

MESSIANIC

KOSHER HELPER

edited by Margaret McKee Huey
with J.K. McKee

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
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Messianic Kosher Helper

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Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as *TWOT* for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

- ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
Ara: Aramaic
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)
b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.
BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)
BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)
CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)
CJSB: Complete Jewish Study Bible (2016)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)
Ger: German
GNT: Greek New Testament
Grk: Greek
HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)
HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
Heb: Hebrew
HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*
ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*
Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)
JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
KJV: King James Version
Lattimore: The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore (1996)
LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)
LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)
LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)
LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
LXX: Septuagint
m. Mishnah

MARV: Messianic Apologetics Revised Version*

MT: Masoretic Text

NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)

NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)

NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*

NEB: New English Bible (1970)

Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*

NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)

NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*

NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*

NIV: New International Version (1984)

NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)

NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)

NKJV: New King James Version (1982)

NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)

NLT: New Living Translation (1996)

NT: New Testament

OT: Old Testament

REB: Revised English Bible (1989)

RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)

t. Tosefta

Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament

Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*

TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*

TLV: Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version (2014)

TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)

TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition

v(s). verse(s)

Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*

Vul: Latin Vulgate

YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

WMB: World Messianic Bible (2020)

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A Summarization of Jewish Kosher Traditions

Margaret McKee Huey and J.K. McKee

To most outsiders who encounter the Messianic Jewish movement, when hearing something about kosher or *kashrut*, what they mostly think about are instructions within the Torah or Law of Moses, which prohibit the consumption of unclean meats such as pork or shellfish. Much of the Messianic community has promoted what it considers to be "Biblically kosher," which primarily begins and ends at not eating pork and shellfish. In traditional Judaism, however, what it means to be **kosher**, is much more involved than observant Jews not eating certain meats labeled to be "unclean." *Kashrut* involves classification of unclean meats to be sure, but also involves some significant traditions regarding the butchering of animals, how meat is to be prepared, what can and cannot be eaten together, and separation of utensils and cookware. It also involves a variety of theological and philosophical reasons proposed for the institution of these Biblical instructions, and their subsequent interpretation and application over the centuries, by Jewish religious authorities and diverse Jewish communities.

Much of the broad Messianic movement considers kosher to just involve not eating pork or shellfish, yet it is clear even from a reading of instructions in the Torah, that this is a rather simplistic and under-developed approach to this issue. Likewise, even with a diverse number of internal Messianic views on the theological aspects of the Torah's dietary laws—but ones which are more positive than not regarding their continued validity in the post-resurrection era—there is not a huge amount of

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understanding for what it means to be ***kosher*** in much of traditional Judaism. Even if many Messianic people, for example, do not think that it is necessary to separate meat and dairy, or have multiple sets of dishes or utensils, or that most food items they purchase have an *hechsher* or official symbol of kosher approval—they still, as members of a movement, with an explicit mandate to declare the good news of Israel’s Messiah to the Jewish people, need to know a few things about Jewish kosher traditions and observance. Given the importance of the kosher dietary laws for Judaism and the Jewish people throughout the centuries, every Messianic person, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, should have a familiarity with how the Torah’s dietary laws have been interpreted and applied over the centuries.

How are any of us to understand how the kosher dietary laws have been approached by Judaism? It has been noted how many contemporary Jewish people, actually can struggle with the dietary laws.¹ This is, as one should see, true for any number of reasons. Orthodox Jewish interpretation and application of the Torah’s dietary laws, is highly restrictive when it comes to interactions with the outside world, as Orthodox Jews will have to be widely constrained to their own communities, to find food items and products which have been prepared according to their standards. On the exact opposite side of this is a Reform Jewish community, which makes up the majority Jewish population in the United States, thinking that the dietary laws were only important for Ancient Israel and today communicate no significant sense of holiness for Jewish people—and a majority of Reform Jews today do not keep any degree of kosher. There are other, more graded levels of kosher observance, present in other branches of Judaism, such as the Conservative movement, allowing for more flexibility than the Orthodox. There are Jews who keep kosher for cultural, not Biblical reasons, and those who keep kosher for ecological, health, or some other personally preferred reasons.²

Given the diversity of approaches, both communal to various branches of the Synagogue and personal to individual Jewish people, it might not be possible for any one of us to understand all Jewish kosher traditions. But, it is very possible for us to have a better understanding and appreciation for how kosher has been widely followed and approached by the Jewish

¹ George Robinson, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), 247.

