

Nutrition in Mosaic Law and Food in the Bible

In the lesson on Medicine, I spoke of nutrition and dietary restrictions that the Bible had for God's chosen people, the Hebrew nation. It was so different from any other nation in ancient times that it is a frequent topic of many discussions and has resulted in numerous books being written on their diet. Much of their dietary rules came from the Torah of the Tanakh, or Old Testament, where God told Moses to write down specific laws concerning their nourishment. In fact, the Jews were a peculiar people according to the King James Version.



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But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

I Peter 2:9 (KJV)

It is true. Jews are a peculiar people compared to other nations. One way that they are peculiar is due to their laws on what they can and cannot eat. This alone has become one of the most defining items of being Hebrew. Kosher or “clean” foods are a staple part of being Jewish.

A trip to a restaurant in Israel or a strong Jewish neighborhood will prove this. As I led trips to Israel, I often encountered questions during our meals of why this was served and why not this. For instance, you cannot get a cheeseburger at McDonald's in Israel. According to the Law they are prohibited from combining meat and dairy. But this law dates back to 1450 B.C. and is still in force today by Jewish people.

The foods of the ancient world were not too much different from what we eat today. Meats, fruits, vegetables, sweeteners, dairy, drinks, etc., are all part of the culinary items of the ancient world. And since the Israelites were coming out of ancient Egypt, let's first examine quickly what the staple diet for Egyptians was. We know what they ate due to the science of archaeology.

Egyptians were farmers in general. They did not keep cattle or sheep. They utilized the Nile, which would flood its banks every year, to grow good grains. The Nile was so important that it was worshiped as a god. Every year from July to October, it would flood and carry vast amounts of nutrients and mineral rich silt over the delta soils. This continuing process replaced soil nutrients yearly. Having such a rich soil allowed them to grow a good variety of foods such as wheat, barley, beans, onions, leeks, rice, potatoes and melons. For drink, beer was the standard drink in ancient Egypt. It was drunk with meals and was considered the drink of the gods. Wine was produced; but because of the agriculture and the abundance of grains, beer was the most popular.



Satellite Photo of the Nile by [USGS](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Canaanites and other cultures utilized many more foods. We know that Philistines were fond of pig and pork, which was forbidden to the Israelites.

Why was God so particular about the food régime of the Israelites? It was because God wanted His people to be the healthiest and to be sanctified or separated from the common world. They were His chosen people. Because of this, the food of the Hebrews was very different. In this lesson we will attempt to just cover a few items in major food groups and why God placed such restrictions on these people. Again, we will learn that this ancient healthy code and its dietary restrictions are still one of the best diets a person can

consume to retain good health. This boggles the mind of experts today because this system was developed before the science of modern chemistry and nutrition, yet it is perfect!



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Meats

These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, and the mountain sheep. Every animal that parts the hoof and has the hoof cloven in two and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat. Yet of those that chew the cud or have the hoof cloven you shall not eat these: the camel, the hare, and the rock badger, because they chew the cud but do not part the hoof, are unclean for you. And the pig, because it parts the hoof but does not chew the cud, is unclean for you. Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch.

