

CLEANLINESS AND HOLINESS: PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL WHOLENESS IN THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

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Old Testament theology is a portrayal of God's attempts to restore the broken relationship that exists between people and their Creator. Genesis begins with God proclaiming each act of creative reality to be "good," until in its completed totality it is declared to be "very good" (Gen 1:3).¹ As the crown jewel of that magnificent handiwork, mankind was included in this proclamation. Fashioned in God's "own image and after His likeness" (v. 27), mankind was given dominion over the earth and its creatures (v. 28). However, in an attempt to achieve equality with Divinity (Gen 3:5), Adam found himself instead to be separated and in open rebellion. He had surrendered his allegiance to a foe. His offspring quickly sank into degradation (chaps. 3-6), a far cry from what God had ordained in the beginning. Throughout the ensuing oracles of Genesis, numerous pictures depict God's efforts to reconcile lost humanity to Himself.

It was God's intention that the reconciliation process be consummated by the nation of Israel. Prior to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, Moses was reminded of the covenant relation that had been established with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers. And I have remembered my covenant. Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I *am* the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments. And I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I *am* the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it to you for an heritage: I *am* the Lord. Exod 6:4-8

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the KJV.

After 215 years of Egyptian exile,² the Abrahamic covenant was about to be actualized, both physically and redemptively. Bondage to Egypt was to be eradicated. The Israelite nation headquartered in Canaan was to be exalted as God's special people of the covenant.

Geographically, Egyptian residency terminated with the crossing of the Red Sea. Yet figuratively, Egypt continued with the Israelites. Physically, this was demonstrated by the mixed multitude; spiritually, it was illustrated by an incessant craving for the pleasures of Egypt (Num 11: 4-6). If Israel was to be Yahweh's holy nation (Exod 19: 6), a holy, special people above all other nations (Deut 7:6), a holy people unto the Lord (14:2), then it was mandatory that a sanctifying process or cleansing, take place between the Red Sea and the Promised Land. Without it Israel could never maintain her part of the covenant. Both Sinai, where God's holy and eternal law was proclaimed, and the wilderness wanderings, which offered daily opportunity for character development, were key elements in God's plan to transform the seed of Abraham. His ultimate goal was that Israel, as His chosen people, would be holy, even as He was holy.

Nowhere is this concept more clearly expounded than in the book of Leviticus. Indeed, the expression, "Be holy for I am holy," could accurately be termed the motto of this book.³ "Holy" (*qādōsh*), together with cognate terms such as "sanctify" (*qādēsh*) and "holiness" (*qōdesh*), occur 152 times in this book alone, about twenty percent of the total number of occurrences in the entire OT.⁴

What then was the essence of the meaning of "holiness" to the author of the Levitical laws? In marked contrast to the animistic "belief in which natural objects are invested with supernatural force,"⁵ holiness speaks of an innate quality understood to mean "that which is unapproachable or withdrawn from common use."⁶ Moses impressed the Israelites with the possessiveness of the term. It was more than something that was simply unapproachable or withdrawn. Rather, "to be holy" became a positive concept, an extension of God's will. Fundamentally, it meant to live the life of godliness.⁷ Holiness thus moved from being a rational idea to a condition, a personal quality. W. Eichrodt states correctly, "The man or woman who belongs to God must possess a particular kind of nature, which by

²"The Chronology of Early Bible History," *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (SDABC), rev. ed., ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington DC: Review & Herald, 1976-80), 1:184-86.

³B. L. Gordon, *Medieval and Renaissance Medicine* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 18.

⁴Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 18.

