

Food for Thought

THE HEART & SPIRIT BEHIND THE BIBLICAL KOSHER LAWS

Study Guide & Overview

Ya'acov Natan Lawrence

Hoshana Rabbah Messianic Discipleship Resources

The Genesis creation account records that YHVH Elohim made man in his own image (Gen. 1:26). As such, the first humans, Adam and Eve, had spiritual communion with their Creator. Though man fell quickly to the temptation to sin, which separated him from a sinless, set-apart and righteous Creator, YHVH has desired to redeem man from the power of sin to be set-apart (*kadosh*) as he is set-apart (e.g. Leviticus 11:44).

Israel was redeemed from YHVH's judgment against sin when they sacrificed the lamb on Passover and painted the blood on the doorposts of their homes. YHVH then immersed Israel in the Red Sea (a picture of baptism for the remission of sins) and led them to the foot of Mount Sinai. YHVH revealed his Torah-truth (his instructions, teachings and precepts in righteousness) to the nation of Israel from Mount Sinai so that they could become a set-apart (*kadosh*) kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:6). He was showing them the pathway of righteousness so that after having been redeemed by the blood of the lamb—a direct prophetic picture pointing to Yeshua the Lamb of YHVH slain from the foundation of the world—they could have fellowship with him by avoiding sinning by walking in the straight and narrow path of righteousness.

Part of the walking in a loving relationship with a righteous and totally set-apart (*kadosh*) YHVH involves keeping his commandments as Yeshua said in John 14:15. To know and to love YHVH is to obey his commandments (1 John 2:3-6). Those who love him and back up their belief in him with the actions of obedience (faith without works is dead, Jas. 2:14-26) are better off than the demons who believe in Elohim *only*, but *do not* back up their belief with obedience to YHVH's righteous commands. Those who love *and* obey YHVH are called *set-apart ones* or *saints*. Scripture defines *saints* as those who keep (i.e., observe or do) the Torah commands of YHVH and who also have the testimony of faith of Yeshua, the Messiah, Savior and Redeemer of mankind (Rev. 12:17 and 14:12). Those who obey (hear and do) YHVH's Torah commands will be called the greatest in the kingdom of Elohim while those who disregard the Torah and its commands will be called the least—so says Yeshua in Matthew 5:19!

Keeping YHVH's dietary laws as outlined in the Torah is a foundational aspect of living a righteous and set-apart lifestyle. If one expects to be a member of the king-priest class in YHVH-Yeshua's future kingdom, one must begin preparing for this role by keeping YHVH's Torah in spirit and in truth (as Yeshua taught us in the Sermon on the Mount). This can only be accomplished through the power of the resurrected Yeshua living in and empowering us through his Spirit. The dietary laws YHVH gave to Moses and the Children of Israel are part of living the redeemed and set-apart (*kadosh*) life that YHVH requires of those who are to become one with him in his kingdom.

The essence of the people of Israel is its spirituality and holiness (*Kashruth*, by Rabbi Yacov Lipshutz, p. 15). Each human was made in the image of the Creator. The Renewed Covenant Scriptures teach us that each born-again believer in Yeshua has become a new creation and a temple of the Spirit of Elohim in that Yeshua lives in him by the Spirit. Hope Egan develops this thought when she writes, "The careful reader sees that Leviticus 11 addresses two different things. First [Elohim] shows how to avoid becoming unclean (by not touching certain carcasses). This enables a person to enter the Tabernacle/Temple and make sacrifices. Indeed, this is not applicable today, since there is no earthly Temple/Tabernacle. Second, he tells his people which animals are permissible to eat. This is unrelated to one's ability to participate in the sacrificial system."

“Just as [Elohim] forbids us from offering unclean animals upon His altar, so too He forbids us from taking unclean animals into the Temple of our bodies. This is relevant for anyone looking to the Scriptures for food-choice guidance” (*Holy Cow! Does Elohim Care About What We Eat*, p. 96).

“[E]ven a commonplace function such as physical nourishment, when properly fulfilled, is sacred in nature and sanctifies the human body. Conversely the consumption of forbidden foods defiles the [temple of one’s body], and its sanctity is injured. This injury reduces [one’s] capacity to reap the full spiritual rewards of Torah and its fathomless depths. The result of eating forbidden foods is referred to by the Talmudic Sages as *timtum halev*—damaging the heart’s ability to fully comprehend.

“To the Jew, the observance of *kasbruth* is not viewed as a restriction preventing him from partaking of culinary pleasure. The affirmation that *kasbruth* gives to his spiritual qualities is the eternal pleasure that true Torah observance brings to life” (*Kasbruth*, by Rabbi Yacov Lipshutz, pp. 15-16).

The Word *Kosher* (or *Kasbrut/h*) Defined

“The word *kosher* literally means *straight* or *right* or *proper*. It is only used a few times in the Hebrew Scriptures, but never in describing food. Over the centuries, however, *kosher* has evolved into a blanket term describing food that observant Jews eat. ... [There] are three main aspects of *kosher* food, as typically practiced by modern-day Orthodox Jews:”

- 1) “Animals labeled *clean* in Leviticus 11 are *kosher* for eating, but only if certain other standards are met...
- 2) “*Kosher* meat is killed via a special slaughtering technique, has had its blood completely drained, and has had certain fats and other body parts removed from it...
- 3) “*Kosher* eating mandates the separation of meat and dairy...” (*Holy Cow! Does Elohim Care About What We Eat*, by Hope Egan, pp. 63-63).

