

1 Timothy 4:1-5

Pastor: 1 Timothy 4:1-5: Those who observe the dietary laws have committed apostasy against Jesus.

“But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.”

1 Timothy ch 4¹ Within 1 Timothy ch. 4, the Apostle Paul will take on much of the false teaching that had manifested itself in Ephesus, squarely associating it as end-time apostasy that has already been foretold, and hence was something to be anticipated. From here to the end of his letter, readers see the important role that Timothy will play (1 Timothy 4:6, 11, 16; 6:2, 17) in making sure that its influence is finally stopped and that the Ephesians turn toward a more constructive and useful spiritual path. Much of the information that we see in chs. 4-6 is either given directly to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:6, 11, 16; 5:23; 6:2, 17), or to Timothy as a mediator who is to implement Paul’s instructions within the Ephesian assembly.² 1 Timothy ch. 4 includes some specific details about what the false teaching was, which had seeped into Ephesus. In 1 Timothy 4:1-5 we see a reference to the opponents and what they have espoused, although the problems they caused are not mentioned again until 1 Timothy 6:3.³

4:1 Paul makes the assertion, “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons” (1 Timothy 4:1, NIV). The Holy Spirit, in stated terms, has “expressly” (RSV; Grk. *hrētōs, ῥητῶς*) been communicating what is to occur, realized quite well with the usage of the present active indicative verb *legei* (λέγει) or “speaks,” a current action occurring for Paul and Timothy’s generation. Language about the Spirit speaking (*legei*) a message to be heeded appears throughout the Book of Revelation (2:7, 11, 17; 3:6, 13, 22), and we can certainly think about how Yeshua did direct an admonition to the assembly at Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7). More poignant to recall for the purposes of Paul’s letter, is how he had warned the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29-30, “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

People departing from or denying the truth of God is something which is certainly seen throughout the Scriptures. The verb *aphistēmi* (ἀφίστημι) means “**go away, withdraw,**” and in a classical context could be used “in ref. to altering allegiance **cause to revolt, mislead**” (BDAG).⁴ *Aphistēmi* is used in the Greek Septuagint to refer to some kind of departure from God and/or His ways (Deuteronomy 32:15; Jeremiah 3:14; 1 Maccabees 1:15). William D. Mounce renders 1 Timothy 4:1 with, “some of the faith will apostatize” (WBC).⁵

As serious as it is to recognize that apostasy is at work in Ephesus, Yeshua Himself had spoken of this as being a sign of the end-times (Mark 13:5-6, 21-22; Matthew 24:4-5, 11-12). Paul himself had also taught of an apostasy to come before the return of the Messiah (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; cf. 2 Timothy 3:1-2). In George W. Knight III’s estimation, “That he writes τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα λέγει [*to de Pneuma legei*] emphasizes the ongoing and present significance of this warning, which had been reiterated by the Spirit through him and

¹ This section has been adapted from the *Messianic Kosher Helper*.

² Philip H. Towner, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 286.

³ “If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness” (1 Timothy 6:3).

⁴ BDAG, 157.

⁵ William D. Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles*, Vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 232.

others.”⁶ There had likely been a swell of First Century prophetic voices anticipating some kind of apostasy from faith in Yeshua, which would involve various demonically-inspired teachings coming forth and spiritual conflicts arising (cf. Ephesians 6:12; 1 Peter 4:1-18; Jude 17-18). Gary W. Demarest astutely reminds us, “We do well to be constantly aware that there is a spiritual warfare always going on. To underestimate the power of the enemy is to invite capture.”⁷ The situation addressed in 1 Timothy was only one front on which the Adversary was waging a battle against the saints.

It is quite true that in 1 Timothy 1:1 it is specified that apostasy will occur *en husterois kairois* (ἐν ὑστέροις καιροῖς) or “in later times.” Some readers who encounter this are a bit puzzled, expressing the thought: “Is this letter not almost two thousand years old? How can this be an ‘end-time’ expectation?” Sadly, too many of today’s Believers have been conditioned by populist prophecy teaching into thinking that the “end-times” are just the very final moments right before Yeshua’s return, as opposed to a broader closing season of history leading to the Millennium. We need to understand that Biblically speaking, the Last Days actually began with the time of the Messiah’s First Coming, as indicated by the Apostle Peter at *Shavuot*/Pentecost (Acts 2:17), who also said in 2 Peter 3:3, “in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts.” Donald Guthrie properly indicates how, “Indeed, as often in prophetic utterances, what is predicted in the future is conceived of as already operative in the present, so the words have a specific contemporary significance.”⁸ As we reach closer and closer to the actual day of the Messiah’s Second Coming, the expectation of apostasy will only grow in magnitude—as bad as it might have been for Paul and Timothy, or even for us right now. For the circumstances in First Century Ephesus, I. Howard Marshall & Philip H. Towner summarize,

“The use of the prophetic form emphasizes both the inevitability of what is happening and the fact that it should not take people by surprise. It brings out the need to take the rise of heresy seriously as part of the disasters associated with the last days: what was prophesied as a fearsome future evil is now taking place.”⁹

People departing from the gospel and from faith in Messiah Yeshua will only accelerate as His return draws closer, as Paul had previously stated how the Lord will not return “unless the apostasy comes first” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). In the Ephesian situation, apostasy has manifested itself in “teachings of demons” (NRSV/ESV, *didaskaliais daimoniōn* (διδασκαλίαις δαιμονίων)). It is unlikely that the actual false teachings distributed are delivered directly by demons—unless demons had fully possessed human vessels—but instead the teachings are of demonic origin and motive. Ben Witherington III states, “The teachers themselves are not said to be possessed, but their teaching comes from a nefarious source.”¹⁰ The effect of dark spiritual forces and demons is a feature of Paul’s letters, especially how the tactic of Satan is to present himself as an agent of “light” (2 Corinthians 4:4; 11:3, 13-14). Via slippery words and deceptive tactics, the enemy is sadly often able to take many people prey, who errantly think they are following the will and voice of God. It is most especially difficult for spiritual leaders and teachers, who know the truth, to get deceived people back on a proper path of loving God and neighbor *and* living forth the imperatives of the gospel—as opposed to false teaching which takes people away from the Messiah who was sacrificed for human sin.

