

# To Eat or Not to Eat?

by J.K. McKee posted 15 April, 2002 www.tnnonline.net

Many subjects arise when today's Messianic Believers often talk about their faith and practice to their evangelical Christian colleagues.<sup>1</sup> We should try to do our best to emphasize common beliefs and convictions as they relate to who Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) is as our Savior, what He has done for us, and the richness we possess in seeing Him throughout the pages of the Tanach (Old Testament) as opposed to just the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament).<sup>2</sup> Likewise, we should also emphasize the Messianic prophetic fulfillment, both past and future, that we see in the Biblical holidays that God gave to His people in Leviticus 23 (cf. Colossians 2:17). But unlike much of mainstream Christianity, we do not believe that the New Testament gives us the "freedom" to eat anything, and that it annuls the dietary laws of God's Torah.

This third set of Messianic convictions is quite easy to camouflage in day-to-day activities, unless friends and associates are over-inquisitive about your eating habits. But nevertheless, many Christians believe that the New Testament tells us we can now eat whatever we want, with the kosher dietary laws being a thing of the past. Is it truly this way, though?

The issue of eating the way God has prescribed is one where we need to realize whether or not He has the right to tell us what we can and cannot ingest into our bodies, and why He specifically gave us these commandments. Messianic orthopraxy directly challenges much of modern Christian thought as it relates to "food." Why do we need to follow the dietary commandments the Lord gave us? What lessons might we learn from following them, in addition to how the kosher laws may affect our health?

## How did humanity start eating meat?

The Biblical dietary laws that specifically relate to food are found in Leviticus 11 and are repeated in Deuteronomy 14. However, before these commandments were codified to the Ancient Israelites at Mount Sinai, it is important that we observe how there were a series of prior instructions given by God, all the way back in the Garden of Eden, which specifically relate to food.

In Genesis 1:29 the Lord told Adam and Eve, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you." The first man and woman were vegetarians and they did not eat meat. But, this instruction was given by God *prior to humanity's fall*, and later we see the dynamics change. The *ArtScroll Chumash* indicates, "At this time, Man was forbidden to kill animals for food; such permission was granted to Noah, only after the Flood."<sup>3</sup>

It is important that we all understand how the first commandment ever given by God to humanity is related to food. Genesis 2:16-17 tells us, "The LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.'" We all know the result of Adam and Eve's actions. Because they ate the forbidden fruit, they were expelled from the Garden of Eden, and we each now have a sin nature and must be redeemed through the blood of Yeshua (Romans 5:12, 15).

The Lord's instructions relating to food continue in Genesis 9:1-4, with what He tells Noah after the conclusion of the Flood:

"And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. Every moving thing [*kol-remes*, כָּל־רֶמֶשׂ] that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as *I gave* the green plant. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, *that is*, its blood."

<sup>1</sup> This article has been reproduced from the paperback edition of *Introduction to Things Messianic*, pp 173-198.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ephesians 4:1-6.

<sup>3</sup> Scherman, *Chumash*, 9.

Many Christians will examine these verses and immediately conclude that Noah and his family were given the right to eat all kinds of meat, which would include things later codified in Leviticus and Deuteronomy as being “unclean.” It is very true that here God gave humanity permission to eat meat, perhaps to limit lifespans as witnessed by the genealogical list of Genesis 11.<sup>4</sup> But does this mean that Noah and company ate “unclean” things? We note that in these verses there is a specific limitation placed on eating meat: “You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it” (Genesis 9:4, NJPS).

Before we begin thinking that Noah would have actually eaten meat considered unclean, let us consider the context of the Noahic Flood. It is commonly believed among many that Noah was given the task of collecting only two of each species of animal, a male and a female into the ark, so that the animals affected by the Flood would be preserved:

“And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every *kind* into the ark, to keep *them* alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, and of the animals after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every *kind* will come to you to keep *them* alive” (Genesis 6:19-20).

But one problem remains if only two of each kind of animal affected by the Flood were brought onto the ark. When the ark rested on Mount Ararat and the animals were let go, if Noah and his family immediately started eating meat, then as a result they could be held responsible for the extinction of certain animal species. However, in Genesis 7:2 the Lord instructed, “You shall take with you of every clean animal by sevens, a male and his female; and of the animals that are not clean two, a male and his female.” Somehow this verse is conveniently glossed over by many Christian Bible teachers, because it indicates that long before the Torah was formally given to Israel, there was an understanding of clean and unclean meats.

Concerning this verse, the *ArtScroll Chumash* tells us, “In addition to the pair from each species that [Noah] had been commanded previously to bring, he was now told to bring seven pairs of the animals that the Torah would later declare to be *clean*, i.e., kosher, so that he would be able to use them as offerings when he left the Ark...They would also provide him with a supply of livestock for food, in anticipation of God’s removal of the prohibition against eating meat.”<sup>5</sup> Allen P. Ross adds, “Into this ark Noah was to take **all** kinds of animals to preserve life on earth. A distinction was made very early between **clean** and **unclean** animals. To preserve life Noah had to take on board **two of every kind of animal**, but for **food** and for sacrificing he had to bring **seven pairs of each kind of clean animal**” (*BKCOT*).<sup>6</sup> *The clean animals that Noah took with him on the Ark would serve as food.*<sup>7</sup>

This Biblical history lesson gives us the necessary background we need to understand why God gave His people the dietary commandments. From the Garden of Eden and until right after the Flood, humans were only permitted to eat plants such as fruits, vegetables, herbs, and nuts. The Scriptures do not tell us which plants are acceptable or unacceptable, but obviously if something is poisonous then it should not be consumed. Following the Flood the Lord gave permission for humans to eat meat, and it is important that we realize that at this time there was already an understanding of what was clean and unclean. Concurrent with this, when permission is extended for eating meat, people are disallowed from consuming blood (Genesis 9:4-6).

<sup>4</sup> This is discussed in more detail in the author’s exegetical paper on Genesis 9:3-7, “Why Meat?”

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Allen P. Ross, “Genesis,” in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 38.

<sup>7</sup> John H. Walton further specifies, “The noun (*remes*) and the associated verb (*rms*) each occur seventeen times in the Old Testament, ten times each in Genesis 1-9. This word group is distinct from both the wild (predatory) beasts and domesticated flocks and herds. Neither verb nor noun is ever used to refer to larger wild animals or to domesticated animals. In no place is *remes* a catch-all category for all creatures. It is one category of creature only. The division of the Hebrew terms used up to this point in Genesis reflects the nature of the animal...” (Walton, *Genesis*, pp 341-342).

