

Mosaic dietary laws essay



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Mosaic Dietary Laws

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Introduction

The Mosaic dietary laws, the laws imposed by the directives of Moses on the Israelites, extended from earlier restrictions that had been placed on the eating habits of the human race. The Old Testament is full of directives regarding food consumption and Gods law, and even Genesis addresses limitations imposed on certain types of food consumption.

Primarily, the restrictions placed on the consumption of certain types of meat, a limitation that continues in rules for maintaining a Jewish kosher home, relates directly to what is viewed as the rules for the holy people of God. The people of God, then, are expected to recognize that God is to be obeyed, concluding that circumcision and the prescriptions of Mosaic law are still obligatory (1).

In understanding the Mosaic dietary laws maintained in the books of the Old Testament, it is necessary to consider the early restrictions placed on certain types of food consumption, the restrictions outlined by Moses for the people of God, and the implications of these eating restrictions both then and in the modern era. What must be recognized is that To this day, these rules with variations, but always guided by Mosaic laws are followed by many orthodox Jews (2). Jewish religious practices, then, are based not only in their ancestral ordinances, but in the specificity of Mosaic law in terms of dietary limitations

and circumcision (3). Relating the significance, then, of early restrictions and their application to Mosaic law, as well as an understanding of the role of Moses, are elements important in understanding Mosaic dietary laws.

Early Restrictions

Early restrictions prior to the initiation of Mosaic dietary laws related directly to the belief that the human race originally consumed just vegetable products, and that it was not until the Flood and the prescriptions relative to Noah's animal ownership that individuals were pushed to consume animal flesh (Genesis 9: 3-4). Initially, it was recognized that animal slaughter was an unclean process, and further, from a historical perspective, it can be argued that the consumption of some animals was just unsafe. The lack of refrigeration and the prevalence of bacterial infection in the flesh of animals determined a lack of safety and the people of this region often saw illness related to meat consumption as the result of an unclean act in the eyes of God.

What should be recognized is that initially, the Book of Genesis placed few restrictions, if any, on the consumption of vegetables or fruit, and it was not until the development of a sacrificial system that the people of Israel found restrictions placed on a variety of different food types. In Leviticus 19: 23-25, these restrictions begin with the assertion that consumption of the early fruits of a young tree was forbidden. After the first three years, the fruit was then taken to a temple for worship and to be blessed, after which time consumption could occur on a yearly basis.

In Leviticus 23: 9-14, there are notes about the forbidden consumption of new corn until 2 days after Passover, when the corn must be placed in the Temple and blessed prior to consumption. Leviticus refers back to the earliest of the restrictions placed on consumption in a vaguer construct from Exodus 23: 19, in which it is asserted that the first fruits of the labor of man must be placed in the Temple and worshipped instead of consumed.

In both Deuteronomy (22: 9) and Leviticus (29: 19), limitations were placed on the consumption of fruits and vegetables of mixed seeds, and there were later prescriptions for the use of religious men to bless the food sources, which in turn would lead to the development of Kosher principles.

The loss of a great deal of vegetation during the great Flood is a supposition that maintains the reasoning for the consumption of animal products. At the same time, there were some animals that were considered unclean, and the people of Israel were forbidden from eating animal flesh that was unclean, including animals that had died before slaughter or that were injured or damaged in some way (See Exodus 12: 30).

In fact, the ancient prohibitions on the consumption of pork, for example, extend not just from Biblical or Mosaic directives, but from the formation of the early Egyptian empire (4). In these early years, the muddy areas of Egypt that were favored by pigs were drained in order to create the food for cattle and this result in territorial wars (5). The battle over the Lower Nile (and its pig totem) by the people of the Upper Nile determined an association between the lower classes and pig consumption (6). Further, associations were also made between the lower classes and the worship of the god Seth,

who was noted as a treacherous and evil figure (7). As a result, the people of the Upper Nile created farmland for cattle and dissuaded others from consuming pork products.

Moses had been in the service of the people of the upper classes in Egypt, and believed that the people of Israel had to adopt these types of restrictions in order to maintain their rights as a people above the control of Egypt (8). As a result, he conveyed these attitudes to the Jewish people and carried a tradition of non-consumption for pork (9).

Other theorists have also argued that the lack of cleanliness, and lack of cold storage, and the easy transference of dangerous bacteria through pork also determined the call for non-consumption (10). This early restriction, though, was as commonsensical as it was doctrinal, and so the development of this dietary restriction was considered much older than the directives of Moses.

