

The Torah and our Diet

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For every new change in our life and understanding there must be a new beginning. As the message of the Torah begins to convict the heart and mind of a Believer the question of where to begin is sure to arise. Adjusting one's schedule to accommodate and observe the Sabbath seems to be the first change. The second point where change most frequently occurs is the diet of the sincere Believer. There is great debate concerning what the Torah teaches about the Believer's diet. With careful study I believe that we can unravel some of the mystery and settle much of the controversy concerning this vital issue.

The first diet mentioned in the Torah is found as part of the creation narrative. Realize that what is recorded in these opening verses of the book of Genesis concern not only the Believer, but all of mankind. Just as the Sabbath was instituted at creation and therefore applies to all of creation, so too does this teaching about man's diet. Genesis 1:29-30 teaches that the first diet was a vegetarian diet.

"And God said, Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat." (Genesis 1:29-30).

For clarity, please understand that the word "meat" in the King James Version of the Bible is an English translation of the Hebrew word "oklah" (Aleph, Kof, Lamed, Hey) which simply means food. Oklah may at times include animal flesh but refers also to grains, flour, meal, and vegetables. We may safely teach from this passage that the diet of man as created in the image of God is one of grasses, herbs, grains, seeds, and fruit. Notice also that this was to be the diet of the animals living in the garden as well.

Death was not a part of the original creation. Only after the fall does death enter into human history. Genesis 3:17-19 records the deadly consequences of the fall of Adam and how it relates to "eating."

"And unto Adam he said, Because thou has hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and has eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

Even though death has entered the world through the fall, we note that God still refers to the diet of man as being from the ground. This passage goes on to specifically mention bread and herbs of the field. Genesis 3:21 records the first death in the garden;

"Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them."

Here the Torah states that an animal was slain to cover the shame and nakedness of Adam and Eve. With this sacrifice we need realize that the animal's death was only for a covering and not for consumption. That animal sacrifice was for making atonement is made very clear in the book of

Leviticus. The Hebrew word for atonement is KePHaR (Kof, Pey, Resh) and means to cover. The shedding of blood in the sacrificial system is to cover sin or make atonement for the sinner. The Torah teaches;

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for your souls.”(Lev.17:11).

The next place we see the ritual sacrifice of an animal is in the offering made by Abel.

“And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground as offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering. But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth and his countenance fell.”(Genesis 4:3-5).

While Abel is clearly described as a keeper of sheep, there is nothing in this passage that tells us that their diet had changed from the original vegetarian diet. It is possible that the sheep were being raised for wool and milk and not meat. Clearly animal sacrifice was considered the acceptable offering but nothing states that it had become an acceptable diet. This story of Cain and Abel is most often told to show that there is no atonement without blood. It is often asserted that Abel’s offering was acceptable because his offering pointed to the Messiah who would shed his own blood to atone for our sins. By sacrificing a lamb Abel demonstrated his faith in the work and grace of God. While Cain on the other hand offered the work of his own labor by demonstrating his faith in his own self-righteousness. This story teaches that we are saved by grace through the death of the Messiah and not by works of righteousness. I believe that this is a true and faithful understanding of the story. To explain further, I believe that Abel killing an animal was a remembrance of God mercifully killing an animal to cover Adam and Eve’s sin. On the other hand Cain’s offering brought from the labor of his hands was a remembrance how man must now labor for food where once the garden produced sustenance for all of man’s needs. While we may agree that means by which man acquired food changed after the fall there is still nothing indicating that the creator had changed man’s intended vegetarian diet.

It is not until ten generations later, in the story of Noah, that we again hear words concerning a change in man’s diet. Genesis 6:5 tells us;

“The wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” We also read in this same chapter that *“the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.”(Gen. 6:11).*

How did the earth become corrupt? The earth is defiled from the shedding of blood. We see this in the cursing of Cain, that Abel’s blood cried out from the ground for justice (Genesis 4:10). We can only imagine that fallen man was killing both man and animal for profit, pleasure, and possibly even for consumption. There is certainly evidence of this after the flood, for it is said of Nimrod, *“He was a mighty hunter before the Lord”* (Gen. 10:9). We may make the assumption that in the corruption and violence of the pre-flood world there was blood being shed even for consumption. Because of such corruption and violence God washed the earth clean with a flood. As Noah and his sons came off the ark with their wives, God made a covenant with them promising never to destroy the earth again by flood (Genesis 9). Then God said to them;

“Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, and upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.” (Gen. 9:1-4)

At first glance it appears that God is encouraging and approving a very radical change in the diet of man. No longer was man restricted to eating just fruits, seeds, and herbs. It appears to be that after the flood animal flesh is now permissible in man’s diet. But let us take a closer look at what is being said here. First we should note the many similarities between Genesis 1:28-31 and Genesis 9:1-4.