## What does God consider food?

Many of the arguments lobbied at Messianics from Christians concern an understanding of “food.” In order to properly respond to these assertions, we must first Biblically define what food is with a foundation in God’s Torah. All too often (American) Christianity fails to consider what has always been considered as “food” in the Bible (Heb. *okel*, אֵכֶל; Grk. *brōma*, βρῶμα), and modern people often read messages into the Scriptures concerning food. This is important to grasp, because we cannot read modern understandings of “food” into the Scriptures in order to justify our cravings of eating certain things, but must understand what “food” is from the perspective of the Biblical writers—and most especially, the Jewish Apostles in the New Testament.

Let us now examine the dietary commandments God gave to His people from both Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

The opening statement that is made concerning the dietary commandments says, “The LORD spoke again to Moses and to Aaron, saying to them, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, “These are the creatures which you may eat from all the animals that are on the earth”’” (Leviticus 11:1-2). It is more direct in Deuteronomy 14 when the Lord simply states, “You shall not eat any abomination” (v. 3, ATS). The Hebrew *toevah* (תוֹעֵבָה) is defined as relating to an “abomination,” “physical repugnance,” “various objectionable acts,” and “idolatrous practices” (BDB).<sup>8</sup> But do note how God says that non-observance of the kosher instructions is “an abomination unto you” (Leviticus 11:12, KJV).<sup>9</sup> Violation of the dietary laws is by no means on the same level as committing murder or adultery.

From this point, God gives His instruction concerning which animals may be eaten and considered food, and which animals may not be considered food.

### *Land Animals*

“Whatever divides a hoof, thus making split hoofs, *and* chews the cud, among the animals, that you may eat. 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. Likewise, the shaphan, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; the rabbit also, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; and the pig, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, it is unclean to you. You shall not eat of their flesh nor touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you” (Leviticus 11:3-8).

“These are the animals which 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. Any animal that divides the hoof and has the hoof split in two *and* chews the cud, among the animals, that you may eat. Nevertheless, you are not to eat of these among those which chew the cud, or among those that divide the hoof in two: the camel and the rabbit and the shaphan, for though they chew the cud, they do not divide the hoof; they are unclean for you. The pig, because it divides the hoof but *does not chew* the cud, it is unclean for you. You shall not eat any of their flesh nor touch their carcasses” (Deuteronomy 14:4-8).

The list of land animals that may be eaten by God’s people is rather succinct. The requirements for clean land animals are that they must have a full hoof split in two and chew a cud. Clean land animals most commonly eaten today include: cows, sheep, goats, and various types of game such as deer. Unless someone goes to a very fancy gourmet restaurant, paying exorbitant fees for their meal, most do not eat rabbit or badger. The most notable animal on the list that is considered unclean, of course, is the pig. And, the consumption of pork is quite a big industry and phenomenon today.

Before we go any further, many of you are no doubt aware of the strong Jewish animosity toward pork. This is not simply because it is forbidden from being eaten in the Bible. It is also because many Jews throughout the Middle Ages were persecuted by Christians by being forced to

<sup>8</sup> BDB, 1072.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Leviticus 11:10, 12, 20, 23.

eat pork. This historical reality *must* be taken very seriously by any Believer engaged in interreligious dialogue with Jewish people. Another reason may be, as Alfred J. Kolatch states in *The Second Jewish Book of Why*, is that “scholars have associated the deep Jewish aversion to the pig with the Hasmonean period in Jewish history (second century B.C.E.) when the Syrian-Greeks, led by Antiochus Epiphanes, dominated the Palestine scene and tried to force Jews to sacrifice pigs in the Temple and to eat of their flesh”<sup>10</sup> (cf. 1 Maccabees 1:47-48).

These are important things to digest because in this hour as the Lord restores all His people, non-Jewish Believers need to be very sensitive to the injustices that have occurred to the Jewish people involving pork. Non-Jewish Believers entering into the Messianic movement have a responsibility to reconcile with Jews. Forced consumption of pork is one of the things that needs to be repented of. If our Jewish brethren are to be provoked to jealousy for faith in the Messiah (Romans 11:11), the last thing non-Jewish Believers should be doing is preaching about a messiah who eats pork, the same “Jesus” that in their minds the Catholic Church and others persecuted and hunted down their ancestors for. (On the contrary, they should seriously consider *giving up pork!*) Furthermore, it is notable that we witness Yeshua casting a legion of demons into a herd of swine:

“Now there was a herd of many swine feeding at a distance from them. The demons *began* to entreat Him, saying, ‘If You *are going to* cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.’ And He said to them, ‘Go!’ And they came out and went into the swine, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters” (Matthew 8:30-32).

Was this only a coincidence? No, it was not. The text plainly states that the demons were cast into *unclean* animals, swine, as opposed to a herd of cattle or sheep that would be clean.

#### ***Marine Creatures***

“These you may eat, whatever is in the water: all that have fins and scales, those in the water, in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat. But whatever is in the seas and in the rivers that does not have fins and scales among all the teeming life of the water, and among all the living creatures that are in the water, they are detestable things to you, and they shall be abhorrent to you; you may not eat of their flesh, and their carcasses you shall detest. Whatever in the water does not have fins and scales is abhorrent to you” (Leviticus 11:9-12).

“These you may eat of all that are in water: anything that has fins and scales you may eat, but anything that does not have fins and scales you shall not eat; it is unclean for you” (Deuteronomy 14:9-10).

The list of marine creatures acceptable to eat is very short. Only two requirements are given: they must have fins and scales. This would qualify many types of fish, freshwater and seawater, but it would disqualify certain types of predator and scavenger fish (i.e., shark, catfish) and all types of popular shellfish (i.e., shrimp, crab, lobster, oyster, clam). J.H. Hertz also makes the observation, concerning the prohibition of eating “all the living creatures that are in the water,” that “This alludes to the sea animals which do not come under the category of fish, such as seals and whales.”<sup>11</sup>

There are internal debates in Judaism about certain types of fish that have scales at one point in their lives but then lose them, or those which do not have scales all over themselves. We will not determine for you whether contested fish such as swordfish or dolphin are clean and are acceptable to be eaten. We trust you will be led by the Holy Spirit and be convicted as to what type of fish you should and should not eat. (At the very least, however, consider such fish as borderline and preferable to eat over those things that are certainly not clean such as shrimp or crab.)

#### ***Birds and Flying Creatures***

“These, moreover, you shall detest among the birds; they are abhorrent, not to be eaten: the eagle and the vulture and the buzzard, and the kite and the falcon in its kind, every raven in its

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<sup>10</sup> Alfred J. Kolatch, *The Second Jewish Book of Why* (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1985), 318.

<sup>11</sup> Hertz, 450.

kind, and the ostrich and the owl and the sea gull and the hawk in its kind, and the little owl and the cormorant and the great owl, and the white owl and the pelican and the carrion vulture, and the stork, the heron in its kinds, and the hoopoe, and the bat” (Leviticus 11:13-19).

