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Ritually Clean and Unclean Water Animals
11: 9-12

Ritually clean and unclean water animals DIG: When did the distinction between ritually clean and unclean animals begin? Why? What did the Tabernacle have to do with being ritually clean or unclean? What was the basis for determining if a fish was clean or unclean?

REFLECT: Why do you think God set the dietary mitzvot primarily about holiness regarding the Tabernacle? Why could only people who were set-apart and holy have anything to do with the Tabernacle? What about believers today? Must they eat kosher or is it a choice?

Ritual impurity is the biblical concept that a person can be in a state which, according to the Torah, prevents the person from having any contact with the Tabernacle or Temple and its sacrifices. God was in the process of teaching His people a critical spiritual reality (**to see link click Bk – Ritually Clean and Unclean Animals**)**.**

In practical terms, **Leviticus 11** refers to **dead** things: **dead animals and dead people.** So, a live, **ritually unclean** animal, does not render it **ritually unclean** while alive. Thus, it is not contaminating to own a cat – at least not in Levitical terms. Only when it is **dead** does its carcass render a person or substance **ritually unclean** through physical contact. **A ritually clean** animal is designated as **clean** because after it is butchered and the blood removed, contact with its carcass does not render a person **ritually unclean**. On the other hand, the **dead** body of a **ritually clean** animal will render a person **ritually unclean** if it has **died** for some reason other than being butchered by **ritual** slaughter. Thus, a cow that dies as road kill is just as ritually **contaminating** as pig's flesh.

The distinction between **ritually clean and unclean animals** did not originate in **Leviticus** or the Sinai covenant. There is evidence that pigs were regarded as **ritually unclean** by the Babylonians. Noah knew the difference between **ritually clean and unclean animals** even before the Flood. The distinction was most

probably decided upon the basis of eligibility for sacrifice. Of those **animals** that were suitable for sacrifice, seven pairs were taken into the ark. Of those that were not, only one pair was taken.

Yet, we might wonder, if the distinction between **ritually clean and unclean animals** existed in the days of Noah, why is there no mention of dietary mitzvot pertaining to **ritual cleanness and uncleanness** until **Leviticus 11**? We might ask the same question in regard to the mitzvot of emissions and leprosy. These mitzvot come immediately after the story of the **death** of **Nadab** and **Abihu**. The **death** of **the two sons** of **Aaron** has sufficiently impressed us with the hazards involved in approaching **Ha'Shem** in **the Tabernacle** (see **Bh – The Death of Nadab and Abihu**). **The mitzvot of being ritually clean and unclean were all holiness and Tabernacle related.** Entering into the presence of **God** in **His Tabernacle** while in the state of ritual impurity was not only a sin, it was dangerous. **Thus, you will separate the people of Isra'el from their ritual uncleanness, so that they will not die in a state of uncleanness for defiling My Tabernacle which is there with them (Leviticus 15:31).**



Regarding **eatable fish** and **seafood**, the Torah limited **the Israelites** to **fish** possessing both **fins and scales**. **Waterlife** needed to have both to be considered as **food**. It didn't matter if **the fish** was from the oceans, the lakes, or the streams, as long as it had both **fins and scales**. Following the pattern with land **animals, God** forbid **Isra'el** to **eat** those that do not meet the condition. **He** also prohibits touching or using the carcass of these **water animals**. But the term used to describe those **animals** is not **"unclean."** Instead, it is described **three times** as **these will be detestable for you. Ha'Shem** nowhere condemns **the fish**; rather,

He objects to any contact with it.[165] **Of all the things that live in the water, you may eat these: anything in the water that has fins and scales, whether in seas or in rivers — these you may eat. But everything in the seas and rivers without both fins and scales, of all the small water-creatures and of all the living creatures in the water, is a detestable thing for you. Yes, these will be detestable for you — you are not to eat their meat, and you are to detest their carcasses. Whatever lacks fins and scales in the water is a detestable thing for you (11:9-12).**

Therefore, other **seafoods** are certainly not kosher. Shrimp, lobsters, clams, oysters and the like are all outside of the dietary mitzvot of the Torah. Furthermore, many **fish** are regarded as **ritually unclean** because they lack **scales** or proper **scales**. The traditional understanding of **the "fins and scales"** rule is that **the scales** must be easily removable and generally overlapping one another. Whales, sharks, eels and the like are therefore eliminated along with any **fish** that never develops **scales**.[166]

Isra'el depended on the supply of **fish** from the Mediterranean Sea, the Sea of Galilee, and the Jordan River. **Fish** played a prominent part in the diet of the nation. One of the gates of Jerusalem was called **the fish gate**. This was where **the fish** from the Mediterranean were brought in, and it is interesting that this was a problem during the times of **Nehemiah**. **The fisherman** would bring in **their fish** on **the Sabbath Day** (see the commentary on **Ezra-Nehemiah Cr – Nehemiah's Final Reforms: The Sabbath had been desecrated**).

The important role of **fishing** in the earthly ministry of **the Lord** is well known to the students of the B'rit Chadashah. The first apostles **Yeshua** called were **fishermen**. They were told that they were to become **fishers** of men. **Yeshua** told the parable that **the Kingdom of Heaven** is like **a net** which caught both **good** and **bad fish** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Fd – The Parable of the Dragnet**). What was the method of determining **the good fish** from **the bad**? It was not whether **the fish** was large or small, but would be according to the Levitical mitzvot written here. **The good fish** had to have both **fins and scales**. Now how is this like the judgment of the wicked from among the righteous in **the Parable of the Dragnet**? Well, the believer is the one who is empowered by **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** and who is clothed in the righteousness of **Messiah**. Those are the two identifying marks. Those are **the fins and scales**, if you please.[167]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that **Your holiness/cleanliness** is all the time.*

For I am ADONAI Your God, the Holy One of Isra'el, Your Savior (Isaiah 43:3a-b). For your Maker is your husband – ADONAI-Tzva'ot is His Name – the Holy One of Isra'el is your Redeemer. He will be called God of all the earth (Isaiah 54:5). *Thank* ***You*** *that* ***Your*** *holiness is not haughty nor prideful, but a loving* ***purity*** *that graciously gives* ***Your*** *own holiness to those who love* ***You****.* ***He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:21).***

You *see* ***their*** *humble and contrite heart and* ***You*** *respond with a holy love that is far above anything we can ever imagine!* ***For thus says the High and Exalted One who inhabits eternity, whose Name is Holy: "I dwell in a high and holy place, yet also with a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and revive the heart of the contrite (Isaiah 57:15)****. Praise* ***You*** *for being so Awesome! In* ***Your*** *holy* ***Son's*** *name and power of* ***His*** *resurrection. Amen*

In the final analysis, today Messianic Jews and Gentiles have the freedom in Messiah to choose whether they want to eat kosher or not (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Bm – The Weaker Brother or Sister**)**.**