Leviticus Eleven Says It All

In this chapter in the Torah is found listed those animals that YHVH deems edible and those that are not. It is not the scope of this work to discuss the specific animals themselves, but rather the heart and spirit underlying the biblical dietary laws. Suffice it to say, Scripture (in Lev. 11 and Deut. 14) specifies that:

- ☞ Quadrupeds that chew the cud and have split hooves are kosher (e.g., cattle, sheep, goats, deer, etc.)
- ☞ Birds which are predatory or scavenger in nature are non-edible as the list in Leviticus 11 indicates. This passage lists none of the edible birds, but from the laws of the sacrifice in Leviticus and handed-down Jewish tradition we know that birds like doves, pigeons, chickens, turkeys, etc. are kosher.
- ☞ Only marine animals that have fins and scales are edible (e.g., trout, salmon, tuna, cod, bass, perch, snapper, halibut, etc.).
- ☞ All amphibians, reptiles and insects with the possible exception of grasshoppers and locusts (the latter species is a debatable point among Jewish scholars) are inedible.

Below are quoted several Scripture passages that discuss the Creator’s primary purpose of the dietary laws.

Leviticus 11:44-47, “For I am YHVH your Elohim: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I am YHVH that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your Elohim: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy. 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.”

Deuteronomy 14:1-3, 21, “Ye are the children of YHVH your Elohim: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. For thou art an holy people unto YHVH thy Elohim, and YHVH hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth. Thou shalt not eat any **abominable** thing. Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien: for thou art an holy people unto YHVH thy Elohim. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother’s milk.”

The word *abominable* in verse three is *tow'ebah* (*Strong's* H8441/*TWOT* 2530) meaning *a disgusting thing, abominable, loathsome*. This same word is used elsewhere in the Tanakh to describe the abominable and detestable practice of homosexuality (Lev. 18:22; Deut. 23:18) as well as other wicked sexual practices such as incest, premarital sex, adultery and bestiality (Lev. 18:26), heathen idols (Deut. 7:25-26), abortion or infanticide (Deut. 12:31; 18:9-10), sacrificing a blemished offering to YHVH (Deut. 17:1), astrology (Deut. 17:4), witchcraft and occultism (Deut. 18:9-10), cross-dressing (Deut. 22:5), and the use of unequal weights and measures (Deut. 25:13-16).

Eating Unclean Foods Is an Abomination

- ☞ **Leviticus 11:10**, “And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers, of all that move in the waters, and of any living thing which is in the waters, they shall be an **abomination** unto you.”
- ☞ **Leviticus 11:11**, “They shall be even an **abomination** unto you; ye shall not eat of their flesh, but ye shall have their carcasses in **abomination**.”
- ☞ **Leviticus 11:12**, “Whatsoever hath no fins nor scales in the waters, that shall be an **abomination** unto you.
- ☞ **Leviticus 11:13**, “And these are they which ye shall have in **abomination** among the fowls; they shall not be eaten, they are an **abomination**: the eagle, and the ossifrage, and the osprey ...”
- ☞ **Leviticus 11:20**, “All fowls that creep, going upon all four, shall be an **abomination** unto you.”
- ☞ **Leviticus 11:23**, “But all other flying creeping things, which have four feet, shall be an **abomination** unto you.”
- ☞ **Leviticus 11:41**, “And every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth shall be an **abomination**; it shall not be eaten.”
- ☞ **Leviticus 11:42**, “Whatsoever goeth upon the belly, and whatsoever goeth upon all four, or whatsoever hath more feet among all creeping things that creep upon the earth, them ye shall not eat; for they are an **abomination**.”
- ☞ **Isaiah 66:15-17**, “For, behold, YHVH will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will YHVH plead with all flesh: and the slain of YHVH shall be many. They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one tree in the midst, eating swine’s flesh, and the **abomination**, and the mouse, shall be consumed together, saith YHVH.”
- ☞ **Ezekiel 8:7-12**, “And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall. Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door. And he said unto me, Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here. So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and **abominable** beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about. And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up. Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, YHVH seeth us not; YHVH hath forsaken the earth.”

The word *abomination* (*Strong's* H8263/*TWOT* - 2459a, 2459b) is *shehketz* (from H8262) and means *detestable thing or idol, an unclean thing, an abomination, detestation*. The word *shehketz* is from *shaqatz* (H8262/*TWOT* 2459), which is a primitive root translated in the KJV as *abomination, abominable, abhor, utterly, detest* and means *to detest, make abominable, count filthy, make detestable, and to make detestable*.

The Torah Links Holiness With Diet

The Jewish rabbis teach that “the Torah stresses the reason for *kashru[t]* (from the Hebrew word *kasher*, meaning *proper* or *fit*) in very clear and powerful terms: By observing these laws, [one] can pull himself up the ladder of holiness; by ignoring them, he not only contaminates himself, he gradually builds a barrier that blocks out his comprehension of holiness. Just as someone who is constantly exposed to loud music and harsh noise, slowly and imperceptibly, but surely, suffers a loss of his ability to hear fine sounds and detect subtle modulations, so too the Torah informs us that [one’s] consumption of non-kosher food deadens his spiritual capacities and denies him

the full opportunity to become holy. And worst of all, it renders him incapable of even perceiving his loss. For this reason ... even small children should be prevented from eating forbidden foods, lest their spiritual perception be harmed” (*ArtScroll Vayikra/Leviticus Commentary*, p. 163).