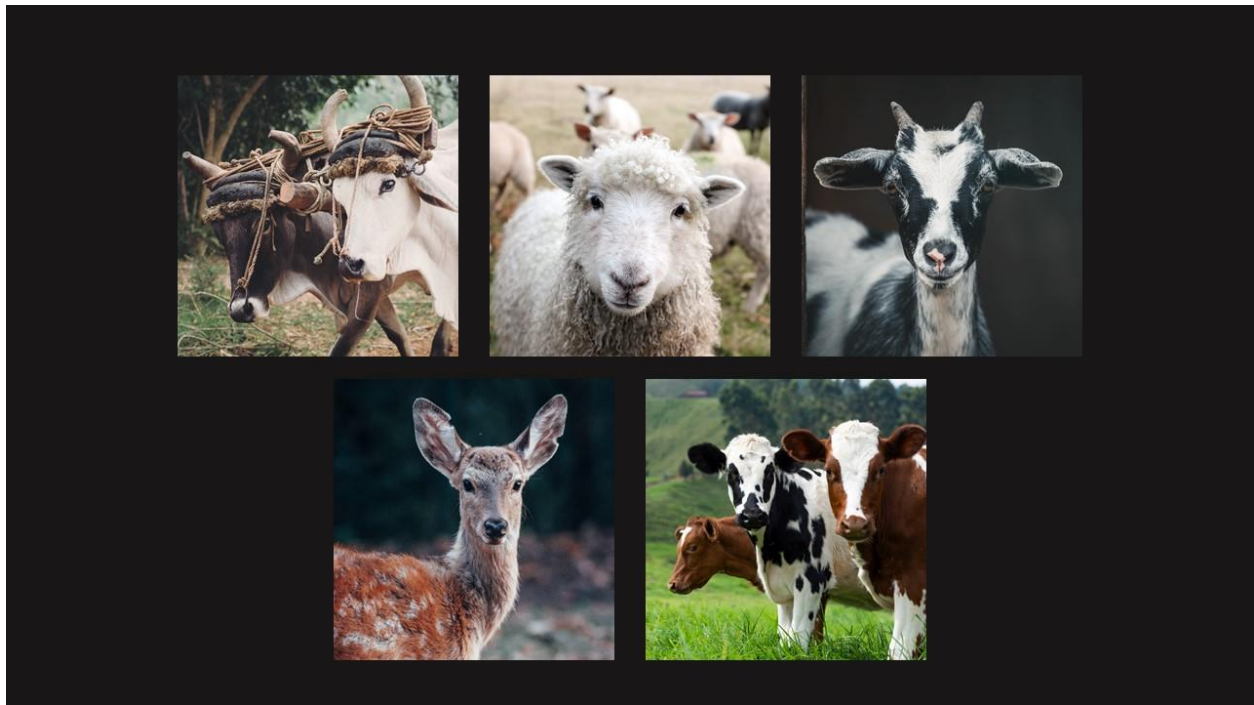
Deuteronomy 14:4-8 (ESV)

Whatever parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat. Nevertheless, among those that chew the cud or part the hoof, you shall not eat these: The camel, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. And the rock badger, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. And the hare, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you.

And the pig, because it parts the hoof and is cloven-footed but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. You shall not eat any of their flesh, and you shall not touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you.

Leviticus 11:3-8 (ESV)

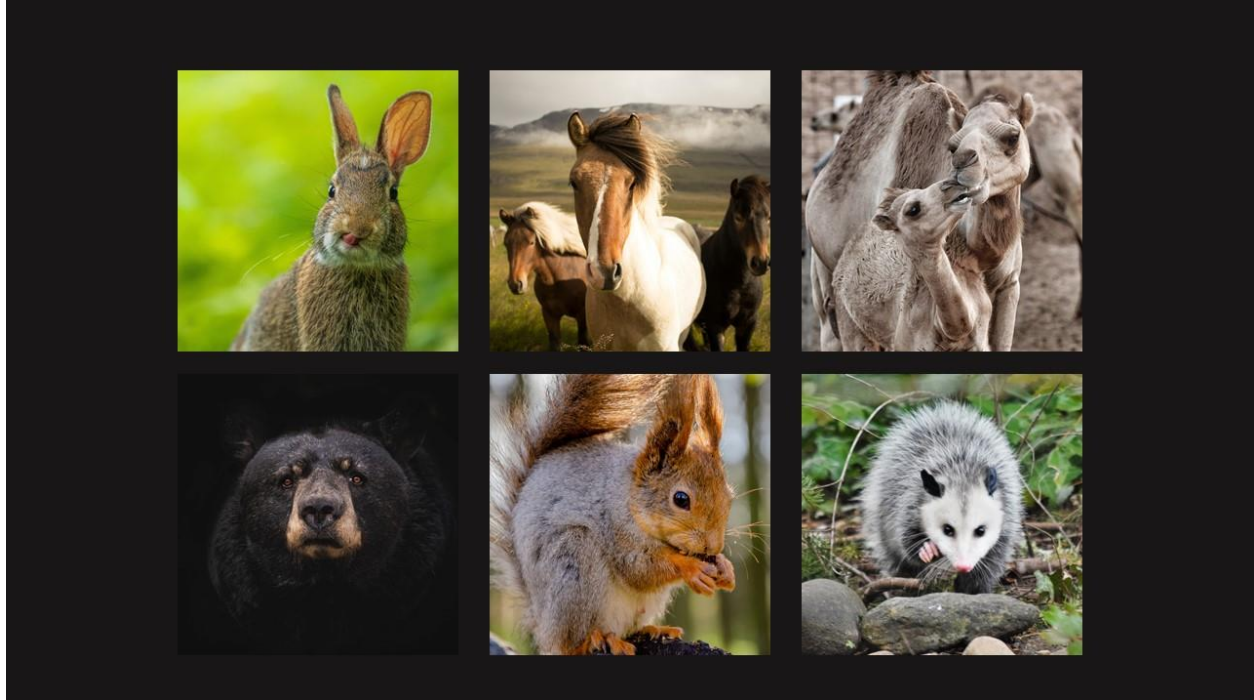
Let's review what is Kosher and clean to eat of the mammals. The list includes ox, sheep, goats, deer, and ruminants like cattle. The anatomy and physiology of such animals is remarkable. For instance, their saliva is alkaline, and these grazers have four stomachs to digest the vegetation that they consume. Their intestines average a length that is almost 30x their body length. They are protein factories that help us with the essential amino acids we must consume for good health. They are also very lean if kept healthy. Some of these creatures can hardly be fried in a skillet without some added fat or oil. But one of the most amazing things to me about their design is that they perspire over their entire bodies. This helps to eliminate and purge metabolic wastes from their muscles. When they are raised properly, they possess few dangerous parasites and few toxins that could harm us.



