

The Biblical Diet

Clean and unclean animals from Leviticus chapter 11

In Leviticus 11, the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron and told Israel which animals they could eat and which they could not. The chapter covers four groups: land animals, water creatures, birds, and insects and creeping things. It ends by giving the reason:

*“For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy.”
(Leviticus 11:44)*

“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.” (Leviticus 11:47)

At a glance

CLEAN: may be eaten	UNCLEAN: may not be eaten
Land animals that have a divided (split) hoof and chew the cud. Both signs are needed. (v. 3)	Land animals missing either sign, such as the camel, rock hyrax, hare and swine (pig) (vv. 4–8), and animals that walk on paws (v. 27).
Water creatures that have both fins and scales. (v. 9)	Water creatures without fins and scales. (vv. 10–12)
Birds that are not on the forbidden list. (The chapter lists only the forbidden birds.)	Birds on the list of 20 in verses 13–19, mostly birds of prey, scavengers and the bat.
Insects: four kinds with jointed legs for leaping: the locust, the destroying locust, the cricket and the grasshopper. (vv. 21–22)	All other flying insects that walk on four legs (vv. 20, 23), and creeping things on the ground, including whatever crawls on its belly (vv. 29–30, 41–42).

PART 1: CLEAN ANIMALS (YOU MAY EAT)

1. Land animals

*“Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat.”
(Leviticus 11:3)*

The two-sign test: the animal must (1) have a divided, split hoof **and** (2) chew the cud, which means it brings food back up to chew again. If either sign is missing, it is unclean.

Leviticus 11 gives the rule but doesn't name the clean land animals. The parallel chapter, **Deuteronomy 14:4–5**, names them: “the ox, the sheep, and the goat, the hart, and the roebuck, and the fallow deer, and the wild goat, and the pygarg, and the wild ox, and the chamois.”

2. Water creatures

“These shall ye eat of all that are in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat.” (Leviticus 11:9)

The test: the creature must have **both** fins **and** scales.

3. Birds

Leviticus 11 doesn't list clean birds. It lists only the 20 forbidden ones (see Part 2), so birds not on that list may be eaten. Elsewhere the Bible shows Israel eating quail (Exodus 16:13) and offering turtledoves and young pigeons (Leviticus 1:14).

4. Insects

“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; 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.” (Leviticus 11:21–22)

NKJV name	KJV name	Why it is clean
Locust	Locust	Jointed legs above the feet, for leaping (v. 21)
Destroying locust	Bald locust	Same
Cricket	Beetle	Same
Grasshopper	Grasshopper	Same

John the Baptist ate “locusts and wild honey” (Matthew 3:4).

Clean: common examples today

These examples aren't named in Leviticus 11. They are what the chapter's tests point to.

Group	Examples that pass the test
Land animals (split hoof + chews cud)	Cattle (beef), sheep (lamb), goat, deer (venison), bison, antelope
Fish (fins + scales)	Salmon, tuna, cod, trout, tilapia, bass, perch, snapper, herring, sardines
Birds (not on the forbidden list)	Chicken, turkey, duck, goose, quail, dove

PART 2: UNCLEAN ANIMALS (YOU MAY NOT EAT)

1. Land animals

“Nevertheless these shall ye not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the hoof.” (Leviticus 11:4)

NKJV name	KJV name	Chews cud?	Split hoof?	Verse
Camel	Camel	Yes	No	v. 4
Rock hyrax	Coney	Yes	No	v. 5
Hare (rabbit)	Hare	Yes	No	v. 6
Swine (pig)	Swine	No	Yes	v. 7

“Of their flesh shall ye not eat, and their carcase shall ye not touch; they are unclean to you.” (Leviticus 11:8)

Animals that walk on paws are also unclean: “whatsoever goeth upon his paws, among all manner of beasts that go on all four, those are unclean unto you” (v. 27). Examples: dogs, cats, bears, lions.

2. Water creatures

“And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers ... they shall be an abomination unto you.” (Leviticus 11:10)

Anything in the water missing fins **or** scales is unclean, along with everything that lives in the water that is not a fish (vv. 10–12).

3. Birds: the 20 forbidden

“And these are they which ye shall have in abomination among the fowls; they shall not be eaten.” (Leviticus 11:13)

#	NKJV name	KJV name	Verse
1	Eagle	Eagle	v. 13
2	Vulture	Ossifrage	v. 13

#	NKJV name	KJV name	Verse
3	Buzzard	Ospray	v. 13
4	Kite	Vulture	v. 14
5	Falcon (after its kind)	Kite (after his kind)	v. 14
6	Every raven (after its kind)	Every raven (after his kind)	v. 15
7	Ostrich	Owl	v. 16
8	Short-eared owl	Night hawk	v. 16
9	Sea gull	Cuckow	v. 16
10	Hawk (after its kind)	Hawk (after his kind)	v. 16
11	Little owl	Little owl	v. 17
12	Fisher owl	Cormorant	v. 17
13	Screech owl	Great owl	v. 17
14	White owl	Swan	v. 18
15	Jackdaw	Pelican	v. 18
16	Carrion vulture	Gier eagle	v. 18
17	Stork	Stork	v. 19
18	Heron (after its kind)	Heron (after her kind)	v. 19
19	Hoopoe	Lapwing	v. 19
20	Bat	Bat	v. 19

Most of these are birds of prey or scavengers that eat dead flesh. The bat is listed with the birds because it flies. Translations differ on some of the Hebrew bird names, which is why the NKJV and KJV columns don't always match.

