

Sh'mini

שמיני

“Eighth”

Leviticus 9:1 – 11:47

Torah Together



This *Torah* portion describes the events that transpired immediately after Aaron and his sons began operating in their new roles as priests. It also details the actions that led to the death of Aaron's two eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu. The portion closes with the rules regarding clean and unclean foods, the laws of *Kashrut* (Kosher in English).

1. The Priests Begin their Ministry - 9:1-24

a) How long after the ordination ceremony did Aaron and his sons begin their work? What were the first offerings and on whose behalf were they made? What was their purpose?

Aaron and his sons began their work the day after their seven day ordination was completed. They began by offering a bull calf as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering for themselves. Aaron and his sons had to make atonement for their sins and commit themselves completely to God as their first act.

b) Specifically what offerings were made next? On whose behalf were they made? Can you identify the purpose for each offering?

Next, Aaron and his sons offered a male goat (sin offering), a calf and a lamb (burnt offering), and an ox and ram together with the grain offering (a fellowship offering) on behalf of the people. The people also needed atonement for their sin and to demonstrate their complete submission to God. In addition, they were to have a fellowship meal with God.

c) According to verse 6, what was to happen? Did the offerings cause this to happen?

Moses said that if the prescribed offerings were made then the glory of God would appear to them. This is not to say that God could be beckoned by performing these sacrifices, but rather that they were required before He could manifest Himself among the people.

The Appearance of God

After the required offerings were made for Aaron and his sons and for the people of Israel, it became **possible** for God to fellowship with His people. (Prior to this, the Israelites were unclean and in a state of sinfulness so that God could not fellowship with them.) After Aaron and his sons did what God required of them to **atone** for the sins of the people and to **draw near** to Him, He came down in the form of a pillar of fire to be among His people. What an awesome display of the power of God this must have been.

The Fire of God

It is likely that the fire that consumed Nadab and Abihu was the same fire that came out from the Tent of Meeting and consumed the offerings that were on the altar. Although it is not specifically stated, it can be imagined that the heart attitudes of the two young men may not have been pure before God. Perhaps they were carried away with the idea of the apparent power of God which they had at their disposal. This is in line with **Leviticus 10:3**, "Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of the people I will be honored." Because of the presence of verses 8-11 in this chapter (which prohibit the drinking of alcohol before entering the Tent of Meeting), some believe that Nadab and Abihu may have been inebriated at the time of their death.

Scripture Link:

The story of another man who came into fatal contact with the power of God can be found in **2 Samuel 6:1-7**. How is this story similar to the story of Nadab and Abihu?

d) What did Aaron do after completing the offerings (verse 22)? Do you know what Aaron said to the people? (Hint: **Numbers 6:22-26**) ***Aaron lifted his hands and blessed the people. Numbers 6:22-26 records the Aaronic blessing.***

e) What happened after Moses and Aaron completed their tasks? What happened to the offerings on the altar? How did the people respond?

Aaron "stepped down" (verse 22) and he and Moses went into the tent of meeting. The glory of God appeared and from it came fire which consumed the offerings on the altar. (The first fire on the altar came from God.) The people "shouted for joy and fell facedown." (verse 24). This is probably a more complete description of the events described in Exodus chapter 40.

2. The Death of Nadab and Abihu - 10:1-20

a) Specifically what did Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, do? What do you think was wrong with what they did? What can we learn from this?

Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them, added incense, and offered unauthorized fire before God. They could have erred in several ways: The incense or the utensils used may not have been consecrated, the fire may not have been from the altar, they weren't the High Priest (whose responsibility this was) and God may not have approved of their "doing this on their own." In any case, it seems that their heart attitude as well as their actions were improper from God's perspective. God's holiness is not to be taken for granted.

b) Who removed the bodies? Why do you suppose they were chosen to do this?

Their cousins, Mishael & Elzaphan, (Levites) removed the bodies so that the priests would not be contaminated by touching a dead body.