“You may eat any clean bird. But these are the ones which you shall not eat: the eagle and the vulture and the buzzard, and the red kite, the falcon, and the kite in their kinds, and every raven in its kind, and the ostrich, the owl, the sea gull, and the hawk in their kinds, the little owl, the great owl, the white owl, the pelican, the carrion vulture, the cormorant, the stork, and the heron in their kinds, and the hoopoe and the bat” (Deuteronomy 14:11-18).

The list of unacceptable birds that are not to be eaten primarily include birds of prey, some of which are believed to be extinct today. These unclean birds, however, include “the eagle, the vulture, the black vulture, the red kite, any kind of black kite, any kind of raven, the horned owl, the screech owl, the gull, any kind of hawk, the little owl, the cormorant, the great owl, the white owl, the desert owl, the osprey, the stork, any kind of heron, the hoopoe and the bat” (Leviticus 11:13-19, NIV). None of these creatures are widely consumed by anyone, notably as many of these birds like the eagle or falcon are considered endangered species. There is a growing trend in America to eat ostrich or emu as delicacy meats, but it is only limited to a few parts of the country. Birds that are considered acceptable for consumption today include: chicken, turkey, duck, goose, and numerous other fowl that are primarily wild.

***Insects***

“All the winged insects that walk on *all* fours are detestable to you. Yet these you may eat among all the winged insects which walk on *all* fours: those which have above their feet jointed legs with which to jump on the earth. These of them you may eat: the locust in its kinds, and the devastating locust in its kinds, and the cricket in its kinds, and the grasshopper in its kinds. But all other winged insects which are four-footed are detestable to you” (Leviticus 11:20-23).

This listing primarily concerns insects and which insects may and may not be eaten. Most Western people today do not eat insects, and it is notable that those who do as culinary delights primarily eat those considered clean: locusts, crickets, and grasshoppers.

***Other Forbidden Creatures***

“Now these are to you the unclean among the swarming things which swarm on the earth: the mole, and the mouse, and the great lizard in its kinds, and the gecko, and the crocodile, and the lizard, and the sand reptile, and the chameleon. These are to you the unclean among all the swarming things; whoever touches them when they are dead becomes unclean until evening” (Leviticus 11:29-31).

Other forbidden creatures also include animals that are not commonly eaten unless in the modern context of being considered delicacies. It is notable that most do not eat: mice, rats, alligators, crocodiles, snakes, or lizards.

***Other Ordinances***

“You shall not eat anything which dies *of itself*. You may give it to the alien who is in your town, so that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner, for you are a holy people to the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk” (Deuteronomy 14:21).

Similar to many of the other forbidden animals above, most of us do not have farms where we would sell our dead animals to our neighbors. Although it is important to be aware of this, the command would simply not apply to most of us. (And besides, who would want to eat an animal that died of natural causes, anyway?)

This verse is, however, a place where the common Jewish practice of not mixing milk and meat originates. It is interpreted today as meaning that Scripture prohibits eating meat and dairy products at the same time, a debate that was present in the First Century world of Yeshua (m.*Chullin* 8:3-4; b.*Chullin* 104a; 130a). If Messianic Believers choose to follow this interpretation, they certainly have the right to do so. But the verse itself only tells us to “not cook a kid in its mother's milk” (ATS). This admonition first occurs in Exodus 23:19, “You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God. You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother.”

The *ArtScroll Chumash* comments concerning this verse, “The prohibition of cooking meat and milk together applies to all sheep [and cattle; not only *kid* meat in the *milk of its own mother*. Rabbinic law extended the prohibition to all other kosher meat and fowl],”<sup>12</sup> admitting that not mixing milk and meat is an interpretation of this passage. When viewing Exodus 23:19 literally, we are told not to *bashal* (בָּשַׁל), generally meaning to “boil, seethe” (*BDB*),<sup>13</sup> meat in milk. Some take this as a prohibition against an Ancient Canaanite religious ritual.<sup>14</sup> The understanding that this is a total prohibition against mixing milk and meat is not stated explicitly in the text, but can possibly be deduced by it.

Abraham served milk and meat when God Himself appeared to him as a man, and ate with him: “He took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed *it* before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate” (Genesis 18:8). Rabbinical commentaries on this passage often conclude that the milk products were served first as the calf was being prepared.<sup>15</sup> The Jewish Rabbis conclude that between eating the milk products and the calf being slain, butchered, and roasted, a sufficient amount of time for digestion occurred so meat could then be eaten. Considering the historical reality that meat would have to be prepared for his guest, it is not impossible that dairy, and later meat, were served by Abraham.

You must decide for yourself how to interpret this. Many in the Messianic community believe that there is no Biblical prohibition for the separation of meat and dairy, there are others who believe that there is such an obvious prohibition, and then there are those who are somewhere in the middle. This third group separates meat and dairy as much as possible for their own personal health, or in deference to some Jewish tradition, but would ultimately follow it out of personal choice—not forcing it on others.

## Why did God give His people the dietary commandments?

What was the actual purpose of God giving His people the dietary commandments?

“For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy.’ This is the law regarding the animal and the bird, and every living thing that moves in the waters and everything that swarms on the earth, to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten” (Leviticus 11:44-47).

At the end of giving the dietary laws in Leviticus 11, the Lord commands His people to “be holy; for I am holy.” The Hebrew verb here is *qadash* (קָדַשׁ), meaning, “to be set apart, to be holy, to show oneself holy, to be treated as holy, to dedicate, to be made holy, to declare holy or consecrated, to behave, to act holy, to dedicate oneself” (*AMG*).<sup>16</sup> The word *kashrut* (כַּשְׁרוּת), from which the modern Anglicized term “kosher” is derived, is related to *qadash*. This concept is reemphasized in Deuteronomy 14:2 when God says, “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth,” an admonition that it is important here to note is given *before* the repetition of the dietary commandments. This ever-important concept is repeated once again in the Apostolic Scriptures in Titus 2:14, describing Yeshua, “who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (cf. 1 Peter 2:9).

The Lord gave His people the dietary commandments so that they would be separate from the world. Eating properly every day is a tangible exercise that not only causes people to think about the God who provides food for them, but also who wants us to be holy in *all* our

<sup>12</sup> Scherman, *Chumash*, 437.

<sup>13</sup> *BDB*, 143.

<sup>14</sup> John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Exodus*, Vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 334.

<sup>15</sup> Hertz, 63; Scherman, *Chumash*, 79.