Fast-forwarding to more modern times, Messianic Jewish commentator David H. Stern actually lists nine different areas of potential apostasy across the Jewish and Christian religious spectrum—ranging from Oriental spiritistic influences, secular humanism and atheism, liberal Judaism and Christianity, to the simple arousal of self-centered sinful activities associated with drugs, alcohol, and sex. Of his list, what is important

⁶ George W. Knight III, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 188.

⁷ Gary W. Demarest, *The Preacher’s Commentary: 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy, Titus*, Vol 32 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 195.

⁸ Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Pastoral Epistles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 103.

⁹ I. Howard Marshall, with Philip H. Towner, *International Critical Commentary: The Pastoral Epistles* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 538.

¹⁰ Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 252.

not to overlook is his reference to “The occult, including astrology, parapsychology, [and] *kabbalah* (the occult tradition within Judaism).”¹¹

4:2 The major reason that the end-time apostasy has begun to manifest itself in Ephesus is how it has occurred “through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared” (1 Timothy 4:2, RSV). The fact that the false teachers demonstrate *hypokrisis* (ὑπόκρισις), “hypocrisy” (NASU) or “insincerity” (ESV), is actually not the only serious factor. The false teachers are also liars, and they are relatively untaught people who are speaking so-called confident things that they know rather little about (1 Timothy 1:4, 7). The false teachers in Ephesus frequently lack the wisdom, discernment, and *basic knowledge* to be able to sort truth from error—or even *gross error*. Mounce thinks, “The opponents are hypocritical liars who know that what they are teaching is wrong and yet continue to teach.”¹² Even if the false teachers might have some truth in their claims, the way that they could have been able to exaggerate things, gain a following, and that they probably have significant pride in what they have done made it too difficult for them to stop. Some of today’s populist Messianic teachers follow a similar mode of operation.

It seems that for a large number of the false teachers Timothy will have to stop in Ephesus, there is probably no hope. Their conscience is seared by the influence of dark spiritual forces, with the verb *kaustēriazō* (καυστηριάζω) actually meaning “to burn in with a branding iron” (Thayer),¹³ the root for our modern English term “cauterize.” The NEB actually states that the false teachers’ “conscience is branded with the devil’s sign.” Paralleling this could be Paul’s previous word in Ephesians 4:19, where sinners “having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.” These are people who are given over to a spiritually unproductive abyss of falsehood and lies, unable to fully access the brains that God gave them to think and act responsibly.

Mounce is direct in his conclusion that “Paul’s opponents have had their consciences branded by Satan to mark his ownership, somewhat like the ‘666’ of the antichrist.”¹⁴ He draws attention to the passive participle *kekaustēriasmenōn* (κεκαυστηριασμένων) for “seared.” The analogy to be drawn is that just as many passive verbs in the Greek Scriptures depict an activity of God or His Spirit on a person, so can Satan and his demons similarly have a supernatural effect on people. In desiring an influence via their false teachings, not only are the false teachers in Ephesus responsible for fueling apostasy—but they have been steadily influenced by the Adversary and his deceptive intentions.

4:3 Those who have been seared by the Devil’s brand (1 Timothy 4:2) are individuals “who forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth” (1 Timothy 4:3, RSV). It is notable here that the source text does not include “men” as provided by the NASU, but simply has *kōluontōn gamein* (κωλυόντων γαμείν), “They forbid marriage...” (NRSV/CJB). To Philip B. Payne, this is an important clue that not only “It is no wonder that this new teaching attracted women,” but also “It is likely that it attracted few men besides the original false teachers.”¹⁵ Unqualified women, after all, had tried to usurp authority in the Ephesian congregation (1 Timothy 2:12, Grk.), and were probably more eager to throw off the bounds of married life than men. It is a possibility that the unqualified female teachers are more in view in 1 Timothy 4:3 than various male teachers. Various women could have found it most appealing to not be married (1 Timothy 5:6, 11-15), although Paul will encourage younger widows in Ephesus to get married (1 Timothy 5:14).

The present active participle *kōluontōn*, indicating that the false teachers promote some kind of immediate acceptance of their beliefs by the Ephesians, can be rendered as “hindering,” “preventing,” or “forbidding.”¹⁶ Yet it was their teachings that forbade or banned these things, and not their actions in

¹¹ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995), 643.

¹² Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 233.

¹³ Thayer, 342.

¹⁴ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 238.

¹⁵ Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 302.

¹⁶ The verb *kōluō* (κωλύω) simply means “to keep someth. from happening, hinder, prevent, forbid” (BDAG, 580).

somehow intruding themselves barring people from getting married or going into homes and seeing what was regularly eaten at mealtime.

