse mentions only the prohibition against touching the carcass of an unclean flying creature. However, it is definite that the prohibition against eating applied also to them, since it had already been stated twice previously (vs. 13, 21-23). This verse states specifically what had been implied in vs. 8,11-12, that breaking these prohibitions made a person unclean. Since unclean creatures were symbols of sin, the purpose of this practice was to teach that when a Jehovah worshiper comes into contact with sin, it adversely affects and influences him or her. That effect is true whether he "eats" the evil, that is, actually receives it into his life, or whether he merely "touches" its carcass, that is, allows its deadening effect to come into contact with his life.

(7) Cleansing of uncleanness from unclean creatures (11:25-28)

Verse 25. **And whoever carries [anything] from their carcasses must wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening.**

And whoever carries [anything] from their carcasses. "Their carcasses" should be taken to refer to all types of dead unclean creatures, not just to dead unclean flying creatures. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that verses 26-28 refer to uncleanness from animals, which had been discussed in verse. 2-8.

must wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening. This statement is the first mention of cleansing away an uncleanness. Cleansing from all types of uncleanness mentioned previously had evidently been reserved to this point, so that they all be discussed at one time.

The verse explains the method of cleansing a person who had become unclean through contact with an unclean creature. Cleansing meant that the person's status as unclean was removed. Two things were required for cleansing away an unclean status: the passage of time until the evening, and washing the clothes. Only washing of the clothes was required in the case of uncleanness from contact with an unclean creature, though washing the clothes and bathing in water was later required for cleansing a person who had an abnormal discharge (see comments on Lev. 15:6-11,13,16-18,21,27) or who ate an animal that died of natural causes (see comments on Lev. 17:15 in MESSAGE 18) or who came in contact with a person with an unclean bodily discharge (see comments on Lev. 15:11-12,13,16,18,22-23,25-27). The requirement of washing the body in those cases is so specific that it would hardly have been omitted here if it had been intended. The cleansing requirements showed that two things are important in removing the effects of sin from a person's life: the passage of time and effort on the part of the sinner to wash them from his life. The additional requirement of washing the body in other cases showed that some sins were of such seriousness that it required greater effort to remove their effects from the person's life.

The requirements for removing uncleanness show that the removal in question here was not pardon from the penalty of sin that comes when a person enters into a covenant relationship with God. It is rather the removal of the effects of sin from the life of a believer who is already in a covenant relationship with God but who afterward has allowed some sin to influence his life. Pardon for the penalty of sin in both the Old Covenant law and in New Covenant grace comes only from the grace of God, not from the passage of time or from human effort. Removal of the effects of sin from the life of a believer requires both. The effects of sin on the life of a believer do not fall away in a moment. It takes time and effort for the effects to be removed.

It had already been noted in Leviticus 5:2, 5-6 that a sin-offering was required when a man touched the carcass of an unclean creature. One reason for that requirement was given in comments on those verses, which was that the sin-offering demonstrated that he confessed that he had sinned. Another reason now becomes clear. As uncleanness symbolized sin in the life of a believer, the sin-offering symbolized the forgiveness and covering of those sins that comes from confession and repentance. When a person was touched by a symbol of sin, it was appropriate for him to practice the symbol of removing sin. Offering the symbolic sin-offering showed that God's forgiveness and grace were also required to remove the effects of sin from a believer's life. While a person may make his life cleaner by washing his own life and by the passing of time, it is not possible for the effects of sin to be completely removed in that manner. It also requires the covering and forgiving work of God. That fact was symbolized by the sin-offering.

Verses. 26-28. **26 And every animal that divides the hoof but is not cloven-footed or does not raise a chew is unclean to you. Everyone touching them will be unclean.**

**27 And all that go on their paws among the animals that go on all fours are unclean to you. Whoever touches their carcass will be unclean until the evening.**

**28 And the one carrying their carcass must wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening. They are unclean to you.**

These verses specifically apply the information about cleansing to uncleanness from contact with animals in particular. Verse 27 shows that animals with no hooves but paws were included among the animals which did not completely divide the hoof. They could not divide the hoof because they had no hooves. That verse also uses the term "going on all fours" with reference to animals, meaning animals that walk or run in contrast to those that leap or jump (see comments on v. 20 above).