⁵Jacob Milgrom, "The Biblical Diet Laws as an Ethical System," *Interpretation* 17 (1963): 293.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

comprising at once outward and inward, ritual and moral purity will correspond to the nature of the holy God."⁸

This matter of holiness was not an option for the Israelites. Indeed, "Israel had to be holy, for her God, Yahweh, was holy."⁹ Included in the meaning of the word were the attributes of sanctification, cleanness, purity, being set apart, and separation from sin. "In the Levitical context, *to be holy is to be whole, complete; to be one—holiness in unity, integrity, and perfection of the individual.*"¹⁰ To the children of Israel, it meant to live "a life entirely dedicated to God and to be set apart for His use."¹¹

Therefore, a critical question that needs to be addressed is, "How was God's ideal, this elevated state of holiness, to be effectually realized?" In over two centuries of Egyptian bondage, Abraham's descendants had become mentally blinded and debased by slavery and heathenism.¹² Israel had adopted egregious idolatrous practices while the knowledge of God's holy law had been lost sight of and replaced with pagan customs and ideas.¹³ The nation was utterly unprepared to be the holy people according to the ideals of the Abrahamic covenant. To bring them from a state of depravity and make them worthy of being the recipients of these sacred precepts, Yahweh spelled out in precise language the very procedures necessary for this transformation to take place. To be God's chosen people Israel had to be holy because God is holy. To that end a process of cleansing or sanctifying had to take place.

In addition to religious instruction, Levitical statutes address a wide spectrum of human health issues. Examples include sexual morality, personal hygiene, quarantine of communicable diseases, burial of human excreta, measures for the prevention of the spread of fungal diseases, prohibitions against tattooing, and dietary restrictions. To understand those laws which had a bearing on the day-to-day physical life, it is helpful to understand the conditions that existed in Egypt during the XVIIIth dynasty.¹⁴ Further, archaeological records reveal that morality had reached the lowest depths of decadence. Marriage between siblings, especially amongst royalty, was common.¹⁵ Such consanguineous marriages were the rule

⁸W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1:137.

⁹Walter Kaiser, *Toward and Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 111.

¹⁰M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1966), 4. Emphasis mine.

¹¹Kaiser, 116.

¹²Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 10.

¹³*Ibid.*, 333, 334.

¹⁴Cf. "The Chronology of Early Bible History," *SDABC*, 1:188-94.

¹⁵H. E. Sigerist, *Primitive and Archaic Medicine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), 239.

rather than the exception. For example, Ramses II had at least 170 children¹⁶ and took a large number of his acknowledged daughters as his wives in order to have "children like unto himself."¹⁷ Brothels were well established institutions since prostitution was an accepted practice.¹⁸ Such promiscuity resulted in extensive blindness due to gonorrheal infections passed on from mothers to their newborns.¹⁹

In marked contrast, Israel was to be a holy people. Not only were such abominable practices to be shunned, they were punishable by death (Lev 20:25). The apodictic law thundered from Sinai proclaimed, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exod 20:14). To clarify, specific explicit instructions were given, detailing types of sexual relationships that were unholy (Lev 18, 20). The gonorrhea that afflicted the Egyptians would have been a natural result of disobedience to the above commandment (Deut 28:27-29). In fact, it is likely that the plague that emaciated the Israelite camp after it had engaged in intercourse with the Edomites, was a particularly virulent strain of a sexually transmitted disease.²⁰

It was by appeal to religious values that hygienic laws were also established.²¹ Cleanliness was to encompass the whole camp, not just individuals. In the region of the Nile, the rudiments of personal hygiene existed. For example, daily bathing was commonplace.²² Nothing that was impure was allowed into the temple, the dwelling place of the deity. Washing areas were even installed in the courtyards of temples so that hands could be washed prior to religious ceremonies.²³ However, such practices were nowhere near as extensive as those found in the Mosaic Health Code with its detailed emphasis on personal cleanliness. Some of these procedures included:

Incinerators placed outside the camp for waste disposal

The skin of the bullock, and all his flesh, with his head, and with his legs, and his inwards, and his dung, even the whole bullock shall he carry forth without the camp unto a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn him on the wood with fire: where the ashes are poured out shall he be burnt. Lev 4:11-12

¹⁶Ibid., 241.

¹⁷J. Thorwald, *Science and the Secrets of Early Medicine* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1963), 90.

¹⁸Sigeriest, 91.

¹⁹Ibid., 334. The Canaanites were even more corrupt. Their vile practices included ritual prostitutes of both sexes, bestiality, and human sacrifices. (Cf. Lev 20:2-5).