Interpreters of the Pastoral Epistles have widely recognized that some kind of proto-Gnostic or dualistic error is confronted by Paul in 1 Timothy 4:3-5, as it concerns a prohibition on marriage and eating various foods. Guthrie asserts, "There is no doubt that these point to an incipient gnosticism with its dualistic view of matter."¹⁷ In reading 1 Timothy 4:3-5 it is important for us to remember that not only did God create food to be eaten and enjoyed, but He *also* created marriage and sex to be enjoyed as well. Neither marriage/sex nor eating are bad things when viewed properly as God originally intended them to be. Both marriage/sex and eating are to be received with thanksgiving as special gifts provided by the Lord, which are to make life on Planet Earth most fulfilling for His human creations. It is true that there are some people whose personality is not well tuned for marriage, yet the Apostle Paul upholds marriage as an honorable estate to which many are called to partake (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:7).

The problem, as noted by Guthrie, is how "the forbidding of marriage could never lead to a healthy society as God had planned it, and food-taboos were in direct opposition to the bountiful provision of God."¹⁸ The asceticism practiced, which involved *both* a lack of regard for marriage/sex *and* eating various foods, would have arisen out of an errant world view that saw God's physical Creation to be marred and evil, and the spiritual dimension to exclusively be pure and good. How is this tied to the false teachers wanting to be Torah experts (1 Timothy 1:7)? In Colossae, adjacent to Ephesus by only a hundred miles or so, a similar false teaching had arisen which had hijacked Torah elements such as the Sabbath, appointed times, and kosher eating—associating them with ascetic rituals involving some kind of angel worship, self abasement or intense fasting, and significant avoidance of so-called "fleshy" indulgences (Colossians 2:16-23).¹⁹ Yet unlike the Colossian false teaching and its attention to drink, the false teachers in Ephesus apparently did not abstain from alcohol (cf. 1 Timothy 3:3).

There might be some parallels with the errors previously present in Corinth as well, among those who needed correction about the future resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12, 35). Gordon D. Fee comments, "Just as some Corinthians denied a future bodily resurrection...and some at least took a dim view of sex (7:1-7) and marriage (7:25-28), it is altogether likely that something very much like that is being given out as 'Law' in Ephesus."²⁰

At one point or another in our faith experience, today's Messianic Believers who observe the kosher dietary laws (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14) as a matter of obedience to the Lord, have been quoted 1 Timothy 4:3 as a rebuke. Is it not true that a sign of the end-times will be the presence of those who "demand abstinence from foods" (NRSV/HCSB)? Are not Messianic Believers who keep kosher doing this? Stern's remark, "**Abstinence from foods** does not mean observing *kashrut*, although the false teachers probably did incorporate elements of the Jewish dietary laws into their ascetic practices,"²¹ is appreciable. But, this does not give Messianics enough details per what the Ephesian false teaching probably advocated. Too frequently, 1 Timothy 4:3 is quoted to us *out of context* from its original Ephesian setting, and the specific fact that "abstaining from foods" is also **directly associated** with those "who forbid marriage." I personally do not know of any Messianic congregation or organization, which keeps kosher as a matter of simple obedience to the Lord and/or good health, that also advocates complete celibacy of men and women. And, Marshall & Towner are keen to point out, "rejection of marriage was not characteristically Jewish."²² So what is the issue of "abstaining from foods" in 1 Timothy 4:3?

Paul is clear to tell Timothy and the Ephesians that there are foods "which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Timothy 4:3, RSV). We can all immediately think of the Creation narrative in Genesis 1:31, "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good."

¹⁷ Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*, 104.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ This is examined in more detail in the commentary *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee.

²⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *New International Bible Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 99.

²¹ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 644.

²² Marshall & Towner, 533.

Food was created by God for human nourishment and enjoyment as a part of what He had formed for the man and woman, made in His image. Originally, mankind was only permitted by Him to eat a vegetarian style of diet (Genesis 1:29; 2:9, 16; 3:2), although after the Flood the abstention from eating animal flesh was lifted (Genesis 9:3), most likely to cause the introduction of heavy chemical elements into the bloodstream to disallow people from living close to ten centuries.²³ In the most basic of terms, God's people are to be quite thankful and grateful to Him for the produce He has provided them for sustenance (Deuteronomy 26:10-11).

Later as the Torah's commandments are codified for Ancient Israel, it is specified that not all meats are clean (Heb. *tahor*, טָהוֹר; Grk. *katharos*, καθαρός) or acceptable for eating. Such a distinction between clean and unclean was previously known by Noah, who actually took seven pairs of clean animals onto the Ark (Genesis 7:2). Still, even though animals like pigs, snakes, lizards, various birds of prey, and shellfish were prohibited from Israel's diet—there was a very large amount of animals that could be eaten like cattle, sheep, goats, various nesting birds, and fish with scales and fins. Any of the First Century Believers, Jewish or non-Jewish (cf. Acts 15:20), who kept kosher, could not be accused of following some kind of “doctrine of demons”—as the kosher dietary laws originated *with God*. Those who would follow the *kashrut* instructions in the First Century were very much eating what God considered “food” (Heb. *okel*, אֵכֶל; Grk. *brōma*, βρώμα) for His people to be.