Genesis 1:28-31

28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be **fruitful**, and **multiply**, and **replenish** the earth, and **subdue** it: and have **dominion** over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

29 And God said, Behold, **I have given you every herb bearing seed**, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.

31 And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Genesis 9:1-4

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be **fruitful**, and **multiply**, and **replenish** the earth.

2 And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; **into your hand are they delivered.**

3 Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the **green herb have I given you all things.**

4 But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.

I do not believe that God is changing his intended diet for man. The scripture assures us that God does not change.ⁱ Nor do I believe that the Creator is condoning or giving man a new diet. Rather I believe that the Creator is chastising and prophesying about the continued condition of man. We should note that in this post-flood covenant God is giving to Noah and his sons the same blessing as was given to Adam and Eve. Like Adam and Eve, Noah and his sons, are to be fruitful, to multiply, and to replenish the earth. While we most often understand the command to replenish the earth to mean to re-populate

the earth with people, it may also refer to re-planting the earth which had been destroyed by the waters of the flood. We should remember that it was from the earth that man receives his sustenanceⁱⁱ. We also see that like Adam all the animals are delivered into the hands of Noah. We also see that both Adam and Noah are given the green herbs to eat. There is no denying the great similarities between these two blessings. What is different is found in Genesis 9:3-4. While it is often taught that God was giving Noah and his son's flesh to eat, I am not sure that this is the intention of this passage. First, we should note that there is no positive command to eat flesh. Nor is there any language of approval indicating any blessing or advantage for doing so. Instead, what we read is the language of prophecy or reporting; "you *shall* eat meat." This type of language is found elsewhere in the Torah, and may help us to understand this passage. In the book of Deuteronomy the Lord declares;

"When thou are come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me."(Deut.17:14).

Here we see God speaking of Israel choosing a king to rule over them. This is not something that God necessarily approved of or desired for Israel. But it was clearly what Israel would desire for itself. This is clearly seen in the story of Samuel.

"And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them." (1 Sam.8:6-9)

Even though it was clearly contrary to God's intended will, the Lord recognizes that in their sinful state the children of Israel are determined to name a king for themselves. What we witness in the Torah is God conceding to the inevitability of Israel's behavior. Instead of merely conceding to the sinful desires of Israel, YHWH places clear restrictions upon their inevitable actions. In the matter of selecting a ruler, YHWH places positive restrictions upon their inevitable act of crowning a king.

"Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among the brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother." (Deuteronomy 17:15)

Immediately after declaring what the people will do the Lord places a restriction upon their behavior. We see this same pattern again, a little later in the book of Deuteronomy concerning polygamy.

"If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the first born son be hers that was hated: then it shall be when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn."(Deuteronomy 21:15-16)

Once again we see that God is neither commanding nor condoning the practice of polygamy. Rather God is recognizing that man in his sinful state is determined to act sinfully, therefore as he did with the demand for a king mentioned above, so now concerning polygamy, the Lord quickly places restrictions upon this behavior.

Yet another example of YHWH'S permissive will or concession being demonstrated is in the issue of divorce. In the Torah we read,

"When a man hath taken a wife, and married her and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house." (Deuteronomy 24:1)

Clearly YHWH has made accommodations for the wickedness of man's heart. But never would we imply that YHWH intends for man to divorce. Y'shua himself makes this point extremely clear.

"The Pharisees also came unto him tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They said unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning in was not soⁱⁱⁱ." (Matthew 19:3-8)

Y'shua's comments make it very clear that YHWH has a perfect will that was evident from the beginning, but also a permissive or concessive will that makes accommodation for the sinfulness of man until that time when all things will be restored. This is the same pattern being displayed in the covenant text of Genesis 9:1-4. The Creator is not authorizing a change in diet so much as he is putting restrictions upon and allowing concessions to what man in his sinful state is bound to do. It is as if God is saying to man, "I know that you are going to kill and eat forbidden flesh just as you ate the fruit of the forbidden tree in the garden." Thus the language of Genesis 9:2-3 must be looked at not so much as the words of a covenant but as a prophetic statement. Let us take another look at these words with this understanding;