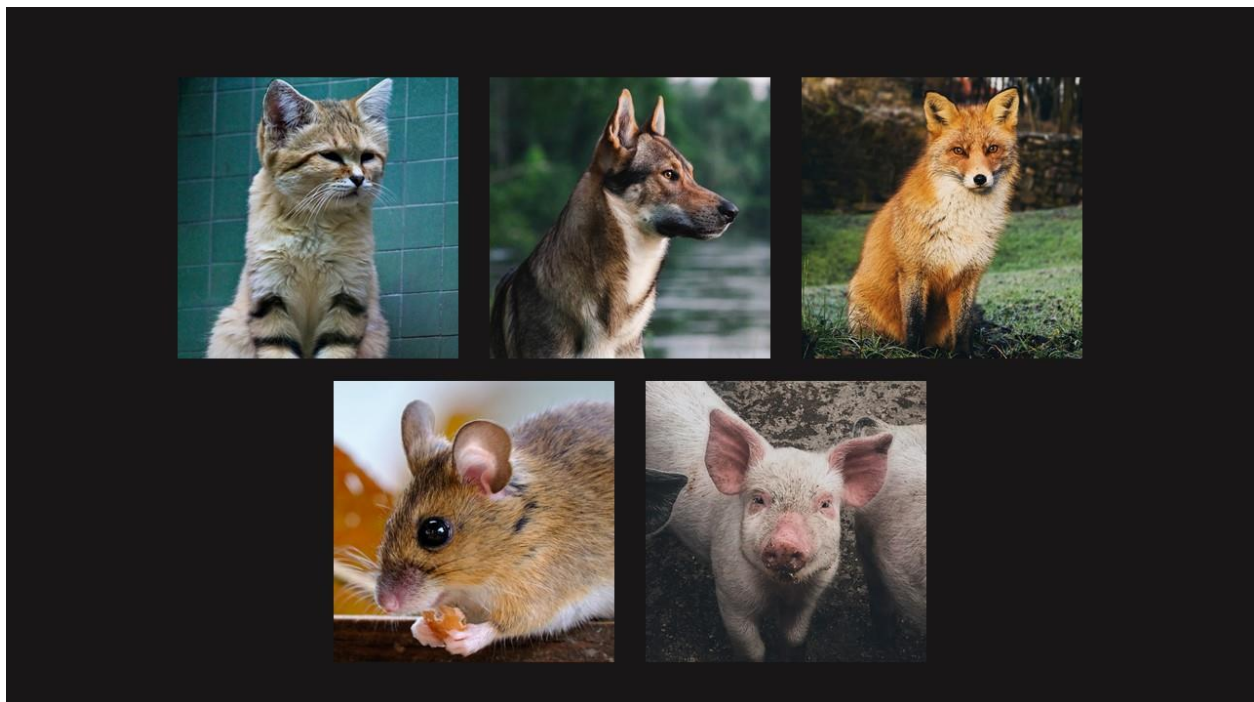
Clean Animals | Photos by, [Ana Cernivec](#), [Sam Carter](#), [Peter Lloyd](#), [Benjamin Raffetseder](#), & [Daniel Quiceno M](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The unclean mammals the Israelites were forbidden from eating or even touching includes rabbits, horses, camels, bears, squirrels, opossums, cats, dogs, foxes, rodents, and swine. These types of animals were not designed for human consumption. The most notable is swine. Anyone who takes a class in parasitology seldom will consume pork outside of the

U.S., as hogs are a host to many diseases. Pigs are filthy animals and are prone to a parasitic worm known as the trichina worm. This microscopic worm cannot be seen with the human eye, so manual inspection of pork can in no way eliminate this parasite from the grocery store.