Fee issues some caution about the different areas where eating is discussed in Paul's letters,²⁴ indicating how “Each of these situations was different...”²⁵ 1 Timothy 4:3 does not at all include any terminology of clean/unclean or common/uncommon, but just speaks of some kind of generalized abstention from foods. The challenge, in properly determining what the issue really was in Ephesus, is in trying to figure out the kind of diet the false teachers followed. Did their teachings make them abstain from all meat, only eating a vegetarian diet (cf. Romans 14:1-2)—or could they have only eaten the minimum amount in order to maintain “life”? Vegetarianism is actually the preferred option among most commentators, as Knight describes “It is likely that βρώμα [*brōma*] is used in...[a] specialized sense here. If so, the false teachers are urging abstention from meat as something intrinsically wrong.”²⁶ Far be it from the false teachers advocating *kashrut*, which does allow for people to eat a wide range of clean meats, the false teaching instead would have pushed a complete moratorium on the principle of eating *any meat*. The validity or non-validity of *kashrut* is really not the issue Paul is confronting, but instead the basic idea of eating animal flesh.

There can be no denying the fact that eating the protein provided by meat is essential to a good and healthy diet, something which the false teaching would clearly prohibit. There might actually be some kind of a Jewish sectarian parallel at work here, as the Qumran community or the Essenes were known at times to be both celibate and purposefully abstain from various foods beyond *kashrut* law. Outsiders to Qumran like Philo and Josephus indicate the kind of practices which Paul might very well be confronting in 1 Timothy 4:3:

Again, perceiving with more than ordinary acuteness and accuracy, what is alone or at least above all other things calculated to dissolve such associations, they repudiate marriage; and at the same time they practise continence in an eminent degree; for no one of the Essenes ever marries a wife, because women is a selfish creature... (Philo *Apology for the Jews* 11.14).²⁷

²³ “Vegetarianism perfectly suits the potential longevity of the first humans. Animal tissue contains between ten and ten thousand times the concentration of heavy elements that plant material contains. This difference sounds drastic, but it poses an insignificant health risk for people living only 120 years or less (the limit God imposed at the time of the Flood). However, the difference is by no means trivial for people living nearly a thousand years” (Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis*, second expanded edition [Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001], 71).

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:23-33; Romans 14:1-23; Colossians 2:16, 21.

²⁵ Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 99.

²⁶ Knight, 189.

²⁷ Philo Judaeus: *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C.D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 746.

...and neither [do they] marry wives, nor are desirous to keep servants; as thinking the latter tempts men to be unjust, and the former gives the handle to domestic quarrels; but as they live by themselves, they minister one to another (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.21).²⁸

These Essenes reject pleasures as an evil, but esteem continence and the conquest over our passions, to be virtue. They neglect wedlock, but select other persons children, while they are pliable, and fit for learning, and esteem them to be of their kindred, and form them according to their own manners (Josephus *Wars of the Jews* 2.120).²⁹

But for those who are caught in any heinous sins, they cast them out of their society; and he who is thus separated from, them does often die after a miserable manner; for as he is bound by the oath he has taken, and by the customs he has been engaged in, he is not at liberty to partake of that food that he meets with elsewhere, but is forced to eat grass, and to famish his body with hunger, till he perish (Josephus *Wars of the Jews* 2.143).³⁰

It is notable that some within the Qumran community did apparently marry (CD 7.6-7; Josephus *Wars of the Jews* 2.160-161), but it does not seem to be their common practice. On the contrary, those men within the Qumran community—believing that the end was somehow “nigh”—believed that marriage was an unnecessary burden (and also that women were a cause of much mischief). It also seems that if any were expelled from the group of covenanters, that because of various oaths taken they would not be allowed to eat anything but grass, slowly leading to death.

Were these the kinds of dynamics at work in the Ephesian false teaching that Paul instructs Timothy to confront? Towner continues to be cautious, observing, “there is nothing to indicate that such strict food asceticism should be linked to the Essenes/Qumran.”³¹ Perhaps there are some similar eschatological expectations between Qumran and the Ephesian false teaching—as God’s people needed to somehow *severely* prepare for the new era or new age of being. Witherington’s conclusion of the varied motives of the false teachers is, “What we can say with more certainty is that the opponents are clearly enough offering up some combination of Jewish and ascetical ideas, and the former rules out their being gnostics. The resemblance here may be more to the Therapeutae in Egypt or the Essenes.”³²

The most probable explanation for the false teaching in Ephesus, advocating both an abstention from marriage/sex and eating meat, comes in the form of an overly-realized eschatology that was promoted. (Given Paul’s reference to the end-times in 1 Timothy 4:1, this should not be too much of a surprise.) We have already seen references to Adam and Eve in Paul’s letter (1 Timothy 2:13), and to how the promised Child-Bearing, Yeshua, would be the salvation of women (1 Timothy 2:15, Grk.; Genesis 3:15). With some kind of proto-Gnostic and/or dualistic ideology influencing the false teachers from one side, on the other they could have wrongly concluded that with the resurrection supposedly having occurred (2 Timothy 2:18) that all Messiah followers were to adhere to an Edenic style of living. Such a lifestyle would have included not marrying, not engaging in any sexual intercourse, and not eating any meat, as human reproduction and eating meat came after the Fall of humanity. Towner notes how “The assumption is that this was regarded as the pattern most suitable for preparation for the arrival of the Eschaton—that life in Eden is the paradigm for life in heaven. Before the fall into sin, sexual relations had not been initiated, and meat was not sanctioned for food until Gen 9:3.”³³ Marshall & Towner together further summarize how,

“It could have been defended on the grounds that people were already living in the resurrection era and that the conditions of paradise were restored...More probably, there may have been people who felt that,

²⁸ Flavius Josephus: *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 477.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 605.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 606.