The same two requirements for cleansing are mentioned in these verses: passing of time until the evening and washing one's clothes. Both time and human effort are required to remove the effects of sin from a person's life

- b. Uncleanness from touching the carcasses of unclean land swarms (11:29-38)

- (1) Identification of uncleanness and swarms (11:29-30)

Verses 29-30. **29. And these are unclean to you among the swarms the ones swarming on the earth: the weasel, and the field mouse, and the great lizard, according to their kinds,**

**30. And the gecko, and the crocodile, and the salamander, and the sand lizard, and the chameleon.**

A fourth class of unclean creatures is presented here. They are creatures that travel or live in swarms on the ground. Flying swarms had already been discussed in verses. 20-23. This passage deals with land swarms. Eight unclean land swarms are named in these verses. The first was the weasel. The second was the field-mouse. The third was a kind of lizard, though the specific variety is unknown today. The creatures named in verse 30 seem to be five kinds of lizards. The specific variety of the first four is not known today. The last was a chameleon, though not necessarily the same type chameleon that is called by that name in many parts of America today.



- (2) Uncleaness from touching the carcasses of unclean land swarmers and its cleansing (11:31-38)

**Verse 31. These are unclean to you among all the swarmers. Whoever touches them, the dead ones, will be unclean until the evening.**

The land swarmers listed made a person unclean when he touched their carcasses. Verses 41-42 state that eating an unclean land swarmer also made a person unclean. Thus, the same rules applied to land swarmers as to flying swarmers. The words “the dead ones” show that the prohibition against touching their carcasses applied no matter how the land swarmer died, not just when it died by natural causes as some have contended.

Cleansing from uncleaness by touching the carcass of an unclean land swarmer is mentioned in this same verse. It is stated that the uncleaness lasted until evening. No mention is made of washing to remove the uncleaness. It should be understood that washing was also a part of the ceremony of cleansing from contact with unclean land swarmers as it was for contact with other unclean creatures (see comments on vs. 25-28 above).

**Verse 32. And anything on which any of them falls, the dead one, will be unclean, from every article of wood to a piece of clothes or a skin or a sack. Any vessel that is used for any purpose must be put into water, and it shall be unclean until the evening.**

And anything on which any of them falls, the dead one, will be unclean, from every article of wood to a piece of clothes or a skin or a sack. Uncleaness was transferred from the carcasses of land swarmers, not only to people but also to objects. Specifically, vessels or containers of all kinds are mentioned in this verse, whether they were made of wood, cloth, skin, or sack-cloth. Any of these vessels became unclean when a dead land swarmer fell on it or into it. This principle is mentioned here because these small creatures were the only ones likely to fall in death onto such vessels. However, we must assume that the same

principle held for larger unclean animals as well. Any vessel that might touch the carcass of an unclean creature of any kind would become unclean. These provisions were to teach that, when a person allowed anything he possessed to be used for a sinful purpose, it would have a detrimental effect on him. A person was to keep not only himself but also his possessions away from sin.

Any vessel that is used for any purpose must be put into water, and it shall be unclean until the evening. The cleansing of vessels from uncleaness was accomplished in the same way as the cleansing of a person. It was cleansed by being “put in water” or washed and by the passing of time until the evening.

**Verse 33. And any clay vessel on which one of them falls into its midst, all that [is] in it will be unclean, and you must break it.**

The cleansing process could not be used for pottery vessels. They had to be broken and thrown away. This requirement seems to have been because of their porous nature, which allowed the uncleaness to penetrate into the vessel itself. Uncleaness that penetrated into the vessel could not be removed by washing the surface of the vessel, so it had to be destroyed (see comments on Lev. 6:28 in MESSAGE 7).

**Verse 34. Any food that may be eaten on which water will come will be unclean, and all drink that may be drunk from every [such] vessel will be unclean.**

Uncleaness could also be transferred to food. If the food was in water or if it was a drink, the whole would become unclean. It is not stated, but it seems to be implied that the food or drink had to be thrown away and could not be cleansed. There is no definite statement concerning dry foods. Likely they became unclean in the same way but only the portion actually touched by the dead creature had to be destroyed, because it was not penetrated by water that could carry the uncleaness throughout.

