

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

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)

^{*} This is a modified and adapted edition of the public domain World Messianic Bible (WMB).

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Being Realistic About Kosher

J.K. McKee

The subject matter of the kosher dietary laws is one which, I have to admit, tends to bring about a wide degree of personal consternation within me when I see it discussed. **I do not think that when the issue of *kashrut* being valid for God's people in the post-resurrection era, is brought up by contemporary Messianics, it tends to be addressed that well.** There are many passages of the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament which remain quantitatively ignored by those of the pro-kosher side, or are at least addressed in a sub-standard manner, with important details left out (i.e., Mark 7:19; Acts 10, 11; Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 10:24-33; 1 Timothy 4:14-16; Titus 1:14-16; Hebrews 9:8-10; 13:9-10; et. al.). Too many Biblical passages, which may seemingly imply that the kosher dietary laws were intended only for the pre-resurrection era, have been either shuffled off by the wayside, or too overly-simplified, by many teachers and leaders within the Messianic community.

More important to be sure, regarding one's dietary or eating preferences, is how many on the pro-kosher side can have a tendency to over-magnify the importance of this issue, beyond what is reasonably acceptable. Yeshua Himself said, about eating anything which enters into one's mouth, "Don't you grasp that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and then is ejected into the sewer? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and those things make the man unholy" (Matthew 15:17-18, TLV). Yet, there are many Messianic teachers, Hebrew Roots aficionados, and certainly scores of individuals—who either subconsciously *or* consciously place eating bacon or shrimp, at the same offense level as murder or adultery. They consider themselves to be ethically and morally superior to many of their

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evangelical Protestant brothers and sisters, because they do not eat the meats classified as unclean or *tamei* on the lists of Leviticus 11 or Deuteronomy 14—and many have no problem expressing a degree of malice or hatred toward them: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander” (Matthew 15:19, TLV).

Neither my family nor myself, in our Messianic quest—as we come from an evangelical background, have embraced our faith heritage in Israel’s Scriptures, and have striven to live more like Messiah Yeshua in obedience to God’s Torah—have denied that the kosher dietary laws have a role in such obedience. *We are hardly people*, especially serving in full time Messianic ministry, *who are going to tell others in our faith community that kosher has been abolished*. But, too many on the pro-kosher side **have just not made their case**. Many of them are tainted by negative attitudes toward those who do not share their convictions, and others have done a sub-standard job at offering some reasonable, alternative explanations *in detail*, of Biblical passages which have traditionally been viewed as abrogating the dietary laws. Furthermore, not a huge amount of patience or graciousness have been demonstrated toward those trying to implement a kosher or kosher-style diet in on-the-ground life circumstances, and are struggling to do so in various ways—with rigidity rather than reason too often prevailing or being forced upon them.

How do any of us, in a still-emerging and still-maturing Messianic movement, sort through some of the issues regarding “kosher”? How do we get a little more realistic about what we see among the Jewish and non-Jewish Believers within our faith community, remembering that not all people share the same views as we do, and allow for a little more grace and mercy to come forth—rather than any unfair or unnecessary condemnation? How many of our challenges have been caused by an insufficient or under-whelming handling of Bible passages—versus having been caused by an under-whelming level of spiritual maturity on behalf of too many people?

The Maccabees and Dying for Kosher

There is little doubting that at one significant point in Jewish history, Jews refused to eat pork, unclean animals, and other unacceptable animals—on the threat of death—which is a major element of contemporary *Chanukah* commemorations. The Maccabean Crisis of the Second Century B.C.E., when the Seleucid Greeks tried to impose Hellenism on the Jewish people in the Land of Israel, was something which decisively forbade the people from circumcising their sons, and forced consumption of unclean animals onto the people, by law:

"And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and feasts, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they should forget the law and change all the ordinances. And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die" (1 Maccabees 1:44-50, RSV).

The historical record is clear how

"many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food¹. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die" (1 Maccabees 1:62-63, RSV).

In 2 Maccabees 6:18, one encounters how

"Eleazar, one of the scribes in high position, a man now advanced in age and of noble presence, was being forced to open his mouth to eat swine's flesh. But he, welcoming death with honor rather than life with pollution, went up to the rack of his own accord, spitting out the flesh, as men ought to go who have the courage to refuse things that it is not right to taste, even for the natural love of life" (2 Maccabees 6:18, RSV).

