**Instructions for the People**

Of all the modern conveniences we have, the importance of refrigeration may be something you have overlooked or taken for granted. Prior to the development of home refrigerators in the early 1900’s, going to a market to buy meat and produce was something that had to be done on a regular basis. The only means of keeping them fresh was an icebox that had to be constantly refilled which was a challenge in the summer. The history of canned foods goes back further to the early 1800’s. These food preservation inventions have greatly extended the shelf life of foods allowing us to stock up for days or weeks at a time reducing the need to go to the grocery store. They have also significantly reduced the pathogens that cause food borne illness. This along with better nutrition led to extending life spans. Prior to these modern conveniences, food gathering and preparation consumed a large portion of the daily life of the typical family. As food security became widespread, the time dedicated to food preparation could be used for other pursuits resulting in more improvements to quality of life.

The farther back in history we go, the more of a central role food played in daily life. In the ancient times we are studying, the tasks of securing and preparing food would have been difficult and time consuming. Famines were common and people could not afford to be finicky eaters. It is not surprising that lack of food or its quality was often the cause of complaints among the Israelites as they traveled through the desert. In our study of Leviticus chapters 11-15, much of God’s instructions are devoted to clean vs. unclean animals. While of the reading of this can be tedious, there were practical and spiritual reasons for God’s dietary requirements. The unclean animals the Israelites were prohibited from eating would have been more prone to serve as disease vectors. Shellfish would have been susceptible to contamination associated with red tide. Some of the animals considered unclean were part of the diets and sacrifices of the Canaanites from whom God wanted to separate the Israelites. With so much time devoted to food and sacrifices, they were constantly reminded of the associated laws and would have been focused on the spiritual aspects of clean and unclean animals.

Chapter 11 is devoted wholly to enumerating the animals which were clean and could be eaten and those that were unclean and could not be eaten. God begins by identifying animals that chew the cud and have a completely divided hoof as clean. Animals that chew cud are known as ruminants and have multi chambered stomachs which allow them bring up food to be chewed a second time to extract more nutrients. According to Fauna Facts, there are 133 such animals on earth. Animals that did not meet those requirements were considered unclean. In addition to the previously mentioned shellfish, numerous birds are mentioned as unclean, most of which were birds of prey that often fed on carcasses so they could have posed a health risk. Most insects and animals with paws were also considered unclean.

Chapter 12 describes purification of women after childbirth. After 40 days, a woman who gave birth was required to bring a sacrifice to the tabernacle and later, the temple. The faithful New Testament saints Simeon and Anna are noted for being at the temple when Mary went to offer the required sacrifice after the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:22-38).

In chapter 13 & 14, God addresses various skin conditions which required an examination by a priest to determine its severity. The KJV uses the term leprosy while the NIV refers to the more general term “infectious skin diseases”. In addition to suffering from the condition, people with that affliction had to suffer the additional humility of being banished from the camp. Significant verses were allotted to the associated sacrificial requirements. Mildew is also addressed (referred to as plague in the KJV) with regulations given regarding mildew in clothing and houses.

Chapter 15 addresses the cleansing requirements associated with sexual activity and menstruation. This could have been due to the immoral sexual acts committed by the Canaanites as part of their idol worship.

The regulations God gave in these chapters were so detailed that strict observance of the law required an inward focus. Following God’s commands meant constant attention to one’s current status with God relative to adherence to His Laws. The question on everyone’s mind would have been: What am I doing for myself today to maintain my relationship with God? The new covenant redirects our focus outward. Much of the Sermon on the Mount is dedicated to how we treat one another. There is perhaps no greater example of how we treat one another than our speech. Jesus said that what comes out of our mouths is of greater importance than what goes into it (Matt. 15:10-20). When Peter came under conviction that the gospel was to be extended to the gentiles, the imagery God used was the consumption of unclean animals (Acts. 10:9-16). The Jews had taken the concept of unclean animals and extended it to their fellow man. Thankfully we do not have to examine the hooves of our protein sources and the abundance of alternatives reduces our reliance on locusts. We are freed from the shackles of the law to devote our time to loving God and loving others. Maybe the question we should ask ourselves is: What am I doing for others today to maintain my relationship with God?