<sup>16</sup> Baker and Carpenter, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, 980.

deeds. The dietary laws are to instruct us in what is holy and unholy that we may be set-apart unto Him. Hertz offers us with valuable thoughts in this regard:

“Israel is bidden to be holy. This demand has two aspects—one positive and the other negative. The positive aspect may be called the Imitation of God... The negative aspect means the withdrawal of things impure and abominable. Even as nothing that suggested the least taint could be associated with God, so it was the duty of the Israelites to strive, so far as it was attainable by man, to avoid whatever would defile them, whether physically or spiritually. Wherever men and women honestly strive after holy living, such striving carries its own fulfillment with it.”<sup>17</sup>

Although many of us who strive to eat the way God has told us may receive criticism at times from family, friends, or peers (often because they do not understand), are we trying to please them or please the Lord? Are we striving for the satisfaction of being accepted by other people, or the fulfillment we should have in obeying God? Hopefully we will choose the Heavenly Father’s will over man’s will, but in such obedience we should be a proper reflection of His good character to others (1 Peter 1:14-16).

This finishes our commentary on what God considers acceptable meats as food for our consumption. We will now address common Christian arguments concerning why today we are no longer supposed to eat the way God prescribes. But regardless of what we think, He plainly tells us “For I, the LORD, do not change” (Malachi 3:6). The dietary laws can *still* benefit people today who follow them.<sup>18</sup>

### What did Peter see in his vision?

The first and primary argument given by most Christians to Messianic Believers, as to why the dietary commandments of the Torah supposedly no longer apply today, is what occurs in the Apostle Peter’s vision in Acts 10:9-16. Let us carefully review the scene:

“On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all *kinds of* four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, ‘Get up, Peter, kill and eat!’ But Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.’ Again a voice *came* to him a second time, ‘What God has cleansed, no *longer* consider unholy.’ This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.”

Christians commonly tell us that God reversed the kosher dietary laws, and we can now eat whatever we want. Pork and shellfish are now permissible to eat. Peter, who observed the dietary laws as a good Jew, was now told via a vision that he could go to the marketplace and eat what was considered unclean in the Torah.

But is this truly the case? In the verses following did Peter truly do this? No, he did not. On the contrary, when we review Acts 10:17-48, Peter went to the home of the Roman centurion Cornelius. He was a non-Jew, but a righteous man who feared the Holy One of Israel. Peter presented him with the gospel message of Messiah Yeshua. Cornelius and all in his house were saved and filled with the Holy Spirit:

“When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped *him*. But Peter raised him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I too am *just* a man.’ As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled. And he said to them, ‘You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and *yet* God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me’” (Acts 10:25-29).

<sup>17</sup> Hertz, 453.

<sup>18</sup> Empire Kosher ([www.empirekosher.com](http://www.empirekosher.com)), a major producer of kosher poultry in the United States, indicates how “Nearly 25 percent of its customers are not Jewish. They purchase Empire because they find the taste superior to ordinary poultry and enjoy the health benefits of the kosher process.”

In his dialogue with those of Cornelius' household, Peter very clearly gives us the *correct* interpretation of his vision—and it has absolutely nothing to do with the dietary laws. Peter states quite plainly “God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean [*koinon ē akatharton*, κοινὸν ἢ ἀκάθαρτον]” (Acts 10:28, RSV). The Greek text uses *anthrōpos* (ἄνθρωπος), which very clearly means “a person of either sex, w. focus on participation in the human race, a *human being*” (BDAG).<sup>19</sup> When Peter was shown various diverse unclean animals (Acts 10:12), such creeping and detestable animals were used to represent great human sin, similar to what is seen in Ezekiel 8:9-10:

“And He said to me, ‘Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here.’ So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts *and* detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around.”

God showed Peter a unique vision because all members of the *human family* are made clean by the blood of Messiah Yeshua, and no person should be considered common or unclean. Because the gospel was preparing to be spread beyond the borders of the Land of Israel and to non-Jewish people, it was necessary for God to communicate this concept to Peter in conceptual thought.<sup>20</sup> The Lord had made “unclean” pagans clean in the Messiah, and it was entirely acceptable to intermingle with them for the sake of the good news. Peter later is forced to conclude, “I most certainly understand *now* that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him” (Acts 10:34-35).

Those who tell us that Peter's vision dealt with the “cleaning of unclean meats” are not reading their Bibles closely enough. By the actions that occur after his vision, it very clearly deals with the salvation of human beings who can be washed clean of their sins by the Messiah's blood, not the supposed “cleansing” of unclean meats (which we still notably point out are *not considered food* by God). After seeing his vision Peter did not go to the local marketplace and buy pork or shellfish; he went to the home of Cornelius and presented him with the gospel message. He associated with someone who he would have been prejudiced to think was “unclean.”

### What did the Jerusalem Council rule about food?

Many Christians usually try to justify their consumption of unclean things by saying that the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 ruled that the non-Jews coming to faith in Messiah Yeshua were not required to follow God's commandments relating to clean and unclean things. But is this really the case? Let us review what happened and the ruling made by James the Just:

“But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.’ The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter” (Acts 15:5-6).

The issues being discussed were in relation to what was to be done with the new non-Jewish Believers. Was it mandatory that they be circumcised and participate in a full-fledged “conversion” to Judaism to be saved? No. But what were they to do in order to fellowship with Jewish Believers? James ruled, “Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication **and from what is strangled and from blood**. For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (Acts 15:19-21).

<sup>19</sup> BDAG, 81.

<sup>20</sup> It is notable that there is no Biblical prohibition regarding associating with those of the nations. This was an extra-Biblical regulation added by some of the Rabbis of Judaism. The Mishnah says in m.*Ohalot* 18:7, “Dwelling places of gentiles [in the Land of Israel] are unclean” (Neusner, *Mishnah*, 980) and as such Jews in the Second Temple period did not often voluntarily associate themselves with others. The Greek word *athemitos* (ἀθέμιτος) used in Acts 10:28, in most Bibles rendered as “unlawful,” does not mean unlawful in the sense of something against the Torah. It pertains, rather, “to not being sanctioned, *not allowed, forbidden*” (BDAG, 24), relating to custom or opinion, as opposed to something that is Biblical law.

Now, is there any reference in these verses to clean and unclean things? Yes, there is. Many Christian teachers today seem to conveniently gloss over these admonitions, especially the admonition that once the non-Jewish Believers met these requirements they could go to the Synagogue to hear Moses being taught—a direct reference to the Torah. We all understand what abstinence from idols and sexual fornication are. But what does “from the meat of strangled animals and from blood” (NIV) actually mean?

The Greek word translated “strangled” in these verses is *pniktos* (πνικτός). AMG states that *pniktos* means “strangled meat, meaning the flesh of animals killed by strangling without shedding their blood (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). The Mosaic Law prohibited the eating of it (Lev. 17:13, 14 [cf. 7:26, 27]; Deut. 12:6, 23).”<sup>21</sup> TDNT makes some very important observations, further summarizing, “The issue is the prohibiting of certain foods on the basis of Lev. 17:13-14; Dt. 12:16, 23. The OT regulations had been sharpened by the rabbis...It seems that the practice of eating the flesh of strangled or choked animals falls under the OT prohibition, and since Gentile customs are connected with the cultus they cause particular aversion to Jews, including Jewish Christians.”<sup>22</sup>

Leviticus 17:13-14 tells us, “when any man from the sons of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, in hunting catches a beast or a bird which may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. For *as for the* life of all flesh, its blood is *identified* with its life. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, ‘You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.’”