These examples demonstrate how many of the Jews during this period did not eat pork, and paid for it with their lives.

The courage and dedication of the Maccabees, those resistance fighters who stood against the onslaught of Hellenism and drove out the invaders via guerilla warfare, are to be doubtlessly remembered and honored. The record of their deeds is to be studied and reflected upon as significant for Biblical history (cf. Hebrews 11:35-36). And, it is to be rightly observed how many Jewish people in subsequent history, when given the option of eating unclean things—either by force or by circumstance—have refused. Sue Fishkoff details in her book *Kosher Nation*,

"Jews have suffered and died for kashrut throughout history. The Jewish principle of *pikkuach nefesh*, the preservation of life, takes precedence over almost any other commandment in the Torah. Jews

¹ Grk. *koina*; more accurately "common" or "defiled."

"But many in Israel remained strong and fortified themselves not to eat common things" (NETS).

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are obligated to give their lives only to avoid perverse sexual relations, idolatry, or murder. But the kosher laws are so deeply ingrained within observant Jews that some will do whatever they can to avoid eating non-kosher food, even in the most dire circumstances. Some observant Jews in Nazi concentration camps and Soviet labor camps fasted on Yom Kippur, and throughout the rest of the year they picked bits of maggoty meat out from their gruel, denying their starved bodies the little bit of nutrition that extra food would have offered” (*Kosher Nation*).²

It is to be noted, of course, that given the wide sectors of a diverse Jewish community, that unlike many of the Maccabees, there have been Jewish people who would eat pork when there was nothing else to eat (m.*Yoma* 8:6). They would not consider this in violation of the *pikkuach nefesh* or regard for human life principle. *But this has often had to be a last resort*, such as Jewish workers in a concentration camp on the verge of death having to eat something. For the most part, Jewish observance of kosher has enabled there to be some degree of separation between the Jewish community and outsiders. However, as Jewish history over the past several centuries has demonstrated, attitudes toward the kosher dietary laws have definitely changed. Whether you are aware of it or not: **a majority of today’s Jewish people do not adhere to a kosher or a kosher-style of diet.** And among those who keep, or try to keep, kosher, there are a variety of different levels—frequently with the more Orthodox and ultra Orthodox believing that their way is the only way.

Acknowledging Jewish Diversity with Kosher

To the Hebrew Scriptures and to Judaism, the kosher dietary laws are all about holiness, and in sanctifying oneself regarding what God’s people are, and are not, to eat:

“But I have said to you, ‘You will inherit their land and I will give it to you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am *ADONAI* your God, who has set you apart from the peoples. Also you are to make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean. And you are not to make your souls detestable by an animal or by a bird, or by anything with which the ground teems, which I have set apart as unclean for you” (Leviticus 20:24-25, TLV).

Many Christian leaders and figures throughout history have derided the dietary instructions of the Torah, as perhaps being only intended for

² Sue Fishkoff, *Kosher Nation: Why More and More of America’s Food Answers to a Higher Authority* (New York: Schoken Books, 2010), 36.

Ancient Israel and the Jewish people of the pre-resurrection era, but not something intended for the universal faith of Christianity in the post-resurrection era. The attitude of many has been that *God really does not care what His people eat*.

While violating the kosher laws should not be regarded as bearing the same degree of stigma as murder or adultery, it is true that the Pentateuch does direct God's people to separate what they eat, so "you shall not make yourselves abominable" (Leviticus 20:25, RSV). The verb *shaqatz*, appearing in the Piel stem (intensive action, active voice), means "detest (as cultically unclean)" (*CHALOT*).³ An activity which people are supposed to enjoy, such as eating (Ecclesiastes 2:24; 3:13; 5:18; 9:7), is one which is still to be regulated by God, at the very least to convey important lessons to His people.