Photos by [Jeremy Hynes](#), [Fabian Burghardt](#), [SURYA DEEPAK](#), [Marc-Olivier Jodoin](#), [George Filatov](#), & [Jennifer Uppendahl](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Photos by [Dušan veverkolog](#), [Tahoe](#), [Linnea Sandbakk](#), [Marcus Ganahl](#), & [Dan Renco](#) on [Unsplash](#)Unclean Animals

In the *Reader's Digest* issue from March 1950 Dr. Laird Goldsborough states, "*In the flesh of a pig, the trichinae are often so minute and so nearly transparent, that to find them, even with a microscope is a task for expert scientific inspectors...Remember this: when you see stamped on a pork product the words, 'U.S. Government Inspected and Passed', those words do not mean that any official inspection whatever has been made as to whether this pork has trichinosis or not. It has merely passed the routine inspection given meat in general.*" The New York Trichinosis Commission even states that physicians have misdiagnosed many ailments including alcoholism and typhoid, which were in fact cases of trichinosis! Sometimes even arm, leg or back pain, arthritis, or even rheumatism is actually trichinosis.



Trichinella/Trichina Worm by DPDx Image

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I remember from a zoology course I took the professor stated that about 15% of the U.S. population is said to be infected, but most that are infected are asymptomatic. An interesting fact about these worms is that once a viable trichina worms enters your body, it remains forever.

Another reason that pigs are not clean, or kosher, is that they eat anything from grain to decaying putrefied animal flesh. This includes feces of many animals. In short, swine are scavengers. What is worse is that they retain many of the toxins in their flesh. They do not

possess sweat glands in their skin to eliminate metabolic wastes or toxins. Thus, these products remain in their flesh. In short, pigs have poorly designed organs of elimination.

So why do people raise pigs for the human market? One very popular reason is that they are very profitable to raise for not only do they eat almost anything, but when they are butchered, everything is used, and nothing goes to waste. Something to try on your own is to study pork hotdogs and discover what all goes into them.



Capreolus Capreolus Cloven hoof By

Foto von Joachim Bäcker, loaded by Fantagu – de: Bild:Schalen Rehwild.jpg, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1899730>

I have been asked in the past why God is using cloven feet as an indicator for some mammals to be clean or unclean. That is because if an animal does not have cloven feet, parasites have an easier entry point. Animals that have cloven feet, the feet are much better protected from injury and parasites have a difficult time trying to pass this barrier to enter the animal. God designed things well.

By eating clean mammals, the Israelites were healthier than their neighboring countries. This would be due to better nutrition and having a lower percent of developing and harboring parasites. It was true in 1450 B.C. and is true today as well.



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Seafoods

“Of all that are in the waters you may eat these: whatever has fins and scales you may eat. And whatever does not have fins and scales you shall not eat; it is unclean for you.

Deuteronomy 14:9-10 (ESV)

“These you may eat, of all that are in the waters. Everything in the waters that has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat. But anything in the seas or the rivers that does not have fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and of the living creatures that are in the waters, is detestable to you. You shall regard them as detestable; you shall not eat any of their flesh, and you shall detest their carcasses. Everything in the waters that does not have fins and scales is detestable to you.

Leviticus 11:9-12 (ESV)

I love seafood. In fact, some of my favorite foods are seafood: conch, scallops, lobster, shrimp, grouper, hogfish...these make my salivary glands begin secreting! Some of these

are great to eat and very beneficial for us, while others are not. God did allow the Israelites to consume scaled fish with fins, but that was about all. What is interesting is that science today has good reasons to support this. Let's examine seafood by the types of seafood.



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Mollusks

These are the clams, oysters, conch, scallops, squid, etc. I must admit, conch is one of my all-time favorites. I have consumed it in about every way thinkable, including raw or scorched conch. I do love it best deep-fried, commonly called cracked conch. But it is not the safest food to eat.

Many mollusks are the scavenger of the seas or filters of the water. They eat dead and dying organisms. They filter and consume wastes from other aquatic creatures. And when we eat an oyster or a clam, we consume its digestive organs and feces as well. YUK! That can't be good by any standard. Thus, it was forbidden by God for the Israelites to consume these creatures.



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Crustaceans

Lobsters and shrimp...the cockroaches of the seas. Yet, I must admit, I love to eat them. But God forbade the Israelites from eating them. Why? Actually, the science behind this is amazing. Remember, God told the Israelites this around 1450 B.C., before microbiology, toxicology, or refrigeration was invented. What did God know about eating crustaceans that others did not? Plenty!

When a crustacean dies, its flesh spoils extremely fast. This is due to bacterial decomposition caused by certain digestive enzymes. Decapods, 10-legged crustaceans, possess an important digestive organ called the hepatopancreas or the digestive gland. It is the largest digestive organ in these creatures and is important not only for the digestion of food consumed, but also for their metabolism and the immune system. This huge organ rests in the cephalothorax and is in direct contact with muscles in the abdomen that we love to eat.

When death occurs, this organ almost instantly secretes digestive enzymes and other compounds into the surrounding area causing a rapid cascade of spoilage to the muscles and surrounding tissues. This prompts a bacterial explosion that is consuming the moist tissue. In short, the meat spoils speedily. Today this is prevented by instant freezing of the animals and keeping them frozen until the customer purchases them for a meal. Also, to prevent this, some restaurants feature live lobsters in aquariums for their customers.

How did Moses know that this biology happens in crustaceans so as to make them a forbidden food? God knew, because He created and designed them. And considering what these creatures eat being scavengers, their digestive tracts are often filled with bacteria and other detestable things.



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Fish

There were two types of fish described in the Mosaic Health Code. If it had fins and scales, it was Kosher. If not, it was forbidden. And by the way, sharks were forbidden as they do not have true scales but denticle, which are more like small teeth covering their bodies. Other fish that were forbidden are catfish, sturgeon, pufferfish and eels. Why? These forbidden fish eat dead and rotting animals. They are often high in toxins.

Sharks are forbidden for another reason as well. Their blood, flesh, and organs contain urea and trimethylamine oxide (TMAO) which are metabolic wastes. These are not pleasant chemicals to taste, and they form ammonia quickly when the shark is dead. Personally, I detest shark steaks. They have an unpleasant fishy, ammonia taste to me. The flesh also spoils quickly because of these chemicals. Urea is a food product for many species of bacteria.

The other finned and scaled fish are acceptable to eat. Such as cod, bass, perch, tuna, salmon, trout, halibut, and smelt. Their flesh is high in omega 3-fatty acids, which are good for you and are high in protein, vitamins, and minerals. They have a longer digestive system

which allows more toxins. Also, their digestive system is encased in a membrane that separates their digestive system from their muscles which helps slow spoilage.

Isn't it interesting how God designed these fish and then separate those that would be dangerous to human health from the clean fish. All of this was written before modern science even began to understand it.



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Poultry

Most animals that can and cannot be used for food are easily distinguishable by some simple classification. Poultry is not like this. There is simply a list of what is clean and what is not. Let's see what God told Moses to write down concerning these animals as a food source.

"You may eat all clean birds. But these are the ones that you shall not eat: the eagle, the bearded vulture, the black vulture, the kite, the falcon of any kind; every raven of any kind; the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk of any kind; the little owl and the short-eared owl, the barn owl and the tawny owl, the carrion vulture and the cormorant, the stork, the heron of any kind; the hoopoe and the bat.

Deuteronomy 14:11-18 (ESV)

“And these you shall detest among the birds; they shall not be eaten; they are detestable: the eagle, the bearded vulture, the black vulture, the kite, the falcon of any kind, every raven of any kind, the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk of any kind, the little owl, the cormorant, the short-eared owl, the barn owl, the tawny owl, the carrion vulture, the stork, the heron of any kind, the hoopoe, and the bat.

Leviticus 11:13-19 (ESV)

Before I move forward, let me clarify a supposed science error in these passages that critics love to point out. The last animal mentioned in both passages is the bat.

As most people realize, bats are not birds. Thus, it appears to us that God made a mistake. That is not an error, because this was written in ancient Hebrew and the lists begin in English with the word *birds*, but that is not an accurate transliteration of the Hebrew word used here.