What did the Jerusalem Council rule concerning non-Jews coming to faith and their eating habits? Did it tell them that they were to eat according to the Torah? The Greek *pniktos* here is indeed quite in favor of this. They were expected to eat kosher meat!<sup>23</sup>

The ruling of the Jerusalem Council clearly does indicate that they expected the non-Jews coming to faith in Messiah Yeshua to eat as the Torah prescribed because “Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (Acts 15:21). These new Believers were expected to go learn the rulings of the Law of Moses, including the dietary ordinances, and in time assert themselves as full obedient citizens of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12).<sup>24</sup>

### Did Yeshua “declare all foods clean”?

Of course, the arguments against eating as God has prescribed do not stop. Many Christians will readily admit that Yeshua, as a First Century Jew, observed the dietary commandments of the Torah. But, they will say that Yeshua abolished the kosher laws in the Gospels, perhaps even as a definite sign that the Torah’s instructions were on the way “out.” Did Yeshua really abrogate these commandments as many Christians believe? Mark 7:18-19 is often used as a proof text to say that the Messiah annulled *kashrut* law:

“And He said to them, ‘Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?’ (*Thus He declared all foods clean.*)” (NASU).

Many will examine these two verses, here quoted from the New American Standard, and then make their case that Yeshua did indeed “declare all foods clean.” But in order to understand what He is actually saying here, we must consider the entire scope of His statements, and examine the Greek source text. Previously, Mark 7:1-5 tells us,

<sup>21</sup> Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 1186.

<sup>22</sup> H. Bietenhard, “*pniktós*,” in TDNT, 895.

<sup>23</sup> Note that various commentators today are agreed that the issue in Galatians 2:11-13, with Peter separating himself from the non-Jewish Believers in Antioch, may very well relate to *some* level of *kashrut* being observed by all the Believers—one being moderate (the non-Jewish Believers), and one quite stringent (“the men from James”).

Cf. Dunn, *Galatians*, pp 121-122; Richard B. Hays, “The Letter to the Galatians,” in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), pp 232-233. Also consult Josephus *The Jewish War* 7.43, 45; and the author’s remarks in his commentary *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>24</sup> For a further discussion, consult the author’s publication *Acts 15 for the Practical Messianic* (forthcoming 2009).

“The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, *thus* observing the traditions of the elders; and *when they come* from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, ‘Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?’”

Notice that *the issue* that this group of Pharisees brings against Yeshua specifically relates to His Disciples eating with unwashed hands. These Pharisees held to a tradition that required them to “give their hands a ceremonial washing” (NIV) or “wash the hands to the wrist” (YLT) before eating, which is what Yeshua’s Disciples failed to do. This, and related traditions, were later detailed in the Mishnah tractate *Yadayaim*.

It is with this background that Yeshua tells these Pharisees that what goes into a person does not defile him, but it is what comes out of a person that does. This spiritual principle is by far what is most important as Proverbs 12:18 tells us, “There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing,” as what we say can be administered as a deadly weapon (cf. Ephesians 4:29). However, even though this is true, this does not suddenly negate or make unimportant the need to eat as God has told us. These Pharisees were making an issue out of an extra-Biblical tradition in regard to a ritualistic hand washing before eating. Author David Friedman makes the following important observations from his book *They Loved the Torah*:

“In this passage, Yeshua nowhere negated the validity of *kashrut*. To do so would contradict his statement of Matthew 5:17-18, where he said he had not come to abolish the Law. Instead, Yeshua was teaching about the misconceptions of the נטילת ידיים (Hebrew, *n'tilat yadayim*, the ritual hand washing before meals). The group of Pharisees in this text always carried out this ritual hand washing before each meal, believing that not to do so according to their specific method would cause a person to be ritually defiled. Therefore, Yeshua said, ‘To eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.’ That is, not performing the ritual hand-washing ceremony according to the method of this group of first-century Pharisees did not make one impure before God, and thereby did not obligate the person to cleanse himself ritually.”<sup>25</sup>

Another description of this comes later in Matthew 15:1-2: “Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Yeshua from Jerusalem and said, ‘Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.’”

Friedman makes another important observation, “In Matthew 15:2, [this] is considered a type of ‘traditions of the elders.’ In the Greek text παραδοσις των πρεσβυτερων (*paradosin ton presbuteron*) reflects the Hebrew concept מסורותי האבות (*masortey ha'avot*, or ‘traditions of the fathers’) and not a mandated *mitzvah* [commandment] from the Torah. This concept denotes the development of traditions, not necessarily found in the Torah, which deal with how to perform a certain *mitzvah*.”<sup>26</sup>

The Complete Jewish Bible renders Mark 7:19 with “Thus he declared all foods ritually clean,” reflecting an opinion that it was unnecessary to participate in the extra-Biblical ceremonial hand washings to eat. This rendering could be valid, but the Greek text does not say, “Thus He declared” in it at all, and the CJB has inserted an opinion that may actually confuse the issue. The clause in question reads *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* (καθαρίζω πάντα τὰ βρώματα), literally meaning “purging all the foods” (LITV).

There is a debate in Bible translation regarding how *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* should be translated. The majority of modern English versions render it as “Thus he declared all foods clean” (NRSV) or something close. Many English versions render this phrase in parenthesis ( ),<sup>27</sup> indicating the opinion of some that this statement may have been added by Mark or a scribe in

<sup>25</sup> David Friedman, *They Loved the Torah* (Baltimore: Lederer Books, 2001), 25.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Including, but not limited to: RSV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, ESV, HCSB.

later centuries to clarify Yeshua's words. However, there has always been a long-standing minority opinion that "purging all the foods" is the more accurate translation. Robert A. Guelich indicates how "Others view this as a possible anacoluthon drawing an obvious, if sarcastic, conclusion that the digestive process 'cleanses all foods.'"<sup>28</sup>

In the context of Mark 7, Yeshua says that it is not eating with unwashed hands that makes one unclean, but what goes into a person's heart. He then finishes His discourse with saying that food, *which Biblically does not include pork or shellfish*, eaten with unwashed hands does not defile a person: "This is because it does not enter into his heart, but into the belly, and goes out into the wastebowl, purging all the foods" (Mark 7:19, LITV). That food which is eaten with unwashed or dirty hands is processed by the natural functions of the body and "is eliminated, thus purifying all foods" (NKJV).

