

Do these Scriptures apply? What does it mean to Live as Swine?

In weeks reading from Parashat Shemini (*Vayikra / Leviticus 9:1-11:47*), we read on the eighth day Moshe called Aaron and his sons and told them to take a bull for a Sin offering and a ram for a Whole burnt offering, for the priesthood. A male goat for a Sin offering, a calf and a lamb both one year old are also given as a Raise offering for the people. Moshe tells Aaron and his sons to offer an ox and a ram for peace offerings and a grain offering mixed with oil because today the Lord will appear to them. Aaron did these things, and *Vayikra / Leviticus 9:24* says *9:24 Then fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. (NASB)* Following this, Nadav and Avihu went before the Lord with fire in their fire-pans and offered strange fire and they died (*10:1-5*). The Lord spoke to Aaron saying *“Do not drink strong drink when you come into the Ohel Moed”* (Tent of Meeting) so that he and his sons will not die; the purpose is so they are able to make a distinction between what is holy and profane. Moshe instructs Aaron and his sons to eat of the Grain offering because it is their portion; the grain offering is to be eaten beside the altar of God because it is most holy. Following these things, the Lord gives the commands on the dietary laws regarding what foods are clean (to be eaten) and unclean (not to be eaten). The purpose is *11:47 to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten. (NASB)* This weeks reading reveals to us it is the Lord who gives us life by atonement in the blood of the sacrifice. It is the Lord in whom we place our trust for the forgiveness of sins. Nothing we do adds merit to atonement before God if one believed in the work of the Sacrifice, according to the Torah. The Scriptures also state that it is important to make a distinction between what is clean and unclean. Do you think these Scriptures are important for us today in light of what Yeshua the Messiah has done for us upon the cross? Let’s examine these Scriptures a little closer.

ספר ויקרא פרק יא *Vayikra / Leviticus 11:44-47*

מד כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְהִתְקַדַּשְׁתֶּם וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי וְלֹא תִטְּאוּ אֶת-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם בְּכָל-הַשְּׂרָץ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ: [מפטר] מֵהַ כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה הַמַּעֲלֶה אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְהִיֵּית לְכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי: מו זֹאת תֹּרַת הַבְּהֵמָה וְהָעוֹף וְכָל נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה הָרֹמֵשׁ בָּמַיִם וְלְכָל-נֶפֶשׁ הַשְּׂרָצָה עַל-הָאָרֶץ: מז לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַטָּמֵא וּבֵין הַטָּהוֹר וּבֵין הַנֶּאֱכָלֹת וּבֵין הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תֵאָכֵל:

11:44 ‘For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. 11:45 ‘For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy.’ 11:46 This is the law regarding the animal and the bird, and every living thing that moves in the waters and everything that swarms on the earth, 11:47 to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten. (NASB)



In the Scripture reading for this week, it is interesting that the reason swine are described in the Scriptures as unclean is because *Vayikra / Leviticus 11:7* "... it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, ..." (NASB) There is a very important distinction that God is making concerning the animal kingdom that we need to pay particular attention to regarding our lives. What can we learn from this command whose purpose is : לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּבֵין הַחֵל וּבֵין הַטְּמֵא וּבֵין הַטָּהוֹר: "to make a distinction between the holy and profane, between unclean and clean?" In order to see what the Lord is trying to tell us with regard to the dietary law, we need to look at a little bit of Biblical history.

According to the Scriptures, Edom (Sier, Esau) is described as the eternal enemy of Israel and of Judah (see *Amos 1:11; Ezekiel 35:1-15*). Edom did not always oppress Israel, however following the destruction of the First Temple, the Edomites took advantage of the situation and seized control of parts of Judah (see *Ezekiel 25:12-14, 35:1-15, Obadiah 1:1-16*), and it is hinted that Edom also took part in the destruction of Jerusalem (see *Tehillim / Psalms 137:7, Obadiah 1*) and even of the Temple itself (see *Obadiah 1*). As a result, there was intense enmity between Israel and Edom. In addition to this, there was also an intense hatred of Rome following the revolt of the Diaspora in the time of Trajan and following the suppression of the Bar Kokhba revolt and the decrees of persecution in Hadrian's days. Rome, like Edom and the first Temple, destroyed the second Temple. As a result of these things, both Edom and Rome are compared to swine. Note also that for Rome the pig (sow, swine) was an important symbol based upon their fertility religions. In addition to this, Edom is described as dwelling on high like an eagle (*Jeremiah 49:16, Obadiah 1:4*) and the eagle is an important Roman symbol. These similarities between Edom (*Sier, Esau*) and Rome caused the rabbis to compare both Edom and Roman to swine in the rabbinic literature. It is interesting that in the Midrashim and the Talmud, the rabbis develop homilies about Edom and Rome ascribing their identity as swine. In *Midrash Rabbah Vayikra, Chapter 13, Part 5* (מדרש ה' רבה ויקרא פרשה יג סימן ה' boar):

R. Phinehas and R. Hilkia, in the name of R. Simeon said, out of the prophets, only two, namely Asaph and Moses, named it (i.e. the fourth beast). Asaph said, The boar (khazir) out of the wood doth ravage it (Tehillim / Psalms 80:14), Moses said, And the swine (khazir) because it parts the hoof, and is cloven footed, but chews not the cud, he is unclean to you (Vayikra / Leviticus 11:7). Why is it (i.e. Edom and Rome) compared to a khazir (swine or boar)? To tell you this, Just as the swine when reclining puts forth its hooves as if to say, see that I am clean, so too does the empire of Edom and Rome boast as it commits violence and robbery, under the guise of establishing a judicial tribunal. This may be compared to a governor who put to death the thieves, adulterers, and sorcerers. He leaned over to a counsellor and said, I myself did these three things in one night. (Midrash Rabbah Vayikra, Chapter 13, Part 5)

