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Unclean Things: Pots and Ovens

Not only does Leviticus 11 declare what living things are considered unclean to us, it also mentions certain circumstances involving such unclean things and the proper process of dealing with those circumstances.

For example, quite often we receive a question that looks kinda like this:

One verse I had a question on is Leviticus 11:35. It says if anything unclean touches a stove the stove should be considered unclean and broken down. How does this work with the stove in my house? I know that unclean animals have touched the stove in the past. What should I do about this? And what about when I eat out? Is it okay for me to eat food from a restaurant that serves unclean animals.

These are fantastic questions. First, we should start with the related verses in Leviticus 11.

Leviticus 11:29-38

“And these are unclean to you among the swarming things that swarm on the ground: the mole rat, the mouse, the great lizard of any kind, the gecko, the monitor lizard, the lizard, the sand lizard, and the chameleon. These are unclean to you among all that swarm. Whoever touches **them when they are dead shall be unclean until the evening. And anything on which any of **them** falls when they are dead shall be unclean, whether it is an article of wood or a garment or a skin or a sack, any article that is used for any purpose. It must be put into water, and it shall be unclean until the evening; then it shall be clean. And if **any of them** falls into any earthenware vessel, all that is in it shall be unclean, and you shall break it. Any food in it that could be eaten, on which water comes, shall be unclean. And all drink that could be drunk from every such vessel shall be unclean. And everything on which any part of **their carcass** falls shall be unclean. Whether oven or stove, it shall be broken in pieces. They are unclean and shall remain unclean for you. Nevertheless, a spring or a cistern holding water shall be clean, but whoever touches a carcass in them shall be unclean. And if any part of **their carcass** falls upon any seed grain that is to be sown, it is clean, but if water is put on the seed and any part of their carcass falls on it, it is unclean to you.”**

The first thing to note is the context of this set of verses. Each section of Leviticus 11 is dealing with a subset of unclean animals, and possible circumstances relating to each subset.

For example:

- Verses 1-8 are about animals and whether or not they have hooves or chew the cud.
- Verses 9-12 are about sea creatures
- Verses 13-19 are about flying creatures
- Verses 20-23 are about winged insects
- Verses 24-28 summarizes the means in which a person can become unclean from the previous context of verses 1-23.
- Just like the previous context subsets, verses 29-38 begin a new context, and this also happens to be the verses we read. The scope of the context here includes insects that swarm on the ground and various small creatures, such as lizards and mice. It is within this context of specific creatures, just like the previous verses, that we have specific information on how various items can become unclean and how a person can become unclean. To clarify, verses 29-38 do not share the same context as pigs covered in verses 1-8, or sea creatures covered in 9-12, or flying creatures found in 13-19, or winged insects found in verses 20-23. As specifically stated, verses 29-38 pertain to only insects that swarm on the ground and small creatures such as a mouse or a lizard.

Now that we know the context of verses 29-38, let's take a look again at the question.

One verse I had a question on is Leviticus 11:35. It says if anything unclean touches a stove the stove should be considered unclean and broken down. How does this work with the stove in my house? I know that unclean animals have touched the stove in the past. What should I do about this? And what about when I eat out? Is it okay for me to eat food from a restaurant that serves unclean animals.

Leviticus 11:33-35

And if **any of them** falls into any earthenware vessel, all that is in it shall be unclean, and you shall break it. Any food in it that could be eaten, on which water comes, shall be unclean. And all drink that could be drunk from every such vessel shall be unclean. And everything on which any part of **their carcass** falls shall be unclean. Whether oven or stove, it shall be broken in pieces. They are unclean and shall remain unclean for you.

Again, the “them” that is being referred to are those found in verse 29 in the heading verse:

“And these are unclean to you among the swarming things that swarm on the ground: the mole rat, the mouse, the great lizard of any kind, the gecko, the monitor lizard, the lizard, the sand lizard, and the chameleon. These are unclean to you among all that swarm.

Obviously an unclean fish, pig or a horse is not going to fall into an earthenware vessel, such as a jar, or a pot. But, a swarming insect or a gecko most certainly might. In this, we see how the context of circumstances fits the heading verse.

Also note that we are basically talking about clay pots as evidenced by the mention of “earthenware vessels” and the fact that when these vessels become unclean that a person should “break it.”

It is easy to break or smash a clay jar. Clearly we are not talking about vessels made of metal. You do not “break” metal jars, but melt them down.

Likewise, in ancient times, an oven or stove was also made out of clay or stone. Here are some

examples of what these would have looked like. Again, we are not talking about jars, stoves, or ovens made out of metal.