In Leviticus 11 we find the laws pertaining to clean and unclean meats. In the previous chapter (Leviticus 10) is the account of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron the High Priest, who, while in their service in the Tabernacle, offered up strange fire. As a result of their disobedience the fire of YHVH executed them. Jewish Torah commentators state that Nadab and Abihu fell into sin because of drunkenness. Immediately after the account of their death Torah issues a prohibition against drinking alcohol prior to ministering in the Tabernacle (Leviticus 10:8-10) since alcohol affects the clarity of one’s judgment. Directly following this, Torah “required that sacred meat must be eaten in sacred places. The implications of these commandments is that what a person eats has a critical bearing on his ‘spiritual and moral calling’ and the discharge of [Israel’s] responsibility to be a ‘kingdom of priests and a holy nation’” (*ArtScroll Vayikra/Leviticus Commentary*, p. 163). As Rabbi S. R. Hirsch notes, “All this brings us very close to the thought of how little we may consider the food we eat to have bearing on our minds and feelings for the fulfillment of our calling, and of the mission which is given us to be a kingdom of priests and a set-apart nation” (*The Pentateuch—Leviticus*, p. 266).

In Leviticus 11:43 we read, “You will not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creepeth, neither shall ye make yourselves unclean [or, do not contaminate yourselves, *ArtScroll Stone Edition Tanach*] with them, that ye should be defiled thereby [or, lest you become contaminated through them, *ArtScroll Stone Edition Tanach*].” The phrase *v’neet-mehtehm* or *you will become contaminated*, is the root נָמַע (*tet-mem-aleph*). “Accordingly, we would expect the word to be spelled with an נ (*aleph*) (as it is in Ezekiel 20:43). Based on the omission of the נ (*aleph*), the *Talmud* explains that the word may also be understood as if it read, *you will become blocked*, for sin (especially eating non-kosher foods, which become a part of the eater’s body) (*Mesillas Yescharim* 11) blocks a person’s heart (*Yoma* 39a), thereby preventing wisdom from entering (Rashi)” (*ArtScroll Kestenbaum Edition Tik-kun*, p. 251). “[T]he consumption of forbidden foods harms one’s spiritual potential. In the words of the Sages: If a person contaminates himself a little, he becomes contaminated a great deal; [if he contaminates himself] down below, he is contaminated above; in This World, he is contaminated in the World to Come. [Conversely,] *you shall sanctify yourselves and you shall become holy* (verse 44): If a person sanctifies himself a little, he becomes sanctified a great deal [etc.]” (*ArtScroll Vayikra/Leviticus Commentary*, p. 182). This is reminiscent of the Apostle Paul’s teaching that “a little leaven leavens the whole lump of bread” (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9).

Are the Torah’s Dietary Laws Strictly For Holiness Reasons Only, or For Health Reasons As Well?

Because the Torah forbids the consumption of certain meats on the basis of holiness and makes no mention of any deleterious effects *treif* (non-kosher meat) may have upon human physical health some rabbinic scholars are reluctant to relate eating kosher to any health benefits derived therefrom.

Rambam (Maimonides), a preeminent medieval Jewish Torah scholar and physician saw a direct link between adhering to the laws of *kashrut* and health. The author of the *Sefer ha-Hinuch* agrees with Maimonides’ medical approach. “He argues that ‘our perfect Torah separated us from harmful factors. This is the common-sense reason for the Torah’s dietary prohibition. If the harmful character of some of these forbidden foods is unknown to us or to medical science, do not be puzzled since the True Physician [Elohim] who warned us regarding them is wiser than us about them’” (*A Torah Commentary For Our Times or ATCFOT*, Vol. 2, p. 116).

Rabbi S. A. Hirsch, the noted nineteenth-century Torah commentator argues that the issues of *kashrut* are more moral and spiritual rather than physical when he states that it is “absolutely undoubtedly clear that it is solely the moral integrity of our being, and in no wise our bodily health which is the motive of the [biblical laws of *kashrut*].” He continues that the clear Word of Torah itself states, “not for our bodily health, but the spiritual and moral health of our soul is to be ensured by the observation of these laws which protect our sensuousness from animal-like unrestrained passion, and our spiritual moral powers of Will from becoming dull and irresponsive to higher and nobler conceptions. These laws want to impress on us that a fundamental condition for our becoming what we are meant to be is the necessity of keeping our material body in that state of receptive purity which makes it the ready instrument by which we can carry out the dictates of the higher and nobler part of our being” (*The Pentateuch—Leviticus*, pp. 305-306). Based on what the rabbi states here, one could almost see him making the case for the salutary benefits of the Torah’s dietary laws.

“[T]he Torah did not come to take the place of a medical handbook but to protect our spiritual health” declares Abravanel, a well-known fifteenth-century rabbi, statesman and philosopher. “He declares that foods forbidden by the Torah and by the rabbis who developed the dietary laws of the Jewish tradition ‘poison the pure and intellectual soul, clogging the human temperament, demoralizing the character, promoting an unclean spirit, defiling in thought and deed, driving out the pure and holy spirit ...’ In other words, they bring spiritual trouble—disaster—to those who consume them!” (*ATCFOT*, Vol. 2, p. 117).