² A number of important Jewish resources on the subject of kosher include, but are not limited to: Samuel H. Dresner, *The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning for Our Time* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly of America, 1982); Yacov Lipschutz, *Kashruth: A comprehensive background and reference guide to the principles of Kashruth* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd, 1989); Lisë Stern, *How to Keep Kosher: A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding Jewish Dietary Laws* (New York: William Morrow, 2004).

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people at large. For, whether today's Messianic community is aware of it or not—a great many Jewish kosher traditions are observed by those who claim to *only* be following Holy Scripture! Many significant interpretations and applications of the Torah's dietary instructions, as actually instituted by the Rabbinical authorities, are observed by those who even just avoid pork and shellfish in their eating habits.

Clean and Unclean

A significant component of understanding what "kosher" involves, surrounds the terms "**clean**" and "**unclean**." While "clean" and "unclean" are logically to be associated with different meats regarded in the Torah as acceptable and unacceptable for eating, these same terms are also associated with a wide degree of human activities which render a person physically or spiritually contaminated, defiled, or engrossed in some sort of immoral or sinful behavior. A significant Jewish book written on the topic of kosher, *Kosher Living*, by Conservative Rabbi Ron Isaacs (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), actually has as its sub-title: *It's More Than Just the Food*. Being "kosher," as it were, extends far beyond what is considered to be an acceptable diet for God's people in the Torah; it also involves their behavior, attitudes, and actions. For presumably, as people learn how to separate things in their diet, they will also be trained and disciplined, to likewise learn how to separate their thoughts, and make more well-informed and conscious decisions about their lives.

Some of the main Hebrew terms employed in the Tanach for "clean" include the verb *taheir*, widely regarding "to **be clean**" (Qal stem) or "to **cleanse, purify**" (Piel stem); the adjective *tahor*, "pure" or "**ceremonially clean**" or "**ethically clean**"; and the noun *tahorah*, "(ceremonial) **cleanliness**," "**establishment of ceremonial cleanliness**," "**cleansing, purifying**" (*HALOT*).³ As summarized by *IDB*,

"The basic root for conveying the idea of 'cleanliness' is [*taheir*] (active, 'to be clean' [Lev. 15:13; 22:4]; intensive, 'to cleanse' [Lev. 16:30; Num. 8:6]; causative reflexive, 'to cleanse oneself' [Num. 8:7; Josh. 22:17]; derived nouns [*tahor*], 'clearness' [Exod. 24:10] or 'purifying' [Lev. 12:4], and [*tahorah*], 'cleansing' [Lev. 13:7; Num. 6:9]; adjective, [*tahor*], 'clean' [Gen. 7:2; Lev. 11:47]). In...Ezekiel...the intensive and causative forms of the verb 'to sin' ([*chatta*]) are used of purification rituals, and are normally translated 'to cleanse' (Lev. 14:52; Num 19:19; Ezek. 43:20) and 'to cleanse oneself' (Num. 19:12-13, 20). The fact that the verb forms in question should mean 'offer a sin offering for' indicates the close relationship in OT thought between SIN and uncleanness; both

³ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 1:369, 370.

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represent a contamination of the true nature by an alien element" (*IDB*).⁴

Some of the main Hebrew terms employed in the Tanach for "unclean," include the verb *tamei*, widely regarding "to **become ceremonially unclean**" (Qal stem) or "to **defile**" or "to **declare unclean**" (Piel stem); the adjective *tamei*, "unclean" or "ceremonially unclean"; and the noun *tumeah*, "state of ceremonial uncleanness" (*HALOT*).⁵ *IDB* further details,

"The idea of 'uncleanness' is expressed by derivatives of the root [*t-m-a*], the direct opposite of [*taheir*]. The verb ([*tamei*]) means 'to be unclean' (Lev. 15:32; 22:6), the passive form of 'to defile oneself' (Lev. 11:43; Num. 5:13), the intensive form 'to make or declare unclean' (Lev. 13:3, 8, 11, 15; Num. 35:34), the causative reflexive form 'to defile oneself' (Lev. 11:43; Ezek. 14:11). The noun ([*tumeah*]) means 'uncleanness' or 'filthiness' (Lev. 5:3; 7:20; Num. 19:13; Ezek. 22:15), and the adjective ([*tamei*]) means 'unclean' (Lev. 11:35; Isa. 64:6; Ezek. 4:13)" (*IDB*).⁶