²⁰C. R. Smith, *The Physician Examines the Bible* (New York: Hallmark-Hubner, 1950), 73.

²¹P. Wood, *Moses: The Founder of Preventive Medicine* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1920), 47-48.

²²Sigeriest, 246.

²³J. B. Hurry, *IMHOTEP, the Vizier and Physician of King Zoser and Afterward the Egyptian God of Medicine* (New York: AMS Press, 1978), 166.

Human excreta buried outside the camp

Thou shalt have a place also without the camp, whither thou shalt go forth abroad: and thou shalt have a paddle upon thy weapon; and it shall be, when thou wilt ease thyself abroad, thou shalt dig therewith, and shalt turn back and cover that which cometh from thee. Deut 23:12-13

The priests as physical and spiritual examples

Speak unto Aaron saying, "Whosoever *he be* of thy seed in their generations that hath any blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God. For whatsoever man *he be* that hath a blemish, he shall not approach: a blind man, or a lame, or he that hath a flat nose, or any thing superfluous, or a man that is brokenfooted, or brokenhanded, or crookbakt, or a dwarf, or that hath a blemish in his eye, or be scurvy, or scabbed or hath his stones broken; no man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the Lord by fire: he hath a blemish; he shall not come nigh to offer the bread of his God. Lev 21:17-21

Sterilization procedures

Eleazar the priest said unto the men of war which went to the battle, "This is the ordinance of the law which the Lord commanded Moses; only the gold, and the silver, the brass, the iron, the tin, and the lead, everything that may abide the fire, ye shall make *it go* through the fire, and it shall be clean: nevertheless it shall be purified with the water of separation: and all that abideth not the fire ye shall make go through the water. And ye shall wash your clothes the seventh day, and ye shall be clean, and afterward ye shall come into the camp." Num 31:21-24

R. Hubbard points out that *Young's Analytical Concordance* lists 63 separate texts in the laws of the Pentateuch where the word "wash" is used. Washing preceded the eating of food, serving in the sanctuary, offering a sacrifice, and was to follow childbirth and sexual intercourse.²⁴ Upon recovery from disease, an individual had to pass a purification test.²⁵

The above examples provide strong evidence that cleanliness was associated with holiness while uncleanness was associated with unholiness. Thus cleanliness and godliness were very much akin to each other. Spiritual cleanness could not be attained apart from physical purity. No filth, whether physical or spiritual, could be tolerated by a holy God. And so God declared that as His chosen people, Israel should be "holy even as He was holy."

²⁴R. Hubbard, Syllabus for Historical Perspectives of Health, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, CA, 1975. (See p. 27).

²⁵Smith, 32.

The book of Leviticus knows of nothing that is beyond God's control or concern. All aspects of life: religious (chaps. 21-24), sexual (chaps. 18,20), neighborly relationships (chaps. 19, 25), atonement for sin (chap. 16), and even our diet (chap. 11), are important to the Covenant Redeemer. To be certain, God was careful to institute guidelines or principles in the Mosaic Health Code that were designed to prevent diseases. These are illustrated in the chart below.

EXAMPLES FROM THE MOSAIC HEALTH CODE

PRINCIPLE	TEXT	DISEASE PREVENTED
Sexual Morality	Exod 20:14: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Lev 18:22: "Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind." Lev 19:29: "Do not prostitute thy daughter."	STDs AIDS
Burial of Human Excreta	Deut 23:12,13: "When thou wilt ease thyself abroad, thou shalt dig . . . and cover that which cometh from thee."	Gastrointestinal diseases, Typhoid, Cholera, Other vector-borne diseases.
Incineration of Waste	Lev 4:11- 12: "Even the whole bullock shall he carry forth without the camp unto a clean place . . . and burn him on the wood with fire."	Vector-spread diseases
Sterilization Procedures	Num 31:21-23: ". . . everything that may abide the fire, ye shall make it go through the fire, and it shall be clean . . . and all that abideth not the fire ye shall make go through the water."	Various infections
Personal Hygiene	Lev 15:13: "He shall wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in running water."	Communicable diseases
Quarantine or Communicable Diseases	Num 5:2, 3: "Put out of the camp every leper every one who hath an issue. . . without the camp shall ye put them; that they defile not their camps."	Communicable and infectious diseases, especially leprosy and skin diseases