**Verse 35. And every oven or stove on which [some] part of their carcass falls will be**

**unclean. It must be broken into pieces. They are unclean, and they will be unclean to you.**

Two other items are mentioned that the carcass of an unclean swarmer would make unclean. They seem to have been mentioned because they were made of clay, and the uncleanness could penetrate into them. The first was the oven, a household item that had already been mentioned in Leviticus 2:4 in MESSAGE 1; and in Leviticus 7:9 in MESSAGE 7 (see comments on those verses). The second seems to have been a clay stove, perhaps with one or more burners. These had to be broken in pieces when touched by the carcass of an unclean land swarmer, because water could not wash away the uncleanness that had penetrated their pores. The additional point is made in this verse that the object that became unclean through contact with an unclean creature could itself transmit uncleanness to others. It is stated that the oven and stove that became unclean “will be unclean to you.” This statement means that a person who touched the oven or stove that had become unclean would become unclean the same as if he had touched the carcass that made it unclean.

**Verse 36. However, a spring or a cistern [that] holds water will be clean, but whatever touches their carcass will be unclean.**

The carcass of an unclean creature did not make a spring or cistern unclean. Probably the reason was that water is a cleansing agent. Such a large amount of water could not be affected by so small a creature. However, the water in the spring or cistern did not make the unclean creature clean, as is shown by the fact that anything used to drag the creature from the water or that touched it by some other means would become unclean.

**Verses 37-38. 37 And if their carcass falls on any seed for sowing that is to be sown, it is clean.**

**38 However, if water is put on the seed and any part of their carcass falls on it, it is unclean to you.**

If the carcass fell on stored seed, the seed would not become unclean. This probably was based on the idea that the kernel of the seed was

protected by the hard outer coating. However, if water was poured on the seed at the same time, the seed did become unclean. The water penetrated the hull of the seed and began the sprouting process. It would carry the uncleanness into the kernel of the seed. Unclean seed evidently had to be destroyed. These special provisions for seed no doubt were mercifully provided to prevent a man's losing his livelihood or food simply through the death of a small creature.

- c. Uncleanness from touching the carcasses of clean animals that died by natural causes and its cleansing (11:39-40)

**Verses 39-40. 39 And if any animal dies that you may eat, the one touching its carcass will be unclean until the evening.**

Even the carcasses of clean animals were unclean if they died by illness, accident, or other natural causes. They were not to be touched or eaten. The reason for this probably was that the blood was not drained from the animal. This view is supported by the fact that the warning against eating such an animal is repeated in Leviticus 17:15-16, which is a part of a larger passage prohibiting the eating of blood (Lev. 17:10-16) (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 21). Thus, the carcass of a clean animal from which the blood was not drained was unclean, just the same as that of an unclean animal.

**Verse 40 And he who eats from its carcass must wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening. Also the one carrying the carcass must wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening.**

Cleansing from touching or eating the carcass was obtained by washing the person's clothes and by the passing of time until evening, as in the case of touching or eating an unclean creature (see comments on v. 25-28 above).

- d. Uncleaness from eating land swarmers (11:41-45)

Verse 41. **And every swarmer the one swarming on the earth is a detestable thing. It must not be eaten.**

Eating land swarmers made a person unclean. The prohibition against eating land swarmers applied to every kind of creature that lived on the ground and traveled or nested in swarms or groups.

Verse 42. **Whatever goes on its belly and whatever goes on all fours and whatever has many feet of all the swarming things that swarm on the earth, you must not eat them, because they are a detestable thing to you.**

This verse identifies the meaning of land swarmers more clearly. The description includes three groups of land creatures. “Whatever goes on the belly” included creatures such as snakes and worms. “Whatever goes on all fours” means land swarmers that crawl or run, as distinct from those that jump (see comments on vs. 20 above), which would include bugs of many kinds. “Whatever has many feet” would include caterpillars and insects. All of these creatures were detestable things and were not to be eaten.

Verse 43. **And you must not make yourself detestable with any swarming thing that swarms, and you must not defile yourselves with them or make yourself unclean by them.**

This verse uses the words “detestable” and “unclean” interchangeably, showing that they have the same meaning. A person was to avoid making himself unclean by eating any kind of land swarmer. Cleansing is not mentioned in this section, but the method had already been described in verses 25-28 (see comments on those verses above).