³¹ Towner, 293.

³² Witherington, *Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John*, 254.

³³ Towner, 295.

if this was how it was to be in the restored paradise, then they should anticipate it in the here and now. The closest links are thus with a tendentious reading of Genesis and with the tendencies to vegetarianism and abstinences from marriage...”³⁴

Anyone who reads 1 Timothy 4:3-5 will need to engage with the thought that kosher *might* play some kind of a role in the Ephesian false teaching, just as it did in the Colossian false teaching (Colossians 2:16). To quote him again, Stern thinks, “**Abstinence from foods** does not mean observing *kashrut*, although the false teachers probably did incorporate elements of the Jewish dietary laws into their ascetic practices.”³⁵ In presenting interpretive options, Marshall & Towner say “The reply [in vs. 3-5] may be an attack on Jewish food laws or on Gnostic dualism.”³⁶ Towner by himself is a bit more cautious in wanting to think that kosher is actually an issue, noting “There is evidence of a Jewish-Christian element in the opposition, but circumcision and laws of purity are not a focal point of the opposition. What seems more central is a sense of elitism, separatism, claims to special knowledge.”³⁷ Witherington further states, “Abstaining from certain foods was of course part of normal early Jewish practice and did not reflect an ascetical bent, but here it appears that more is meant, perhaps along the lines of what we find in Colossians 2:21b,”³⁸ which of course is a rebuke of those who would insist on “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” (Colossians 2:21).

Because all of today’s Messianic Believers will be quoted 1 Timothy 4:3-5 at one point or another in their Torah observance, it is important that we explore the logic behind the conclusion that *kashrut* is being targeted here. Of the various interpreters we have been considering in this Pastoral Epistles study, only Mounce really argues that kosher was the issue associated with the “abstaining from foods” in 1 Timothy 4:3, which is a bit odd as he does recognize that there is a mystical-esque teaching being refuted and not mainline Biblical practices. He admits that “this passage does not help us in determining the source of the Ephesian heresy. The perversion of the gospel truth may have been the result of the philosophical dualism present throughout the first-century world,”³⁹ further noting how “Paul held a much higher view of marriage than did his opponents...”⁴⁰ Mounce recognizes the errant eschatology present in the false teaching confronted, so to argue that keeping kosher is the issue—and not something directly associated with proto-Gnostic dualism—seems a bit odd.

Reviewing his comments, Mounce is probably too pre-disposed to his conclusion “The opponents’ desire [was] to force all to obey the law...”⁴¹ Yet, the Apostle Paul himself was clear to emphasize how “They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm” (1 Timothy 1:7, NIV), engulfing themselves in myths (1 Timothy 1:4). An ascetic practice completely forbidding marriage is *hardly* adhering to the Torah. However, because Mounce thinks that the false teachers are wanting to impose a rigid Torah observance onto the Ephesians, this forces him to assert, “Paul spends the next two and one-half verses explaining why food laws are wrong,”⁴² and so following the kosher instructions must have been a part of the false teaching. It is notable, though, that Mounce does have to admit how “βρῶμα [*brōma*], ‘food,’ is used elsewhere with various shades of meaning,”⁴³ not limited to *kashrut*. While Mounce has offered many excellent thoughts in his Pastoral Epistles commentary, including an astute defense of Pauline authorship, 1 Timothy 4:3-5 are a place where he demonstrates that he has practiced some eisegesis away from the actual issues present in Ancient Ephesus. We are justified to conclude that kosher eating was probably not an element (or at least a major element) of the false teaching, because the bigger issue **was abstention from eating meat altogether**.

³⁴ Marshall & Towner, 535.

³⁵ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 644.

³⁶ Marshall & Towner, 544.

³⁷ Towner, 294.

³⁸ Witherington, *Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John*, 254.

³⁹ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 238.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Mounce’s references regarding *brōma* include: Romans 14:15, 20; 1 Corinthians 3:2; 8:8, 13.

What would it have meant for the false teachers to promote their abstention from marriage and eating meat? If the false teaching in Ephesus was associated with a quasi-Edenic style of living, then it would surely have enabled many adherents to think that they spiritually “arrived,” and that they were indeed a part of an exclusivist clique. There are many potential applications of 1 Timothy 4:3 in today’s religious world, as Demarest describes “when it comes to demanding abstention from certain foods (or drinks), some consider these marks of a superChristian,” also observing “To begin with Christ and end up with such rules is a contradiction.”⁴⁴

Even if today’s Messianic Believers who keep kosher strive to do so *not* to prove themselves superior to their Christian brothers and sisters—but as a matter of simple obedience to the Lord—we do need to strive to recognize that kosher eating is not an end to itself and not at all be prideful or act superior about it. Should we ever be criticized from 1 Timothy 4:3-5, we need to be able to present a well-reasoned, Ephesus-conscious response *in a proper and constructive spirit*. Rather than act exclusivist toward any naysayers, our job as mature Believers is to take people to the text and point out how it is not only abstention from food which was the issue, **but also** abstention from marriage—ancient ascetic practices. Again, I do not know of any Messianic organization or congregation which advocates such things today: celibacy *and* vegetarianism.

