

BACON:

The Bible Study



Respect the Law
Embrace the Grace

BACON: The Bible Study

SESSION 1: God's Beef with Pork

LEADER PREP

Setting the Heart

Bacon.



Just seeing the word can jog a smell memory. And for reasons unknown, bacon has enjoyed a resurgence in cult-like popularity. Internet bacon memes abound. This brings up a few questions:

- **Why does bacon taste so good?**
- **Why did the Old Testament Law restrict the Israelites from eating bacon? (What was God's beef with pork?)**
- **Why did we have the Law in the first place?**

It's amazing where a bacon trail will take you.

Now that we have your nose and taste buds prepped, let's take a minute to prepare your heart for this study by starting with the end. The passage below from 1 Peter, directed toward Christians, speaks of God's people with descriptive words that express God's goal for His people. Read this passage picturing God's relationship with His creation from Adam to this day today.

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

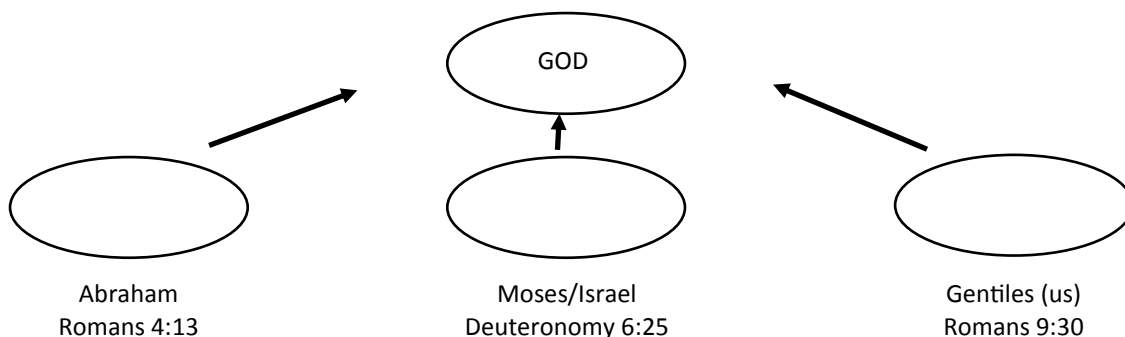
1 Peter 2:9-10

Digging In: God's Beef with Pork

Before we dive in too deeply, let's take a minute for a quick Old Testament recap:

1. God blessed Abraham and covenanted with him to make his family a great nation (Genesis 26:4)
2. Through the events of Joseph, his coat, and his brothers, Abraham's descendants (grandson, great grandkids) end up in Egypt (Genesis 37-47).
3. The family grows to the point of threatening the Egyptians so the Egyptians make them slaves (Exodus 1:1-14)
4. God calls Moses to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 3).
5. God adopts the Israelites as His treasured possession; He asks for their adherence to His Law (this is where the bacon issue is introduced) to seal the deal (Exodus 19:7-6).

Now let's dive in. The big-theme issue with regard to eating bacon is simply this: having a right relationship with God. The big Bible word for this? Righteousness. Below you'll find three distinct eras of righteousness described throughout the Bible. Look up each era's respective verse and note the primary channel for a right relationship with God (write it in the blank oval).



Digging Deeper: *Moses/Israel Era***LEADER PREP**

Let's hone in on the Moses/Israel era. This is the era that started the whole bacon thing. Explore the verses noted below and look for the following (jot down your observations beneath each verse reference):

1. Reasons why God gave the Israelites the Law.
2. Any info regarding pork.

Exodus 19:5-6

Deuteronomy 4:5-8

Deuteronomy 6:20-25

Deuteronomy 26:16-19

Leviticus 11:1-8

Write two or three bullet points explaining the purpose of the Law from the perspective of the Old Testament, the verses you just read.

Old Testament View of the Law

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Insight: *Clean vs. Unclean*

Why are certain animals unclean? Scholars have probed this question for years. The list below is a synopsis of the leading explanations, adapted from Gordon Wenham's commentary, "The Book of Leviticus," by Eerdmans Publishing.

1. Arbitrary: God is God. He chooses to do what He wants to do.

This was a school of thought held by rabbis long ago but scholars today label this approach as a last resort.

2. Cultic: The shunned animals are those used in pagan worship or associated with non-Israelite deities.

In fact, archeology shows a collection of pig bones in a geological layer that's pre-Israel, suggesting it could have been a sacred animal in pagan religions. This could explain why God had a beef with pork. But, this thinking does not hold up in that the Canaanites sacrificed some of the same animals as the Israelites, but these animals were not declared unclean. Further, the bull was a huge Canaanite cultic animal but it was not prohibited in the Law.

3. Hygiene: The laws were intended to help preserve the nation, keeping them from diseased food.

Many of the animals declared unclean do present health hazards. Thus, this is an attractive school of thought. But the reasoning breaks down in that some of the clean animals are more questionable than unclean. And if health was the primary concern then why weren't poisonous plants declared unclean? Further, Scripture gives no indication that health and hygiene are the reasons for the dietary restrictions.