Tattooing Forbidden	Lev 19:28: "Ye shall not make any cutting in your flesh for the dead."	Hepatitis, Tetanus
Prevention of Fungal Disease	Lev 13:47-59: Care of clothing. Lev 14:38-42: Treatment of houses.	Allergies, Spore-borne diseases
Exercise and Rest	Exod 20:8-11: "Six days shalt thou labor, but the seventh day is the Sabbath . . . in it thou shalt not work."	Stress related illness. Maintenance of physical fitness
Low Fat and low Cholesterol Diet	Lev 3:17: "Eat neither fat nor blood." Lev 7:23-26: Eat no manner of fat of ox or sheep or goat	Heart disease. Cancer, and Diabetes

Clean and Unclean Meats

Because Seventh-day Adventists have emphasized Lev 11 more than any other chapter in the book of Leviticus, with the possible exception of chap. 16, I would like to address the issue of clean and unclean meats in some detail. It must be recognized that it is within the context of holiness that the distinction between clean and unclean foods is made. After explicitly defining what is clean and what is unclean, the following proclamation is made:

For I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I *am* holy. . . 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. Lev 11:44-45

Again it must be emphasized that "holiness" meant entire separation from heathen, worldly practices. Israel was to exemplify God's holy ideals to the nations with regard to sexual purity, personal hygiene, control of environmental pollution, disease free environs, and obedience to God's commandments and statutes. But why should diet have anything to do with physical cleanliness, not to mention sanctification? What difference would partaking of a pork chop versus a beef steak make in one's relationship with God? Why should certain aquatic life be clean and acceptable while other creatures swimming in the same waters be relegated to uncleanness?

Biblical scholars cite about five possible underlying reasons for the Levitical distinction between clean and unclean meats.²⁶ Following is a brief evaluation of

²⁶Cf. Wenham, 166; Milgrom, 288-301.

each position. Since the hygienic stance is the one usually forwarded by Seventh-day Adventists, it will be addressed last.

The Distinction is Arbitrary

This position assumes that the rationale behind the distinction is known only to God. If He made a distinction, then it must be regarded precisely, whether or not there is any logical moral or physiological explanation.²⁷ Though this was the view of some of the rabbis, Wenham recommends it only as a last resort.²⁸ God is reasonable and He puts reasonable demands upon His people. Because of who He is, He does have the right to be arbitrary, but such a label should not be automatically attached to that which is obscure to human intellect. In this instance, the weight of evidence is so great as to deem arbitrariness to be implausible.

The Distinction is Based on Cultic Grounds

There appears to be some tenability for this explanation. Both M. Noth and Eichrodt support this position²⁹ on the basis that the pig was an ancient sacrificial and domestic animal that was used for food. In researching food taboos, F. J. Simoons could find "no hint of negative reaction to pigs or pork throughout the early period of pig keeping in Egypt."³⁰ In fact, Pharaoh, himself possessed pigs and they were bred on the temple grounds at Abydos, the "most sacred place in all Egypt."³¹ Mice, serpents, and hares were regarded in magical belief as especially effective media of demonic power.³² Fried mouse was an Egyptian remedy for toothache.³³

While cultic practices of the Egyptians and Canaanites were taboo to the Israelites, the above explanation cannot be accepted as the major impetus for forbidding unclean foods. The Canaanites sacrificed the same general range of animals as did Israel. The bull in particular was an important cultic mammal in both Egyptian and Canaanite ritual.³⁴ Because of the bull's esteem in Egypt, Israel

²⁷Cf. A. Bonar, *A Commentary on Leviticus*, 5th ed. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 209.

²⁸Wenham, 166.

²⁹M. Noth, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, rev. ed., trans. J. E. Anderson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 91-96; Eichrodt, 134.