Two liberal English translations, surprisingly enough, properly render Mark 7:19. *The New Covenant* by Willis J. Barnstone renders it as "since it doesn't enter the heart but the stomach, and goes into the sewer, purging all foods."<sup>29</sup> *The Original New Testament* by Hugh J. Schonfield says, "because it enters his stomach, not his mind, and is evacuated in the toilet."<sup>30</sup>

"Thus He declared" is an addition by Bible translators that is not in the Greek text. On the contrary, the text speaks of a person's bodily elimination of food by excretion. This is confirmed by the parallel passage in Matthew 15:17: "Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated?"

Yeshua the Messiah did not abrogate the Biblical dietary commandments in Mark 7. He criticized a group of Pharisees for their ritualistic handwashing and said that food eaten with unwashed hands was not unacceptable. But at the same time He also said that what is more important is what comes out of a person's mouth. Those of us who follow the dietary commandments need not be harsh to those who do not. We need to speak words of encouragement and life into others that the Holy Spirit may convict them to fully obey the Lord, demonstrating the benefits that eating kosher can bring to a person.<sup>31</sup>

## What did Paul think about food?

Another claim of Christians in defense of them not following the dietary laws comes from the comments of the Apostle Paul to Timothy. Paul wrote his faithful colleague, "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude" (1 Timothy 4:4). He precedes these words with, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons...*men* who forbid marriage *and* advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Timothy 4:1, 3).

One Christian writer I encountered says, "Paul warns Timothy that in the latter times there will be teachers who will command the Christians to '*abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving.*' Paul says that this will be evidence of a departure from the faith."<sup>32</sup> His implication is that Paul has declared that God has made everything good and acceptable to be eaten, and those teaching otherwise are preaching false doctrine. It should be no surprise that Christian writers like these are vehemently against a Messianic community that encourages Believers to eat as God has prescribed.

But is this really what 1 Timothy 4:1-4 tells us? Author Gordon Tessler remarks his book *The Genesis Diet*, "In order to interpret 1 Timothy 4:4 in this way, we must reject the clean and

<sup>28</sup> Robert A. Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 1-8:26*, Vol. 34a (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), Prolepsis database.

<sup>29</sup> Willis J. Barnstone, trans., *The New Covenant* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2002), 68.

<sup>30</sup> Hugh J. Schonfield, trans., *The Original New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 22.

<sup>31</sup> For a further analysis of Mark 7:19, including the connection/non-connection between the Greek participles *legei* (λέγει) and *katharizōn* (καθαρίζων), consult the article "A Short Note on Mark 7:19" by Tim Hegg, available for access at <[www.torahresource.com](http://www.torahresource.com)>.

<sup>32</sup> Dennis Kizonas, "What's For Supper?" *Berean Searchlight*, Vol. 61 No. 8:18.

unclean laws of God, as well as endorse cannibalism! If we believe that God is telling us to eat poisonous snakes, rats, worms, spiders, and each other, then God would be contradicting His word and would not be the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).<sup>33</sup>

Paul did not tell us that “all creatures” could be eaten (although everything God made is good), because quite simply God *does not* consider all creatures to be food for us. This is easily confirmed as we compare the respective Hebrew and Greek terms for “food,” *okel* (אֵכֶל) and *brōma* (βρώμα), used in the Scriptures. When Paul speaks about food he is obviously referring to what God considers to be food in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, as he would also remind Timothy of the authority of the Tanach or Old Testament for teaching and doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Tessler further observes, concerning 1 Timothy 4:1-4, that “Some people in the church of the first century were ‘**departing from the faith**’ teaching false doctrines. These people were advocating celibacy (forbidding to marry) and vegetarianism (abstaining from certain foods or meats). This teaching or doctrine was forbidding activities that God desires His children to do. The Lord certainly ordained for us to marry and He created certain clean foods ‘**to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth**’.”<sup>34</sup>

Paul was actually warning Timothy about various ascetic practices that were making their way into the *ekklēsia*. Abraham Smith observes, “The apostle draws a contrast between the false teachers who promote celibacy and physical asceticism (4:1-5) and the recipient who actually gains nourishment for godly training (4:6-10).”<sup>35</sup> Some of this actually began to take place in the Third and Fourth Centuries with the founding of various monastic movements in the emerging Christian Church, many of which had high eschatological expectations. Justo L. González adds, “This impulse towards celibacy was often strengthened by the expectation of the return of the Lord. If the end was at hand, it made no sense to marry and to begin the sedentary life of those who are making plans for the future.”<sup>36</sup> Dispensationalist author John F. Walvoord makes some further comments in regard to these verses and what they are perhaps really talking about:

“Of special interest is the prophecy that in the end of the age there will be prohibition of marriage and requirement to abstain from certain foods. It is evident in the Roman Church today that priests are forbidden to marry on the ground that the single estate is more holy than the married estate, something which is not taught in the Word of God....Another obvious factor is the religious custom to abstain from meats on Friday and to retain from certain foods during Lent. This again is a man-made invention and certainly not taught in the Word of God.”<sup>37</sup>

It is interesting that Walvoord, surely a person who would disagree with today’s Messianics on the validity of the kosher dietary laws, would attest that what 1 Timothy 4:1-4 is really speaking of is Roman Catholic abstention from things during Lent—and not Messianics keeping kosher and abstaining from pork and shellfish as the Bible instructs us.

Those of us who live a Messianic lifestyle do not advocate celibacy and total vegetarianism, nor do we advocate abstention from Biblical foods as a part of human traditions. We do encourage people to eat, with thanksgiving, those *good things* which the Lord considers food in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. We are not part of some end-time apostasy designed to draw people away from Messiah Yeshua. On the contrary, the Biblical dietary commandments are to teach us about God’s holiness, and they are beneficial for maintaining proper health.

Another claim that many people use to tell Messianic Believers that it is now acceptable to eat unclean things is what Paul writes in Romans 14:14: “I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.” On this basis, those in the Christian community tell Messianic Believers that Torah-defined unclean meat such as pork and shellfish is not unclean in and of itself, and that it is

<sup>33</sup> Gordon Tessler, *The Genesis Diet* (Raleigh: Be Well Publications, 1996), 97.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 98-99.

<sup>35</sup> Abraham Smith, “1 Timothy,” in *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, pp 2133-2134.

<sup>36</sup> Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1984), 137.

<sup>37</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Church In Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), pp 54-55.

acceptable to eat. Are Paul's words here contrary to the admonition of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, which instructed the non-Jewish Believers to stay away from things strangled? Could there be something we have missed?