One of the most intriguing applications of 1 Timothy 4:3 that I have encountered is from dispensationalist John F. Walvoord. He connects celibacy, vegetarianism, and the expectation of apostasy in the end-times (v. 1) with some of the traditions found in Roman Catholicism:

“Of special interest is the prophecy that in the end of the age there will be prohibition of marriage and requirement to abstain from certain foods. It is evident in the Roman Church today that priests are forbidden to marry on the ground that the single estate is more holy than the married estate, something which is not taught in the Word of God....Another obvious factor is the religious custom to abstain from meats on Friday and to refrain from certain foods during Lent. This again is a man-made invention and certainly not taught in the Word of God.”⁴⁵

It is interesting that Walvoord, surely a person who would disagree with today’s Messianics on the validity of the kosher dietary laws, would attest that 1 Timothy 4:3 is really speaking of Roman Catholic abstention from things during Lent—and not Messianics keeping kosher and abstaining from pork and shellfish as the Bible instructs us.

4:4 In directly wanting to subvert the false teachers’ ascetic and so-called Edenic lifestyle, the Apostle Paul writes how “every creature of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Timothy 4:4, NKJV). Is this to be an emphasis on primarily food, or the goodness of the physical creation?⁴⁶ Everything that has been made by God is surely good, but is every creature made by Him to really be considered food? There are definitely linguistic echoes to be found between 1 Timothy 4:4 and Genesis 1:31 in the LXX:

⁴⁴ Demarest, 197.

⁴⁵ John F. Walvoord, *The Church In Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), pp 54-55.

⁴⁶ Note how *ktisma* (κτίσμα) can mean one of two main things: “*anything created, a creature*” (LS, 453).

GENESIS 1:31 (MT)	1 TIMOTHY 4:4
<p>God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.</p>	<p>For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;</p>
<p><i>v'yare'a Elohim et-kol-asher asah v'hineih-tov meod v'yehi-erev v'yehi-boker yom ha'shishi</i></p> <p>וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיְהִי־טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי׃</p>	<p><i>hoti pan ktisma Theou kalon kai ouden apoblēton meta eucharistias lambanomenon</i></p> <p>ὅτι πᾶν κτίσμα θεοῦ καλὸν καὶ οὐδὲν ἀπόβλητον μετὰ εὐχαριστίας λαμβανόμενον</p>
GENESIS 1:31 (LXX)	
<p>And God saw all the things that he had made, and, behold, they were very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day (LXE).</p>	
<p><i>kai eiden ho Theos ta panta hosa epoiēsen kai idou kala lian kai egeneto hespera kai egeneto prōi hēmera hektē</i></p> <p>καὶ εἶδεν ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα ὅσα ἐποίησεν καὶ ἰδοὺ καλὰ λίαν καὶ ἐγένετο ἑσπέρα καὶ ἐγένετο πρωὶ ἡμέρα ἕκτη</p>	

One can see how the Septuagint assertion in Genesis 1:31 of *ta panta hosa epoiēsen kai idou kala* (τὰ πάντα ὅσα ἐποίησεν καὶ ἰδοὺ καλὰ), is reflected in Paul’s statement *hoti pan ktisma Theou kalon* (ὅτι πᾶν κτίσμα θεοῦ καλόν). When God had finished creating the world and all things in it, it was all to be considered *ton meod* (מְאֹד טוֹב) or “very good.” Before the Fall of humanity, the different animals—which would include clean, kosher animals for human consumption—were good. From Paul’s vantage point, there was nothing intrinsically bad or wrong about eating meat. Paul did not want the Ephesians to abstain from the good things to eat in God’s Creation, and as the adjective *apoblētos* (ἀπόβλητος) means, “to be thrown away as worthless” (LS).⁴⁷

In employing the terminology *ouden apoblēton* (οὐδὲν ἀπόβλητον), “nothing to be thrust away” (LITV), is Paul equating clean and unclean meats as being quantitatively indifferent? Or, does he continue to speak in general terms about whatever “foods” the false teachers preach abstinence from as being incorrect, since God’s Creation—both meat and vegetable—is good? Towner thinks that “considered ritually or otherwise unclean...Believers are indeed free in Christ to make use of all foods.”⁴⁸ But how much is this view really rooted within the problem Timothy was going to have to solve in Ephesus? Is it possible that some interpreters, in wanting today to eat all kinds of meat, have gone beyond the original scope of Paul’s instruction? The Jerusalem Council, for example, expected the non-Jewish Believers to honor the kosher laws in not eating things strangled (Acts 15:20), and the Ephesian false teaching would have barred kosher-keeping Believers from eating clean meat.

It is commonly argued, and perhaps rightly, that Paul is arguing from an early Genesis position of the basic principle how humans being allowed to eat meat is not at all a bad thing. In Genesis 9:3 Noah is told by

⁴⁷ LS, 95.

⁴⁸ Towner, 298.

God, “Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as *I gave* the green plant.” Without any further examination, many think that Noah was actually permitted to eat all kinds of meats, including those things which would be considered off limits for Israel. We need not overlook the fact that a *specific category* of animal was given permission by God for Noah to eat: *kol-remes* (כָּל־רֶמֶשׂ). While *remes* (רֶמֶשׂ) is often defined as “everything that moves and lives” (*HALOT*),⁴⁹ more might need to be considered. John H. Walton makes some very careful observations that we need to pay close attention to:

“The noun (*remes*) and the associated verb (*rms*) each occur seventeen times in the Old Testament, ten times each in Genesis 1-9. This word group is distinct from both the wild (predatory) beasts and domesticated flocks and herds. Neither verb nor noun is ever used to refer to larger wild animals or to domesticated animals. In no place is *remes* a catch-all category for all creatures. It is one category of creature only. The division of the Hebrew terms used up to this point in Genesis reflects the nature of the animal...”⁵⁰