Midrash Rabbah Vayikra, Chapter 13, Part 5 is one midrash among many on the dietary laws that speaks about the khazir (swine) and equates the khazir to both Rome and Edom. Note how they say the reason Edom and Rome are compared to a khazir (swine) is to show us how the swine puts forth his cloven foot and states “*look, I am clean.*” However, something on the inside is not right (swine do not chew the cud). The Torah reading this week states the following:

Vayikra / Leviticus 11:6-8

11:6 You may eat any animal that has a divided hoof and that chews the cud. 11:7 However, of those that chew the cud or that have a divided hoof you may not eat the camel, the rabbit or the hyrax. Although they chew the cud, they do not have a divided hoof; they are ceremonially unclean for you. 11:8 The pig is also unclean; although it has a divided hoof, it does not chew the cud. You are not to eat their meat or touch their carcasses. (NASB)

Notice in *Vayikra / Leviticus 11:6*, the Scriptures state that the animals we are to eat must have both a divided hoof and chew the cud. The pig has a cloven hoof, but does not chew the cud (*Vayikra / Leviticus 11:6*). What exactly are the rabbis saying here in the midrash and what is the Lord trying to tell us with regard to these dietary laws? The midrash states that the swine puts forth his cloven foot and says “*look, I am clean.*” This is paralleled to Edom and Rome who boast as they commit robbery and violence in the midrash. A parallel is then drawn between an unrighteous judge who judges to be put to death thieves, adulterers, and sorcerers, while at the same time stating that he himself did all three of these things in one night. The point of the midrash and of the dietary command is to show us that righteousness must show forth both on the inside and on the outside. There is to be no deception amongst the Children of God. In the case of the swine, when performing a quick examination of the animal, one may be deceived to think this one is clean to bring into our lives. However, after a further more careful examination, one can see that the swine does not chew the cud, illustrating that this beast is a deceiver. Is the purpose of this command to reveal to us that we are not to live deceptive lives? Are the dietary laws meant to be kept for the purpose of bringing us back to this concept that we are holy and we are to live in truth and not in robbery and violence towards others? The pervasiveness of this concept for our lives is echoed throughout the Scriptures, a concept the rabbis pick up on in the rabbinic literature as well. Take for example the Apostle Paul, he states in *1 Corinthians 10:31* “*Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*” (NASB) and in *Colossians 3:17* “*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (NASB). According to the Apostle Paul, it would seem that all aspects of life, even such common activities as eating and drinking, are meant to bring glory to God. This teaching is consistent with the Word of

God found in the Torah.

In addition to this, with regard to eating and drinking, King Solomon writes in *Mishley / Proverbs 9* that wisdom calls us to drink the wine she has mixed. How does “wisdom” give wine to drink? The definition of wisdom is “*knowledge; insight, common sense.*” Wisdom is not a person, what is the meaning of these Scriptures with regard to drink? Wisdom functions in the sense that having become wise, we know how to live our lives and how to interact with others. Note also that eating and drinking of food from the Temple service in Parashat Shemini, or *Vayikra / Leviticus 22:7* or wine in *Mishley / Proverbs 9:5* is synonymous with one internalizing the holiness of God. It is in this way we are called to sanctify ourselves, set ourselves apart for the Lord, and we are to go before the Lord in purity of heart and spirit and God gives us the wisdom of His words and its teachings become a part of who we are. Note also that when eating, the food we eat nourishes us and a part of the food, the essential vitamins, minerals, and sugars become a part of our bodies. The consumption of wisdom’s food and drink suggests that wisdom will nourish our soul and change us from the inside out; this is exactly what happens when we place our faith in God and His Messiah Yeshua. After having confessed our sins, the need for a savior, and believing upon the One in whom we are saved (Yeshua), the Lord sends His Holy Spirit to dwell within us giving us wisdom and creating a new person, one who is to be wholly set apart for the Lord.

Keeping these things in mind, the dietary command on the swine reveal to us that we are to make a distinction in our lives between good and evil. It is not possible to live two different lives before God, looking one way on the outside (cloven hoof) but on the inside being a deceiver (not chewing the cud), or even having violence and robbery in our hearts. The dietary laws are a daily reminder to watch what we eat and what we drink, and to watch what we are taking into our bodies. We are to sanctify our bodies by modifying our behavior to watch what we do, how we behave, what we touch (what goes into our bodies), and that we are to go before the Lord with innocence in purity of heart and of spirit. None of this is possible without the empowering work of the Holy Spirit of God! By doing these things, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we sanctify our bodies and we sanctify His Name because He (Yeshua) has sanctified us. This is exactly what the Lord is telling Moshe, the people, and you and I to do in *Vayikra / Leviticus 11:44* “*For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy...*” (NASB) Note that “*to consecrate*” means to “*to sanctify.*” By taking what one eats and restricting the diet to follow what God has commanded, this is the process of elevating food, sanctifying food, setting food apart for the Lord as holy. The parallel for our lives in the command on the dietary laws is that righteousness must show forth both on the inside and on the outside. There is to be no deception amongst the Children of God. Not eating swine is a reminder of the deceiver who puts forth the outward appearance of truth, but inwardly is full of “*dead man’s bones*” and deception. Our lives should not be characterized by deception and we should be careful not to be deceived by what we bring into our lives or into our minds. The Scriptures in both the Torah, the Prophets, the Writings (Tanach), and the Apostolic Writings speak of the eating and drinking; do you think these Scriptures are important for us today in light of what Yeshua the Messiah has done for us upon the cross? I would certainly hope the answer would be “*YES!*”