The Greek term commonly translated "unclean" in Romans 14:14 is not the same that is normally associated with "unclean" meat. In Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, the Hebrew term translated "unclean" relating to meats is *tamei* (טָמֵא), with its Greek Septuagint rendering being *akathartos* (ἀκάθαρτος). But the word used in Romans 14:14 is *koinos* (κοινός). "This word means 'common'...in the sense of common ownership, property, ideas, etc" (TDNT).<sup>38</sup> *Koinos* relates to "that which comes into contact w. anything and everything, and is therefore *common, ordinary, profane,*" and "of that which ordinary people eat, in contrast to those of more refined tastes" (BDAG).<sup>39</sup> "Common food" is not the same as "unclean 'food,'" because common food would include those things that are Biblically clean, but perhaps considered inedible by a certain sector of people, in particular a strict sect of Judaism.<sup>40</sup> *Koinos* is more properly understood to mean "common," used in Mark 7:2 to refer to the Disciples' *koinais chersin* (κοινῶν χειρῶν), their "impure hands." LITV renders Romans 14:14 correctly with "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing by itself is common; except to the *one* counting anything to be common, it is common."

AMG tells us that *koinos* can mean "to lie common or open to all, common or belonging to several or of which several are partakers."<sup>42</sup> The reference to things "common" in Romans 14:14 are most certainly to food, because Paul later says, "For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Messiah died" (Romans 14:15). He says in Romans 14:20, "Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense." This would be in the context, though, of what "food" is *Biblically defined*, that the Roman Believers would have eaten at their fellowship meals. Pork and shellfish are not food, and neither should they be considered "common." That which the Lord has made to be food, however, is clean and is good for our consumption.

The Apostle Peter said when he saw his vision, "I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean" (Acts 10:14, RSV). This meant that Peter had never eaten of anything that was common, and that he had also not eaten of anything that was unclean. *He likely followed a stricter kosher regimen than many of his Jewish contemporaries.* The things that are common would be those things that were considered food by the Torah, but were perhaps not consecrated properly by certain Rabbinical standards. Those things that were unclean were those things that the Torah declared unacceptable for human consumption.

So what does Paul mean when he says that nothing is *koinos* or common of itself? Could the things that were "common" refer to things that were acceptable to eat, but were not acceptable to eat according to some of the Rabbinical standards of Paul's time? In Romans 14:2, he says "One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only.*" Here, Paul is setting vegetarianism against eating meat. One of the possible reasons that

<sup>38</sup> F. Hauck, "koinós," in TDNT, 447.

<sup>39</sup> BDAG, 552.

<sup>40</sup> In actuality, the term "unclean food" is an oxymoron, as Biblically something that is unclean and not on the food lists of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 cannot be considered food.

<sup>41</sup> Consider how in 1 Maccabees 1:47, it is attested that Antiochus Epiphanes issued a decree "to sacrifice swine and unclean animals" (RSV), *húeia kai ktēnē koina* (ὑεῖα καὶ κτήνη κοινὰ), at the Temple in Jerusalem. The verse following includes a reference to "everything unclean and profane" (1 Maccabees 1:48, RSV), *panti akathartō kai bebēlosei* (παντὶ ἀκαθάρτῳ καὶ βεβηλώσει), similarly followed by a later reference to "an unclean place" (1 Maccabees 4:43, RSV) or *topon akatharton* (τόπον ἀκάθαρτον).

It would seem best that the so-called "unclean animals" (1 Maccabees 1:47) are actually "common animals," given the two later uses of *akathartos*. The pigs sacrificed would be unclean, but the other animals could actually be clean animals sacrificed by the Seleucid Greeks, but not at all being *tamim* (טָמִים) or fit for sacrifice in God's holy place (i.e., Exodus 12:5; Leviticus 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6, 9, etc.). Although being pagans they did sacrifice swine, traditional Greco-Roman religion did use Biblically clean, albeit common, animals in their sacrifices as well.

<sup>42</sup> Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 872.

vegetarianism could have been adopted by some of the Believers in Rome was that Jewish butchers or slaughterhouses might not have sold kosher meat to them. This is not impossible per the controversies that had been stirred up in the Roman Jewish community over “Chrestus,” having actually forced the Jews out of the city for a season (Acts 18:2).<sup>43</sup> Jewish Believers doing business with other Jews would not have been easy. So rather than eat the “common” clean meat of the time, such people could have simply eaten vegetables.

I believe from this vantage point, Paul says, “I know and am persuaded in *the* Lord Jesus that nothing by itself is common; except to the *one* deeming anything to be common, *it* is common” (Romans 14:14, LITV). In other words, the “food” being talked about here would be those things considered “food” from a Biblical perspective, but “common” by certain Rabbinical standards. This food would probably have included things like beef or lamb or chicken, considered to be clean, but would probably have been considered “common” by a certain group of Roman Believers. They would not have eaten clean meat from the Roman marketplace, even though the clean animals could have been slaughtered in the Roman marketplace properly according to their specifications. Paul says that this meat is not “common,” per se, but obviously to the one who considers it common, it is.

We do not believe that Romans 14:14 is speaking of pork and shellfish being “clean meats” as many Christians do. For Paul himself says in 2 Corinthians 6:17, “Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,” says the Lord. ‘AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN [*akathartos*]; and I will welcome you.” If Romans 14:14 were speaking of the “cleansing of unclean meats,” then Paul may contradict himself here when instructing Believers to touch not the unclean thing. Is he telling us to stay away from things *akathartos*, meaning meats that would be considered unclean?

Paul quotes directly from Isaiah 52:10-11: “The LORD has bared His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God. Depart, depart, go out from there, touch nothing unclean [*tamei al-tigga'u*, אֶל-תִּגְגַּעוּ]; go out of the midst of her, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the LORD.”

This is very interesting because as Paul says to stay away from the unclean, the Prophet Isaiah also says “all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.” It is no coincidence that the Hebrew word for “salvation” here is *yeshuah* (יְשׁוּעָה), the improper noun form of our Messiah’s given name *Yeshua* (יֵשׁוּעַ). When we read this passage, is there a connection between having salvation in our lives and staying away from unclean things? Certainly, if we want to live a life like Yeshua’s, we will endeavor to eat as He ate. We do not need to be defiantly opposing commandments of God which decree that certain creatures are unadvised for human consumption.

Consider the following words that the God Himself gives about clean and unclean things and the Last Days:

“For the LORD will execute judgment by fire and by His sword on all flesh, and those slain by the LORD will be many. Those who sanctify and purify themselves *to go* to the gardens, following one in the center, who eat swine’s flesh, detestable things and mice, will come to an end altogether,’ declares the LORD. ‘For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory” (Isaiah 66:16-18).

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<sup>43</sup> The Roman historian Suetonius records, “Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, [Claudius] expelled them from the city” (*Life of Claudius* 25:2; Suetonius: *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves [London: Penguin Books, 1957], 202). A number of Romans commentators are agreed that this “Chrestus” is none other than a reference to the good news about “the Christ,” Yeshua the Messiah, making its way into the Roman synagogues and causing a ruckus so big that Claudius’ government expelled the Jewish population from the city.