"And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hands they are delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But the flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall you not eat" (Genesis 9:2-4)

Let us look carefully now at what God is saying in this covenant with Noah. If YHWH intended that all animals were to become food for man we may ask why would God create fear of man in them? Is it not possible that fear and dread in the animals is created by the sinful behavior of man and not from an act of God? While God used the flood to judge sinners we must be clear that the flood did not do away with sin. The language of the above passage has a sense of surrender to it. It is as if God were delivering all creation into the hands of these eight souls that he saved from the waters of the floods. Realizing that sin has not been done away with the Creator then states that they shall eat every living thing for food, just as they ate indiscriminately of the green herbs and trees which he gave them in the garden. But we should also recognize that YHWH does not surrender to or accommodate sin. Therefore YHWH quickly reveals the limits of his permissiveness will by placing restrictions on man's behavior.

"But the flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat." (Genesis 9:4)

It appears that just as in the case of divorce, polygamy and the naming of a king, God is yielding to man's determination to do his own will. At the same time, however, YHWH is placing clear restrictions upon man's behaviors and revealing to man the boundaries of his own permissive will.

In some sense we see this attitude toward man's appetite again in the story of the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings. Immediately after leaving Egypt, God began providing for the needs of his redeemed.

"And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger. Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no."(Exodus 16:3-4).

Concerning this passage, we should first notice that the people were lusting after flesh. This would seem to indicate an overt and sinful desire for flesh to eat. God does not satisfy their lust, but instead feeds them with "bread from heaven." The question remains as to whether or not God was intending to return them to a meat free diet? A little later in the journey we see that once again the children have not given up their desire for flesh.

"And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and garlic: but now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes." (Numbers 11:4-6)

So the cry goes up before the Lord, and once again we see him responding, but it is not necessarily a favorable response. God responds to Moses,

"And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow, and ye shall eat flesh: for ye have wept in the ears of the Lord, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt: therefore the Lord will give you flesh, and ye shall eat. Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; But even a whole month until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the Lord which is among you and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt."(Numbers 11:18-20).

And so it was that God gave them meat to eat in the form of quail. But was it to be a blessing? The answer is found yet a little later.

"And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people, with a very great plague. And he called the name of that place Kibroth-Hattaavah (graves of the lusting) because there they buried the people that lusted." (Numbers 11:31-34).

Clearly the lust for flesh was not something the Lord found pleasing in man. But again we must ask ourselves whether the wrath of the Deliverer fell upon the children of Israel for desiring flesh or simply for not being satisfied with YHWH'S provision for them? Either way God gave these flesh craving people what they wanted. But it was not to be received as a blessing but as a reprimand. YHWH gave

the Israelites over to the lusts of their heart in the hopes that their inordinate craving for flesh would finally become repulsive to them.

The next place that we are given specific instructions concerning our diet is upon Mount Sinai. For all of those who would agree to be God's peculiar treasure and a priestly people^v a new set of boundaries would be set for them. To be a part of God's priestly kingdom would require the children of Israel to live within the boundaries of God's revealed word. This revealed word includes numerous statutes, ordinances, commandments, and judgments which govern every aspect of life including the diet. Of particular interest is the list of tahor (clean) or acceptable foods found in Leviticus 11:1-47 and expanded upon in Deuteronomy 14:3-20. Here again, I think that we need to be very careful to understand that there is no positive commandment to eat the flesh of these animals. Once more we see the prophetic and permissive word "Shall", as if reporting what will surely happen in the future. This possibility begs the question, "If God did not intend us to eat flesh, why then would he make a list of approved meats?" I believe the answer is found in the very last two verses;

"This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth: To make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten." (Leviticus 11:46-47)

God has called the redeemed to a life of holiness. To maintain this holiness the redeemed must learn to make distinctions between Tahor (Clean) and Tamei (unclean), sacred and profane, light and dark, good and evil, right and wrong, Godly and ungodly. To this end the Lord has given many commandments which provide the redeemed the opportunity of making the right choices.

"Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard be defiled. Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together. Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together. Thou shalt make thee fringes upon the four quarters of thy vesture, wherewith thou coverest thyself."(Deut.22:9-12).