"Among those who approach me, I will show myself holy;"
Leviticus 10:3

c) What was the point of Moses' instructions to Aaron and his sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, in verses 6-7? Why do you think this was necessary?

Moses was telling Aaron and his sons not to mourn over the death of Nadab and Abihu. Leviticus 21:10-12 says that the high priest must not mourn a death.

d) Verses 8-11 give another command concerning how the priests were to carry out their duties. What was this command and its intent? Do you think this had any bearing on the incident with Nadab and Abihu?

Priests were not to enter God's presence after having had alcohol. This has led some to suspect that drunkenness caused Nadab & Abihu's death.

e) Verse 16 explains that Moses was angry with Aaron and his sons. What reason did he have to be angry? Specifically what instructions had Aaron failed to follow? What was Aaron's response to this? Why do you think this satisfied Moses?

Moses was angry because Aaron and his sons had not eaten their portion of the sin offering (Leviticus 6:26). Aaron responded, saying God would not have been pleased had he eaten of the offering when he was grief-stricken. Moses understood.

3. Clean and Unclean Food - 11:1-47

a) Of land animals, what two characteristics must they have to be proper food for us? Can you name some animals that have one but not both of these characteristics? How are we to treat these animals?

Land animals must both chew the cud (ruminant) and have split hooves to be proper food. (Pigs, for example, have split hooves but do not ruminate.) All other land animals are to be considered unclean.

b) Of sea animals, what two characteristics must they have to be proper food for us? How are we to treat animals that don't have both of these characteristics?

Sea animals must have fins and scales to be proper food. All other sea animals are to be considered "detestable," (Leviticus 11:12).

Scripture Link:

As priests, Aaron and his sons were to strive to always be ceremonially clean so that they might serve before God. Expressions of grief (such as the tearing of one's clothing or putting ashes on one's head) would render a priest unfit for duty. In **Leviticus 21:10-12**, God specifically forbids that priests mourn in this way.

Clean and Unclean Food

For land and sea animals, God made the rules for distinguishing clean from unclean fairly clear. For birds, however, the rules are not so simple. The *Torah* simply provides a list of clean and unclean birds. Over the years, many of the names may have been mistranslated (bats?) and certainly the list isn't exhaustive. Some have suggested that birds whose diets are primarily seeds and plant life are clean whereas birds whose diets are primarily meat (scavengers or hunters) are unclean. This would make birds such as chickens and turkeys clean but make eagles, vultures, owls and other raptors unclean.

What's Kosher?

The Hebrew word translated as "kosher" is *kashrut*, which means "fit," as in "fit to eat."

Leviticus 11 provides the Biblical definition of what food is "fit to eat." The Hebrew word that describes food NOT fit to eat is *treif*, coming from a root that means "torn," and probably alludes to meat from an animal that has not been killed in the proper way.

Many people want to ascribe health benefits to Kosher foods, and with today's understanding of nutrition and health, this may often be true. However, in the *Torah*, we are instructed to eat only clean foods only for ceremonial reasons. Even so, it is certainly reasonable to believe that God knew His people would be healthier over time by adhering to a Kosher diet.

It's important to note that today, Kosher foods involve much more than just the rules given in this *Torah* portion. Over the years Jewish scholars have clarified and added to these rules so that today, Kosher includes rules that are somewhat different than these, involving food preparation and other considerations.

c) Is it clear from scripture which birds are suitable as food? Can you suggest a general rule that might help determine which birds are clean and which are unclean?

The list of unacceptable birds is not clear in that it is not exhaustive and many of the names have been lost over time. It would appear that birds which live primarily (maybe exclusively) on vegetable matter are proper food whereas birds that live on meat (either dead or alive) may be improper. (This would make eagles, vultures, kites, owls, osprey, etc. unclean but would allow chickens, turkeys, etc.)

d) Of insects, what characteristic must they have to be proper food for us? Can you name some insects which are edible? How are we to treat the others?