These are some very interesting statements, as it could suggest that *remes* is a category that God specifically wanted Noah and company to eat from, perhaps different from those clean animals he had taken on the Ark to later sacrifice. Walton sees a connection between *remes* and the Akkadian cognate *nammashthu*, “which typically refers to wild animals that travel in herds...they are distinct from wild animals that hunt or scavenge.”⁵¹ He makes reference to the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which speaks of “The small wild creatures of the plains [who] were glad of the water, and Enkidu with them, who ate grass with the gazelle and was born in the hills.”⁵² His conclusion of *remes* is that “These animals were typically characterized as being the prey of hunters and predatory beasts,”⁵³ concurring with God’s word to Noah, “The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps [*ramas*, רָמַשׂ] on the ground” (Genesis 9:2). Genesis 9:3 issues specific permission, then, for Noah and company to go out and hunt animals for food.

Interestingly enough, the animals that Walton lists that would principally fall into this *remes* category include “wild cattle, antelope, fallow deer, gazelle, and ibex.”⁵⁴ These are all animals considered clean on the specific food lists of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. His view is that “domesticated plants and animals were always considered legitimate sources of food, while permission was granted for...hunting animals for food (9:5).”⁵⁵ There seems to be no major problem here between the laws of *kashrut* and Noah being allowed to eat *remes*. The *remes* animals would have been clean animals, but many would have needed to be hunted and/or tamed in order to actually be eaten. The fear that such animals would have for humans would come as they were hunted for food, and/or hoarded and domesticated for food. Noah just needed approval from God to go out and “get them.”

Objections are sometimes made to the view that Noah was only allowed to eat *remes*, meaning various kinds of wild, yet kosher game. The LXX rendered Genesis 9:3 as “every reptile which is living shall be to you for meat, I have given all things to you as the green herbs” (LXE). It is unavoidable that the “creeping thing” (NETS) referred to here is *herpeton* (ἑρπετόν), the standard meanings of which are either “a walking animal, quadruped” or “a creeping thing, reptile” (*LS*),⁵⁶ and *herpeton* is the root for our modern term herpetology, the study of amphibians and reptiles. So when Noah exited the Ark, was he given permission by God to go and basically eat snakes and lizards? This is certainly not the impression that we get from reading Genesis, as the diet of the Patriarchs was focused around their domesticated flocks and herds, and not trying to pick reptiles out of the ground for a quick snack. While in Egypt, the infant male Israelites were thrown into the

⁴⁹ *HALOT*, 2:1246.

⁵⁰ John H. Walton, *NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), pp 341-342.

Remes appears in: Genesis 1:24-26; 6:7, 20; 7:14, 23; 8:19.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 342.

See also William White, “*remeś*,” in *TWOT*, 2:850-851.

⁵² N.K. Sandars, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 64.

⁵³ Walton, 342.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁵⁶ *LS*, 315.

Nile to be eaten by crocodiles (Exodus 1:22); we do not see any implication that the Israelite slaves regularly ate crocodiles.⁵⁷

While *Thayer* indicates how in “secular writings [*herpeton* is] used chiefly of serpents...an animal of any sort,” and “in Biblical Greek [it is] opposed to quadrupeds and birds,”⁵⁸ in the LXX rendering of Isaiah 16:1 *herpeton* is actually used to translate “lamb”: “Send the *tribute* lamb [Heb. *kar*, כֶּרֶךְ; Grk. LXX *herpeton*]⁵⁹ to the ruler of the land, from Sela by way of the wilderness to the mountain of the daughter of Zion.” This is a good indication that there was at least some ancient flexibility of the term *herpeton*, and that Diaspora Jewish readers of Genesis 9:3 in the Septuagint would be able to deduce that Noah, while permitted to eat meat, would not be eating snakes and lizards. The *Louw-Nida Lexicon* further summarizes how there might be a difference between how *herpeton* is used in the LXX, and then later in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures,

“Though ἑρπετόν [*herpeton*] is often interpreted as referring only to snakes, it also includes in biblical contexts (as the result of the influence of classifications based on Hebrew terminology, as in Genesis 1.25, 26, and 30) a number of small four-footed animals...However, in the various NT contexts (for example Ac 10.12, 11.6; Ro 1.23; and Jas 3.7 where ‘creeping things’ are contrasted with birds, animals, and fish) it is probably more satisfactory to use a term which designates primarily snakes.”⁶⁰

In the specific argumentation of Paul in v. 4, he wants to make an emphasis that from Creation, God’s physical world is all good, for which the human beings He also created should be thankful. While Paul is specifically using language from God’s creation of animals used for food, which the false teaching in Ephesus would have said were *all* off limits, 1 Timothy 4:4 should not be read as exclusively speaking about eating. Marriage and sex were prohibited by the false teachers as well (1 Timothy 4:3), and as Adam notably said at Eve’s creation, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:23). Knight describes, “It is God’s goodness more than human freedom that Paul defends here, even though the conduct he defends is human, i.e., marriage and eating of certain foods.”⁶¹ Marriage and sex were created by God for human enjoyment every bit as much as eating, and they are not to be rejected.⁶² On the contrary, as many husbands and wives—who are Believers—are discovering in our post-Victorian era, sex is something that married couples should indeed find most pleasurable. By abstaining from sexual intercourse, no different than how abstaining from a broad spectrum of things to eat can negatively affect a person’s diet and body,⁶³ men and women can experience chemical imbalances and various psychological issues.