³⁰F. J. Simoons, *Eat Not This Flesh: Food Avoidances in the Old World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), 15.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²Eichrodt, 134, 135.

³³P. Ghalioungui, *The House of Life: Magic and Medicine in Ancient Egypt* (Amsterdam: B. M. Israel, 1973), 130, 146.

³⁴Wenham, 167.

did not engage in sacrificial offerings while in captivity.³⁵ In the ancient Egyptian Medical Papyri, both bull's blood and pig's blood were prescribed for certain ailments.³⁶ It seems logical that if pagan ritual was the reason behind the separation of clean and unclean animals, then either the cow should have been considered unclean, or the swine clean. Certain heathen customs were indeed forbidden on moral grounds, but nowhere is such an explanation given for the separation recorded in Lev 11 and Deut 14.

The Distinction is Based on Ethical Grounds

Milgrom agrees that several factors may have been involved but emphasizes that "in no manner can they begin to account for the biblical dietary system in its entirety. . . . Of all the theories, only the ethical one best fits the facts; to teach reverence for life through restricted access to animal life for food."³⁷ The laws were intended to have an immediate effect upon the consciousness of the Hebrew. Such statutes would make him abhor cruelty to animals as a monstrous crime; such abhorrence would then extend beyond animal life to the ultimate goal of reverence for human life. Ritual was necessary for a pragmatic display of lofty principles of life.

Such arguments leave one wondering why the distinctions are made in the manner in which they are. Could not the same reverence for life be taught using different criteria to determine what is clean and what is not? It seems that the logical conclusion to be drawn from an ethical approach would be abstinence from all flesh foods, not just an arbitrary division between clean and unclean meats.

The Distinction is Based on Symbolic Grounds

The symbolic interpretation allegorizes the behavior and habits of clean animals into living examples of how righteous Israel should live. In opposition, the lifestyles of the unclean symbolize sinful humanity. According to Douglas, well known approaches to the allegorizing tradition include the first century Epistle of Barnabas and Bishop Challomer's notes on the Westminster Bible at the beginning of the twentieth century.³⁸ Such an approach can be dangerous in that it offers no hermeneutic guidelines, thereby resulting in an *ad infinitum* possibility of interpretations. An illustration of the lengths that such allegorization may be taken to is Bonar's assertion that each animal is designed to teach people something about their relationship with God. The camel, an unclean animal that in some ways

³⁵White, 333.

³⁶C. D. Leake, *The Old Egyptian Medical Papyri* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1952), 79.

³⁷Milgrom, 296.

³⁸Douglas, 47, 48.

is similar to the clean ruminants, merely teaches that it is safe to trust God in areas of doubt. Conies teach that we are to hide from the least appearance of evil. The pig impresses us with the filth of iniquity. The Lord as shepherd, God's sustaining providence, the saint panting after his Savior, and the beauty of holiness are illustrated through the clean sheep, wild goat, hart, and roebuck, respectively.³⁹

Douglas attempts to give guidelines to avoid such tangents. All of these injunctions must be explained by the command to be holy.⁴⁰ The concept of holiness is developed to the point that it means correct definition and discrimination; it is order, not confusion.⁴¹ To put it another way, "the notion underlying holiness and cleanness was wholeness and normality."⁴² The analogy between holiness in humanity and cleanness in animals extends to the point that creatures conform to the standards of the biological group to which they belong just as a person must conform to the norms of moral and physical perfection.⁴³ Cud-chewing, cloven-hoofed mammals are the proper kind of food for a pastoralist.⁴⁴ Any creature digressing from the normal order of things would then be considered unclean. Split hooves and rumination were criteria for normalcy among land animals. Fins and scales were characteristics of proper aquatic life. Predatory fowls were classified as unclean because feasting on carnage and carnivorous lifestyles were contrary to holding life sacred. Unfortunately, such reasoning leaves Douglas to conclude that there is no deeper reason for the prohibition against swine than its failure to live up to the criteria of being a ruminant.⁴⁵

There are a number of arguments against establishing symbolism as the primary intent of the dietary restrictions given by God to Moses. Distinctive classes of clean and unclean did not originate at Sinai but prior to the Flood (Gen 7:2). Leviticus only enumerates what had already been established. Further, the Bible does not equate cleanness with that which is edible while uncleanness is associated with that which is inedible. Proper equivalents that are better suited for such distinctions are "pure" in contrast with "defiled."⁴⁶ Allegorization disavows the correlation between healthful living and spiritual growth.

