

10.1 Food Taboos from Leviticus

Instructions: You are a cultural anthropologist studying the origin of traditional Southwest Asian religious beliefs. You accept as true that most religious practices have their origins in local environmental conditions. Your task is to explain the reasons ancient Israelites had so many rules about what foods they could eat and what foods were “unclean” or “abominations.” According to the Book of Leviticus in the Judeo-Christian Old Testament, while the children of Israel could eat cows, goats, and lambs, Yahweh forbade them to eat animals that “chew the cud” but “divideth not the hoof.” These animals were described as unclean. They included camels, rabbits (coney and hares), and pigs (swine). Other “unclean” species were any animals with paws, mice, tortoises, and snails. In addition, Israelites could not eat fish or seafood “that have not fins and scales,” or birds such as eagles, owls, and vultures. These were all described as an “abomination unto you.” However, the Israelites were permitted to eat chickens, locust, beetles, and grasshoppers.

Food taboos from Leviticus, chapter 11

Source: <https://biblehub.com/leviticus/11-2.htm>

- 1: And the LORD spake unto Moses and to Aaron, saying unto them,
- 2: Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, These are the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth.
- 3: Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat.
- 4: Nevertheless these shall ye not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the hoof: as the camel, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you.
- 5: And the coney, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you.
- 6: And the hare, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you.
- 7: And the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be clovenfooted, yet he cheweth not the cud; he is unclean to you.
- 8: Of their flesh shall ye not eat, and their carcase shall ye not touch; they are unclean to you.

- 21: Yet these may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon all four, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth;
- 22: Even these of them ye may eat; the locust after his kind, and the bald locust after his kind, and the beetle after his kind, and the grasshopper after his kind.

- 44: For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.
- 45: 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.
- 46: This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth:
- 47: To make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten.