

What Has Four Feet and Flies?

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Every once in a while, someone trots out a particular passage in Leviticus, alleging that it is an error in the Bible. But is it?

In Leviticus 11:20-23, the King James Bible says:

²⁰All fowls that creep, going upon all four, shall be an abomination unto you. ²¹Yet these may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon all four, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth; ²²Even these of them ye may eat; the locust after his kind, and the bald locust after his kind, and the beetle after his kind, and the grasshopper after his kind. ²³But all other flying creeping things, which have four feet, shall be an abomination unto you.



The problem starts in verse 20 with the word *fowls*. To the modern reader, that word means *birds* and only *birds*. And, besides, what birds walk on four legs? That would be a big problem, if the modern reader were correct.

Actually, both the Hebrew word, *owph*, translated in Leviticus 11:20 as *fowls*, and the English word *fowls* both have a much broader meaning than just *birds*. Originally, both were used in reference to any creature that possesses wings and flies. Creatures such as birds, bats, pterosaurs, and flying insects were considered *owph* or *fowls* because of what all these diverse creatures have in common: wings and flight. Nowadays, though, fowl is generally used only in reference to birds in general and more commonly to domesticated or game birds such as ducks, geese, pigeons, chickens, grouse, etc.

But what about the four legs? After all, birds, bats, and pterosaurs (extinct flying lizards) have wings but only two legs whereas insects have wings and six legs. How is this not a mistake in the Scripture?

Actually, in reference to birds, bats, pterosaurs, the answer is simpler than you might expect. While it is true that birds have only two wings and two legs, bats and pterosaurs, while similar, are just a bit different. Unlike birds, their wings are used for both flying and walking or crawling. Remember, wings

in birds, bats, and pterosaurs are actually forelimbs. Both bats and pterosaurs, unlike birds, use their forelimbs to walk or crawl on the ground in addition to flying. Bats, for instance, use the strong thumbs and wrists of their forelimbs, along with their hind legs, to shuffle or crawl on all fours. Some species like vampire bats possess a unique hopping gait by using their powerful forelimbs in conjunction with their hind legs. Pterosaurs, on the other hand, walked on all four limbs, using the fingers of their forelimbs, specifically the metacarpals, to support their front weight while the wing digits were folded or held upward. So, in that sense, both bats and pterosaurs are truly “*fowls that creep, going upon all four.*”

But what about insects? After all, in verses 21-23 of Leviticus 11 the Bible speaks about insects, mentioning locusts, bald locusts, beetles, and grasshoppers specifically and other insects generally, as having four legs. This seems like a legitimate problem because all insects, by definition, possess six, not four, legs.

Admittedly, this seems like a more difficult problem than that presented by birds, bats, and pterosaurs. However, a close reading of the passage reveals the truth regarding locusts, bald locusts, and grasshoppers, though the reference to beetles and *all other flying creeping things* requires a little more consideration.

Let’s look at Leviticus 11:21-22 specifically again:

²¹Yet these may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon all four, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth; ²²Even these of them ye may eat; the locust after his kind, and the bald locust after his kind, and the beetle after his kind, and the grasshopper after his kind.

Locusts, bald locusts, and grasshoppers all have common physiology. They have six legs, but the two hind legs are different from the other four legs. The hind legs are larger and stronger, designed to enable the insect to leap suddenly and powerfully. If you look closely at Leviticus 11:21, that is exactly what the Bible describes; flying creeping things that walk about on four legs with two much larger legs that enable them to leap. In other words, the Bible describes flying insects with six – not four – legs that creep and jump. Problem solved.

The reference to beetles is a little more challenging. Clearly it is not referring to the typical type of beetle that we would think of today, which is an insect of the order *Coleoptera*. Instead, it appears to be referring to a form of grasshopper or cricket because it is translated from the Hebrew word *charegol*, which refers to a leaping insect similar to a locust. Crickets, like grasshoppers and locusts, are of the order *Orthoptera* and, like grasshoppers and locusts, crickets have been used as food by many peoples down through the ages. This makes sense since Leviticus 11:21 is talking about types of insects that can be eaten. Problem solved.

Now that brings us to the last difficulty, the creeping things that have four feet described in Leviticus 11:23:

But all other flying creeping things, which have four feet, shall be an abomination unto you.

The Hebrew word, *sherets*, translated here as *creeping things*, is a reference to flying insects. And, as I said before, insects have six, not four, legs. Yet the text clearly talks about flying insects with only four legs. How can that be explained?

Actually, this final difficulty is a lot easier to understand than you might think. Consider, for example, the praying mantis. The praying mantis is a flying insect which has six legs, but the two front legs are much different from the four hind legs. The praying mantis stands and walks about on its four hind legs. The two front legs are held up near their head, giving them the appearance of praying while they are hunting. When suitable prey comes in range the front limbs spring out rapidly, seizing the prey and holding it while the praying mantis consumes it. In fact, the front legs are so different, both in appearance and use, that some people consider them arms with hands instead of legs with feet. Consequently, they are just one type of insect that could easily be described as *flying creeping things, which have four feet*. Again, problem solved.

As you can see, there really is no problem or error to be found in Leviticus 11:20-24. Despite claims to the contrary, the Bible accurately reflects what nature presents. This, and other so-called errors in the Bible generally stem from misunderstanding, misreading, ignorance, bias, laziness, or even a lack of curiosity, and are usually resolved by giving God the benefit of the doubt and asking for the Holy Spirit's help rather than first assuming that the Bible is wrong and you are not. Then, upon spending time digging into and carefully reading the passage in question and seeking the help of other Believers, the problem can usually be resolved.

Nevertheless, this and other supposed errors persist because Bible deniers, and those otherwise convinced, predisposed, or desirous to doubt God and His Word ultimately want them to.

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