Despite the controversies surrounding the issue of whether it is harmful to the human body to eat non-kosher food or not, it is not the scope of this present work to delve into this large issue. Suffice it to say, for truth-seekers there is ample evidence from medical and health experts available to show that the benefits are there. It is the opinion of the author that not only did the Creator have man’s spiritual best-interests in mind, but that of his physical well-being also when he gave us his dietary laws.

Eating Clean Meats Relates to Speaking Pure Words

“[T]he laws concerning permitted and forbidden foods,” according to a Chasidic teacher, Levi Isaacs, “have to do with what one allows to enter the mouth. If there is no discipline concerning what one eats, if one is careless about consuming forbidden foods, it is likely that one may also be insensitive and careless about what one says, about slandering and lying, about what comes out of the mouth. *Kashrut*, for Levi Isaac, is not only about food; it is also meant to help us keep our mouths clean and pure from harmful talk” (*ATCFOT*, Vol. 2, p. 117).

Eating Kosher Prepares One to Be a Fit Vessel to Receive the Word of Elohim

“Keeping kosher is a way of preparing oneself to receive the word of [Elohim]. It is a way of cultivating the bodily habits that will make one a fit receptacle for the Divine Presence” according to David Blumenthal (as quoted in *ACTFOT*, Vol. 2, p. 117). “In other words, observing the dietary laws sensitizes one to all the other laws of Torah. It leads to the observance of them, and [it] leads one to be more open to the spiritual message of [Torah]” (*ACTFOT*, Vol. 2, p. 117).

Keeping Kosher Points Man to a Higher and Nobler Life

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz argues, “All the laws pertaining to *kashrut* are ‘based on the principle that a man cannot live a higher, nobler life of the spirit without having the body undergo some suitable preparation for it.’ For Steinsaltz body and soul are connected. What a person eats influences feelings, responses, and readiness to unite with influences of good or evil in the world. Observing dietary laws, says Steinsaltz, makes one more sensitive to holiness and to the tasks of bringing ‘all things in the world to the state of *Tikkun* or perfection...’” (*ACTFOT*, Vol. 2, p. 118).

Keeping the Biblical Dietary Laws Unites the Community and Helps to Prevent Assimilation Into the World

There is no doubt that in most cultures, and certainly in ours, sharing a common table unites people. In fact, some of the most important occasions in life are marked by a ritual meal (weddings, anniversaries, state banquets, communion [i.e., the “Lord’s Supper”], Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter), which serve to bind people together in a common purpose and identity.

Mordechai Kaplan, notes the power of the dietary laws in the preservation of the Jewish people due to loss through assimilation with non-Jewish cultures. Kaplan explains that the purpose of *kashrut* is to make ‘the people of Israel aware of its dedication to [Elohim] as a priestly or holy people’... *Kashrut* has contributed to the perpetuation of the Jewish people and the retention of its way of life.

“In other words, the dietary laws regulating what a Jew shall and shall not eat are a means of preserving Jewish identity and Jewish loyalty. “*Kashrut*,” Kaplan concludes, ‘is particularly effective in lending a Jewish atmosphere to the home, which, in the Diaspora, is our last-ditch defense against the inroads of assimilation’” (*ACTFOT*, Vol. 2, p. 118).

More Food For Thought: The Metaphorical Implications of Eating Clean and Unclean Animals

Philo the Jew of Alexandria Egypt lived at the end the first-century B.C. and into the beginning of first-century A.D.

and was one of the greatest Jewish religious philosophers of that or any time since. He notes some interesting metaphorical parallels between clean or kosher animals and the righteous man. For example, the Torah stipulates that for a quadruped to be clean for human consumption it must chew the cud and divide the hoof. Philo says, as the animal which chews the cud, while it is masticating its food draws it down its throat, and then by slow degrees kneads and softens it, and then after this process again sends it down into the belly, in the same manner the man who is being instructed by his learned mentor cannot assimilate a full body of knowledge all at once, but must little-by-little “chew” and reflect on it until he is able to assimilate it into his understanding in a cohesive manner. But understanding, or a body of knowledge, though understood by the intellect is of no use without the wisdom to apply it properly. As the hoof is split, so one has to make one of two choices as to which direction his path will take him in the application of his knowledge: the path of right or wrong, righteousness or wickedness. Thus the wise man will properly discern to follow the right path and renounce the wrong one (*The Works of Philo, Special Laws* 4.104, p. 626, Hendrickson).

By contrast, Philo notes that unclean animals have solid hooves implying that they make no choice in their footsteps between good and evil (*ibid.*), and that by implication good and evil are one as epitomized in the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which represents all the false (non-biblical) religions of the world and are called spiritual Babylon in John’s book of Revelation. Philo continues that the concave hoof shows us that the uphill and downhill paths are the same in these religious systems. Likewise, the unclean animal with not a hoof, but with many toes (e.g., dogs and cats) show us that there are false religious systems that would tell us that there are many paths which lead to spiritual enlightenment, but which are in reality paths which lead to deceit (*Ibid.*) and confusion (i.e., spiritual Babylon).

Next, aquatic animals with fins and scales are edible, while all others are not. Philo teaches that those without fins and scales are sucked down by the current, while those equipped with fins and scales are able to not only resist the current, but to swim upstream against the current. This shows us, again, a contrast between the righteous and the wicked. The former not only resist evil, but also prevail against it and make headway in spite of it, while the latter offer no resistance to the current and are pulled wherever the currents take them—usually down river. The former people are devoted to perseverance and temperance while the latter to pleasure. The path of one is narrow and straight while the path of the other is broad and aimless. One leads men’s souls upward, while the other downward (*Ibid.* pp. 626-627).