The main Hebrew terms for "clean," *tahor*, and "unclean," *tamei*, are obviously different from the term ***kosher***, which is seldom seen in the Bible itself. The *Jewish Study Bible* summarizes some of the main points regarding the term kosher, and how Judaism has approached much of it:

"***kosher*** (Heb 'fit' or 'proper') a general term used in postbiblical texts for dietary laws; usually applied to food, but also to other ritual objects and practices. Most dietary laws apply to meat: It may not be consumed with blood in it, certain kinds of internal fat are not to be eaten, it may not be consumed along with dairy products, and some meats (e.g., pork), sea creatures (e.g., shellfish), and 'creeping things' (e.g., snails) are not permitted" (*The Jewish Study Bible*).⁷

A term more specific than *kosher*, and which does carry with it some significant theological ramifications, is ***kashrut***, "fitness, worthiness, legitimacy" (*Jastrow*).⁸ Widely encountered in extra-Biblical Jewish materials, the term *kasheir* involves what is "fit, esp. *kasher*, ritually

⁴ L.E. Toombs, "Clean and unclean," in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:642.

⁵ *HALOT*, 1:375, 376.

⁶ Toombs, "Clean and unclean," in *IDB*, 1:642.

⁷ Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp 2132-2133.

⁸ Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Treasury, 2004), 678.

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permitted, legal," not only involving clean and unclean meats, but also involving things that are "*worthy, honest, of noble conduct*" (*Jastrow*).⁹ In a Biblical context, the verb *kasheir* largely relates to "be advantageous, proper, suitable, succeed" (*BDB*),¹⁰ as is seen in the following examples:

"She said, 'If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor before him and it seems right [proper, NASU] to the king [v'kasheir ha'davar l'fnei ha'melekh], and if I am pleasing in his eyes, let an edict be written rescinding the dispatches devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are throughout the king's provinces'" (Esther 8:5, TLV).

"If the iron axe is blunt and one doesn't sharpen the edge, then he must exert more force. **So wisdom has the advantage of giving success** [v'yitron ha'kesheir chokmah]" (Ecclesiastes 10:10, TLV).

"In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not let your hand be idle, for you do not know if this or that **will succeed** [yikshar], or if both will prosper together" (Ecclesiastes 11:6, TLV).

The term ***kosher***, which one will widely encounter today, is often concluded to originate from a mixture of Yiddish and Hebrew, although it originates directly from the Hebrew root *kaf-shin-resh* (*k-sh-r*).¹¹

While in much English speech, it is common to simply hear the terms ***non-kosher*** or ***unkosher*** used as the antithesis of ***kosher***, it is not uncommon at all to hear the term ***treif*** also used to describe non-kosher meats or animals. It is derived from the Hebrew of Exodus 22:31, "You are to be a holy people for Me. You must not eat any flesh torn by beasts in the field. You may throw it out to the dogs" (TLV). Here, the term *terefah* means, "animal torn (by wild beasts); torn flesh" (*BDB*).¹² *Treif* is a Yiddish derivation which has been incorporated into the vocabulary of many contemporary Jews, now used to label unclean meats like pork.

Meats Acceptable for Consumption

A huge part of contemplating the topic of "kosher," is obviously being aware of what animals the Torah declares acceptable for consumption. The most minimal form of kosher understanding, is recognizing that the Torah regards animals such as the pig, and all shellfish, as being unclean. Your average Bible readers in today's Messianic community, tend to focus

⁹ *Jastrow*, 677.

¹⁰ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 506.

¹¹ Cf. the summary provided by Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, 18.

¹² *BDB*, 383; cf. *Jastrow*, 554.

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almost all of their attention on Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Yet, it should be obvious that there are more instructions in the Torah which inform the reader what *kashrut* is all about, as well as some critical areas regarding human approaches to animals. And beyond this, whether some are consciously aware of it or not, various Rabbinical traditions and rulings, do play a role in classifying some things as "kosher" or "fit."