³⁹Bonar, 214.

⁴⁰Douglas, 48.

⁴¹Ibid., 53.

⁴²Wenham, 169.

⁴³Douglas, 14.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., 55.

⁴⁶Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, 22d American ed., s.v. "cleanness;" "uncleanness."

The Distinction is Based on Hygienic Grounds

The proponents of symbolism are adamant in decrying the trend of the twentieth century to make Moses an enlightened public health administrator. While allowing for the fact that there might be some hygienic values undergirding these statutes, they feel that the Israelites themselves did not regard them as such.⁴⁷

In the Torah, it is not necessary for God to preface His decrees with physiological reasoning every time He addresses a distinct segment of human existence. Yet on several occasions the correlation between freedom from disease and obedience to God's commandments is made. Such notable passages include:

If ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them . . . the Lord will take away from thee all sickness and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee. Deut 7: 12, 15

If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book . . . He will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt. Deut 28: 58; 60

If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee. Exod 15: 26

Here is definite evidence that obedience to God results not only in spiritual blessings but also physical health. Disobedience inevitably leads to disease. The true impact of the conditional promise in Exod 15:26 can only be realized when its magnitude is properly understood. Translations of medical papyri, as well as autopsies performed on Egyptians mummies disclose that prevalent diseases in ancient Egypt included chronic rheumatism, dental caries, smallpox, schistosomiasis, arthritis, tuberculosis, staph infections, pneumonia, pleurisy, digestive illnesses, gout, kidney stones, atherosclerosis, constipation, polio, bubonic plague, dysentery, cholera, malaria, gonorrhea, visceral pains, urinary disorders, epilepsy, fevers, and a wide assortment of diseases caused by poor sanitation in general.⁴⁸

Medical historians agree that the height of ancient Egyptian medical perspicuity was during the XVIIIth dynasty,⁴⁹ roughly about the time of the Exodus. The priest-physician had access to several very valuable medical texts. They contained a mixture of magic, sorcery, and ignorance intertwined with scientifically rational therapy. Since the official doctors belonged to the class of priests, and their training centered around the temples, it is likely that Moses had

⁴⁷See Wenham, 167; Douglas, 29.

⁴⁸Thorwald, 34-46.

⁴⁹Leake, 35, 36.

been educated in the healing arts of the time. Yet within the Mosaic Health Code, not even a fragment of Egyptian medicine can be found. Rather than being curative, the Mosaic Health Code is entirely preventive. The dietary laws formed a part of that system of preventive medicine. They also had significant religiosity in that God was trying to impress upon Israel the fact that breaking a law of physical well-being was just as much a defilement as it was to break one of the Ten Commandments.⁵⁰

The general connection between health and holiness needs to be extended to the specific distinctions between clean and unclean meats. Most theologians bypass the fact that such laws were casuistic, matters of conscience having particular importance at only a certain time and place in history, namely the wandering in the wilderness. It must be reiterated that in the beginning God never intended for mankind to eat flesh of any kind. Yahweh was not making arbitrary ritual demands upon His holy people but was rather giving instruction for their betterment, intending to eventually bring them back to the original vegetarian diet.⁵¹ To aid the Israelites in making the transition from flesh-eating to vegetarianism, the animals most likely to cause diseases were forbidden. The animals deemed unclean were the carnivores, the scavengers, the so-called "garbage collectors." God knew that eating such flesh would so enfeeble the brain that sacred things could not be discerned.⁵²