The Torah specifies that all reptiles are inedible. Reptiles are those who either have no feet or who drag their bellies on the ground. Philo equates this type of animal with what in modern parlance we would refer to as a “low-life” type existence. These are those who’s Elohim is their miserable belly and are given to strong alcohol, confectations and hedonistic delicacies (*Ibid.* p. 627).

In the bird realm, those birds that are wild, carnivorous, preying on and plotting to kill others Scripture rejects as inedible. On the other hand, those that are edible are tame, gentle and do not feed on each other. These types of birds are again reminiscent of two kinds of human specimens: the wicked and the righteous (*Ibid.*).

Continuing in Philo’s vein of thought it is interesting to note some aspects of man’s anatomy. Though man is obviously inedible and is unclean to eat, man has five fingers and toes combined to form ten of each. Five is the biblical number for *Torah* since there are five books in the Torah-law written by Moses. Furthermore, on the two tablets of stone upon which YHVH wrote the Ten Commandments with his own fingers the first five (relating to loving YHVH with all your heart) were written on the right table while on the left table were written the remaining five commandments (relating to loving our neighbor as ourselves). The feet upon which the two sets of five toes are found speak of man directing his steps (his spiritual pathway of life) in accordance with YHVH’s *instructions, precepts* and *teaching* in righteousness (which is the definition of the Hebrew word *Torah*, see *Strong’s* H8541) or the *Torah*. Psalms 119:105 says that the Word of YHVH is a lamp unto our path and a light unto our steps. The hands upon which the two sets of five fingers are found speak of man’s action lining up with the Torah-instructions in righteousness of YHVH. Of course, both sets of fingers and toes add up to ten each pointing to the Ten Commandments, which are the cornerstone commands of the Torah’s entire 613 laws. What YHVH seems to be teaching us here is that all that we do, and our entire path of life must line up with His Torah-instructions—including the food we eat—and by so doing instead of being a spiritually unclean, profane or polluted people we become set-apart unto righteousness and spiritually clean as stated in Leviticus 11:44-45 and Deuteronomy 14:1.

A Brief Overview of Messianic Scripture Passages Used to Abrogate the Biblical Kosher Laws

Let's first establish some facts.

- ☞ YHVH's character is perfect and righteous. What was right and righteous for him in the past will remain so in the future. His standards of righteousness and perfection do not change. (Ps. 100:5; Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17). They are immutable. He is not a man that he should lie (Num. 23:19).
- ☞ YHVH does not have one set of rules for one group of people and another set of rules and standards of righteousness for another group of people. YHVH is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Deut. 10:17; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; 1 Pet. 1:17). His ways are straight and narrow (Matt. 7:14). His ways are truth (Ps. 119:142, 151; John 17:17). Yeshua, the Word of Elohim made flesh (John 1:1-14), is truth and light. Truth is light (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23). Free of outside influences light always travels in a straight line.
- ☞ Since Yeshua was the Word of Elohim in flesh-form and in him dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9) then his physical life on earth was a reflection of the perfect will and character of YHVH Elohim (John 4:34; 6:38; 5:30; Matt. 26:39). As such, all of his words, thoughts and deeds lined up perfectly with the Torah.
- ☞ Because Yeshua was the Torah-law of Elohim made flesh he in no way would have abrogated or nullified it (rendered it inoperative and non-binding) (John 1:1-14; Matt. 5:16-17).
- ☞ The Apostles were commanded to be faithful to the teachings of Yeshua and to carry them forth, teaching their disciples *to observe all* that Yeshua had commanded them (Matt. 28:20).
- ☞ Paul was a follower or imitator of Yeshua and urged Believers to follow him in this (1 Cor. 11:1).
- ☞ Paul, the one who many claim freed us from the Torah-law actually spoke favorably of the Torah-law (Rom. 7:12, 14) and remained obedient to it until his dying day (Acts 24:14; 25:8; 28:16, 23).

Matthew 15:11 and Mark 7:18-19

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 the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? (KJV)

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.**) (NASV, emphasis added)

These are parallel passages in that they record the same events. Mark's account reads, "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 the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?" (KJV) The Hebrew Roots Version, which is a translation from the Aramaic, confirms the KJV rendering of this verse. However, some of the modern texts (e.g., the NIV and NAS) add the phrase to the end of this verse, "In saying this [Yeshua] declared all foods clean." This variant phrase in the newer English translations is the source of the confusion in the minds of many who read this.

The KJV is translated from the Greek family of manuscripts called the *Textus Receptus* or Received Text, which until the end of the nineteenth century was accepted as the most authoritative and purest manuscripts by the Protestant Church. On the other hand, the newer translations derive from another family of Greek manuscripts that were rejected by early Protestant scholars as being inferior to the *Textus Receptus*, but liberal scholars from England challenged these beliefs of earlier scholars and were instrumental in popularizing the variant and previously rejected family of Greek manuscripts (called the Western family of texts).

The debate has raged on for more than 100 years as to which family of manuscripts is the oldest and most reliable in accordance with the actual autographs. But since no one knows for sure which family of manuscripts are the oldest and purest, can we approach the issue of determining whether the added words in the newer English

translations, “In saying this [Yeshua] declared all foods clean” are accurate or not to the original language? Was Yeshua saying here that the dietary laws delineated in the Torah are now nullified? If so, would this be consistent with the rest Yeshua’s teachings?