Verses 44-45. **44 For I am Jehovah, your God, and you must make yourselves holy and be holy, for I am holy. You must not defile**

**yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the earth.**

Verse 45. **Because I am Jehovah the One having brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. Therefore, you shall be holy, for I am holy.**

The reason for observing the laws of clean and unclean creatures is stated here. It is spoken specifically concerning land swarmers, but it obviously applied as well to all other classes of unclean creatures. The reason was, “You must be holy; for I [am] holy.” To be holy means to be set apart to Jehovah, with the obligation to be like Him in character (see comments on Lev. 2:3 in MESSAGE 1). Jehovah was a righteous God; therefore, those set apart to Him were to be righteous. The clean-unclean regulations were symbols that the person was set apart to be like God. When an Israelite separated himself from unclean creatures, his action symbolized that he was committed to separating his life from sin in order to be like Jehovah. Avoiding unclean creatures did not make him holy, but his doing so was a symbol that he had committed himself to be holy. In other words, he had set himself apart to live in the likeness of Jehovah and according to His commands.

Summary note (11:46-47)

Verses 46-47. **46 This is the law of the animal and the flying creature and every living creature that moves through the waters and every living creature that swarms on the earth**

**47 To make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, between the living being that may be eaten and the living being that may not be eaten.**

These words are a summary of the entire content of this MESSAGE. Since other summary notes in the Book of Leviticus were clearly not parts of the MESSAGES spoken by Jehovah (Lev. 7:37-38; 8:36; 13:32,59; 14:54-57; 15:32-33; 16:34b; 21:24; 23:44; 24:23; 26:46; 27:34), most likely this note was added by Moses and was not a part of the MESSAGE spoken to him by Jehovah.

### **Application**

When we as Christians become followers of Jehovah and of His Son Jesus Christ, we commit ourselves a life separated from the world. This commitment means living in the moral likeness of Jesus. No Christian can live like Jesus completely, but we must make a daily and constant effort to do so. When we fail to live by the high standards of Jesus, our lives and our relationship to God are damaged. Our sin is more than just some deed we have done. It is a powerful influence has become a part of our lives. The damage that results is real whether we participate directly in some evil deed or whether we allow it to be around us and closely associate with it. In either case, we are affected by the evil that has touched us. Our lives are hurt.

However, we can cleanse away the effects of those sins and remove the stain that has invaded our lives. We can be cleansed by staying away from those evil influences for a period of time and also by our own efforts to wash the effects from our lives. The longer we stay away from evil influences, the cleaner and the stronger we become. Also, our efforts to resist sin and to be separate from it can restore us to cleanness and strength. Even so, we still need the covering and forgiving power of Jesus to make us truly clean. Since all Christians live in a sinful world and are still sinners ourselves, cleansing our lives from the effects of sin needs to be a daily, constant effort and also a matter of daily prayer to God for forgiveness.

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### **Critical Note**

Some interpreters have argued that, since three passages in this chapter concern uncleanness from animals (Lev. 11:2-8; 26-28; and 39-40) the materials were selected from several sources and combined together in one writing by a later editor. The conclusion should be the opposite. If the chapter had been formed by an editor who selected materials from several sources and placed various excerpts where he wished, he surely would have placed the three passages on unclean animals together. The fact that they were not placed together is an indication that the materials came into being in the conversational fashion that the book describes. The Book of Leviticus claims to have been spoken out of The Tabernacle by Jehovah to leaders of Israel, usually Moses (see comments in INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS under the heading Theme). The MESSAGES in Leviticus 11-15 claim to have been spoken by Jehovah to Moses and Aaron (see comments on Lev. 11:1 below, on Lev. 12:1 in MESSAGE 15, in Lev. 13:1 in MESSAGE 16, on Lev. 14:1 in MESSAGE 17, on Lev. 14:33 in MESSAGE 18, and on Lev. 15:1 in MESSAGE 19). In a conversation, it is natural to return to a subject that has already mentioned but that has not been quite fully discussed. In addition, a characteristic of Biblical revelations is that the same subject is covered over and over again with a little added information each time it is mentioned. Repetition and further clarification are marks of a good teacher, which Jehovah certainly was. That method is skillfully used in this chapter. It is not evidence of multiple sources, but of a skillful teacher.

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