

Bible Study

Health Aspects of Old Testament Laws

By Craig M White
Version 1.1

“But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’.” [ie the Old Testament] (Matthew 4:4)

Introductory Comments

Much of what I write is a response to something stated in a sermon or said by someone or something read which does not appear to be correct.

Further thought and study is motivated or provoked as a result. In this case the statements made that the clean and unclean meats commandments are spiritual and not health. My further analysis revealed that of course they are physical commandments with spiritual lessons, but there are also physical blessings or punishments/curses for not observing them.

In this short study I address the physical/health/hygienic aspects of the commandments and not the spiritual aspects.

The Old Testament contains approximately 613 commandments (known as *mitzvot*). Many of them—especially in Leviticus and Deuteronomy - have clear hygienic, medical, or public-health benefits and logic that modern science has either confirmed or found effective for an ancient society during the Bronze and Iron Ages.

Commandments and Health or Hygienic Benefits

Below is my overview of the major commandments with likely health benefits from my readings across numerous works. This is a collection of research by others I have gathered over time and summarised, not my own research.

Dietary Laws – Clean vs. Unclean Animals

Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14:

- Prohibits animals that are high-risk for parasites and zoonotic disease (pigs: trichinosis, tapeworms; shellfish: vibrio bacteria, paralytic shellfish poisoning; scavengers/birds of prey: high bacterial load).
- Ruminants with split hooves (cows, sheep) are low risk.
- Fish must have fins and scales (excludes sea bottom-feeding shellfish that concentrate toxins).
- Blood must be fully drained (Lev 17:10-14) reduces risk of blood-borne pathogens.

Prohibition of Eating Fat and Blood

Leviticus 3:17; 7:23-27:

- Removes visceral fat rich in saturated fats and toxins stored in adipose tissue.
- Draining blood lowers iron overload risk and bacterial contamination.

Hand Washing & Ritual Immersion

Exodus 30:17-21 - implied health benefits for the priests:

- One of the earliest codified hand-washing rituals (before eating bread, after toilet, etc.).
- Reduced cholera and infant mortality in 19th-century Jewish communities (Jewish midwives washed hands and had lower puerperal (postpartum infection) fever rates).

Circumcision on the 8th Day

Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:3:

- Day 8 is when vitamin K (clotting) and prothrombin (a vital, liver-produced blood protein) levels peak in a newborn - minimises bleeding risk.
- Reduces urinary tract infections in infants by approximately 90% and later lowers Human papillomavirus (HPV), herpes, and HIV transmission (many health experts recognise male circumcision as an HIV-prevention strategy).

Laws of Menstrual Separation

Leviticus 15:19-30; 18:19; 20:18:

- 7-day minimum separation: acts as natural family planning (reduces intercourse during peak fertility if desired).
- Reduces risk of vaginal and pelvic infections by avoiding intercourse during menses when cervix is open.
- Modern studies show lower cervical cancer rates among Jewish women historically (also linked to circumcision reducing HPV).

Quarantine of Infectious Skin Diseases

Leviticus 13-14:

- Detailed diagnosis and 7-14 day isolation of suspected contagious skin conditions (possibly leprosy, psoriasis, fungal infections).
- Priest acts as public-health officer; infected people sent "outside the camp." Earliest known quarantine system.

Mould / Mildew in Houses

Leviticus 14:33-57:

- Rules or protocols for inspecting, scraping, or demolishing mould-infested homes.
- Recognises airborne spores and the need to remove infected plaster/bricks - very similar to modern black-mould remediation (Stachybotrys, Aspergillus risks).

Bodily Discharge Laws

Leviticus 15:

- Any abnormal discharge (gonorrhoea-like); isolation, washing, immersion.
- Clothes and objects washed or destroyed; prevents spread of STDs and other pathogens (disease causing agents).

Defecation Outside the Camp

Deuteronomy 23:12-14:

- Soldiers must dig a latrine outside camp and cover excrement.
- This is one of the earliest sanitation laws; dramatically reduces faecal oral transmission (dysentery, typhoid, cholera).

Not Boiling a Kid in Its Mother's Milk (Basis of milk-meat separation by Jews)

Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21:

- Possible original intent: prevents ingestion of hormones/enzymes in mother's milk when cooking young animal.
- Prevents very long bacterial spoilage time when milk and meat are mixed and left at room temperature (common pre-refrigeration).

Tithing of Produce & Leaving Corners of Fields

Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-21:

- Indirect public-health effect: ensures food for the poor; reduces starvation and malnutrition in society.
- 2nd tithe eaten in Jerusalem or given away; encourages communal meals and food redistribution.
- 3rd tithe to help the poor (welfare safety net).