Originally in the Garden of Eden, humanity was only permitted to eat fruits and vegetables (Genesis 1:29), and along with this it has to be noted how it was Adam and Eve's crime of eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 2:17; 3:6-24) which caused the Fall. At the time of the Flood, Noah was notably directed by God to take with him two pairs of every animal, but along with this seven pairs of clean animals (Genesis 7:2) were to be taken as well. Following the Flood, formal permission was granted to Noah to eat meat, provided that the blood of the meat was not consumed (Genesis 9:2-4).

With the formal giving of the Torah to Ancient Israel via Moses, what some of the clean and unclean animals actually are would be detailed. The main requirements for *land animals* is that they have a divided hoof and chew a cud (Leviticus 11:3; Deuteronomy 14:7), which would include animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, deer, and various other wild game (Deuteronomy 14:4-6). Animals which are notably prohibited include the camel, the rock badger, the rabbit, and most especially the pig (Leviticus 11:4-7; Deuteronomy 14:7-8). Among the land animals consumed within a more-or-less traditional Western diet, not eating pork, and eating from cud-chewing animals with a split hoof like cows, sheep, and goats, is something which has notably distinguished the Jewish people over the ages, and which does serve as a sign of Jewish identity to many outsiders.

The issue of what regards clean and unclean *birds*, is a bit more complicated than those of land animals. There are a number of birds of prey regarded as unclean in the Torah, which include birds like the eagle, vulture, hawk, raven, and the ostrich (Leviticus 11:13-19; Deuteronomy 14:11-18). What notably does not appear within the lists of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, is what birds are considered clean and acceptable for consumption (Deuteronomy 14:20). Notwithstanding the fact that some of the birds prohibited by the Torah may be extinct today, birds which are considered to be kosher and acceptable for eating by the Jewish community, are those which have been ruled as kosher entirely by the Rabbinical tradition.¹³ Birds considered clean and eaten by Jews today include, but are not limited to: chicken, duck, and goose.

The role of the Rabbinic tradition in determining kosher birds has been especially key for classifying a New World bird like the turkey as kosher.

¹³ Lipschutz, pp 18-19; Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, pp 26-27.

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One of the main rules for determining whether a bird is kosher or not, as witnessed in the Mishnah, is that

"Any fowl which seizes is unclean. Any [fowl] which has an extra talon [the hallux] and a craw, and the skin of the stomach of which [can] be stripped off is clean" (m. *Chullin* 3:6).¹⁴

The classification for clean and unclean birds also extends to the eggs of such birds (b. *Chullin* 64b). Eggs which have a blood spot, indicating that fertilization has taken place, are to be discarded and not consumed.¹⁵

The instruction regarding clean and unclean **fish**, while fish can be eaten from both freshwater or saltwater sources, is that clean fish have both fins and scales (Leviticus 11:9-10; Deuteronomy 14:9-10). This seems to be straightforward enough. There are plenty of fish which have determinable fins and scales, and popular shellfish such as shrimp, crabs, lobsters, oysters, and clams would be definitively unclean. Yet, there are enough fish which need some decisive ruling made on whether or not they might be kosher. A major ruling seen in the Talmud regarding fins and scales states,

"*Our rabbis taught on Tannaite authority*: If [a species of fish has no fins and scales] now but is going to grow them later on, for example, the sultanic fish and the aphis fish, lo, this [species of fish] is permitted. If it has [fins and scales] now but is going to slough them off when it is taken out of the water, for example, the colias, scomber, swordfish, anthias, and tunny, it is permitted [b. A.Z. 39a]" (b. *Chullin* 66b).¹⁶

As is seen in later Jewish practice, some of these guidelines have been altered a bit, as time has progressed and the Jewish community has spread worldwide, especially into places beyond the Mediterranean basin.¹⁷

Multiple Jewish resources on kosher have provided various lists, some rather extensive, with the scientific names of specific fish, which are regarded as permissible and/or non-permissible for eating.¹⁸ Yet, it has to be recognized how there is not agreement among all kosher-keeping Jewish sects that some fish are to be regarded as unclean. A notable disagreement to be aware of, is how "The Committee of Laws and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly of America (Conservative) has ruled

¹⁴ Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 772.

¹⁵ Lipschutz, pp 51-53.

¹⁶ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*. MS Windows XP. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005. CD-ROM.

¹⁷ Lipschutz, pp 47-48 summarizes some of this, from an Orthodox Jewish perspective.