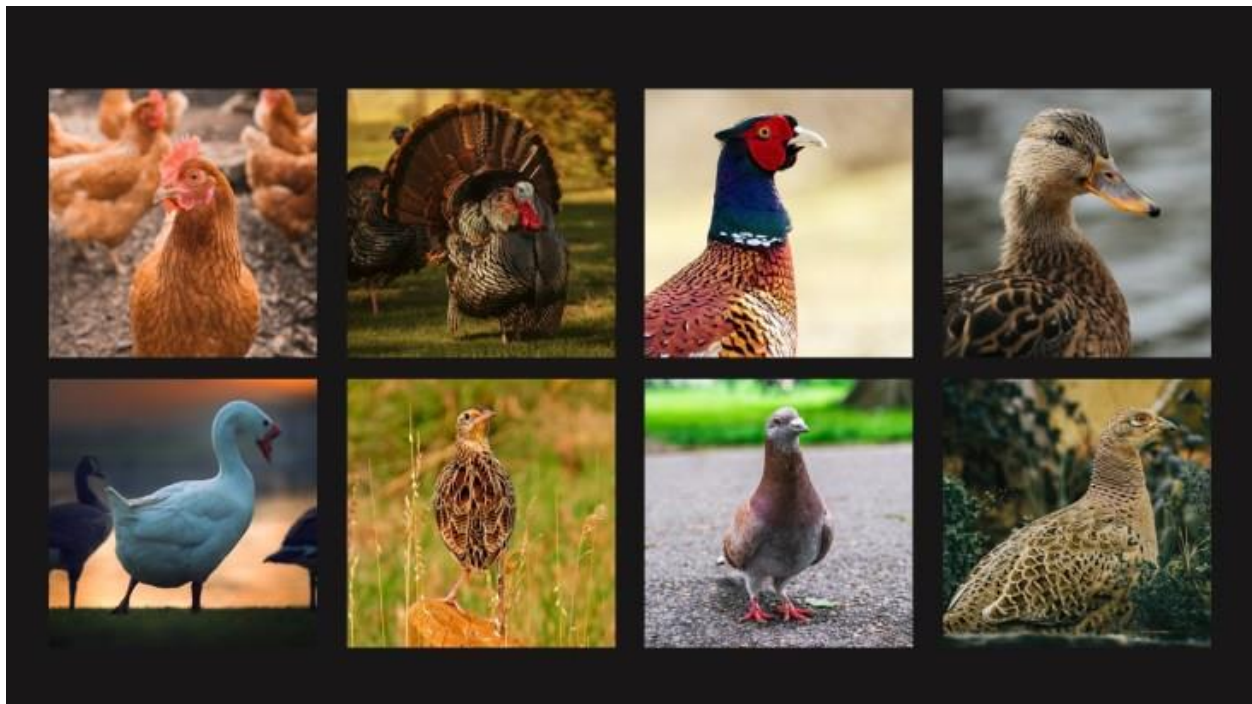
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In Leviticus, the Hebrew word translated bird here is the Hebrew word עוף pronounced *oph*. This word means *flying animal* and not necessarily just birds as we find in a modern classification.

In Deuteronomy, the Hebrew word is ציפור pronounced *tsippor*. To explain this apparent scientific error, let's go to the experts on ancient Hebrew, the *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (HALOT)*, to find the answer.

The Hebrew term **צִפּוֹר** (tsippor) can refer to a “bird” or “winged creature” (*HALOT* 1047 s.v.). In this list it appears to include bats, while insects are put in their own list next. Hebrew terminology seems to have focused on the mode of movement or environment rather than our modern zoological taxonomies.

Clean birds include chicken, turkey, pheasant, duck, geese, quail, pigeon, and grouse. The clean birds are all birds that are commonly used for food today as they have been used since ancient times. They have a relatively long digestive system and thus contain few toxins in their muscles. Most clean birds consume grains reducing pathogens and natural toxins in their bodies.



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Unclean birds are mostly scavengers or predators. Many feed on the dead, decaying, rotting flesh or animals. Because of this, they often accumulate toxins and pathogens. Some on this list are natural incubators for pathogenic bacteria and viruses.

Bats have a short digestive system and are known to harbor and incubate many pathogens, including rabies. Though they serve a useful ecological purpose of eating mosquitoes and pollinating flowers, they are not healthy to handle, let alone eat.

How did Moses know all of this? The answer is simple. The same God who created everything knew what had happened as a result of the fall and the curse on the cosmos. He

gave this health code around 1450 B.C. and it is still an excellent code today. This amazed skeptics!