Sabbath Weekly Rest

Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-17; Matt 12:8; Mark 2:27-28; Luke 6:5:

- Sabbatarians live longer (per Seventh-day Adventist research)
- Blood pressure levels are lower
- Lower rates of heart disease.
- Rates of depression, anxiety, and burnout are lower.
- Lower systemic inflammation.

Sabbatical Year – Letting Land Lie Fallow

Exodus 23:10-11; Leviticus 25:1-7, 18-22:

- 7th-year agricultural rest: soil regeneration, breaks pest/parasite cycles.
- Prevents nutrient depletion (early crop-rotation concept).

Jubilee Year & Debt Release

Leviticus 25:

- Socioeconomic “reset” every 50 years
- Prevents permanent debt slavery and extreme poverty, which correlate strongly with poorer health outcomes.

Not Muzzling an Ox While Treading Grain

Deuteronomy 25:4 - animal welfare resulting in:

- Healthier animals.
- Safer meat/milk.

Not Wearing Mixed Wool-Linen

Leviticus 19:19; Deuteronomy 22:11:

- Possible static electricity or excess perspiration issues in hot climates.
- Prevents fungal growth in mixed fibres (less relevant today).

Fringes (Tzitzit) on Garments

Numbers 15:37-41:

- Originally wool strings could carry louse-borne typhus.
- Dyeing with Techelet (marine snail dye) may have had insect-repellent properties.

Concluding Remarks

Antinomians and those who water-down the commandments of God or spiritualise them away, will have a hard time accepting what is contained in this study. Why? Because they jump through hoops trying to find ways to get around or negate what God has commanded.

Why Christ would abolish any of these is beyond imagination. After all,

- The Torah created one of the earliest comprehensive public-health codes in human history.
- Jewish communities in the Middle Ages repeatedly showed lower mortality during plagues (e.g., Black Death) because of ritual hand-washing, burial practices (immediate burial reduces fly vector spread), and dietary laws.
- Israeli epidemiologist Dr. Doron Behar and others have noted that many of these laws would have given a strong survival advantage in the pre-modern Middle East.

While Jews observe these laws as Divine commands regardless of health benefits, the overlap with modern hygiene is amazing. Virtually every major category of God's law that looks "ritual" at first glance has a likely health or sanitary benefit → can we bring ourselves to agree that the science matches the Bible?

For example, here are some works that demonstrate the health benefits of the clean & unclean meats commandment: *The Bible Cure* by Reginald Cherry (1999); *Living in Divine Health* by Don Colbert (1999); *Can Eating Pork and Shellfish destroy your health?* at NewsWithViews.com by Greg Ciola (2006); *Jewish Food Laws in Early Christian Community Discourse* by Peter Tomson (1999).

There are a number of books drawing parallels between Biblical commandments and hygiene etc, including the famous *None of These Diseases* by Sydney McMillen, M.D. (1963); *The Bible and modern medicine : An interpretation of the basic principles of the Bible in the light of present day medical thought* by Jacob Glenn (1963); *Twelve essential oils of the Bible: Ancient Healing Oils and their Contemporary Uses* by Opitz-Kreher & Johannes Huber (2023); *The Bible and Medicinal Plants* by Mohamad Shahrajabian (2021); *The Medical Language of the Bible* by William Cole, M.D. (1998); *God's Key to Health and Happiness* by Elmer Josephson (1976); *Biblical Health Secrets* by Reginald Cherry, M.D. (2001); *What the Bible Says About Healthy Living* by Rex Russell, M.D. (1996); *The Seven Pillars of Health* by Don Colbert, M.D. (2007); *The Maker's Diet* by Jordan Rubin (2004); *Proof Positive: The Bible and Health* by Neil Nedley, M.D. (1998) and many more!

Suggested Reading

- *All Animal Flesh Good Food?* by Herbert W. Armstrong (Worldwide Church of God).
- *Biblical Principles of Health* by Douglas S. Winnail (Living Church of God).
- *None of These Diseases* by Sydney I. McMillen.
- *Sickness and Healing – What the Bible Tells Us* by the Church of the Eternal God.
- *What Does the Bible Teach About Clean and Unclean Meats?* By the United Church of God.
- *Why Unclean and Clean Meats Are Commanded* by the Eternal Church of God.
- [Old Testament Laws and Spiritual Requirements repeated in the New Testament](#) by Craig M. White (free online). Other Bible Law research by this author [is available here](#).
- [Bible Law Indexes. The Commandments categorised according to subject](#) (free online).

History Research Projects

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