¹⁸ Dresner, pp 82-93; Lipschutz, pp 139-160; Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, 64.

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that both the sturgeon and swordfish are permitted, whereas in England the Ashkenazi authorities forbid sturgeon while the Sephardi permit it" (*EJ*).¹⁹

While not common to much of the traditional Western diet today, the Torah does permit various types of *insects* to be eaten. The requirements for insects being designated as clean, is that they must walk on four legs, and have their feet joined for jumping (*Leviticus 11:21*). This would namely include the locust, cricket, and the grasshopper as being kosher for eating (*Leviticus 11:22*). Honey from bees is notably considered to be kosher (*b.Bekhorot 7b*), as bees merely transfer nectar from flowers to the honeycomb.

Another important guideline, derived from *Genesis 9:4*, "Only flesh with its life—that is, its blood—you must not eat!" (TLV), is how it is morally and ethically reprehensible to eat flesh which has been torn from a live animal. While commonly perceived within Judaism as being a part of the so-called Noahide laws,²⁰ the Talmud does record a connection made between *Genesis 9:4* and eating the flesh torn from a live animal:

"Is it possible to suppose that the prohibition of cutting a limb from a living beast should not apply to [the children of Noah]?' Scripture says, 'But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, you shall not eat' (*Gen. 9:4*)" (*b.Sanhedrin 59b*).²¹

Further points to be reviewed, regard how clean animals with various diseases and defects should not be regarded as fit, and thusly rendered as non-kosher. This may involve some kind of examination of the internal organs of an animal.²²

A final Torah regulation to be aware of, which can be easily glossed over, is the direction, "Speak to *Bnei-Yisrael*, saying: You are to eat no fat of a bull or sheep or goat" (*Leviticus 7:23*, TLV; cf. 3:17). This is obviously not speaking of the *fat* which is naturally marbled into meat, because otherwise no one would be able to eat any meat. Rather, this is referring to the significant fat portions of the animal, which need to be trimmed away by butchering.

¹⁹ Harry Rabinowicz, "Dietary Laws," in Roth, Cecil, and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds. *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), 6:27.

²⁰ Consult the Messianic Apologetics FAQ, "Noahide Laws."

²¹ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

²² Lipschutz, pp 22-23.

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Ritual Slaughter and Preparation

A definite requirement seen of eating meat in the Torah, is the need for the blood of animals slaughtered to be drained and not consumed. As is specified in Deuteronomy 12:21, 23-25,

"If the place *ADONAI* your God chooses to put His Name is too far from you, then you may slaughter any of your herd and flock that *ADONAI* has given you—as I have commanded you—and you may eat within your gates, all your soul's desire...Only be sure that you do not eat the blood—for the blood is the life, and you are not to eat the life with the meat. You are not to eat it—you are to pour it out on the ground like water. You are not to eat it, so that it may go well with you and your children after you, when you do what is right in *ADONAI*'s eyes" (Deuteronomy 12:21, 23-25, TLV).

Given the Torah's direction about blood being prohibited from consumption, there are extensive guidelines followed in Jewish tradition (b.*Chullin* 8a-9a) about how clean animals are to be slaughtered and butchered. Known as *shechitah*, "cutting the throat, slaughtering according to the Jewish ritual" (Jastrow),²³ they involve the selection of a sharp knife which will cut decisively into the animal, causing almost immediate unconsciousness, and for the most amount of blood to be drained.²⁴

Given the strong words against consuming blood found in the Torah (Leviticus 7:26-27; 17:10-14), and the fact that even with traditional Jewish slaughter intended to quickly render an animal unconscious and see its heart pump out blood—there will still be traces of blood within meat. In traditional observance of *kashrut*, meat which has been butchered will be soaked in salt water within seventy-two hours, to assure for the meat not having any final traces of blood coagulated within it.²⁵

One of the notable advantages of the religious freedom provided in the United States, as has been recognize, is how *shechitah*, traditional Jewish slaughter, has always been legal and permitted.²⁶ This has not always been the case, in various European countries.

Another aspect of traditional Jewish slaughter, is based on Genesis 32:33:

²³ Jastrow, 1547.

²⁴ Consult the summaries provided by Lipschutz, pp 19-21; Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), pp 659-660; Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, pp 33-37.

²⁵ Eisenberg, *JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*, pp 660-661.

²⁶ Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, 43.

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"That is why the children of Israel do not eat the tendon of the hip socket, to this very day, because He struck the socket of Jacob's thigh on the tendon of the hip" (Genesis 32:33, TLV).

The hindquarters of cows and sheep are not typically eaten, due to the placement of the sciatic nerve. A good part of a kosher-slaughtered cow, for example, is traditionally sold to non-kosher butchers. Yet, there are some trained Jewish butchers who do know how to cut out the sciatic nerve. Customarily, Ashkenazic Jews do not eat hindquarters, while Sephardic Jews do.²⁷

Milk and Meat

One of the most noticeable features of traditional Jewish observance of *kashrut*, is the separation of milk and meat products. This understanding is rooted from a statement appearing within the Torah:

"Do not boil a kid in its mother's milk" (Exodus 23:19b, TLV; cf. 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21).

As the Talmud comments on this statement,

"In its mother's milk" — [from this verse] all I would know is that [it is prohibited to seethe it in] its mother's milk. What is the source of the assertion [that it is prohibited to cook meat] in its own milk? You may derive this as follows from an inference *a fortiori*. What is the case [regarding this law]? It was not prohibited to slaughter the offspring with other offspring on the same day. It was prohibited to slaughter the offspring with the mother on the same day. In a case where it was prohibited to cook the offspring with other 'offspring' [(lit.: produce) here taken to mean the milk] is it not logical to conclude that it was prohibited to cook the 'offspring' [i.e., the milk of the kid] with the mother? It comes to teach us, 'In its mother's milk.' [By mentioning the phrase again it teaches that it is prohibited to cook it in any milk.]"
(b. *Chullin* 114b).²⁸

Here, it is concluded that mixing a kid in its mother's milk, should be taken to mean that slaughtering a mother and its offspring at the same time should be prohibited. It is also concluded that cooking meat in milk products is likewise prohibited. Various reasons have been proposed for the Torah regulation, including, as stated by *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism*, that it is "probably as a measure against paganism, which

²⁷ Dresner, 55.

²⁸ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

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prepared charms by seething kids in their mother's milk.²⁹ However, the Torah's direction about not boiling or seething a kid in its mother's milk, has obviously been extrapolated to mean that neither milk nor meat products may be prepared or eaten together. The main dairy products which are not supposed to be served with meat, would obviously include things such as cheese, butter, sour cream, and fresh cream.

Usually among observant Jews, meat and dairy products are not consumed within a six-hour period of each other, although there can be significant variance among Jewish communities.³⁰

Concurrent with the separation of eating meat and dairy items together, is how observant Jews also make sure that meat and dairy products are stored separately, and that there must be separate meat and dairy utensils in place for food preparation and serving.³¹

While the separation of meat and dairy, in traditional Jewish observance of *kashrut*, does carry with it the implication that popular treats such as cheeseburgers or a beef lasagna would be off limits—there are a significant number of items classified as *pareve* or “neutral” in *kashrut* law. These mainly include fish, eggs, fruits, vegetables, and grains,³² which may be served with either meat or dairy products.

Also not to be overlooked, are various issues and positions present among sectors of Judaism regarding milk. This not only concerns milk from kosher animals, but differences of opinion between Orthodox and Conservative Jews concerning which milk products may be consumed.³³

Modern Jewish Approaches to Kosher

While much of what we have summarized in this article involves various traditional, Orthodox and/or Conservative Jewish approaches to the Torah's dietary laws and their application—we have to be reminded how there are many, many modern Jews today, who do not keep kosher. Even among those who keep a kosher diet in the modern era, and throughout multiple centuries of Jewish history, there have been a diverse number of reasons proposed for the dietary laws.

What is the purpose of *kashrut*? Does it just pertain to obedience to God? Does it just involve Jewish distinctiveness or exclusivity, when compared or contrasted to the nations? Are there any physical or psychological or spiritual dynamics to the dietary laws? The *EJ* article on

²⁹ “Dietary Laws,” in Geoffrey Wigoder, ed. et. al., *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Publishing House, 2002), 215.

³⁰ Cf. the summary offered by Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, 53.

³¹ Lipschutz, pp 43-44 details some of the main aspects of this.

³² Dresner, 59.

³³ Cf. the summary offered by Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, pp 59-60.

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"Dietary Laws," describes a number of the main reasons which have been suggested for kosher:

"Throughout the ages, many attempts have been made to explain the dietary laws. The Pentateuch itself does not explain them, although in three separate passages in the Bible they are closely associated with the concept of 'holiness.' Thus, Exodus 22:30 states: 'And ye shall be holy unto Me; therefore ye shall not eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; ye shall cast it to the dogs.' Leviticus repeats the idea: 'For I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy, for I am holy; neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of swarming thing that moveth upon the earth' (Lev. 11:44-45). Finally, Deuteronomy 14:21 states: 'Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself; thou mayest give it unto the stranger that is within thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto a foreigner; for thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God.' The Pentateuch classifies the dietary laws as *hukkim*, 'divine statutes,' which by definition are not explained in the text (Yoma 67b). It has been variously suggested that the underlying motivation for the dietary laws are hygienic and sanitary, aesthetic and folkloric, or ethical and psychological" (EJ).³⁴

From a theological or philosophical standpoint, this same article goes on to detail,

"In Ezekiel 33:25, the prophet equates the eating of blood with the sins of idolatry and murder. One interpretation of this verse teaches that the dietary laws are ethical in intent, since abstention from the consumption of blood tames man's instinct for violence by instilling in him a horror of bloodshed. This is the view expressed in a letter by Aristeas, an unknown Egyptian Jew (probably of the first century B.C.E.), who states that the dietary laws are meant to instill men with a spirit of justice, and to teach them certain moral lessons. Thus, the injunction against the consumption of birds of prey was intended to demonstrate that man should not prey on others (Arist. 14:2-7). Philo, the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, also suggests that creatures with evil instincts are forbidden lest men, too, develop these instincts (Spec. 4:118)" (EJ).³⁵

While there are surely going to be various ancillary reasons proposed for the Torah's dietary laws—which may include the association of unclean animals with pagan idolatry, hygiene and health, and what the behavior of various animals may teach human people—the main reason as stated in

³⁴ Rabinowicz, "Dietary Laws," in EJ, 6:42.

³⁵ Ibid.

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Scripture itself (Leviticus 11:44) is **holiness**. *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* is right to direct one's attention,

"Thus Jews were required to avoid anything that could defile them, either physically or spiritually. The consumption of nonkosher food impedes people's ability to elevate and sanctify themselves, dulling their spiritual potential and creating a barrier between Jews and their perceptions of holiness" (*The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*).³⁶

While the Torah prescribes *holiness* or *sanctification* as being the main reason for God issuing the kosher dietary laws, many Jewish people today—perhaps even the majority of worldwide Jewry—actually do not keep a high level, or any level, of kosher. *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism* records how while kosher eating has been historically viewed as a major component of Jewish identity, things changed substantially in the Nineteenth Century with the advent of Reform Judaism, which rejected the importance of the dietary laws as conveying any sense of spirituality or holiness to Jewish people. Conservative Judaism is less stringent on particulars of kosher than Orthodox Judaism, and in the late Twentieth to early Twenty-First Centuries there has been a resurgence of kosher observance within much of the Jewish community:

"Until the modern period, *kashrut* was one of the touchstones of Jewish observance and one of the unmistakable marks of Jewish identity. The 19th-century REFORM movement in Germany decided that the dietary laws were connected with the Temple ritual and were to be regarded as a temporary regulation, not integral to the Jewish religion. American Reform Judaism rejected the dietary laws at its Pittsburgh Conference of 1885, declaring that 'they fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness,' and that 'their observance in our day is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.' Today, the dietary laws are disregarded by a large segment of the Jewish people. CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM adheres to the laws of *kashrut*, although there is a tendency to select the more lenient options available in the *halakhah* over stricter rulings that may have previously gained acceptance. Observance of the dietary laws has recently enjoyed a certain revival in various Jewish communities with numerous kosher products widely available and new kosher restaurants opening. In the State of Israel, nearly all food products are produced under rabbinical supervision to ensure conformity with the dietary laws. In the Israel Defense Forces and public institutions, the dietary laws are observed" (*The New Encyclopedia of Judaism*).³⁷

³⁶ Eisenberg, 665.

³⁷ "Dietary Laws," in *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism*, 216.