LEADER PREP

4. Symbolic: the laws are living illustrations of how righteous Israel should live.

This approach turns each animal into a metaphor. Animals that “chewed the cud” were clean because they reminded Israel to meditate; sheep were clean because they reminded Israel that the Lord was their shepherd. And dirty animals like pigs were symbolic of iniquity.

5. Hybrid: It's a little bit of everything

Many scholars draw a conclusion that's sort of a hybrid of all the above. Each restriction is a reminder to Israel that: A. they have been chosen; B. they are to be pure.

Taking It Inward: Your Personal Thoughts

Take a minute to pull together your thoughts on the purpose of the Law based on the verses you just explored. Write out your thoughts as if you are explaining the Law to someone who is hearing the story of God's redemptive plan for the first time. Write each thought in the rows of the left-hand column below. We'll get to the right-hand column in a minute.

Your Thoughts on the Law	How to Cherish

Putting Into Practice: So What?

At first glance there may not appear to be much application; you may even find yourself asking “So what?” And that's just the question we want to finish with.

In Romans 3:1-2 the apostle Paul, in explaining the relationship between the Law and the new era of grace, made this comment:

What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? ² Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.

Romans 3:1-2

The Law is not to be ignored or dissed. It is to be cherished and respected as the very words of God. Look at the thoughts you just wrote about the Law in the left-hand column above. For each thought you wrote down, answer the question “How can I cherish this?” Another question to ask: “How can the principles of the Law shape my daily walk with God?”

The era of the Law gives us insight into God's character and His ways—insight that is gleaned solely during this era of God's interaction with His creation and His people. It can give us great personal insight into our relationship with God today.

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SESSION GUIDE



Materials

Before your session gather the following:

- Bacon Memes: print out or prepare images to project of your favorite bacon memes such as “Be Calm, Eat Bacon” or “Press Button: Receive Bacon” (an entire meme theme using the universal wavy line icon such as found on hand dryers).
- Print out student journal pages and Scripture sheets for your students.

Each student will need:

- A Bible or Bible app, pen, student journal pages and Scripture sheets.

Open

After your group has gathered, open your session with a general discussion about the bacon meme phenomenon. Some options to choose:

1. Share your favorite bacon memes, either print outs or by projecting images.
2. Ask students to share their favorite bacon memes.
3. Ask: “What’s your favorite way to enjoy bacon?”

Digging In: *God’s Beef with Pork*

Transition into your study time with this question:

Do you know there was a time when our spiritual ancestors were not allowed to eat bacon?

Then share in your own words:


Different eras of history in the Bible represented different ways to have a right relationship with God. The big Bible word for this is “righteousness.” On your journal page under “Digging In: God’s Beef with Pork” you’ll see three eras represented in a diagram. Look up each era’s respective verse in your Bible and note the primary channel for a right relationship with God by writing it in the blank oval.

Give students a couple minutes to make their observations, then discuss these questions:

1. How does our era achieve a right relationship with God?
2. What’s the difference between our era and the Moses/Israel era?

Digging Deeper: *Moses/Israel Era*

Share that the best way to appreciate our era of relationship with God is to understand how we got here. Point out that the verses on their Scripture sheets under “Digging Deeper: Moses/Israel Era” give insight into the era of Moses/Israel. You may want to invite students to move to a place of solitude. As they read these verses from their Scripture sheets, ask them to do the following:

1. Underline reasons why God gave the Israelites the Law.
2. Draw bacon waves  over any info regarding pork.

After a few minutes, call your group back together and ask them to write two or three bullet points explaining the purpose of the Law from the perspective of the verses they just read. Then ask students to share their bullet points and process the verses as a group. Invite students to take notes on the discussion, writing down other students’ responses in the space provided on the journal page.

Ask:

What is the purpose of the Law (God's decrees) from the perspective of these verses?

Possible responses:

1. *Distinguishes Israel as God's treasured possession over all other nations (Ex. 10:5-6).*
2. *Shows wisdom and understanding to surrounding nations (Deut. 4:6).*
3. *Shows other nations how near and how great God is (Deut. 4:7).*
4. *Gives parents an opportunity to teach/share the ways of God (Deut. 6:20).*
5. *It preserves Israel for God's use (Deut. 6:24).*
6. *Provides the path to a right relationship—righteousness (Deut. 6:25).*
7. *Sets Israel apart as God's treasured, holy possession (Deut. 26:18-19).*

What did you learn about pork?

Possible responses:

1. *These animals are unclean (Lev. 11:5).*
2. *Not to eat these animals (Lev. 11:8).*
3. *Not to touch the carcasses of these animals (Lev. 11:8).*

Insight: Clean vs. Unclean

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Taking It Inward: Your Personal Thoughts

Let's pick up on that last point: Israel was chosen, and they were to be pure. This is a big-picture pullback of the purpose of the Law, including dietary restrictions such as "don't eat pork."