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Insects

“All winged insects that go on all fours are detestable to you. Yet among the winged insects that go on all fours you may eat those that have jointed legs above their feet, with which to hop on the ground. Of them you may eat: the locust of any kind, the bald locust of any kind, the cricket of any kind, and the grasshopper of any kind. But all other winged insects that have four feet are detestable to you.

Leviticus 11:20-23 (ESV)

Most people in the U.S. do not relish eating insects even though they are extremely high in protein, but the rest of the world commonly consumes insects like mealworms, crickets, grasshoppers, etc. According to the *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, they list the consumption of insects as:

- 31% of all insects eaten are beetles

- 18% are caterpillars
- 14% are ants, wasps, and bees
- 13% are grasshoppers, crickets, and locusts
- 10% are cicadas
- The remaining 14% are others like termites, flies, dragonflies, etc.

Clean insects are mainly those related to grasshoppers, locusts, and crickets. None of these drink blood, use venom, or have chemicals that make them taste nasty. They generally do not have many transferable pathogens or carry diseases that could affect humans when they are roasted. Again, it is amazing that God put together such a perfect protein for us.



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Dairy

Milk and cheese made up a large part of the Israelite diet. They raised sheep and processed cheese in a form of curds and blocks, and a product similar to yogurt. It would be redundant to list all of the passages of God calling the Promised Land a land flowing with milk and honey.

If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey.

Numbers 14:8 (ESV)

Even when Abraham was visited by the Lord and angels, Abraham prepared a dairy meal to present to them.

Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

Genesis 18:8 (ESV)

Archaeologists and scholars teach us that the Israelites drank milk as one of their most common beverages. It was Kosher and it is nutritionally abundant, and it is still today, though raw milk has many advantages to some of the processed form we find today. It contains a lot of calcium, proteins, and some natural sugar and fats.

Today, scientists tell us that cultured raw milk and products like cottage cheese, curds, buttermilk, butter, and yogurt are products for a healthy diet. Unlike what science taught a few decades ago that people can prevent heart disease, weight gain, and arthritis if they avoided dairy products, science has come around to the Mosaic Health Code's way of thinking. An excellent paper on this was published in *Calcified Tissue International*, "Effects of Dairy Products Consumption on Health: Benefits and Beliefs—A Commentary from the Belgian Bone Club and the European Society for Clinical and Economic Aspects of Osteoporosis, Osteoarthritis and Musculoskeletal Diseases," Volume 98, 2016.



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Fats

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, You shall eat no fat, of ox or sheep or goat. The fat of an animal that dies of itself and the fat of one that is torn by beasts may be put to any other use, but on no account shall you eat it. For every person who eats of the fat of an animal of which a food offering may be made to the Lord shall be cut off from his people.

Leviticus 7:22-25 (ESV)

When I was in college, I was a morning kitchen cook and made breakfasts for the student body. Each day we fried either pork sausages or bacon. At the end of the shift, we would collect most of the fat and store it in stainless steel bins for greasing the griddles for later meals. Today, the use of lard, bacon, or other animal fats is almost a taboo to those who try to eat healthy. There are reasons for this.

To discuss thoroughly the subject of fats is complicated and would take a whole lesson for which we do not have time. Simply put, fats are chemically a form of triglycerides, which are large molecules composed of long chains of fatty acids attached to a glycerol molecule. There are different types of fats, saturated and unsaturated are just a couple.

Certain polyunsaturated fats are necessary for us because we need them to be healthy. Yes, some fats are essential to us being healthy, so to remove all fats from our diet would be detrimental to our health.

Almost all of the fats that come from animals that are consumed in our foods are saturated, and solid at room temperature. Our bodies can even manufacture fats from excessive carbohydrates, fats, oils, and proteins and store them for later use. (The problem, many of us never use them up and they just get stored.) These fats have a tendency to build up in certain areas of our bodies, but also in our blood vessels leading to cardiovascular disease.

Another concern of consuming animal fats is that animals often store toxins and harmful chemicals in fat cells. Thus, this leads to another problem in eating animal fats in high amounts.

Plants also produce fats and oils that can be healthier than fat like lard. Fats from certain fruits and nuts are actually quite healthy if eaten in moderation. There have been many studies in this area supporting the health benefits of plant-based fats and oils over animal fats (*The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, “Monounsaturated fats from plant and animal sources in relation to risk of coronary heart disease among US men and women.” Volume 107, Issue 3, March 2018, Pages 445–453).