While we admit that this is merely speculation, all the reasoning behind all of this is likely quite simple. It is easy to clean and sanitize objects of metal. However, objects of earthenware are porous and also absorb fats and liquids quite easily. It penetrates deep into the object itself. If you have ever baked with stoneware, then you have observed how you really cannot clean stoneware back to its original, never-used-before state.

A small creature such as a mouse could fall into an earthenware vessel or the oven when it dies. The same would be true for an earthenware vessel.

Also notice the specifics. This instruction specifically surrounds the carcass of a mouse or lizard (or something similar) or part of their carcass falling into the earthenware vessel or oven.

Leviticus 11:33-35

And if any of them falls into any earthenware vessel, all that is in it shall be unclean, and you shall break it. Any food in it that could be eaten, on which water comes, shall be unclean. And all drink that could be drunk from every such vessel shall be unclean. And everything on which any part of their carcass falls shall be unclean. Whether oven or stove, it shall be broken in pieces. They are unclean and shall remain unclean for you.

Why is this important?

These specific creatures are not only known to be more likely to harbor various disease or bacteria, but they clearly died and then fell into the earthenware vessel or oven. This of course is more dangerous given the disease ridden nature of these creatures, and the fact that these creatures were obviously not in the best health to begin with before they died and fell into the earthenware vessel or oven...meaning this, there is a reason these particular creatures were called out in this context for these particular circumstances.

How does this work with the stove in my house? I know that unclean animals have touched the stove in the past. What should I do about this?

First, remember that verses 33-35 are in the context of ground swarming insects, rodents, and lizards. Not only that, but the instructions pertain specifically to either of those things falling into your vessel or oven. And finally, the nature of the earthenware vessels and ovens are just that, made out of clay or soft stone, not metal.

More than likely, none of this criteria comes close to mirroring any of our circumstances today.

If the stove of your house, or cooking ware is metal, then Leviticus 11 does not offer us any instruction to abandon its use.

However, here is where Leviticus 11 could come into play. If any ground swarming insect, rodent, or lizard falls onto your stoneware then that certainly warrants its destruction.

And what about when I eat out? Is it okay for me to eat food from a restaurant that serves unclean animals?

The context of stoves becoming unclean in Leviticus 11 is only specific to earthenware context. Furthermore, it is only specific to insects that swarm, or small animals such as the gecko or mouse. And finally, it is only about such things falling into or on those earthenware vessels or ovens. Just as these things likely do not impact you in your home kitchen, this likely does not impact your restaurant kitchen as well. In fact, like Leviticus 11, most health codes in the U.S. already restrict the presence of ground swarming insects, rodents, and lizards in a kitchen environment. It is recognized that such things bring disease, bacteria, and other problems into a kitchen, and even more so should one of those things die in the kitchen.

So, if we were to stay within the scope of context, then a restaurant's grilling or cooking process does not appear to be in conflict with Leviticus 11.

It appears that unclean things such as small rodents, lizards, and ground swarming insects are in our particular interest to avoid when it comes to kitchen contamination. On the surface, it makes more sense as such things are more likely to be harbingers of disease and other issues.

An example of how this has played out in Biblical reality can be discerned from Paul's recommendations.

In our teaching "[Meat Sacrificed to Idols](#)" we discuss how Paul noted no difference between meat purchased in the gentile meat markets as it related to whether or not the meat originated from pagan sacrifices. That means that Paul found it acceptable to purchase clean meat from the gentile markets to begin with.

Do we think that gentile butchers would have a different knife to butcher the pig verses butchering the bull? Of course not.

Would they have different ovens for either if they were buying precooked meat? Of course not.

It appears that Paul also recognized the context of Leviticus 11 and also applied it to the Gentile meat markets.

Our conclusion is likely controversial to some, however, true to our method of Biblical analysis, we are heavily focused on context. We believe context and details matters. We hope it does for you as well.

It is difficult to deny that there is a specific order and context to each of the clean and unclean subgroupings found in Leviticus 11, and the fact that certain instructions can vary somewhat depending on each grouping. We simply recognize and apply that.

YHWH seemed to know that certain creatures that died in the kitchen, and could come into contact directly or indirectly with our food, was more dangerous than your typical unclean creature.

Interestingly enough, we also know and understand that today as evidenced in typical health codes. If only more understood and practiced the broader instruction from our Creator to not eat anything unclean at all, then how much better would that be?

We hope that this teaching has blessed you.

Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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