Even with those animals deemed as clean, strict instruction was given regarding their preparation. "It shall be a perpetual statute . . . that ye eat neither fat nor blood" (Lev 3:17). And to be doubly sure that the Israelites understood that He was talking about the "clean" animals, a few verses later God spelled it out very clearly, "Ye shall eat no manner of fat, of ox, or of sheep, or of goat . . . Moreover ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or of beast" (Lev 7:23 -26). Was it permissible to eat clean animals? Yes. But clear prohibitions were given against consuming their fat and blood. Considering that more than eighty diseases can be transmitted from animals to humans,⁵³ the most logical conclusion seems to be that even the clean meats were not intended to become a permanent part of the diet. But to the Israelites, the ritual became an end unto itself and they failed to understand the connection between physical habits and spiritual health. Thus, even on the borders of Canaan they still lusted after the diet they had eaten while in Egyptian servitude.

Wenham is quite accurate when he states that the dietary laws were for specific people in a specific situation; that they were part of the blueprint for

⁵⁰Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods* (Washington DC: Review & Herald, 1938), 17.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 378.

⁵²Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948) 1:9.

⁵³Otto H. Christensen, "Diet and Spiritual Health," *Review*, September 1976, 153.

making Israel holy.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, instead of perceiving God's desire to ultimately bring His people back to the original diet, he suggests that in the Christian dispensation there is no longer any reason for making a distinction between "clean" and "unclean" animals; hence, all flesh is permissible for food.

In general, Seventh-day Adventists have also missed the casuistic intent of Lev 11. If we are going to selectively choose which parts of the Levitical laws are binding on Christians today, then we should at least be consistent and also teach *complete abstinence from all animal fat and blood*. The Levitical message is straightforward in this aspect.

Paul clearly understood the intent of Leviticus. He begged the Jewish Christians in Rome, "I beseech you therefore, brethren . . . that ye present your *bodies* a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world. . . ." (Rom 12:1,2).

In the final analysis, the spirit of holiness cannot be attained with diseased bodies and minds.⁵⁵ Holiness is not possible while the body is being polluted with the unclean. The message communicated throughout Leviticus may be paraphrased in modern parlance, "You are my special people. As such, you are to be separate from heathen practices of the nations around you. The state of holiness is so lofty that you were not even able to conceptualize it. Therefore, as part of the covenant relationship, I am going to instruct you in the way of holiness." Such instruction pervades more than just the moral law embodied in the Ten Commandments. It involves more than a ritual of sacrifices and offerings. It envelopes holiness and sanctification and is deeply concerned with every aspect of living: flocks and herds, houses, work, leisure, and certainly diet. Israel could never be "holy" as long as they were living the lifestyle practiced in Egypt. Geographical separation was not enough. The camp could only be clean, the people could only be sanctified, when they stopped lusting after the Egyptian lifestyle. This was a lesson that Israel never learned and the consequences were far reaching. Ellen G. White's comment is quite insightful:

Had they been willing to deny appetite in obedience to God's restrictions, feebleness and disease would have been unknown to them. Their descendants would have possessed physical and mental strength. They would have had clear perceptions of truth and duty, keen discrimination, and sound judgment. But they were unwilling to submit to God's requirements, and they failed to reach the standard He had set for them. . . God let them have flesh but it proved a curse to them.⁵⁶

The essence of Leviticus, then, is that physical life is enmeshed with spiritual sanctification. One cannot be separated from the other. To relegate the Levitical

⁵⁴Wenham, 161.

⁵⁵White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:554.

⁵⁶White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, 378.

laws to mere ritual is to miss their intent. To make the ceremonies all-important is to obliterate their purpose. To rebel against them is to engender destruction.

A Historical Application

In 1348, the Black Death (bubonic plague), the worst epidemic the world has ever seen, broke out in Europe and continued for the next 40 years. It is estimated that between two thirds and three fourths of the entire population of Europe was decimated.⁵⁷ So many died that the pope consecrated the Rhone River as a final burial place for the afflicted.⁵⁸ H. W. Haggard indicates that the plague threatened to exterminate the human race.⁵⁹

It is interesting to note that 800 years earlier a similar outbreak of bubonic plague, called the Plague of Justinian, ushered in the Dark Ages. It too ravaged the whole known world, wreaking its devastation for seventy years. A whole host of plagues and epidemics flourished between these two outbreaks of bubonic plague including leprosy, smallpox, diphtheria, measles, influenza, tuberculosis, anthrax, cholera, and syphilis.