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While both the Orthodox and Conservative sects of Judaism accept the kosher dietary laws as being valid for Jews of the modern era, there are differences in their application to be sure.³⁸ Conservative Jews have, at times, notably had to struggle with keeping relatively kosher homes, but then eating non-kosher meat items outside of the home—and this has contributed to intermarriage and assimilation and a dismissal of Jewishness. Various authorities, reflecting on the development of kosher within more modern Jewish history, have considered this to be a major problem which modern Jews, interacting with larger non-Jewish society in the Diaspora, is going to have to contend with. It has even been noted that a failure to keep kosher, could lead to some degree of Jewish generational extinction.³⁹

Interestingly enough, over the past two decades or so, Reform Judaism—while historically seen to not encourage Jews to keep the Torah’s dietary laws—has begun something of a reinvestigation of various Torah instructions. The Reform community, while not exactly encouraging observance of *kashrut*, will not, however, prohibit it either. The Reform community may also be seen to observe what it labels as “eco-kashrut,” concerned with “the labor conditions of the workers who produced a particular product, the environmental friendliness of the packaging used, and the treatment of the animals before being slaughtered” (Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*).⁴⁰ Many Reform Jews then, may be seen to adhere to the apparent “spirit” of the kosher dietary laws, by making sure that many food items they purchase are labeled either “organic” or “fair-trade”—among many possible designations which would get them to pay attention to what they eat.⁴¹

Perhaps because of issues of modern Jewish identity, too much multiculturalism in the West, too much intermarriage and assimilation—or any number of other factors—there has been a resurgence of some degree of kosher observance by many people within the Reform Jewish community.⁴²

³⁸ “Dietary Laws,” in R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Widoger, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 202.

³⁹ Dresner, pp 44-46.

⁴⁰ Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*, 9.

⁴¹ A further examination of how the topic of kosher, and eating in general, as has been approached by many contemporary Reform Jews, is witnessed in Mary L. Zamore, ed., *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2011).

⁴² Cf. the summary offered by Robinson, *Essential Judaism*, 252.

Messianics Approaching Traditional Jewish Kashrut

In our experience as a Messianic, non-Jewish family since 1995, our observance of the kosher dietary laws, for the most part, has been limited to abstention from pork and shellfish—which is the same basic level of kosher observance present within the broad Messianic community. There are, as one will find, however, various Messianic Jewish people who do look much more carefully for a *hechsher* seal of approval on various, if not most, food items they purchase; the meat that they purchase will be from authorized kosher butchers; and there will be those who separate out meat and dairy. On the whole, though—even among many Messianic Jews who were raised in strictly observant homes—there is more the tenor of “Biblically kosher” (as could be seen in the resurgent sectors of the Reform Jewish community), which means not eating the flesh of non-kosher animals, birds, and aquatic life. There are various Messianic congregations which will insist, for congregational events at the congregational facility, that meat and dairy be separated, or that *pareve* be observed with a menu only consisting of fish and cheese—but then not insist upon this at extra-congregational activities at a private home, where meat and dairy will be mixed, and some form of “Biblically kosher” observed.

It is doubtful, even with Messianic people being aware of the different levels of *kashrut* observance present within the major sectors of contemporary Judaism, that very many are even going to practice a Conservative Jewish level of kosher keeping. Most are going to limit their observance—some because of practical issues regarding extended family and friends, and others far more because of budgetary constraints—to basically abstain from pork and shellfish, with some nominally separating out meat and dairy, and perhaps with purchasing authorized kosher meat on occasions when it is available and affordable. **This does not, however, mean that today's Messianic people should remain ignorant or unaware of the major traditions associated with kosher present in Judaism.** Too many Messianic people, in their witness to Jewish people who do not know Yeshua—even if they are Reform Jews who do not keep kosher—are too quick to dismiss the separation of meat and dairy, or the presence of a *hechsher*, as some sort of vain “traditions of men.”

We need to do much, much better in understanding what some of the major Jewish traditions are regarding kosher, the Biblical passages they are based upon, and how we can be more sensitive to the needs of others—*even if we might not necessarily follow such an elaborate level of kosher eating ourselves, or in our homes.* For, if we do not at least try to understand the position of someone else, regarding the convictions they have in interpreting God's Torah—perhaps in the words of the Apostle Paul, “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22, ESV)—how will we be able to establish some

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common ground and valued trust, to communicate the truths of the good news, to Jewish people who need to know their Messiah?