Cf. F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp 16-17; C.E.B. Cranfield, *International Critical Commentary: Romans 1-8* (London: T&T Clark, 1975), pp 16-17; Douglas J. Moo, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp 4-5. Also consult the author’s entry for Romans in *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

It is important to note how the KJV rendering of these verses tells us that it is those who eat unclean things, who will be the people who say that they are “holier than thou”—not those of us who *only* eat acceptable things, as today’s Messianics may be inappropriately accused:

“A people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick; which remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments, which eat swine’s flesh, and broth of abominable *things is in* their vessels; which say, stand by thyself, come not near to me; **for I am holier than thou**. These *are* a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day” (Isaiah 65:3-5, KJV).

The Lord says that in the Last Days He will judge those who eat swine’s flesh, detestable things, and mice. *These people are defiant toward God about it*. We should sincerely hope and pray that those Christians who vehemently may tell us as Messianics that what we are doing is wrong will see the significance of His Instruction and not be judged, because they would be pretty hard-pressed to provide an alternative interpretation of these prophecies.

### Christianity’s Double Standard

Based on the responses to various Christian arguments we have examined, it is evident that today’s Christians have missed some things when it comes to the kosher dietary laws and what God actually considers “food.” Many Christian pastors strongly declare from the pulpit that God has made all animals acceptable for eating, while at the same time they strongly condemn the consumption of alcoholic beverages and smoking tobacco.

This is strong evidence of a double standard used to judge others, because there is *more* spoken of in the Scriptures about food and eating than about drinking. In fact, all that is really said about alcohol is “do not get drunk with wine” (Ephesians 5:18), and it was Yeshua whose first miracle was turning water into wine (John 2:1-11). Paul wrote Timothy to “use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (1 Timothy 5:23).<sup>44</sup> And as Kolatch astutely observes, “The smoking of tobacco is not mentioned in the Bible.”<sup>45</sup>

**We do not endorse careless drinking or smoking**, but do believe that those who condemn such things, and then go around and eat all the unclean things they want, are not judging with a fair scale. A common Scripture quoted to Messianic Believers is Colossians 2:16, “Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day.” But Colossians 2:8 prefaces this by saying, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Messiah.” Are the dietary commandments of Scripture empty traditions and deceptions of fallen human beings? No, they are not. They are ordinances that were given by God to make His people holy. Those of us who keep these Biblical commandments are not to take judgment from those in the world (or even those in the Christian community if something does not align with Scripture). Have God’s commandments all of a sudden become vain and worthless worldly philosophies? I do not believe so.

But many Christians will still interpret these verses as meaning that they can eat whatever they want, regardless of what God says. So let them. Let us **not harshly condemn** those who do not presently see things the way we do about what God considers food. Let us see if these Christians truly act in kind and do not judge us for eating the way He has prescribed.<sup>46</sup> But if some decide to treat us harshly, let our Heavenly Father be their Judge, for a few of them could sadly be

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<sup>44</sup> To argue that this “wine” was just some form of grape juice is utterly absurd. While wine in antiquity may have been watered down at times, suggesting that “wine” in Scripture is not at all alcoholic is often the product of a fundamentalist, North American brand of Christianity (reflecting a society that once experimented with Prohibition). In stark contrast, none of today’s European Biblical scholars propose that “wine” in Scripture is anything but an alcoholic beverage.

For a further discussion, consult B.C. Bandstra, “Wine,” in *ISBE*, 4:1068-1072.

<sup>45</sup> Kolatch, 285.

<sup>46</sup> Consult the author’s commentary *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic* for a detailed examination of Colossians 2:8, 16 (forthcoming late 2009).

some of those who defiantly eat unclean things mentioned in Isaiah 66:16-18. I would hope and pray that such people are just being immature and are speaking before they think—and in most cases, they are.

## A Proper Attitude for Messianics and Christians

It has been our unfortunate observation that some Messianics make the dietary laws into a (major) stumbling block for many Christians who believe they are unimportant, when explaining their Torah observant convictions to them. All too often, Christians who do not eat the way the Scriptures tell us are said to have “bacon breath” and be “pork loving pagans.” Insulting people with such derogatory slurs will not at all help them to see the importance of following these commandments, or lead them into greater maturity.

While it is a fact that God does say that in the Last Days He will judge those who defiantly eat pork and other unclean things, it is also a fact that many Believers *are turning* to the instructions that He gave us and are ceding their will to His will. Many are seeing the health benefits of eating kosher, and no longer consuming pork or shellfish. As the Messianic movement grows and many Christians realize that there is more to our faith than just the “New Testament,” many now keep kosher homes and no longer eat unclean things like pork and shellfish.

Yet if we intend to really live a life like Yeshua’s—and while this does mean we should *eat* the way He did—it also means we must not be harmful or mean-spirited to others who presently do not see things the way that we do. We need to be *loving and merciful* in our critiques, for by no means is one’s salvation determined on what a person eats—rather, the issue of eating the way God prescribed is one of maturity and commitment. *It could also add more years to your life as well!*

How should we approach those who might criticize us? That is something each of us will have to figure out on our own, because it has been my sad observation that often those who claim to know the Messiah are usually more critical toward Messianic Believers who eat kosher than those who are secular. Hopefully, these Christians will simply realize that we are trying to live a life like Yeshua’s, and while they may not completely understand why we do not eat things like pork or shellfish, they will be mature and realize that this is not a salvation issue. *There are, after all, plenty of people who sincerely love God and eat bacon on a regular basis.* We should pray that they will not be found criticizing something that our Savior did. Instead, *we* should demonstrate the positive benefits of eating kosher, both in what it teaches us about God’s holiness and how to live healthy! Such an example will cause people to ask the appropriate questions (cf. Matthew 5:16).

## Can we make sacrifices for God?

The whole purpose of understanding the dietary commandments of Scripture is the holiness of God’s people. They are to teach us to separate the holy and the profane. With the evidence we have provided in favor of born again Believers following these commandments today, there are still going to be people who continue to eat unclean things, and not accidentally.

The real question at hand has always been: Does God have the right to tell us how to eat? Well, does God have the right to tell us how to conduct ourselves? Absolutely! We cannot let our personal agendas and pride get in the way of this. His Instruction is for our good, after all!

Whether we be Messianic or Christian, we all believe that Yeshua the Messiah, God’s only Son, came down to Earth from His glory in Heaven to become our perfect sacrifice—being the ultimate example of humility (Philippians 2:5-11). He endured incredible hardships, mockeries, torture, and finally crucifixion for us. His death on the cross covered our sin, it covered our pride, greed, lust, hatred, murder, fornication, *and* our consumption of what the Lord considers unclean. God bought our lives with His most prized possession. If our personal salvation is truly valuable, and we remember what the Messiah had to give up for us, maybe not eating unclean things is not as “bad” as it sounds. Maybe making the small sacrifice of giving up things that our flesh wants, is actually worth the spiritual fulfillment of pleasing God.

Is our Heavenly Father interested in what we eat? Perhaps we need to ask Adam and Eve this question!

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