Isn't it amazing that before people knew about cardiovascular disease, and other fat related healthy diseases, God gave this command to the Israelites. He commanded His people to stay away from the animal fats; and as part of their diet, they consumed olive oil and other plant fats and oils. Today, many health experts say the say thing as God commanded centuries ago.



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Honey

Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds.

Genesis 43:11 (ESV)

The most common sweetener used in ancient times was honey. It has recently become extremely popular again in health food stores. In the U.S., healthy people have begun to throw away aspartame, sucrose, saccharine, and sucrose for natural honey.

Honey is frequently mentioned in the Bible as part of the Hebrew diet. Natural honey is a valuable source of thiamine, riboflavin, biotin, niacin, some vitamin C, and has traces of many important minerals. The sugars in natural honey are 40% fructose, 34% glucose, and less than 2% sucrose. Being predigested, it enters the blood stream quickly, requiring little for the body to do to be able to absorb it. It has been referred to as the most perfect natural food source because of its nutrient content and the fact it does not spoil. God knew what He was doing when He gave us this food source.



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Nuts

Then their father Israel said to them, “If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds.

Genesis 43:11 (ESV)

A lot of people like eating nuts, especially in the winter holiday season. Nuts are usually a good nutrient source of fats, oils, minerals, and vitamins. Two are described in the Bible as being a food source for the Israelites, almonds and pistachios. It is interesting that these two nuts are two of the healthiest people can consume.

Besides being delicious and very healthy, almonds help regulate dopamine in the brain. Dopamine helps brain development and function and also helps sharpen memory and help our moods. They also help control cholesterol levels in people (*Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry*, “Health Benefits of Almonds Beyond Cholesterol Reduction.” July, 2012.)

Pistachios are loaded with unsaturated fatty acids, antioxidants, and help prevent inflammation (*National Product Research*. “Health Benefits of Pistachio Consumption.” March, 2019.)

Some nuts are not that good for your health. Some are in fact harmful to consume. Peanuts for instance, though very popular, are known to cause more allergic reactions in humans than any other nut. They also can trigger inflammation and can contain many dangerous fungi containing aflatoxin (medicpole.com/dangers-of-peanuts-for-health).

It appears the Bible is correct again in dealing with nut consumption. Almonds and pistachios are some of the best to consume to keep you healthy.

Blood

Moreover, you shall eat no blood whatever, whether of fowl or of animal, in any of your dwelling places. Whoever eats any blood, that person shall be cut off from his people.”

Leviticus 7:26-27 (ESV)

Most neighboring nations to Israel often used blood in food and even drank it for many reasons. Often it was consumed for idol worship, which is forbidden to righteous Israelites. In some ancient cultures it was mixed with wine as well for certain ceremonies. Even today, it is used in the culinary art. I recall when taking cooking lessons that we, on rare occasions with French cuisine, would use it as a thickener. But there are good reasons not to consume blood.

Today, science has proven that many parasitic diseases and other pathogens can be transferred to humans from animal blood. Blood contains metabolic wastes from the animal that hosted it and those are transferred to us if we consume it. There was a recent outbreak of *E. coli* in ground beef in the U.S. that was traced to infected blood. Besides pathogens, fertilizers, pesticides, drugs, and more can be found in animal blood.

I find it amazing that even though this was a commonly consumed product in the ancient world and even in some modern cultures, it was written in the Bible not to consume this for good health, and science has now supported this.



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Roadkill

The Mosaic Health Code did not allow the Israelites to eat animals, even if they were clean animals, that died on their own.

You shall not eat anything that has died naturally. You may give it to the sojourner who is within your towns, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 14:21 (ESV)

The Israelites were not to be scavengers of roadkill or dead animals found in the fields. This makes perfect sense to us today, though historians and archaeologists tell us that this was a common food source for other ancient nations.

God knew that what killed the animal could be a bacterial or viral disease that could transfer to His people if they touched it or consumed it. Of course, this information was unknown in the ancient world, but it rings true even to this day.

Conclusion

The Mosaic Health Code is not only the first written health code in human history, but it also seems to have been created supernaturally because it covers bacterial, viral, and other problems people still encounter in food service that were unknown until modern times.

I believe that this shows more evidence that God exists and that His Word is not some man-made literary work. It was given to Moses from a perfect, all-knowing God. God's Word is true.