

# Clean And Unclean Meats

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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The biblical command of clean and unclean meats is often assailed as an "Old Covenant law." Detractors claim it is no longer required of Christians, having been "done away" like the Old Covenant. This contention, however, ignores the plain meaning of passages in both the Old and New Testaments. This law is still in force today!

The law of clean and unclean represents several dozen other laws, such as the laws of quarantine and sexual behavior, that guard against physical and spiritual impurity. These relate directly to our desire for and practice of "holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

1. What principle undergirds the law of clean and unclean? Leviticus 11:44-47; Deuteronomy 14:2-3.

**Comment:** Both *sanctification* and *holiness* imply being "different" or "set apart" for a special purpose. God instituted His law of clean and unclean to show the difference between His people and the nations around them. Paul calls the church "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). I Peter 1:13-16 shows very clearly that Christians, spiritual Israelites, now have a responsibility to be holy as God is.

2. Are Christians commanded to cleanse themselves of defilements of the flesh? II Corinthians 6:16-7:1.

**Comment:** As the spiritual temple of God, as God's sons and daughters, we have a duty to make ourselves as "clean," "pure" or "holy" as possible. This "perfecting holiness" includes all areas of life, not just the spiritual. Paul makes an unmistakable distinction between flesh *and* spirit (II Corinthians 7:1) only two verses after he paraphrases Isaiah 52:11: "Do not touch what is unclean."

3. Was the law of clean and unclean known before the Old Covenant? Genesis 7:1-3.

**Comment:** Since it was in force in Noah's time, and possibly in Abel's lifetime (Genesis 4:4), it was not made obsolete with the passing of the Old Covenant. This is a vital principle to remember regarding the Old and New Covenants: *What did not originate with the Old Covenant did not die with it.*

4. How do we know what foods are clean or unclean? Leviticus 11:1-47; Deuteronomy 14:3-21.

**Comment:** God lists those foods we can or cannot eat, and for those He does not list, He states how we may identify whether they are clean or unclean.

5. Did Christ do away with this law? Mark 7:1-23.

**Comment:** This long section dealing with defilement begins with a question from the Pharisees about eating with unwashed hands (verse 7). Christ's answer never strays from this point; He is addressing *ritual washings that the Jews added* (verses 7-9), not unclean

meats. Verse 19, however, is often cited as proof that Jesus declared all foods clean. Yet He is speaking about the human digestive system! He says that whether one washes his hands or not, the digestive tract handles, or "purifies," all food the same way. He then moves to the more serious issue of a man's conduct, which is what truly defiles him.

**6.** Did Peter's vision signify that God nullified this law? Acts 10:9-16, 28, 34-35; 11:1-18.

**Comment:** Three times Peter refused to eat the unclean animals shown to him within the great sheet, and God did not rebuke him. The meaning of the vision is clearly defined in verse 28: "But God has shown me that I should not call *any man* common or unclean." Nowhere in the ensuing dispute (Acts 11:1-18) is any mention made of clean or unclean foods.

**7.** Did Paul allow the eating of unclean meats? I Corinthians 8:1-13.

**Comment:** Notice here again that no mention is made of clean or unclean. Paul is speaking of clean meats offered to idols, for some of the pagan deities were offered bullocks, sheep, goats, chickens, doves and other clean animals, the remainder of which would be offered for sale in the market. His main subject is not clean and unclean, but being sensitive to a brother's conscience.

**8.** Will the law of clean and unclean be in force in God's Kingdom? Ezekiel 44:23; Revelation 21:27.

**Comment:** In the Millennium the priesthood will teach the difference between clean and unclean! And after the thousand years, no abominable thing, nothing that defiles will mar the New Jerusalem! All of its citizens will be holy. This is the wonderful destiny that we are preparing for, and part of making ourselves ready is following the law of clean and unclean meats.