Scholars such as Samuel H. Dresner, reflecting from a Twentieth Century Conservative Jewish standpoint, have offered some criticism of various traditional Christian views of eating.⁴ His main conclusion is,

"The glory of man is his power to hallow. We do not live to eat; we eat to live. Even the act of eating can be sanctified; even the act of eating can become a means for achieving holiness" (*The Jewish Dietary Laws*).⁵

There is little denying how there have been Christians throughout history who have dismissed the idea that God would be concerned about His people hallowing so simple a life process as eating, to those Christians throughout history who have practiced asceticism and eschewed eating to various degrees. Yet in a great deal of Judaism, it is thought how people should be able to balance inward integrity with outward practice. It is not just enough for people to have appropriate thoughts or ideas in their hearts and minds, as they should be enjoined with the appropriate outward actions. *And yes, these can involve what people choose or do not choose to eat.*

There is an array of traditional Jewish approaches to *kashrut*, with some diversity witnessed within contemporary Judaism. This involves how both Orthodox and Conservative Judaism have handled issues like ritual slaughter of animals, determination of which birds are acceptable for eating, the issue of mixing meat and dairy, what is pareve, and food storage and preparation. These are among the aspects of keeping kosher, to much

³ William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 383.

⁴ Samuel H. Dresner, *The Jewish Dietary Laws: Their Meaning for Our Time* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly of America, 1982), pp 17-20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

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of Judaism, where it believed that people can hallow their activities before the Lord.

While it is widely and rightly recognized that keeping kosher has served, certainly socially, as an identifier of the Jewish people throughout history, it needs to be kept in mind that not all Jews throughout history have kept kosher. This has been especially true since the rise of Reform Judaism in the mid-Nineteenth Century, which cast aside the kosher dietary laws as only being something important for Ancient Israel in the Ancient Near East. Yet one might argue that a few of the seeds for many modern Jews wanting to throw away *kashrut* were planted many centuries earlier, though. Much of it may be traced to inventing kosher versions of various non-kosher dishes, particularly when pork is substituted with beef or chicken in a recipe.⁶

Beyond this, however, is a very well known incident which took place in 1883, at a banquet to commemorate the first graduating class of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. This event served blatantly non-kosher meat items to those gathered, much of the unclean fare actually being what would not be normally provided at a standard luncheon or dinner. This gathering really helped to assert the independence of American Reform Judaism from its more traditional, and far more observant, relatives in Central and Eastern European Orthodoxy.⁷

While this 1883 Trefa Banquet, as it has become infamously known, proved to be a major historical turning point for American Reform Judaism (and has interestingly enough, probably helped much of Conservative Judaism position itself between Reform and Orthodox Judaism), this gathering notably did not serve pork. Reform Jews of America, who today constitute the majority, do not keep kosher. But at the same time, though, it should be observed that there has been more of a *selective* kosher-style of diet present among Reform Jews—stemming from the fact that the Trefa Banquet served no pork.⁸

Pork is still a major culprit among many Reform Jews who believe that kosher was for another time, because of how pork was forced upon Jewish people to renounce Judaism, during times like the Maccabean Crisis or the Spanish Inquisition. However, over the past several decades, many Reform Jews have started to reevaluate their position regarding kosher and other Torah instructions, which their forbearers widely kept reserved to the distant past. In all likelihood, Jewish assimilation into much broader non-Jewish culture, has served as a factor for many Reform Jews wanting to reclaim their heritage, and observe various outward Torah practices and

⁶ Detailed by Fishkoff, 227.

⁷ Summarized in Ibid., pp 231-232.

⁸ Ibid., 233.

traditions—now involving various levels of kosher, *mikveh* (immersion), wearing of *tzitzityot* (fringes), and wrapping *tefillin* (phylacteries).⁹

There is a growing resurgence in much of the American Reform Jewish community to keep, or at least appreciate—on some degree or level—the kosher dietary laws. What is more likely to be seen, more than anything else, is for today's Reform Jews reconsidering kosher to keep a very minimalist, kosher-style of diet, avoiding pork and shellfish, and perhaps also separating meat and dairy on some level. It is not too likely that Reform Jews reconsidering kosher are going to look for a *hechsher* on every food item they purchase, or even avoid eating at all restaurants. But, it will be more likely that Reform Jews reconsidering kosher are going to be considering flagrant violations of the dietary laws—such as eating shrimp cocktail or a ham sandwich—and what the more observant of the Jewish community might think of their actions.

Acknowledging Messianic Diversity with Kosher

If you have attended one of the thousands of Messianic congregations or fellowships across North America to be sure, but also in many other places across the world, then you are most probably aware of the diversity present within our faith community regarding the subject of “kosher.” The spectrum of positions on the kosher dietary laws, their relevance and application, and their implementation *or* non-implementation in the lives of God's people—is quite diverse!

On one side of the spectrum are those, similar to Reform Judaism, who generally believe that *kashrut* is a thing of past Biblical history, and was probably abolished by various instructions witnessed in the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament. On another side of the spectrum are people who may observe a highly rigid, Orthodox Jewish level of kosher, and will often not join into fellowship meals with other people in the Messianic community. Generally speaking, though, the bulk of people in the Messianic community may be said to observe a kosher-style of diet, which basically avoids pork and shellfish. Many try to be flexible when interacting with evangelical Protestant Believers who do not keep any form of kosher, and with those who observe an Orthodox Jewish level of kosher, making sure to be aware of all their sensitivities. (This should also include a wide degree of keeping one's comments or personal views, regarding someone else's habits, to oneself.)

During fellowship meal times at a local Messianic congregation, one is likely to encounter people who hold to a very low, a medium, or a very high or rigid view of the kosher dietary laws. It can be detected that there tend to be four distinct schools of thought present surrounding “kosher” within

⁹ Ibid., pp 234-235.

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the broad Messianic movement. Each of us needs to be aware of these, as there will be probably individual people who hold to these views present within just about all Messianic congregations:

1. Kosher has been abolished for the post-resurrection era, but might be necessary to observe for Jewish evangelistic purposes:¹⁰ It is detectable from various sectors of the Messianic movement, widely involving those organizations whose major purpose is to evangelize Jewish people with the good news of Yeshua, that they hold that the kosher dietary laws have probably been abolished in the post-resurrection era. Passages of the Apostolic Scriptures like Peter's vision of Acts 10-11 or Paul's direction of Romans 14, among others, are interpreted along traditional Christian lines. If kosher is to be really observed for anything, it would be via Jewish Believers being sensitive to various cultural concerns of Jewish non-Believers, but not out of any sense of obedience to the Torah. Jewish Believers in Yeshua may keep kosher out of a sense of loyalty to Jewish culture and the traditions of the Hebrew Scriptures, but do not have to if they do not want to.

2. A kosher-style diet should be encouraged for Jewish Believers:¹¹ Much of today's Messianic Jewish movement, having built itself upon a foundation of the earlier Hebrew Christian movement—which was primarily interested in Jewish evangelism—does tend to encourage a kosher-style of diet for Messianic Jewish Believers, which avoids pork and shellfish. It does not tend to theologically argue that the dietary laws of the Torah were abolished in the Apostolic Scriptures, but at the same time would not argue that the dietary laws are more

¹⁰ This view would be witnessed, to various degrees, in: Rich Robinson, ed., *The Messianic Movement: A Field Guide for Evangelical Christians* (Purple Pomegranate Productions, 2005), 102; Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus Volume Four: New Testament Objections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), pp 273-282; Sam Nadler, *Messianic Foundations: Fulfill Your Calling In the Jewish Messiah* (Word of Messiah Ministries, 2010), pp 171-177; Michael Brown, *60 Questions Christians Ask About Jewish Beliefs and Practices* (Minneapolis: Chosen Books, 2011), pp 64-67, 224-226.

¹¹ This view would be witnessed, to various degrees, in: Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs: A Messianic Jewish Guide to the Biblical Lifecycle and Lifestyle* (Baltimore: Lederer Books, 1996), pp 97-110; David H. Stern, *Messianic Judaism: A Modern Movement With an Ancient Past* (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2007), pp 139, 160-161; Daniel Juster, *Jewish Roots: Understanding Your Jewish Faith*, revised edition (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2013), pp 227-279.

important than the Ten Commandments or more ethical or moral instructions regarding human relations.

Frequently at many Messianic Jewish congregations, one will be told to only bring a “Biblically kosher” dish to fellowship gatherings. While this would quantitatively rule out someone bringing a roast ham, it might mean that someone could bring a meat lasagna, or even a bucket of fried chicken from KFC. Outside of the congregation, Messianic Jews who observe a kosher-style of diet would more than probably eat out at most restaurants (including fast food), but when ordering would tell the waiter to “hold the bacon” on various items, yet at the same time might order a cheeseburger.