4. Flying insects

“But all other flying creeping things, which have four feet, shall be an abomination unto you.” (Leviticus 11:23)

Every flying insect is unclean except the four leaping kinds in Part 1 (vv. 20, 23).

5. Creeping things on the ground

“These also shall be unclean unto you among the creeping things that creep upon the earth.” (Leviticus 11:29)

#	NKJV name	KJV name	Verse
1	Mole	Weasel	v. 29
2	Mouse	Mouse	v. 29
3	Large lizard (after its kind)	Tortoise (after his kind)	v. 29
4	Gecko	Ferret	v. 30
5	Monitor lizard	Chameleon	v. 30
6	Sand reptile	Lizard	v. 30
7	Sand lizard	Snail	v. 30
8	Chameleon	Mole	v. 30

“Whatsoever goeth upon the belly, and whatsoever goeth upon all four, or whatsoever hath more feet among all creeping things that creep upon the earth, them ye shall not eat; for they are an abomination.” (Leviticus 11:42)

This includes snakes and worms (on the belly), and many-legged creatures such as centipedes.

Unclean: common examples today

These examples aren't named in Leviticus 11. They are what the chapter's tests point to.

Group	Examples that fail the test
Land animals	Pork (ham, bacon, sausage), rabbit, horse, camel, dog, cat, squirrel
Water creatures (no fins and scales)	Shrimp, crab, lobster, crawfish, clams, oysters, scallops, mussels, octopus, squid, catfish
Birds	Eagles, hawks, owls, vultures, ravens and crows, sea gulls, storks, herons
Creeping things	Mice, rats, lizards, snakes, frogs

PART 3: OTHER RULES IN LEVITICUS 11

Rule	What it says	Verses
Touching a dead unclean animal	Unclean until evening. Whoever carries its carcass must also wash his clothes.	24–28
An unclean creeping thing falls on an item	Wood, cloth, skin or sack: put it in water; it is unclean until evening. A clay pot: it must be broken.	32–33
Food and drink	Food touched by water from such a pot, or drink from such a pot, becomes unclean.	34
Ovens and stoves	If touched by such a carcass, they must be broken down.	35
A spring, cistern or seed	A spring or cistern stays clean. Dry seed stays clean, but wet seed becomes unclean.	36–38
A clean animal that dies on its own	Whoever touches it is unclean until evening. Whoever eats of it or carries it must wash his clothes.	39–40

The simple tests to remember

Land: split hoof **and** chews the cud. **Water:** fins **and** scales. **Birds:** not one of the 20 listed. **Insects:** only the locust, the destroying locust, the cricket and the grasshopper. **Anything that crawls on its belly:** never.

For further study: Deuteronomy 14:3–21 (the same laws repeated), Genesis 7:2 (clean and unclean animals on the ark), Daniel 1:8, Acts 10:9–16 and Mark 7:18–19.

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version. The NKJV animal names follow the Leviticus 11 text in Bible by Olive Tree. The “examples today” are applications of the chapter’s tests, not names from the chapter itself.

WHAT “DIVIDED HOOF” AND “CHEWS THE CUD” MEAN

These are two things you can check on an animal. It is clean only if it has **both**.

1. A divided (split) hoof

Look at the animal's foot. A cow's hoof is split down the middle into two toes, like two halves. A horse's hoof is one solid piece, so it isn't divided. A dog or cat has paws with pads and claws, not hooves at all.

2. Chews the cud

Some animals eat grass quickly and swallow it. Later, while resting, they bring some of it back up from the stomach and chew it again, then swallow it a second time. That re-chewed lump of food is the “cud.” When you see a cow lying in a field with its jaw moving even though it isn't eating, it is chewing its cud.

How the two work together

Animal	Split hoof?	Chews cud?	Result
Cow, sheep, goat, deer	Yes	Yes	Clean
Pig	Yes	No	Unclean
Camel	No (padded foot)	Yes	Unclean
Rabbit / hare	No (paws)	Looks like it does*	Unclean
Horse	No (one solid hoof)	No	Unclean

The pig is the well-known example. It has the split hoof but doesn't chew the cud, so it fails, and one sign alone isn't enough (Leviticus 11:7).

*The rabbit doesn't bring food back up from its stomach the way a cow does. It re-eats soft droppings to digest its food a second time, and it moves its mouth constantly as if chewing. The Bible's “chews the cud” for the hare likely describes what people could see.