

The selected passages in this lesson demonstrate the emphasis that the LORD places on the separation of His people from the world. Israel was to live differently than the Egyptians and the nations that they would be displacing in Canaan. Like Israel, God wants the lives of Christians to be distinct from the world, obeying Him rather than following the things of the world and the desires of the flesh.

Leviticus 11:1-43: The context of Leviticus 11 is a description of the characteristics by which the children of Israel could identify clean and unclean animals. They were allowed to eat clean animals but they were not allowed to eat or even touch the carcasses of unclean animals. In fact, anything that touched the carcass of an unclean animal also became unclean and had to be purified, whether it was people or objects. Anything used for food or for preparing food that came into contact with an unclean creature had to be destroyed because it was no longer suitable to be used for anything related to food. Surprisingly, insects in the grasshopper family (grasshoppers, crickets, locusts, etc.) were considered clean, but all other unclean animals, fish, birds and insects were to be considered an abomination. It's possible that the distinction between clean/unclean animals was made for reasons of sanitation and to protect the people from disease. However, it was likely there were also other reasons, particularly in the setting apart (sanctification) of God's people from the rest of humanity.

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.

“For I *am* the LORD your God” – The LORD reminds them of His authority as their God to determine which animals that they may eat and which are to be considered unclean.

“ye shall therefore sanctify [kaw-dash' : to separate as sacred] yourselves” – Because He is their God and they are His people, they are to set themselves apart as being a unique people that are dedicated to serving the LORD. They are not to be like other nations but are to be distinct in their lifestyles as dictated by the LORD as they obey His commandments.

“and ye shall be holy; for I *am* holy [kaw-doshe' : to be set apart as sacred]” – The Hebrew word for “holy” is rooted on the word translated “sanctify.” “Sanctify” is the verb and “holy” is the adjective form of the same word. Something that has been sanctified has become holy. The LORD wants His people to be holy because He is holy. He is “set apart” in that He is unique in His sinlessness and purity and He is unlike any other entity that exists. He is without equal and nothing else can be compared to Him. The LORD wants His people to be uniquely separated from the rest of the world because they belong to Him and therefore they are to live in obedience to Him.

“neither shall ye defile [to make unclean] yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” – While the term “creeping thing” may primarily refer to insects, the Hebrew word can refer to anything that crawls around on four legs. Likely the LORD is speaking of any unclean animal and is repeating the command that his people not make themselves unclean by eating them or touching their dead carcasses. To do so would be to break the command that they be a holy people that reflect the holiness of their God. The context of the chapter is clean vs. unclean creatures, but obviously the LORD does not want His people to become unclean regardless of the cause.

Leviticus 18

2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the LORD your God.

Verse 1 identifies the LORD as the One speaking to Moses. Like Leviticus 11:44, the LORD authenticates the commands in this chapter by reminding Israel that He is the LORD their God. He is their God and the authority behind the commands He is about to speak.

3 After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances.

“After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do” – Up until the time the LORD used Moses to lead the children of Israel out, they had lived their entire lives in Egypt. No doubt they had been influenced by the culture and idolatry and perhaps some had even worshiped the gods of Egypt. However, the LORD instructs the children of Israel to leave those pagan cultural and religious practices behind.

“and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do” – The land of Canaan, where they were going, also had cultural and religious practices that were contrary to the will of the LORD. When they arrived in Canaan, the children of Israel were forbidden from adopting these pagan cultural and religious practices as well.

“neither shall ye walk in their ordinances [statutes]” – The Hebrew word for “ordinances” means “statutes” but can also mean “customs.” Because Israel's occupation of Canaan was going to be gradual (Ex. 23:29-30), the LORD knew that the influence of the culture, religions, customs and laws of the Canaanites would still be present. The laws, ordinances, statutes and customs of the Canaanites were to be ignored, particularly concerning their gods.

4 Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I *am* the LORD your God.

Instead of adopting the customs and religions of the Canaanites they were instead to obey the judgments and ordinances of the LORD. The phrase “to walk therein” indicates that they were not to merely go through the motions of obedience but that they were to “walk” in these things. They were to be a way of life for them. The LORD again reminds them of Who He is, stating that He is their God and they are to obey Him, not the ways of the Egyptians or Canaanites.

5 Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I *am* the LORD.

The LORD now attaches consequences to the command. If they will obey the LORD and keep His statutes and judgments, then they will enjoy long and blessed lives in the land of Canaan. The implication is that if they do not obey then their lives may be shortened as well as their time in the land. They eventually experience this consequence when the LORD caused them to be carried off captive by the Assyrians and Babylonians because of their persistent disobedience (2 Kings 17:6-18; 2 Chr. 36:11-21).

Leviticus 20

22 Ye shall therefore keep all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: that the land, whither I bring you to dwell therein, spue you not out.

After spending the chapter declaring the prohibition against various adulterous and incestuous relationships (vs. 1-21), the LORD repeats the warning that disobedience will result in their expulsion from the land. The word “spue” means “to vomit up,” yielding the imagery that the land that the LORD will give them will have such a distaste for their disobedience that it will forcefully expel them. The LORD repeatedly warns them of the seriousness of disobedience and will eventually have to judge them by causing them to be conquered by the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

23 And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them.

The LORD again warns Israel not to adopt the ways of the people that they will be replacing when they enter the land of Canaan. The sins of the Canaanites were the reason that the LORD was punishing them by displacing them. The Hebrew word for “abhorred” means “to be grieved or to loathe.” The LORD hated their sin and had pronounced judgment against them.

24 But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I *am* the LORD your God, which have separated you from *other* people.

“But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey” – The entrance of Israel into the land of Canaan will serve a two-fold purpose: (1) a punishment for the sins of the Canaanites; (2) a gift to His people to fulfill His purposes for Israel.

“I *am* the LORD your God, which have separated [to divide; to make a distinction] you from other people” – The LORD again reminds them that He is their God and because of that He has “separated” them from the other nations. They are unique in that they have been chosen by the LORD and are to live in obedience to Him. The other nations were living in darkness without the knowledge of God and were following their fleshly and sinful desires and thinking (Eph. 2:11-12), but Israel was to be a people whose God is the LORD. They were to be different.

25 Ye shall therefore put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean: and ye shall not make your souls abominable by beast, or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that creepeth on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean.

It is because the LORD had separated Israel from other people that they were to always make the distinction between clean and unclean animals in order that they could avoid defiling themselves with unclean animals. To do so would be to make their “souls abominable.” The Hebrew word for “soul” refers to a living being, while “abominable” means “to make detestable.” Thus the LORD was referring to physical uncleanness, not eternal spiritual uncleanness.

26 And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD *am* holy, and have severed you from *other* people, that ye should be mine.

“And ye shall be holy [kaw-doshe' : to be set apart as sacred] unto me: for I the LORD *am* holy” – “Holy” here is the same Hebrew word used in Leviticus 11:44. The LORD Himself is holy and therefore His people are to be holy as well. They are to be set apart to do His will, not their own or the will of the world.

“and have severed [to separate or set apart] you from other people, that ye should be mine” – They are to be holy because their God is holy, and because the LORD has separated them from the world as a distinct and unique people. The purpose behind this separation is so that they would be His people.

Many of the things listed here concerning the separation of Israel can also be said of Christians today. We have not been promised a land to inherit on earth but the LORD still wants those who are called by the name of Christ to be unique and separate from the world.

John 17:14-16 (Jesus praying for His followers) *“I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”*

Phil. 3:20 *“For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:”*

1 Peter 4:3-4 *“For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:”*