3. A kosher(-style) diet should be encouraged for all Believers:¹² In the wider Messianic sphere of influence, beyond Messianic Judaism, which would include non-Jewish Believers embracing a life of Torah pursuance on some level, are many who think that all Believers should be encouraged to eat kosher. This may include a kosher-style of diet similar to that observed by many of today’s Messianic Jews, to a more stringent kosher observance like that found in Conservative to Orthodox Judaism. Because this includes many people who hold to a One Law/One Torah theology, there may be some legalism regarding kosher present, including an elevation of the kosher instructions to a higher level of importance than would be Biblically appropriate. Yet, this is certainly not true of all those who are convicted that adherence to the Torah’s dietary instructions should be encouraged for God’s people. And, people in this category will be widely prone to encourage a kosher(-style) diet not only out of obedience to Scripture, but also for various health reasons.

¹² This view would be witnessed, to various degrees, in: Hope Egan, *Holy Cow! Does God Care About What We Eat?* (Shelbyville, TN: Heart of Wisdom, 2012), 20; Tim Hegg, *Introduction to Torah Living* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2002), pp 187-199.

4. Traditional kosher should be observed, for the most part, only by Jewish Believers:¹³ Among Messianic Jews who either directly or indirectly adhere to a bilateral ecclesiology, it is often asserted that Messianic Jews have a Biblical responsibility to not just observe a kosher-style diet, but a responsibility to the Jewish people to observe many (or most) of the kosher regulations as prescribed by Orthodox Judaism. This sector is not at all a majority of today's Messianic Jews. Those within it may typically have a negative disposition not only toward non-Jewish Messianic people who observe kosher on some level, thinking that it is something all Believers can benefit from, **but** they even tend to have a negative disposition toward their fellow Messianic Jews, who do not observe as high a level of kosher as they do.

In our family's experience since 1995, a fair majority of today's Messianic people would fall into the category of being what is labeled as **kosher-style**. This is actually a level of kosher observance practiced by a fair number within today's American Jewish community as well, with a more heightened sense of kosher being present during seasons such as Passover season.¹⁴

Among Messianic people, who are convicted from the Scriptures that the kosher dietary laws are not a thing of past Biblical history, **why do most at best keep a "kosher-style" diet?** From one side, there are those who would say that by following any kind of Old Testament code regarding food, that these people must be legalists. But from the other side, there are those who would say that these people are compromised to various degrees, and should seek out only those food items which have a *hechsher*, a Rabbinic stamp of approval, and would for the most part only be eaten by members of the Orthodox Jewish community.

While among many contemporary adherents of the environmental movement, there are definitely people (more liberal than not politically) who adhere to either a **vegetarian** or **vegan diet**—this is simply not an

¹³ This view would be witnessed, to various degrees, in: Mark Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), pp 49-96; Aaron Eby, *Biblically Kosher: A Messianic Jewish Perspective on Kashrut* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2012); Boaz Michael, *Tent of David: Healing the Vision of the Messianic Gentile* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2013), pp 44-45, 137; Carl Kinbar, "Messianic Jews and Jewish Tradition," in David J. Rudolph and Joel Willitts, eds., *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), pp 72-81.

¹⁴ Cf. Fishkoff, 35.

option for most people. Unless significantly convinced because of a health condition, or thinking that it is best not to eat animal flesh or products for conservationism purposes—most people, Jewish or non-Jewish, are not going to eliminate meat, fish, and/or dairy completely from their diets. While adhering to a vegetarian or vegan diet would certainly be a quick solution to the kosher issue, especially when interacting in public, most people are not willing to make this commitment. Various Messianic congregations, perhaps even following the lead of various non-Messianic synagogues, might choose to only allow for vegetarian meals at fellowship gatherings, mainly so that all present can eat. Yet, the people at large, both in leadership and membership, are not likely to do this in their homes.