Such laws of separation helped to make Israel a truly peculiar treasure in the eyes of the Lord, and a unique people in the eyes of the nations. The same may be said of the dietary list of Leviticus 11. What the Lord seems to be doing is adding yet further distinguishing restrictions to what flesh may be eaten by those who wish to keep the covenant. Again, I believe this is an example of YHWH'S permissive will and not his original intention. Israel may be the chosen people, but they are still people, and therefore subject to the same desires and lusts as all other people. Recognizing that the written Torah cannot change the nature of man^v God does not expect such change from man, but does expect man to exercise restraint. While all men may desire to eat flesh, the redeemed are commanded to distinguish themselves from other men by showing restraint even in the most basic needs, such as in their appetites. By making distinctions between clean and unclean even in what they eat the children of Israel are set apart unto YHWH.

For the sake of integrity we must acknowledge that we no longer know with certainty what many of the animals listed in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are. While tradition have added English names in our translations to fill in the blanks of knowledge, the truth of the matter is that neither history nor language has clearly preserved the names of these animals for us. Some of these animals may no longer exist, or where only known by the ancient people of that area. For yet others the connection between the animal and the names listed have been lost, forgotten, or misidentified. This has caused a great deal of debate even among the great sages of old. Therefore the best that a contemporary Believer seeking to

keep the Torah can do, is to keep that which is understood from among the list of animal flesh, or avoid flesh altogether, choosing the Genesis 1, diet instead. Here the prophet Daniel may serve as our best example. Living in captivity in service to a pagan king Daniel and his companions faced the daily challenge of determining whether the food placed before them was or was not acceptable. Instead of risking defilement Daniel and his companions chose the Genesis 1 diet.

"And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king...But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself....let them give us pulse^{vi} to eat, and water to drink." (Daniel 1:5-16)

What we may say with some degree of certainty thus far is that God created man to eat a vegetarian diet. We also know that at some undetermined point in time man began eating the flesh of animals. We also have clearly seen that YHWH permits man to eat the flesh of certain animals but not others. We have also seen that the eating or drinking of blood is expressly forbidden.

Now let us look at some of the passages of the scriptures which do positively command the eating of flesh. The first example of this is found in Exodus 12 concerning the sacrifice of Passover.

"Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, in the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house. And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep or from the goats: and ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. And thus shall ye eat it with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord's Passover." (Exodus 12:1-11)

Clearly the Passover Lamb was meant to be eaten by those participating in the feast. This theme continues in the book of Leviticus where we again see the eating of meat not only condoned but commanded. Concerning the peace offering and the sin offering the Torah teaches,

"The priest that offereth it for sin shall eat it: in the holy place shall it be eaten, in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation...All the males among the priests shall eat thereof: it is most holy."(Lev.6:26,29).

Again concerning the trespass offering,

"Every male among the priests shall eat thereof: it shall be eaten in the holy place: it is most holy."(Lev. 7:6).

The same is true for the peace offering,

“And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace-offering for thanksgiving shall be eaten the same day that it is offered; he shall not leave any of it until the morning.”(Lev.7:15).

There are other such examples, but let these suffice for now to make the point. It would appear as if the only place where there appears to be a positive commandment to eat the flesh of animals is connected with the offering of a sacrifice and even then it is predominately, though not exclusively, the priests who shall eat it. These three particular offerings were all to be eaten before the Lord. The reason for this is because the priesthood is to be understood as an embodiment of YHWH ELOHIM. The priest's eating of the sacrifice in some sense demonstrates that God has accepted the offering. On the other hand the priesthood also serves as an intercessor representing the people. By eating the sacrifice the priests demonstrate the participation of the people in the service of the altar. This is much like what Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Messiah? The bread which we break is it not the communion of the body of Messiah? For we being many are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?” (1 Cor.10:16-18)

From these teachings we may say once again that the eating of meat was not the intended general diet of man but is clearly a part of the sacred sacrificial system. The eating of flesh is a sign of the sinfulness of man, and therefore it is appropriately connected with the sacrifices, the holy place and the priesthood. This is further supported by the prohibition against eating or drinking blood, since the purpose of the blood was to make atonement for sin. The Lord proclaimed through Moses,

“For the life of the flesh is the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.”(Lev.17:11).

This would again seem to support the understanding that from the beginning God did not intend man to eat the flesh of animals but because of the fall he has made a concession to do so.

If I am correct in ascertaining that the eating of flesh is an act of the Creator's permissive will and not his intended will, then we should see a return to the original diet when all things are restored. To answer this question let us turn to the prophecies of the world to come. It is the prophet Isaiah, who describes the kingdom of our coming King;

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like an ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain” for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”(Isaiah 11:6-9)

What we see in this prophecy is a picture of the restored world. Clearly the animal kingdom experiences a profound change in their diets for there will no longer be predator or prey. There is no more malice between species, which includes man as well. Isaiah goes on to proclaim,

“For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord, joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.”(Isaiah 51:3).