It is inappropriate, according to the Apostle Paul, for mature Believers to completely reject the estate of marriage and reject how God indeed did create various clean meats for people to eat. In Guthrie’s estimation, “Such taboos should have no place in an intelligent Christian’s approach, in strong contrast to the many systems of taboos in heathen cults.”⁶⁴ As we may need to remind ourselves, normal Jews of the First Century looked on marriage and eating clean meat as favorable activities. Mystery religions and ascetic cults looked at these things as aberrations, as barriers to be overcome in order to access spiritual powers, the cosmos, or some perceived higher level of being. Echoes of such ideas, coupled with a bad interpretation of the Torah (1 Timothy 4:4, 7), were promoted by the false teachers, but are squarely rejected by Paul.

4:5 Paul asserts that the things created by God, marriage and eating, are to be “consecrated by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:5, RSV). Most of the attention given to 1 Timothy 4:5 is

⁵⁷ For a further discussion, consult the author’s exegetical paper on Genesis 9:3-7, “Why Meat?”, appearing in the *Messianic Kosher Helper*.

⁵⁸ *Thayer*, 250.

⁵⁹ “I will send as it were creeping animals on the land” (NETS) or “I will send as it were reptiles on the land” (LXE).

⁶⁰ *BibleWorks 7.0: Louw-Nida Lexicon*. MS Windows XP. Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2006. CD-ROM.

⁶¹ Knight, 192.

⁶² “To forbid to marry suggests that there is something evil in sex or marriage or both. But God created us as sexual beings. Therefore, both are good when properly used” (Demarest, 196).

⁶³ As a kosher-keeping Messianic, I am here referring to things to eat in general terms. Those who stay away from protein, or who only eat carbohydrates, or who only eat certain kinds of fruits and avoid various vegetables, or who eat large quantities of sugar—are bound to have physical problems.

⁶⁴ Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*, 105.

understandably attached to praying at mealtimes, a rather regular occurrence for First Century Jews, and modern Jews and Christians as well, as thanks are issued to the Lord for His bounty and provision. Yet in recognizing how He created marriage to be good as well, we need not forget how Scripture reading and prayer were always a critical part in marriage ceremonies of Biblical times, and likewise up until today.

Thanking God for food is something that is most appropriate, especially as the Torah instructs, “When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you” (Deuteronomy 8:10). Thankfulness is certainly a theme which Paul employs in other letters (1 Corinthians 10:30; Romans 14:6). Being thankful to the Lord for what one eats is true whether a prayer is issued before (Mark 6:41; 8:6; Matthew 14:19), during (Mark 14:22-23), or after eating. In current Jewish tradition, it is most typical for a prayer of blessing to be issued following meals, as one can thank God for the bounty He has just provided.⁶⁵ The Talmud actually records a wide variety of blessings that can be employed for thanking the Lord regarding various aspects of His good Creation:

How does one say a blessing over produce? Over produce of a tree one says, “Creator of the fruit of the tree,” except for wine. For over wine one says, “Creator of the fruit of the vine.” And over produce of the earth, one says, “Creator of fruit of the ground,” except for a bread. For over bread one says, “He who brings forth bread from the earth,” and over vegetables one says, “Creator of the fruit of the ground.” R. Judah says, “Creator of diverse kinds of herbs.”

What is the source of this rule [that one must say a blessing before eating produce]? It is in accord with what our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority: “The fruit thereof shall be holy, for giving praise to the Lord” (Lev. 19:24). [This verse refers to produce in the fourth year after planting a given tree.] This teaches that [produce] requires the recitation of a blessing, both before and after eating. On the basis of the foregoing exegesis, R. Aqiba said, “It is forbidden for a person to taste anything before reciting a blessing” (b.Berachot 35a).⁶⁶

Christians today who frown on the relevance of *kashrut* will claim that any form of meat, most especially unclean things like pork or shellfish, should not be rejected if Believers simply pray and thank God before eating. But how does this fit into the specific background of the Ephesian false teaching? Abstaining from meat would affect kosher-keeping First Century Believers who ate clean meats. Marshall & Towner make the nuanced remark on 1 Timothy 4:5, “It now becomes clear that the foods rejected by the heretics were regarded as unclean and therefore inedible,” which might lead one to think that the false teaching involved advocating a high degree of kosher. Yet they actually have to go on to indicate, “The cleansing of foods rejected under Jewish food laws is probably not in mind.”⁶⁷ Contrary to the thoughts of modern Christians who might think that “all meat is clean,” the false teachers in Ephesus would have held to the exact reverse idea of “all meat is unclean.” Paul simply argues in 1 Timothy 4:1-5 that the basic principle of eating meat is sound as the animals were created by God; he does not really argue about the specifics of *kashrut* law or its validity here.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ J.H. Hertz, ed., *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, revised (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1960), pp 964-981; Jules Harlow, ed., *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2007), pp 337-350.

⁶⁶ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*. MS Windows XP. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005. CD-ROM.

⁶⁷ Marshall & Towner, 545.

⁶⁸ Some general Messianic thoughts regarding 1 Timothy 4:1-5, associating this text with some form of asceticism or (proto-)Gnosticism are seen in Hope Egan, *Holy Cow! Does God Care About What We Eat?* (Shelbyville, TN: Heart of Wisdom, 2012), pp 123-125; Aaron Eby, *Biblically Kosher: A Messianic Jewish Perspective on Kashrut* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2012), pp 52-56.