The main issue regarding a kosher-style diet for contemporary Messianics, surrounds the sources of **meat** and **poultry** which are available to people. It is a fact that if someone lives outside the confines of a city which does not have a large Jewish population, that the option of acquiring meat products which have been slaughtered and butchered according to the traditional Jewish practice of *shechitah*, is going to be very limited. Even among those who live in a city or town with a large Jewish community, where kosher markets may be present and/or a major supermarket chain may have a kosher market sub-section, the biggest deterrence to buying authorized-kosher meat is not that many Messianic people are unwilling to buy it; **it is the cost**. When one goes to a supermarket with a kosher market sub-area, and can compare the cost of authorized-kosher meat versus the more standard meat—with some of the authorized-kosher meat costing between 300-500% more—it is not difficult for the Messianic consumer to make an economic decision to observe a kosher-style diet, purchasing the cheaper product.

Many of today's Messianic people—not because of failure to obey but because of stewardship issues—have chosen a kosher-style diet, because they have to be careful with their financial resources. And, it is a place where they have looked more to keep the essential substance or spirit of the Torah (cf. Romans 7:6; 2 Corinthians 3:6), and allow for some degree of fluidity, given both the proclivity and need of many to still eat meat. For not only Torah observant non-Jewish Messianics, but even Messianic Jews raised in a Reform Jewish home, **giving up pork and shellfish has come with great difficulty**. It can cause tension when interacting with one's friends, and does cause tension at various family gatherings, even when one's dietary preferences are not made into an issue. But, it can be downright insulting to many—who have made significant sacrifices to give up certain recipes and dishes with sentimental value—to be told by a rigid observer of kosher, "Someone who has stopped eating unclean meat has certainly taken steps toward observance, and many of these steps are

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necessary and praiseworthy...[but] still, they have no platform to call themselves 'kosher'" (Boaz Michael, *Tent of David*).¹⁵

It may be true that a wide number of today's Messianic people in the 1990s-early 2010s, got a little too comfortable with saying that they adhere to "Biblically kosher"—when what is now more accurate is the terminology "**kosher-style.**" But a much bigger issue surrounding kosher, is in recognizing those circumstances where the interests in seeing people brought to Messiah faith *clearly takes precedence over diet*. This is an area regarding the whole topic of "kosher," where far too many within our faith community—even among those who adhere to a very minimalist kosher-style of diet which avoids pork and shellfish, but would mix meat and dairy and eat out at most restaurants—does not score very highly. Acknowledging and improving our attitudes on this, is absolutely imperative for our long-term future.

Being Served Unclean Things by Others

While it is to be commended that most of today's Messianic people are committed to following the kosher dietary laws, on some significant level—it is also true that almost all of us interact with other people who eat unclean things on a regular basis. Most significant among those who eat unclean things are our evangelical Protestant brothers and sisters, and notably among those will be close family and friends. And also not to be overlooked, Messianics are often prone to interact with various Reform Jews, who are not too keen on eating kosher. What are we to do with various social circumstances in everyday life, when we might be fellowshiping with others, and not only are unclean things present for eating—but we might be served them ourselves?

Many interreligious gatherings which include evangelical Protestants and Messianic people, will often provide some sort of a buffet. Obviously at a buffet, people can not only individually choose what they want or do not want to eat, but how much they want to eat. For Messianic people who follow a more-or-less kosher-style of diet, eating out with groups of friends or colleagues, widely means that one's dietary preferences can be asserted as a personal choice, when a waiter comes around to take an order. It is when fellowship takes place at one's home or place of business, and things are put on one's plate, when potentially tense situations will arise. I have heard more than my fair share of stories from Messianic people, who are rigidly kosher, that they have made a scene (via a rude comment) when being served bacon and eggs at a breakfast—when they could have eaten the eggs and left the bacon quietly off to the side.

¹⁵ Michael, pp 44-45.

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The Holy Scriptures are clear that what a man or woman eats is quite secondary to the way he or she acts. If in their observance of the kosher dietary laws, Messianic people make little effort to treat others with love, grace, or mercy—then they have lost the focus of what separating clean and unclean tries to convey. *It is not enough to try to keep kosher in one's diet, when a person may come up short at keeping kosher in separating out any ungodly or unsanitary thoughts about one's fellow human beings.* Most of us are going to have situations arise in our lives, when we will be served things like pork or shellfish, by well meaning family or friends, and we are going to have to have an appropriate attitude about it.