If the Lord is indeed going to restore the condition of Israel to the Garden of Eden, then surely there shall be no death there. This means that our diet in the Messianic Kingdom will again return to a vegetarian menu. This is further supported in the Book of Revelation. In describing the new heaven and the new earth, John writes,

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things have passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.”(Rev.21:4-5)

Added to this confirmation of Eden restored is the vision of the tree of life.

“In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” (Rev.22:2)

Thus we may assume that God has not changed his original intention for the diet of man. From the beginning he created us to eat a vegetarian diet and in the end we shall again eat a vegetarian diet. In between the beginning and the end, there seems to be a great forbearance toward the sinful nature of man and his desires. Thus it would appear that until our sinful nature is laid to rest and we are once more restored to our proper nature, God extends his mercy towards us. YHWH tolerates man’s desire for flesh but places clear restrictions upon it.

For those who desire to serve God as his priestly people these dietary restrictions require careful consideration. These restrictions reveal to us the boundaries of YHWH ELOHIM’S permissive will. To transgress these boundaries is to be living outside the will of God. These restrictions are also to serve as an aid to us, in teaching us how to make the proper distinctions in our lives, as to what is acceptable or unacceptable. By placing these restrictions upon the daily needs of man, we are daily reminded to make distinctions in our lives between sacred and profane, holy and unholy, right and wrong, light and dark, good and evil, clean and unclean. By placing restrictions upon our diet YHWH has demonstrated his interest and concern for ever minute and mundane detail of our lives. We should also recognize that these restrictions are to serve as fences to protect us from allowing our sinful lusts and appetites to running away with us. As is true for all of the Torah these dietary restrictions are for our benefit.

Strangely it is these very distinctions that cause so much controversy in the Christian Church today. Let us turn our attention therefore to what the New Testament has to say concerning the diet of the Believer.

There seems to be four texts that are at the heart of the diet controversy: Mark 7:18-19; Acts 10:1-48; Romans 14 and 1 Timothy 4:1-5. Let us address these texts one at a time and in order.

Mark 7:18-19 maybe the most difficult of these text to deal with because the controversy has been created by well intentioned translators inserting their beliefs into the text. Thus what we must argue against is not the words of Y’shua but the words of an unknown translator. Let me first quote the text from the NIV^{vii} and then address it. In this story Y’shua is responding to the Pharisees criticism that his disciples were eating without first ritually washing their hands. Y’shua rebuffs them, stating

“Are you so dull? He asked, Don’t you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make a man unclean? For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body. (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean).” (NIV Mark 7:18-19).

There are two extremely significant errors with this translation. The first error involves words that are added to the translation that are not in **any** of the Greek manuscripts. The NIV translators, as well as many others, have added words to the text in order to support their anti-Torah bias. The final words of the above quote, *“In saying this, Jesus declared all meats clean”* are completely fabricated by the NIV translators.

Now let us look at the King James Version of the text to see a more accurate translation.

“And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into his belly and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?” (KJV Mark 7:18-19).

Here we see that Y’shua said nothing about declaring meats clean. In fact when we look at the whole context of this passage we quickly see that it all begins with Y’shua chastizing the Pharisees for keeping the traditions of the elders and the commandments of men, while at the same time violating or laying aside the commandments of God.^{viii} It should be quite apparent to every Bible reader that Y’shua is upholding the teachings of the Torah while criticizing those who pollute the word by mixing it with teachings of men, or over ride it with man’s traditions.

“Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandments of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things.”(Mark 7:7-8)

Clearly Y’shua is not advocating that his disciples break the dietary restrictions of Torah, but instead Y’shua is upholding the Torah even against the leaven of the Pharisees. The NIV translators would have us believe that Y’shua hypocritically condemns the Pharisees for “letting go of the commandments of God and teaching instead the traditions of men” (NIV Mk 7:8) while at the same time teaching his own disciples to let go of the commandments of God concerning food restriction to embrace his own new teachings. Clearly this is not the meaning of this text. What Y’shua was saying is that dirty hands, that have not been ritually washed will not make a man ritually unclean, but breaking the Torah for the sake of man’s traditions will. Y’shua is pointing out the reality that ritual defilement can be quickly cleansed, and the polluted meat will be eventually purged from our systems. But a wilfull and sinful heart is the real problem, for only YHWH can change our heart.^{ix} Clearly there is no controversy between Y’shua’s teachings and the Torah’s concerning dietary restrictions. Nor is there any evidence that Y’shua ever taught that all flesh is acceptable for Believers to eat. Further evidence of this is seen in the confession of Peter, Y’shua’s chief disciple, as will be addressed in the next passage.