Revisit the question in "Digging Deeper" *What is the purpose of the Law?* Ask students to take a minute to write their thoughts in the right-hand column (labelled "Today") of the chart on their journal page regarding this question:

How can each purpose of the Law we discussed shape our walk with God today?

Possible responses:

Purpose of the Law	Today
1. Distinguishes Israel as God's treasured possession over all other nations (Ex. 10:5-6).	Obedience to God's Word sets us apart.
2. Shows wisdom and understanding to surrounding nations (Deut. 4:6).	People around us will notice.
3. Shows other nations how near and how great God is (Deut. 4:7).	Obedience shows people around us how great God is.
4. Gives parents an opportunity to teach/share the ways of God (Deut. 6:20).	Obedience gives us an opportunity to explain our relationship with God.
5. It preserves Israel for God's use (Deut. 6:24).	Obedience puts us in a position to be used by God.
6. Provides the path to a right relationship—righteousness (Deut. 6:25)	This is where things differ: our path to a right relationship with God is through faith (more on that in session 2)
7. Sets Israel apart as God's treasured, holy possession (Deut. 26:18-19)	Obedience sets us apart.

Putting Into Practice

As we'll see in Session 2, we get to enjoy bacon. But the Old Testament is not to be ignored or dissed. Close your session with the following exercises.

Look at the items you have in your "Today" column from the "Taking It Inward" exercise. Which of these items would you like to turn into an action point this week? For example: You might have listed under "Today" that obedience to God's Word sets us apart. Your action point might be something like this: "I will seek to be obedient to God's Word in a way that makes me distinct from the world."

Give students a few minutes to process the exercise and then ask for volunteers to share their responses.

Finish by praying that students would be challenged to have a deeper understanding how the Law, even though fulfilled by Jesus, can still shape their faith walk today.

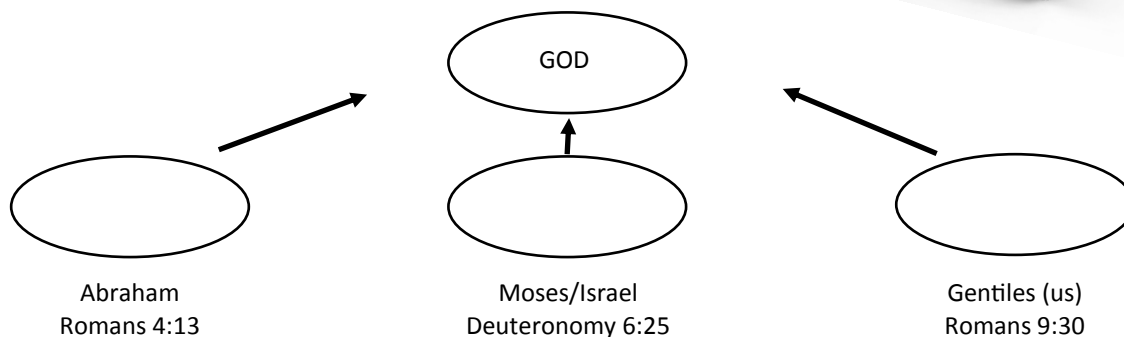
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STUDENT



Digging In: *God's Beef with Pork*



Digging Deeper: *Moses/Israel Era*

What is the purpose of the Law (God's decrees)
from the perspective of the verses in Exodus, Deuteronomy and Leviticus?

Your Responses:	Today?
Others' Responses:	

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SCRIPTURE SHEET

Digging Deeper: *Moses/Israel Era*



Exodus 19:5-6

⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

Deuteronomy 4:5-8

⁵ See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. ⁶ Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." ⁷ What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? ⁸ And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

Deuteronomy 6:20-25

²⁰ In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?" ²¹ tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ²² Before our eyes the LORD sent signs and wonders—great and terrible—on Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. ²³ But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land he promised on oath to our ancestors. ²⁴ The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. ²⁵ And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness."

Deuteronomy 26:16-19

¹⁶ The LORD your God commands you this day to follow these decrees and laws; carefully observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. ¹⁷ You have declared this day that the LORD is your God and that you will walk in obedience to him, that you will keep his decrees, commands and laws—that you will listen to him. ¹⁸ And the LORD has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all his commands. ¹⁹ He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honor high above all the nations he has made and that you will be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.

Leviticus 11:1-8

¹¹ The LORD spoke again to Moses and to Aaron, saying to them, ² "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'These are the creatures which you may eat from all the animals that are on the earth. ³ Whatever divides a hoof, thus making split hoofs, *and* chews the cud, among the animals, that you may eat. ⁴ Nevertheless, you are not to eat of these, among those which chew the cud, or among those which divide the hoof: the camel, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you. ⁵ Likewise, the shaphan, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; ⁶ the rabbit also, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; ⁷ and the pig, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, it is unclean to you. ⁸ You shall not eat of their flesh nor touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you.