Briefly, what was Yeshua’s stand on the Torah? In Matthew 5:17-19 he said,

Think not that I am come to destroy the Torah-law, or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Here Yeshua instructed to *not* think that he came to annul the Torah-law.

Then in both Matthew 15:6-9 and Mark 7-9 Yeshua rebukes the religious folks of his day for nullifying the Word of Elohim by their man-made traditions. What did he mean by the phrase *Word of Elohim*? When he made this statement there was no “New Testament,” but only the Hebrew Scriptures (or “Old Testament”). He was rebuking the Jews for changing YHVH’s Word of which the biblical dietary laws in the Torah were a part. So for him to rebuke the Jews for changing the Word of Elohim, and then a few verses later to be advocating the annulment of the dietary laws found in that Word would have made Yeshua not only a hypocrite, but a Torah-law breaker and thus a sinner (1 John 3:4). To suggest that Yeshua was a law-breaker is utter blasphemy(!) and nullifies the entire Gospel message and the entire “New Testament.” Yeshua could not have been advocating the violation of the Torah-law, and at the same time be the Word of Elohim made flesh and be YHVH’s sinless redemptive lamb, as the newer translations imply by the addition of the phrase, “In saying this [Yeshua] declared all foods clean.” Therefore, we utterly reject this phrase as a corruption of the original text.

By looking at the context, we see that the issue in these passages in Matthew and Mark was not about eating kosher versus not eating kosher, but whether it was allowable to eat with unwashed hands or not. According to Jewish non-biblical oral tradition it was imperative for one to go through an elaborate hand washing ceremony for mystical reasons before partaking of food. These commandments were rooted in traditions of men, not in the Torah-law of YHVH. Yeshua is taking the Jews to task for placing more emphasis on man-made traditions rather than on the pure and firm Word of Elohim. This seems to be a chronic problem in many religious circles even in our day. Sunday worship replaced the seventh day Sabbath. Christmas and Easter replaced the appointed feasts of YHVH such as Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles. And the list goes on.

Acts 10: What About Peter’s Vision?

And a voice came to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” And a voice spoke to him again the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” (Acts 10:13-15)

In Peter’s vision of the sheet covered with unclean animals the voice from heaven commanded him three times to kill and eat these unclean animals. Peter was confused by the meaning of this vision since being a Torah-law abiding Jew he knew that eating unclean meat was forbidden and in good conscience he could not do that which was contrary to YHVH’s Torah-law, for to do so was sin (sin is the violation of the law, 1 John 3:4).

Often visions are metaphorical in nature and not literal. There are many examples in Scripture of people receiving metaphorical visions. Just read the books of Daniel and Revelation, for example. Indeed, Peter’s vision was no exception, for no sooner had the vision ended when three “Gentile” men appeared at his door seeking the Gospel and the Spirit of Elohim bade Peter to go and to meet them. Peter then realized that the interpretation of vision was that he should not call any man common or unclean; that is, the Gospel message is for all whether Jew or those of the nations (verse 28). The Scripture interprets itself in this passage and the issue is not about whether it is now permissible to eat non-kosher meat or not, but rather the fact that the Spirit of Elohim was now directing the Apostles to begin taking the Gospel to the Nations, who by Jewish standards were considered common and unclean (verse 28).

Luke 10:8 and 1 Corinthians 10:27

Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you.

If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake.

Do these passages give Believers the freedom or even enjoin them to eat whatever is placed before them if, for example, they are in someone else's home even if the food is non-kosher? Understanding context is vital to understanding Scripture. When verses are taken out of context they can not only lose their meaning, but can take on an entirely different meaning to the writer's original intent. As Messianic teacher Dr. Daniel Botkin points out in an article entitled *God's Dietary Laws: Abolished in the New Testament?*, "Yeshua spoke these words when he sent out the seventy. These were seventy Torah-observant Jews who followed a Torah-observant Rabbi. ... Rabbi Yeshua had told his disciples, 'Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel,' (Matt. 10:6).

"It is obvious from this statement that the disciples would be lodging in Torah-observant Jewish homes, where the kosher laws were followed. It is ridiculous to suppose that the disciples might have been offered a pork chop in one of these Jewish homes. Even if this very unlikely possibility had occurred, the disciples would have had enough sense to know that this is not what their Master meant when he said to 'eat such things as are set before you.' He simply meant to be content with the food which your host provided" (*Gates of Eden* magazine, Nov./Dec. 1997 issue).

Though similar to Yeshua's passage, Paul's passage in Corinthians has an entirely different context. The issue is not kosher versus non-kosher meat, but meat that was sacrificed to idols that was later sold to the public in the meat markets of Greek cities (for context read 1 Cor. 10:19-29). Botkin points out that in the four times in the Apostolic Scriptures Believers are forbidden to eat meat sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:20; 21:25; Rev. 2:14, 20), yet the dilemma was that when one bought meat in the public markets it was not known whether it had been sacrificed to idols first or not. So for conscience sake Paul instructed the Corinthian Believers to buy the meat and to not ask about its origination (10:25). However, if a person knew that it was meat sacrificed to idols (verse 28) for their own conscience sake and that of others who might be watching them then they were not to eat of it (*ibid.*). The same principle applied to those eating in someone's house as a guest. If one knew that the meat was offered to an idol then they were forbidden to eat it. However, if they did not know, then it was not necessary to ask. Again, it was not a matter of clean or unclean meats, but of meat sacrificed to idols or not.