The next controversy is found in the book of Acts 10:1-48. Here we encounter an hungry Peter praying upon the house top. During this prayer he sees a vision of a huge sheet being let down from heaven filled with all manner of animals. At the same time that he sees the sheet full of clean and unclean animals he hears a voice saying, “kill and eat”. Peter’s first response is a telling one. Peter responds to the command to kill and eat saying,

“I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.” (Acts 10:14).

This is a very revealing statement. Peter here confesses that during the whole time that he walked with Y'shua he never broke any of the Torah's dietary restrictions! Surely, if Y'shua's intention was to liberate his followers from bondage to the Torah's dietary restrictions he would have eaten prohibited meat with them. Surely Peter would have some point in time demonstrated this new found freedom by eating forbidden flesh. But this is obviously not the case. Even when the divine voice of the vision commands him to kill and eat, Peter steadfastly refused to violate the Torah. The voice of the vision speaks to Peter a second time directing, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common."^x It is this verse that many Christians point to when saying that God has declared all meat approved for food. But is that what this verse truly says? Is this the stated intention of the vision? I believe the answer to both of these questions is resounding No! Nowhere in this vision, does God declare anything to be clean. There is nothing in the vision or in the voice where God expresses any declaration of a change in diet or dietary restrictions. Clearly there is ambiguity concerning this message. Even Peter is perplexed by the ordeal.

The instructions given to Peter are simply not to call "common" that which God has cleansed. But what has God cleansed? Even Peter himself "doubted" what this vision should mean.^{xi} The story goes on to tell us that while Peter was still pondering the meaning of the vision, Gentiles from the house of Cornelius arrived to ask Peter to come and teach them.^{xii} Cornelius is described for us as a Centurian, which mean he was a Roman soldier, over a hundred soldiers. The text also tells us that he was a just man, that feared God, and of "good report among the nation of Jews."^{xiii} There is great significance to this description. A God Fearer, a Gentile who was in fellowship with the Jews, observing the Torah, keeping Sabbath, celebrating the Festivals of the Lord, and for all intents and purposes living as a Jew, but without formally converting. From this description we may assume that Cornelius too was observing the Torah's dietary restrictions. Peter is puzzled over the invitation, yet concedes to go. It is in this encounter that Peter discovers the meaning of the vision. Peter responds to Cornelius and his household,

"Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."(Acts 10:28).

After the events of this encounter with Cornelius, Peter gives us the meaning of his vision: "*I should not call any man common or unclean*". Clearly this is God's intended meaning. It did not have anything to do with the dietary laws, or even food. The point of the vision was to instruct Peter to recognize the power of the Holy Spirit to sanctify even the Gentiles. This is made evident in the rest of the story. What had God made clean? The Gentile Believers. The narrative ends with a dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon these God Fearing Gentiles.

"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as come with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit."(10:44-45).

What we should notice in this story is that throughout the entire narrative, there is never any indication that either Peter, or Cornelius, nor God himself, ever broke or changed any of the Torah's dietary restrictions. There should be no question that breaking of dietary restrictions is not the proper meaning, or intention of this passage. To infer such from this text is nearly to apply an already existing extra-biblical bias to the story.

The same anti-Torah bias is brought to Paul's writings of Colossians 2:16,

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days.”

Here most Christians are taught that we are set free from such things as the Sabbath, the festivals, and new moon, and should not let the Jews judge us for not doing them. Ironically the context of this passage clearly teaches the exact opposite. Paul is writing to Gentile Believers that have recently left their pagan roots to be grafted into the commonwealth of Israel. Paul’s original warning,

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Messiah.”(Colossians 2:8)

Clearly Paul is speaking of the Gentiles and not the Jews. Paul goes on to show these Gentile Believers how they qualify to be inheritors of the covenants of Israel through Y’shua. Paul writes;

“And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power; In whom ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Messiah.”(Col.2:10-11).