Insects that have jointed legs for hopping on the ground may be eaten. This includes locust, katydid, cricket, and grasshopper. Others are to be considered "detestable."

e) How does God describe the animals that are not to be considered as food? Describe the rules for dealing with these animals either dead or alive. Can you suggest some practical reasons for these rules?

Animals that are not proper food are "unclean" and "detestable." In general, when things which have to do with cooking and eating come in contact with an "unclean" animal, they are to be either destroyed or thoroughly cleaned. This would help eliminate disease within the Israelite community.

f) When one comes in contact with an unclean animal or the carcass of any animal, how does his status before God change? What must he do to correct this problem?

A person becomes "unclean" when he comes in contact with one, either dead or alive. The person must wash himself and his clothes and remains "unclean until evening."

g) In verses 41-45, God prohibits creatures that crawl on the ground as food. In general, why do you think God put such emphasis on this aspect of "clean" and "unclean"?

God desires that we maintain our separateness, our consecration to Him, through our diet. It appears that the food we eat can make us appear to Him as either clean or unclean and we are to be holy (set apart) by only eating the proper foods.

Digging deeper

1. Compare the story of Nadab and Abihu with the story recorded in **Acts 5:1-11**. Identify similarities and differences. What insights into God's character can you gain from these stories?

Both stories involved 2 people who were endeavoring to worship God in a less-than-total way. Both had somehow offended God's sense of justice and holiness. Both paid for it with their lives. (The Haftarah portion relates the story of Uzzah and Ahio as they helped David move the ark from Baalah in Judah (II Samuel 6:1-7) and how Uzzah died because he touched the ark. This story may add some insight, but seems to be different than the two stories cited here.)

Worshipping God as He Desires

To come to know God through the Messiah Yeshua necessarily highlights God's great love and mercy toward us. ("For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son ..." – John 3:16) However, God is also the Judge of the world. ("Will not the Judge of all the Earth do right?" – Genesis 18:25) An accurate concept of our God will involve both of these aspects: a God who loves us more than we can imagine but also a God who makes certain that the demands of justice are met. God keeps these two aspects of his character in perfect balance.

Should we eat Kosher?

Whether or not to observe the Laws of Kashrut (kosher) is a matter of some debate among modern believers. A careful reading of the relevant New Testament passages does not lead to the inescapable conclusion that Yeshua taught that these laws were done away with. Indeed, this would directly contradict several statements made by Him to the contrary. (See for example **Matthew 5:17-20** which states, "...not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.") Perhaps in the absence of a clear understanding, the best choice would be to obey God's teaching and instruction, his *Torah*. As we learn in Deuteronomy, one is blessed for obedience to the *Torah*.

2. Read **Mark 7:1-23**. Does Yeshua's teaching change the definition of clean and unclean foods given in Leviticus? What light does this shed on the definition of clean and unclean foods? How do you think one should approach the instructions in **Leviticus 11** today? (Read the parallel passage describing this incident in **Matthew 15:1-20** for additional insight.)

This is clearly a confusing passage. First, it should be noted that Yeshua was dealing with the issue of the ceremonial hand washing before eating, not with what was being eaten. The entire passage deals with rules added by the Pharisees pertaining to clean and unclean. However, Yeshua seems to indicate that nothing we eat can make us "unclean" (verse 15). (Certainly the parenthetical statement in verse 19 implies that he meant that all foods were to be considered clean but this statement is not in some of the early Greek texts.) It could also be argued that by the word "foods" he only meant those items listed in the Torah - all other things would not even be considered as "food." It would appear that the Holy Spirit must lead each person to his or her own conclusion on this matter.

For further study, see

Haftarah : Jeremiah 46:13-28

Brit Hadashah : Luke 2:22-24; John 19:31-37; Acts 13:16-17;
Revelation 8:6 – 9:12; 16:1-21