If we didn’t know this book came directly from God, a fact that the text reminds us of again and again, we would be mystified as to how Moses knew so much. If you have ever wondered if the Bible is truly the Word of God, this chapter should strengthen your faith, for the health concepts contained in the book of Leviticus are thousands of years ahead of their time! How is this possible? Well, verse 1 of Leviticus 11 tells us: “Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron.”

Unfortunately, we often spiritualize away the practical teachings of the Bible, or to put it differently, we create spiritual applications before we take the time to understand the practical ones. Chapter 11 teaches us the importance of washing clothes, dishes, and our bodies to protect from contamination and disease (vv. 25, 28, 32). Although Israel had no concept of germs, God knew of them, and if they simply trusted Him by doing what He instructed, they would escape the diseases common in their day. Isn’t it encouraging to know that God cares about us not only spiritually but also physically? Our bodily health is important to Him!

Thankfully, our God is not sitting up in heaven coming up with laws for the purpose of restricting freedom and leaching joy out of our lives. Instead, as mentioned above, all of His laws, including His health laws, are for our good and are expressions of our Creator’s deep care for us (Rom. 13:8–10).
Outline or chart out Leviticus 11 from the translation of your choice. You may also find other insights in Leviticus 12–15.
PRINCIPLES OF INGESTING

Four things bear mentioning as we dive into Leviticus 11. First, notice that God tells us what we can eat before telling us what we cannot eat (vv. 1–3). There is so much we can learn from this. God knows that humans are much more willing to obey and less likely to rebel when they are positively motivated. This is why God first told Adam and Eve they could eat from “every tree of the garden” and then warned them against eating from the one tree that had death slithering in its branches (Gen. 2:16, 17). When you think about what it means to be a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, what comes to mind first? Is it a list of things you cannot do, or a list of things you can do?

Second, notice how simple God makes it for us to identify healthy or harmful meats! Land animals that are good for food must not only chew the cud but must also have a split hoof. So, split hoof + chews cud = good to eat. Pretty simple, huh? This means pork chops and camel meat is off the table . . . literally. Pigs have split hooves, but they don’t chew the cud, and camels chew the cud, but they don’t have split hooves. And by the way, pigs are riddled with toxins and contaminants. When you get a chance, google “trichinosis.”

God also makes it easy to differentiate between water creatures that are kosher (clean) or unkosher (unclean) to eat. If they have both fins and scales, they can be eaten (Lev. 11:9). As for the birds, though God gives a list of unclean fowl, it can be simplified this way: birds and other animals that are scavengers or predators should not be eaten, but birds and other animals that eat nonflesh foods in many cases can be (vv. 13–20). In other words, say no to hawks, owls, vultures, and any other meat eaters! While we’re at it, take snakes, reptiles, dogs, rats, and bears off the menu too! (vv. 27, 29, 42).

It’s interesting to note that Adventists who live a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle actually live 10 years longer than the average person—an entire, productive 10 years! Do a Google search of “Loma Linda Blue Zones” and discover more about this for yourself. It’s also good to be reminded that a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle was the original diet given to man; the option to eat meat was not given until after the Fall (Gen. 1:29; 2:9; 9:3, 4; Lev. 11; Deut. 14:3–21).

Third, what we eat affects us not only physically but also spiritually. God Himself speaks at the end of Leviticus 11, saying, “For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy” (vv. 44).

Fourth, Leviticus 11 reminds us that animals matter to God. Not every animal should be hunted down, killed, and eaten—only what is needed to sustain life and only what is for our best health and the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). Also, the most humane treatment was given to even the sacrificial animals, a fact exemplified by the careful and considerate criteria given in Leviticus 22:27, 28. What a compassionate and wise God we have!
RUMINATING ON RUMINATING

Some argue that the Levitical laws regarding clean and unclean meats are no longer applicable to us today. They argue that because of the cross, New Testament Christians are free to eat whatever meats they want. But is this logical? Don’t we have the same bodies they had? And doesn’t the blood of Jesus make sinners, not food, clean? The truth is, there is not a single passage in the Old or New Testament that invalidates the dietary laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Along with other passages, the following verses are often used to argue against keeping God's guidelines for healthy and holy living, but their true meanings can be quickly discovered when the context is prayerfully considered.

In Mark 7:18, 19, where Jesus says anything that enters a person cannot defile them, He is talking about moral purity, not declaring unclean meats to be clean. And when Jesus mentions foods being purified by the stomach he is not speaking about unclean meats, because the Bible never categorizes unclean meats as food.

When God gives Peter the vision in Acts 10:14, 15, He is helping Peter rid himself of his prejudice toward the Gentiles (wrongly considered unclean) by using the analogy of clean and unclean meats. Peter understood clearly the meaning of the dream: “God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (v. 28). He did not arise from this vision and go eat pork; he arose from the vision, overcame his partiality and embraced people from every nation (vv. 34, 35).

In 1 Peter 1:15, 16, the apostle Peter wrote, “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” As we have already observed, this was a direct quote from Leviticus 11:44. Although there are many ways to be holy as God is holy, surely what we put in our bodies is still one of them! There are some who read this and wonder if perhaps it would be better to abstain from meats all together, especially when we compare the meat in the days of Leviticus with the meat produced today and when we consider that the whole point of keeping the food laws is to bring glory to God. Many within the Seventh-day Adventist Church have taken this view, especially as one observes the process that even clean meats must go through before reaching our plates. Before they are butchered, animals often experience abuse, overcrowded pens, and excessive hormone injections, not to mention infections and diseases. If the purpose of keeping the food laws is to glorify God, perhaps a wholistic vegetarian or vegan diet is best way to live these days.