Romans 14:2

For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.

Is Paul teaching in this passage that it is permissible for Believers to eat "all things?" including unclean meat, which includes rats, bats, scorpions, lizards and cockroaches?

First let's examine the greater context of Romans 14:2, which is 14:1-15:6. Messianic Jewish biblical scholar David Stern in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* states that among Believers there are two groups: those with "strong faith" and those with "weak faith." The latter are depicted in this passage as feeling they must abstain from meat or wine and/or observe certain days as set-apart (*kadosh*), while the former feel no such compunctions.

Stern continues, it is clear from this passage itself that the "weak" cannot be equated with Torah-observant Messianics. Nothing in YHVH's Torah-law requires an Israelite to be vegetarian (verse 2). It is argued that kosher food might not have been available in Rome, but Rome had a large Jewish colony (Acts 28:17), and it is unthinkable that it would not have had a *shochet* (ritual slaughterer). Also nothing in Torah requires one to refrain from wine (verse 21); the only exception are Nazirites during the period of their vow and *cobanim* (priests) on duty. On the contrary, wine drinking is so much a part of Jewish ritual that is lent an aura of sanctity that, at least until recently, made alcoholism very uncommon among Jews.

In Stern's opinion, the weak are Believers, either Gentile or Jewish, who have not yet grown sufficiently in their faith to have given up attachment to various pagan ascetic practices and non-biblical Greek or Jewish calendar observances. (This is not a reference to the biblical feasts or appointed times that YHVH spells out in his Torah-law.) He then lists four types of people who fit into this category: (1) Gentiles who want to avoid the appearance of evil by maintaining physical and emotional distance from anything that reminds them of their previous idolatrous practices... who want to avoid the trappings of their former sinful way of life. (2) Gentiles who adopted elements of Jewish practice as part of their faith along with believing in Yeshua. They have, as it were, bought what they considered a whole package and have not yet unwrapped it and decided what is really important for them. In

the first century the phenomenon was common enough to require considerable attention among the early Believers (Acts 15 and the whole book of Galatians, for starters). (3) Gentiles or Jews who have brought into their faith practices found in other religions with which they are familiar. These practices often appeal to their religiosity but are irrelevant or even contrary to the Gospel. (4) Finally, Messianics who have not grasped how the incorporation of the Renewed Covenant into Elohim's Torah and the presence of the Set-apart Spirit in themselves alters the way in which the Torah is to be applied. They therefore feel a compulsiveness about observing ceremonial and ritual details. When their faith grows stronger they will be free *not* from the Torah-law but from legalistic compulsiveness (*Stern*, pp. 431-434).

On the phrase in Romans 14:2, "One man has faith ... eats vegetables," Messianic Jewish biblical teacher Joseph Shulam writes that the references to "vegetables" (and thus to "meat" by contrast) most likely relates to the problems associated with food offered to idols; vegetarianism was not a religious or theological issue per se during the Second Temple period. The Jewish Believers' sensitivities derive from extensions or "fences" against the possibility of idolatry and or from traditional interpretations concerning *kashrut* (the laws concerning clean and unclean animals and ritual slaughtering), as well as the laws concerning ritual purity. To exclude meat from one's diet was a solution to those who doubted the origin of meat, its method of slaughter, and the possibility that it might have been offered to idols before sale in the market. When the "weak" person refrains from eating food that has been offered to idols, Paul considers him in effect to question whether Elohim has more power than the idol (*A Commentary On the Jewish Roots of Romans*, pp. 457-458).

So nowhere is the issue in Romans 14 a matter of clean versus unclean meats, but of vegetarianism as opposed to meat eating as a means of avoiding eating meat sacrificed to idols. So once again, in examining the Hebraic and historic cultural context of the passage we see that the traditional Christian interpretation of this passage as an invalidation of the biblical kosher laws is erroneous and a matter of men's traditions making of none effect the plain Word of YHVH (Matt. 15:7-9 and Mark 7:7-9).

Romans 14:14

I know and am convinced by the Master Yeshua that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

In this verse, is the Apostle Paul declaring that there is no longer a distinction between clean and unclean foods, therefore making void the biblical dietary laws? Let's analyze the contextual and linguistic aspects of this passage to see what Paul is really saying here.

The word *unclean* (*koinos*) in this verse can also mean *common*, and in three places in the Apostolic Scriptures the two words "common" and "unclean" are used side by side; q.v. Acts 10: 14, 28 and 11:8, which says, "But I said, Not so, Master: for nothing common [*koinos*] or unclean [*akathartos*] has at any time entered into my mouth. "From this example, we see that *unclean* in Romans 14 can also mean *common* as we find in Acts 11. The word for *unclean* in Acts 11:8 is an entirely different word; therefore, *akathartos* is a reference to unclean meat, as proscribed by the Torah. *Koinos*, on the other hand, cannot mean unclean meat in Romans 14, or else Acts 11:8 would be a superfluous and unexplainably redundant in using two words that mean exactly the same thing. The word *koinos* is used elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures not to mean *unclean*, as in *unclean meat*, but *unclean* as in *unwashed hands* (Matt. 7:2), or *common*, as in something that is shared commonly among people (Acts 2:44; 4:32; Tit. 1:4; Jude 3). Of the seven places this word is used in the Apostolic Scriptures it never means unclean meat.