There are, of course, many stories of missionaries who travel to remote areas, who have little choice in eating what they are served by native peoples. They do this in order for them to gain favor as outsiders, in developing some kind of relationship with them, that they might be open to hearing the good news. *Many of these native peoples are impoverished, and missionaries being offered some of the local grubs and worms, is like them literally being granted a banquet by their host.* Most of us, though, are not going to be placed into those sorts of circumstances. Instead, what we are likely to encounter is something similar to the Corinthian Believers, who may have been invited to a non-Believer's home for a meal. We might get asked to supper at a person's home, where no form of kosher is observed, and we may have to make a decision on what to, and not to, eat.

1 Corinthians 10:24-33 tends to totally stump today's Messianic people who are rigidly kosher, as they often fail to realize that the Apostle Paul, in instructing the Corinthian Believers, did direct them to eat whatever was set before them at a meal at a non-Believer's home. Yet, Paul did direct how they were to refuse it, if it became public knowledge that the meat served had been sacrificed to idols:

"Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, without raising questions of conscience. For 'the earth is the Lord's, and its fullness [Psalm 24:1; 50:12; 89:11]. If an unbeliever invites you over and you want to go, eat whatever is set before you, without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, 'This is from an idol sacrifice,' do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—not your own conscience, I mean, but the other person's...Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jewish or Greek people or to God's community" (1 Corinthians 10:25-29a, 31-32, TLV).

What Paul definitely did in this passage, was place the spiritual interests of other people and their redemption in Yeshua *ahead of* any Torah instructions regarding food and diet. When he communicated, "If

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some unbeliever invites you to a meal, and you want to go..." (1 Corinthians 10:27a, CJSB), this was obviously a conditional statement given to the Corinthians, as there may have been circumstances present where an invitation to a non-Believer's home was not ideal and could have been refused. Furthermore, what can catch people totally off guard sometimes, is how Paul's word, "Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake" (1 Corinthians 10:25, NASU), did not so much concern the Corinthian Believers going out and purchasing meat which had been sacrificed to idols among the local butchers, but instead what their potential non-believing host would have purchased. The verb *pōloumenon* is actually a present passive participle, making "being sold" (LITV, Brown and Comfort)¹⁶ an action outside the control of the Corinthian Believers.

What can really get rigidly kosher Messianic people upset, is that Paul did direct the Corinthians, "eat whatever is put in front of you without raising questions of conscience" (1 Corinthians 10:27b, CJSB). This meant that, if in accepting an invitation by a local pagan family, a non-Jewish *or* Jewish Corinthian Believer was to eat whatever beef, lamb, fowl, *pork*, fish, or *shellfish* were set before him. If when finding out that the meat was involved in pagan rituals, it was then to be refused (1 Corinthians 10:28). The principle at work, which exceeds the importance of *kashrut*, is "Do not be an obstacle to anyone—not to Jews, not to Gentiles, and not to God's Messianic Community" (1 Corinthians 10:32, CJSB).

Did Paul throw out the dietary laws, or the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29), in 1 Corinthians 10:24-33? I do not read his instruction in this way. But the interests in seeing other people brought to saving faith in Israel's Messiah—as sharing the good news would have been the main reason for a Corinthian Believer to accept a dinner invitation from a non-Believer—does take precedence over the Torah's dietary laws. Paul said, "I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, **so that they may be saved**" (1 Corinthians 10:33, NRSV). The Corinthians needed to be respectful to their non-believing hosts, in eating what they had prepared with gratitude.

In my own ministry experiences, there have certainly been occasions when I have not only been served unclean things, but I have eaten them. I have also found it necessary, on occasion, to eat unclean things as a matter of courtesy to others. Following the end of my Vocation of Ministry class at Asbury Theological Seminary in December 2005, there was a brunch held for all of the students. This was a buffet prepared by some older women in a local Methodist church in the Orlando area—what we would

¹⁶ Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort, trans., *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1990), 602.

more commonly just call *little old church ladies*—in their late seventies and early eighties. The main fare at the brunch was a classic egg and sausage casserole. Recognizing the significant Torah importance of, “You are to rise up in the presence of the gray-haired and honor the presence of the elderly. So you will fear your God. I am *ADONAI*” (Leviticus 19:32, TLV), I put two small pieces of the egg and sausage casserole on my plate, I said to two of these women “Thank you for hosting us this morning,” and then I sat down and ate them. I did not go back and have any more, but as a matter of respect to these older women—some of whom looked like they should be in a retirement community—I ate a pork product.