Paul then goes on to show these Gentile converts how all of the Torah commandments that previously judged them and prevented them from inheriting the promises of God have been satisfied in Messiah. Paul writes;

“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross;” (Col. 2:14).

Paul is in no way advocating that because Messiah died on the cross we should no longer keep the Torah. Rather Paul is saying that as long as we are in Messiah the Torah’s righteous demands are being met in him, thus allowing for our fellowship with God and his chosen people. When Paul writes;

“Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days :which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is Messiah.” (Col. 2:16-17)

The Apostle is not referring to the Jews judging the Gentiles for not keeping these things, but rather he is referring to the Pagans who are judging their former adherents for now keeping the Torah which once condemned them. The fact that Paul is not advocating that the Gentiles forsake keeping the Sabbaths, Festivals, and the Torah, is evidenced by Paul’s teaching that all of these things are shadow pictures of things to come.

Once again, the Church’s bias is to say that the sabbaths and festivals were just shadows and not the real thing, Jesus is the real thing. Now the Church teaches that since the real thing has come we no longer need these shadows. We must however keep in mind the Paul wrote these words after Y’shua’s death, resurrection, and ascension. Yet, Paul clearly states that these are all shadow pictures of things to come. Yes they are just shadows, and not the real thing. But they proclaim a truth of what is yet to come. Clearly Messiah has not done away with the Sabbath, New Moon, and Festivals. For the Sabbath, New Moon, and Festivals declare the very return of the Messiah. By observing these things we keep the proclamation of their truth alive. Therefore it is important that we continue to keep the feasts and the sabbaths for they point to and prepare us for what Y’shua is going to do in the future. All of the texts

we've discussed thus far suffer greatly because of the Church's anti-Torah bias. The Christian Church is guilty of conforming the text to its doctrines instead of basing their doctrine on the teaching of the text.

The next passage of scripture in this dietary controversy is that of Romans 14. Here Paul is teaching the brethren that they should not judge those who have not yet reached full maturity or understanding in the faith. The question in debate is not about keeping of God's dietary restrictions but about the treatment of weaker brethren. The debate of Romans 14 is concerning those who refuse to eat flesh that has been sacrificed to idols. This passage is referring to flesh deemed to be clean according to the list recorded in Leviticus 11, yet may be seen as unclean because it was sacrificed to a pagan idol. The subject of this text becomes clear when compared with a similar passage in 1 Cor. 8:4-9.

"As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many and lords many,) But to us there is but one God the Father of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Y'shua Messiah, by whom are all things, and we by him. Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumblingblock to them that are weak."

Thus Paul's concern is not with whether the Believers are keeping kosher, but are they causing a weaker brother to fall because of their own maturity. This is also true of the passage in Romans 14. In the fifteenth chapter of the book of Acts Paul and Barnabas are defending their ministry among the Gentiles. The brethren at Jerusalem were faced with the crisis as to how to bring the Gentiles into the commonwealth of Israel. It was the wisdom of the elders to advise four things; abstaining from the pollution of idols, from fornication, and from things strangled including blood, and finally that they attend synagogue to learn Torah.^{xiv} It is the first of these things that Paul is addressing in both Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8. New converts from paganism would feel as if they were being polluted by idols if they ate flesh sacrificed in a pagan temple regardless of whether it was declared acceptable meat according to the restrictions of the Torah. An older maturer Believer might say, "There are no other gods, therefore the meat has been sacrificed to nothing and is untainted". What Paul is advocating in both of these passages is not the destruction of dietary laws but the careful consideration of the younger and weaker brother. Paul is in no way advocating that anyone break God's dietary restrictions. Instead Paul is encouraging the stronger brother not to let his maturity in the faith cause a weaker brother to break the Torah.

The final passage in this controversy is found in Paul's first letter to Timothy.

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."(1 Timothy 4:1-5).

Once again the controversy over this passage is due largely to the anti-Torah bias of the Church. As we have already demonstrated this anti-Torah bias even effects our English translation of the Bible. To understand the truth of what Paul is teaching here we must first realize that our English translation is

based upon a Greek text. The word “meats” is a translation of the Greek word “broma” which simply means food. Thus the word “meats” in this text should not be understood as animal flesh, but in the same sense that the Hebrew word oklah was used in Genesis 1:29 where God said,

“Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.”