In David Stern's *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, on Romans 14 he states that Paul is not abrogating the biblical dietary laws. On verse 14, Stern states that Paul is referring to ritual purity, not whether something is unclean (unkosher) meat or not. What is ritual purity? It is a reference to either how something was slaughtered, and whether it was bled properly, or whether the meat had previously been sacrificed to idols before being sold in the public meat markets—a common practice in that day in pagan cities.

Furthermore, Paul could not have been advocating eating swine, and other unclean meats, without making himself into a total hypocrite and liar, since in several places in the Book of Acts he strongly states (toward the end of his life) that he was a Torah-observant Jew and walked orderly and kept the Torah (Acts 21:20), and that he had not broken any of the Torah laws (Acts 25:16), which would have included the dietary laws contained in the Torah.

Let's also keep an important point in mind when speaking of YHVH's biblical dietary commands: When someone gets born again their digestive system does not change. Eating unclean or biblically unkosher meat is, from a purely medical standpoint, deleterious to one's health regardless of whether one is a Believer in Yeshua or not.

Colossians 2:16

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths ...

Because no one is to judge us in meat or in drink does this mean that Believers are free to eat anything they want, regardless of the biblical kosher laws? This is how many interpret this passage.

As in the other passages we are examining, the key to understand the single verse is to understand it in its context. As Botkin points out, verses 13-14 state that we have been forgiven because “the certificate of debt” that was against us has been taken out of the way. Is this referring to the Torah-law of Elohim that somehow in the “New Testament” has been annulled by Yeshua’s work on the cross?

To the contrary, Botkin points out that the Greek word for *certificate of debt* is a unique technical term used in extra-biblical Greek writings and it means *certificate of indebtedness* (see *A Greek Lexicon of the NT*, by Arndt and Gingrich). This, according to Botkin, is referring to the record of man’s sins that have been thrown out of Elohim’s heavenly courtroom. Because the Messiah died for our sins, this record of our transgressions is inadmissible evidence in the Courtroom of Heaven. Because of the work of our Advocate, Yeshua, we have triumphed over our accuser (verse 15). It is for this reason that we are to let no man judge us (verse 16) since we have been forgiven of our sins (verse 13), which is the violation of YHVH’s Torah-law (1 John 3:4). Since the record of our sins has been removed from Elohim’s heavenly courtroom through the work of Yeshua our advocate (lawyer), and since Yeshua triumphed over the devil (verse 15) who had claim on our lives because of our sin, the penalty of which is death (Ezek. 18:4 and Romans 6:23) and through Yeshua we passed from condemnation (eternal death) to (eternal) life (John 3:18; 5:24; Rom. 7:24 and 8:1-2) no one has the right to judge or condemn us.

For that reason, says Botkin, Paul goes on to say, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink” or in any other of YHVH’s Torah commands such as the appointed times or festivals or the Sabbath. In other words, through Messiah (through his grace and divine empowerment of the indwelling presence of his Spirit in you) you have the power to obey the commandments of Elohim regarding food, drink, feast days, new moons and Sabbaths (*God’s Dietary Laws*, by Daniel Botkin, *Gates of Eden* magazine, Nov./Dec. 1997 issue).

So once again this passage in no way abrogates YHVH’s dietary laws, but validates them.

1 Timothy 4:3-5

... commanding to abstain from foods which Elohim created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of Elohim is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of Elohim and prayer.

Many take this passage to mean that simple “prayer over the food” sanctifies unkosher food. Were we to take this logic to its illogical conclusion, then we might suppose that prayer over skunk meat, certain poisonous types of frogs, snakes and salamanders would make them edible. Of course, this is ridiculous. Is this really what Paul, the orthodox Jewish rabbi, is teaching? Once again, understanding Scripture in its context is essential to obtaining its proper interpretation. These verses read:

Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which Elohim hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. **For every creature of Elohim is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the Word of Elohim and prayer.** (emphasis added)

What does this passage really say? Does it say that the meat we eat is sanctified (i.e., set aside for special use) *only* through the act of prayer?

In verse five Paul teaches that the meat we eat is sanctified through prayer *and* the Word of Elohim. When Paul wrote this letter to Timothy there was no “New Testament” (or Apostolic Scriptures)—only the “Old Testament (or Hebrew Scriptures or Tanakh). Where in the Hebrew Scriptures do we find which meats YHVH has set aside or sanctified for man as edible? Leviticus chapter eleven, of course. Furthermore, in verse three above Paul talks about “them which believe and know *the truth*.” How does Scripture define *truth*? Yeshua defined *truth* as *the Word of Elohim* (namely the Hebrew Scriptures, which is all that existed at that time) (John 17:7). The Hebrew Scriptures define truth as the Torah-law of YHVH (which contain YHVH’s biblical kosher laws pertaining to

clean and unclean meats) (Ps. 119:142 and 151).

So when examined in its proper context this passage in 2 Timothy in no way teaches that it is scripturally permissible for Believers to indulge in unclean meats. On the contrary, this passage in fact validates the biblical kosher laws as outlined in the Torah and shows clearly, if we let Scripture speak for itself and define its own terms instead of reading into it our own meanings, that the biblical dietary laws are for Believers today.