What caused these pandemics that nearly wiped out the human race? A clue can be found in the burial of Thomas A. Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, who was murdered in 1170. When the monks undressed him for burial, they found lice everywhere in his undergarments "like boiling water."⁶⁰ Under papal Christianity, the Levitical emphasis on cleanliness had become lost. The pagan Greek belief that the soul is good but the body is evil and, therefore should be shunned, was adopted into papal dogma. As a result, personal hygiene and health were neglected. Living in filth became a sign of sanctity. In summarizing medical historians on this point, Hubbard states that throughout the Middle Ages cleanliness was a sign of weakness, and worldliness, and luxury.⁶¹ He concludes,

While the squalor and dirty habits may have been the physical cause, the intellectual stagnation of the Dark Ages which produced ignorance of the simplest rules of hygiene and sanitation would be closer to the truth. . . . Religious dogma, which had no basis in Scripture, produced results which still baffle historians and medical researchers.⁶²

⁵⁷Gordon, 462.

⁵⁸L. S. Goerke and E. L. Stebbins, *Mustard's Introduction to Public Health*, 5th ed., (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 10, 11.

⁵⁹H. W. Haggard, *The Doctor in History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), 174-178.

⁶⁰A. Swinson, *The History of Public Health* (Exeter: Wheaton, 1966), 19.

⁶¹Hubbard, 144.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 154-54.

Application for Today

First recognized as a distinct clinical entity in 1981, AIDS has since claimed the lives of over 21 million people. Approximately 16,000 new infections occur daily.⁶³ Had the sexual guidelines in Lev 18 been carried out, it would have been impossible ever to have an AIDS epidemic.

In some parts of the world we see the effects of not properly disposing waste and garbage and of not having proper sanitary measures for eliminating excrement. As a result gastroenteritis, intestinal parasites, typhoid, cholera, trachoma, schistosomiasis, and skin diseases are endemic in many developing countries. Yet, the amount of human waste pales in comparison to that produced by animals that are being raised for food. In the United States the livestock industry produces 250,000 pounds of excrement a second. This is 20 times more excrement than that produced by the entire human population of the country.⁶⁴ In America, a typical egg factory with 60,000 hens produces 165,000 pounds of waste per week while a pork operation of just 2000 pigs produces four tons of manure and five tons of urine, not in a week, but every day.⁶⁵

Further, it is the high consumption of animal foods in developed countries that is leading to huge morbidity and mortality numbers due to heart disease, cancer, and stroke. Today, in almost every Pacific Rim country, these are now the top three killers, whereas just 25-30 years ago they were almost unheard of in that part of the world. Even in the Philippines, heart disease is now the number one cause of death.⁶⁶

Perhaps it is time that the book of Leviticus, especially those verses containing parts of the Mosaic Health Code, be re-examined. Could it be that we are in danger of making the same mistakes as did the Israelites of the Exodus, or Christians in the Dark Ages?

The book of Leviticus is not about animal sacrifices. It is not about ritual cleansing. It is not about "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not." Instead, it is about becoming and being clean: clean in our personal habits, clean in taking care of our environment, and clean in our relationships toward one another. The underlying theme throughout is that sinful, filthy, depraved, unclean mankind cannot stand in the sight of God unless he is sanctified. Cleanliness on the outside is indicative of a sanctifying process that has occurred on the inside. Without either, neither man nor woman, can ever be completely whole.

⁶³P. F. Basch, *Textbook for International Health* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 473.

⁶⁴John Robbins, *A Diet for a New America* (Walpole: Stillpoint, 1987), 372.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶National Statistical Coordination Board, *1998 Philippine Statistical Yearbook* (Makati City, Philippines: The National Statistical Information Center, 1998), 9-14.