True obedience is a response to God’s grace (Titus 2:11). The more we understand His deep love for us, the more willing we are to instantly obey Him, even when we don’t understand why He’s given the command. This doesn’t mean we should obey God blindly or that we can’t ask questions, discuss, or debate ideas (Isa. 1:18), but it does mean that even when we don’t understand why God commands certain things, it is always wise to obey while we are asking the questions.
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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Genesis 1:29; 3:18
Deuteronomy 14:8; 23:14
Daniel 1
Leviticus 13:46–52; 14:45–47;
    15:4–12; 20:24, 25
1 Corinthians 3:16, 17
1 Peter 2:9
Romans 14

What other verses come to mind in connection with Leviticus 11?

Review your memorized verse from Leviticus 11.
SPRINGS OF SANITATION

We’ve spent a lot of time dealing with the eating aspect of health in Leviticus 11, so let’s briefly turn our attention to the sanitation aspects and how these point to Jesus. Before germs were discovered, God prepared His people to avoid much of their contaminating effects. Chapters 11 to 15 are all about sanitation measures, the latter of which could be titled the “take a bath and wash your hands” chapter (Lev. 15:5–11, 21, 22, 27). In several places in chapter 11, God’s people are reminded not to touch contaminated people, things, and animals (vv. 8, 24, 26, 27, 31). They are also instructed to wash contaminated things and persons (vv. 25, 32, 35, 40). Instructions were also given for mitigating contagious diseases such as leprosy by isolating carriers (Lev. 13:4, 5, 31, 33, 46). All of this ahead-of-its-time instruction regarding cleanliness was not for the purpose of health alone, but primarily for the purpose of holiness (Lev. 11:43–45; 15:31). God’s people were to stand out among the pagan nations of the world.

Leviticus 11:36 is perhaps one of the most important verses in this chapter, as it has powerful gospel implications. This verse declares that the only thing that cannot be contaminated by impurity is a spring or fountain of water. Have you ever noticed how Jesus could touch people who were considered unclean by the rules in Leviticus and not become unclean Himself (Matt. 8:2)? It makes sense, given that Jesus is the Living Water (John 4:10) and the source of purity. Anyone who comes to Him, confessing and forsaking their sins, will be cleansed by Him (1 John 1:9).

But wait, there’s more! Jesus said that when we receive Him as our Savior, we become fountains of water in this world. In other words, you and I do not need to be victims of our environment. Instead, with Jesus living inside us, we can be conduits of purity and positive change in our churches, schools, and communities. Jesus promises to become in us a fountain of uncorruptible water “springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

Even though our Savior grew up in the troubled town of Nazareth (John 1:46), He was able to live through the violence, addiction, lust, greed, and selfishness around Him. Today, He is more than willing to do the same through and with all who submit to His lordship in their lives.
CLEANLINESS AND GODLINESS

“In the teaching that God gave to Israel, the preservation of health received careful attention. The people who had come from slavery with the uncleanly and unhealthful habits which it engenders, were subjected to the strictest training in the wilderness before entering Canaan. Health principles were taught and sanitary laws enforced” (Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905], p. 277).

“Many articles of food eaten freely by the heathen about them were forbidden to the Israelites. It was no arbitrary distinction that was made. The things prohibited were unwholesome. And the fact that they were pronounced unclean taught the lesson that use of injurious foods is defiling. That which corrupts the body tends to corrupt the soul. It unfits the user for communion with God, unfits him for high and holy service” (Ibid., p. 280).

“Had the Israelites obeyed the instruction they received, and profited by their advantages, they would have been the world’s object lesson of health and prosperity. If as a people they had lived according to God’s plan, they would have been preserved from the diseases that afflicted other nations. Above any other people they would have possessed physical strength and vigor of intellect. They would have been the mightiest nation on the earth” (Ibid., p. 283).

“Grains, fruits, nuts, and vegetables constitute the diet chosen for us by our Creator. These foods, prepared in as simple and natural a manner as possible, are the most healthful and nourishing. They impart a strength, a power of endurance, and a vigor of intellect that are not afforded by a more complex and stimulating diet” (Ibid., p. 296).

“The diet appointed man in the beginning did not include animal food. Not till after the Flood, when every green thing on the earth had been destroyed, did man receive permission to eat flesh....

“Upon their settlement in Canaan, the Israelites were permitted the use of animal food, but under careful restrictions which tended to lessen the evil results....

“Flesh was never the best food; but its use is now doubly objectionable, since disease in animals is so rapidly increasing.... People are continually eating flesh that is filled with tuberculous and cancerous germs. Tuberculosis, cancer, and other fatal diseases are thus communicated” (Ibid., p. 311–313).

“Many die of diseases wholly due to meat eating, while the real cause is not suspected by themselves or by others” (Ibid., p. 315).

“The intelligence displayed by many dumb animals approaches so closely to human intelligence that it is a mystery. The animals see and hear and love and fear and suffer. They use their organs far more faithfully than many human beings use theirs. They manifest sympathy and tenderness toward their companions in sufferings. Many animals show an affection for those who have charge of them, far superior to the affection shown by some of the human race. They form attachments for man which are not broken without great suffering to them. What man with a human heart, who has ever cared for domestic animals, could look into their eyes, so full of confidence and affection, and willingly give them over to the butcher’s knife?” (Ibid., pp. 315, 316).
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

Why do you think the information regarding meat was given to Moses to write and share?

Should we consider avoiding meat all together? Explain.

Is it a sin to eat meat? Is it a sin to not eat meat? How should we treat others who feel differently on this subject?

How does this chapter in Leviticus give evidence of a divine Author?

How do Ellen White’s writings help us progress in healthy living?

What do these health laws in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy tell us about God’s concern for us?

What does the treatment of our bodies have to do with holiness?

What other unhealthy practices does Leviticus warn against? (Lev. 7:26; 10:8–11)