Thus what Paul condemned as doctrines of devils, was

“Forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.” (1 Tim. 4:3)

Paul’s objection is not that people are being taught to abstain from certain animal flesh, but that they are being taught to abstain from that which God created to be food. Notice that Paul also qualifies what food is by saying, *“which God created to be received”*. In other words, Paul recognized that not everything that God created is food. Many in the Church try to teach that Paul was teaching that those who encourage Believers to keep kosher are teaching the doctrines of devils. To teach this is to maintain that the dietary restrictions of God which prohibit us from eating the flesh of certain animals and blood is a doctrine of devils. Such a position borders upon blasphemy. We should also remember that the Apostles themselves taught that Gentile Believers should abstain from eating the flesh of animals that have died of themselves, or were strangled, and still have their blood in them.^{xv} To maintain the traditional Christian position that dietary restrictions are the doctrines of devils is to claim that the Apostles themselves taught the doctrine of devils. Clearly this traditional interpretation and application of this text is contrary to the scriptures. To further understand what Paul is teaching in this text we must understand the word “creature”. The Greek word translated as “creature” is the word “ktisma” which means “something created”. This we should compare with the Greek word “ktahnos” which means “animal”, “domestic animal” or “pet”. This last word would be used of animals that are owned or domesticated. This would certainly apply to sheep, cattle, goats, and other animals raised for food. But the word “ktahnos” is not used in this text. Instead it is the word “ktisma- created” that is used here. By understanding the difference between these two words we arrive with a much clearer translation. The text should read,

“Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created (ktizo) to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creation (ktismo) of God is good and nothing to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving. For it is sanctified by the word of God and by prayer”

Twice in this teaching we see Paul make reference to the creation. Again Paul is pointing to that which God created for food. Where does God tell us what he created to be food? The answer is simple:

“And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.” (Genesis 1:29)

To further support this understanding, Paul wrote;

“For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”(1 Timothy 4:5).

The word sanctified means to set apart. Paul is teaching that that which God created to be received for food is set apart in the word of God. Therefore we should turn to the word of God to discover what the

Creator has set apart for food. Again the answer is clearly stated Genesis 1:29, Leviticus 11, Deuteronomy 14 and elsewhere. Paul was not teaching the Gentiles to live contrary to Torah but that they should study the Torah to show themselves approved.^{xvi}

After careful consideration of these passages our conclusion from the scripture must be this: That God's perfect will for man is a vegetarian diet. Yet YHWH realizes that man is still living in a fallen state and may desire to eat flesh. Recognizing this sinful nature, God extends his merciful permissive will towards man but reveals its limits through the Torah's distinct dietary restrictions. In the future millennial kingdom both man and animal's nature as created in the Garden will once again be restored. At that time, the vegetarian diet will most probably be restored as was YHVH's original intent for mankind. In the interim, Believers who desire to serve God as a priestly people should consume only food that is within the boundaries of God's permissive will as revealed in his dietary restrictions of Leviticus 11. Some may desire to move toward a vegetarian diet now, and should be given the freedom to do so. For those who are not yet so inclined or have not received such grace as of yet, there should be no judgment, as long as live is within the boundaries of YHWH'S permissive will. Either way, it is very clear; The dietary restrictions of the Torah have not been abrogated nor done away with by YHWH, Y'shua, the apostles nor anyone else.

As Believers in Y'shua we should seek the will of our Master in prayer and let His Spirit inform our conscience and direct our actions. If we seek to love and serve YHWH with all of our heart, soul, and strength then this will certainly include our diet. Y'shua has taught us that if we love him we will keep his commandments.^{xvii} If we love Y'shua then he will give us a new heart^{xviii} emblazended with the Torah. It is from this change of heart that changes in our life will come. In the mean time let us show grace one to another and allow the Holy Spirit time to work our lives and the lives of our brethren.

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ⁱ Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17

ⁱⁱ Genesis 3:17

ⁱⁱⁱ Emphasis added by the author

^{iv} Exodus 19:5-6

^v Hebrews 7:19

^{vi} Pulse –The Hebrew word is HaZaRaYiM which means from the sowing, referring to that which is sown in the garden. It means grains and vegetables.

^{vii} The NIV Study Bible, Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI

^{viii} Mark 7:9-16

^{ix} Cp. Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26 Jeremiah 31:31-33; Matthew 7:15-20; 12:33-34

^x Acts 10:15

^{xi} Acts 10:17

^{xii} Acts 10:21

^{xiii} Acts 10:22

^{xiv} Acts 15:20-21

^{xv} Acts 15:20

^{xvi} 2 Timothy 2:15

^{xvii} John 14:15

^{xviii} Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26