There would certainly be many Messianic people who would say what I did was wrong, but **I made a conscious decision in deciding that honoring my elders was more important than what I ate.** These elderly women did not have to take hours of their time cooking for us as seminary students, and extend their congratulations to us for finishing our class, but they did. I decided that their honoring of us needed to be reciprocated.

These sorts of situations are admittedly few. When our family interacts with our larger Christian family today—which certainly does not keep kosher—they know that we no longer eat pork and shellfish, and both we and they do not try to make a huge issue out of it, especially since there are also vegetarians and vegans in our larger family.

Yet like many non-Jewish Believers who have adopted a kosher-style of diet, I definitely went through a past phase when I thought that eating a sausage egg McMuffin from McDonald’s *was more of a problem* than other, far more problematic violations of the Torah and Scripture (perhaps like looking at pornographic images of women). *Why was this the case?* Was it just because, at one point in going through puberty, I was still spiritually maturing, hormonally unbalanced, and needed to work through some things in terms of inward morality and outward holiness? Or, was it also widely influenced by the fact that many Messianic people who make a point to “keep kosher”—and who in turn influence much of our overall spiritual culture—**do not make too much of a point to emphasize ethics and morality?**

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The Lord told the Ancient Israelites, “So you will eat and be full, and you will bless *ADONAI* your God for the good land He has given you” (Deuteronomy 8:10, TLV). In the Qal stem (simple action, active voice), the verb *savah* can mean: “to **eat one’s fill**,” “to **drink one’s fill**,” or quite possibly also “to **eat one’s fill of, satisfy oneself with**” (*HALOT*).¹⁷

¹⁷ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 2:1303.

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Eating is definitely to be a positive experience, as it is to not only provide people with sustenance for living, but that people get to partake of the good Creation of God. Far too often in much of Christian history, eating has not been viewed as an act to be sanctified and enjoyed, as much as it has just been a necessary act of human living. Judaism has had a much better approach to sanctifying the act of eating, not trying to separate physical and spiritual things to the same degree as historical Christianity.

There should be little doubt that the widespread, positive emphasis we see today in the Messianic community on the kosher dietary laws, is helping many of God's people to consider how it is important that we all sanctify the act of eating. At the same time, there has not often been that realistic or balanced approach to what the Holy Scriptures communicate about food, clean and unclean meats, and how there is a much higher priority to be placed on how we treat other people than what other people eat, *as there should be*.

A situation arose among the Messiah followers in Rome, most probably over what was being served at fellowship meal gatherings, where there were people unnecessarily judging one another over what they would and would not eat. Paul issued the sharp rebuke: "for the kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking, but righteousness and *shalom* [peace] and joy in the *Ruach ha-Kodesh* [Holy Spirit]" (Romans 14:17, TLV). Too many people who strive to keep kosher, unfairly look down on others who do not. And, among many people who keep kosher, there are those who look down on others who do not keep as stringent a level of kosher as they do.

It does not seem too likely that, similar to the diversity one encounters in the Jewish community regarding "kosher," there is going to be any uniform "kosher" standard practiced by any person or group in the Messianic movement. Because of this, each of us needs to (regularly) check our attitudes, and how we look at the actions of how other people choose to eat. This needs to be enjoined with more detailed analyses of Biblical passages, in both the Tanach and Apostolic Scriptures, so that we might have a better handle on what *kashrut* is all about, and what it means for us living in the post-resurrection era.

More than anything else, those who have been convicted by the Lord that kosher eating has not been abolished, need to balance how they sort between clean and unclean meats—with how they sort between clean and unclean thoughts, ideas, and statements they might make. **They need to decisively demonstrate a kosher way of how they interact with their fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord, and how they interact with a fallen world—which has far bigger concerns than people who eat pork or shellfish on a regular basis.**