The call for prohibition from consumption of pork and some scaleless fish was in fact a consideration based on the belief that unrefrigerated, these could produce considerable illness (11). Though the generalized view was that there was an abhorrent element to these types of meat or animals, the development of regulations regarding their consumption may have been more protective than anything else.

Further, prohibitions were also placed on the consumption of meats from animals that consume other animals. It was believed, for example, that animals that are carnivorous could spread their evil spirit to the people who eat them. But there was little evidence of a directive from God for this and there was distinct permission given to the people of Israel under the

leadership of Noah to consume animals following the great flood (Genesis 9: 2-3).

The prescription for distinguishing between clean and unclean animals, then, occurred as an element of the belief in the need for sacrifice of animals at the altar of a temple (before a priest) (Exodus 16: 3) (12). The "... provisions ordained for the sacrificial worship of God in the Mosaic code clearly indicate a central Temple cult (13). Unclean animals, then, prescribed under the directives in Genesis (7: 2-8) relate to the separation of clean and unclean animals following the flood, and the use of clean animals as a part of the sacrificial process of this cult.

The transference of these prescribed notions of clean and unclean and the development of Mosaic dietary laws, then, occurred as a result of the role of Moses and the directives that were provided to the people of Israel by Moses. Essentially the people of Israel believed that Moses word was the word of God and the application of these dietary limitations were imposed by God for their benefit. Understanding Moses role, then, and the way in which the Mosaic dietary laws corresponded with existing limitations is an important consideration. This also provides a basis for understanding Mosaic dietary laws as they determined rabbinical rules for diet and dress (14).

The Role of Moses

Moses is often considered the author of the first five books of the Old Testament, called the Pentateuch, beginning with the work of Genesis. Moses introduces the relationship between God and man and the belief that God defines roles for man through distinctions of human choice. It is in

Genesis that we learn about Gods decision to give man the power of choice, especially of the choice to live under Gods directives or to relinquish these for a belief in evil. For humans this provides the origins of right and wrong from a historical standpoint. We learn that it is Gods love that provides us with such a choice, and Gods directives, handed down to Moses, that determine prescriptions for the embracing of Gods order.

Clearly, Moses main purpose in the Book of Genesis is that of historian, and there is no doubt that he provides extensive information about the origins of man, the origins of the earth, and about the relationships between God and man. Moses actively fulfills his objectives in this book, never wandering far from a strictly utilitarian approach. In this same book, the prescriptions for some of Gods limitations on mans consumption are outlined, and Moses becomes an important historian in the retelling of these elements. The conceptual view presented by Moses, then, relates directly to the centrality of the the temple in Jerusalem, supported by age-old Mosaic requirements. Jesus would return to the circumcised, those who followed Jewish law, dietary rules, and religious observances (15).

The Book of Exodus also offers specific restrictions relative to the story of Moses and the history behind the faith of the people of Israel. It should be recognized that conflicts exist between the perspectives presented by Moses as a part of the constructs of the faith of his people and the role that Moses and Jesus ultimately played. Moses story of the move from poverty to the life in the home of the Pharaoh to imposed poverty with his people separated him and determined specific reasons for divine intervention. At the same time, this shift also influenced his perceptions and determined the

underlying reason why pork consumption was outlawed for the people of Israel. This also defined a conflicting role between perceptions of Moses dietary laws and the views of Jesus. Jesus claimed that the kosher dietary laws are superfluous; Judaism insists that the Torah has never been superseded. Jesus exalted poverty as a means to greater spirituality; Mosaic tradition forbids a person from pauperizing himself (16).

Some have argued that Mosaic dietary laws, then, run counter to the beliefs that are asserted in the New Testament under the leadership of Jesus (17).

The Book of Leviticus provides some interesting insight into the premises of worship and sacrifice and outlines some of the dietary restrictions through further observation of elements like sacrifice. Leviticus specifically determines the beasts that may be consumed by man and how the Mosaic elements have determined the creation of what would later be deemed the Kosher laws (18). Some have argued, though, that the application of the Mosaic constructs presented in Leviticus may have determined a meaning that is essentially foreign to the intention under the directives of Moses (19).

The book of Leviticus deals primarily with worship and its rules of sacrifice. It is the book of Leviticus that presents the Ten Commandments, as well as a plethora of ancillary information. More specifically, this book contains five main revelations about God: 1) the character of God, 2) the fundamental conditions of true religion 3) the principles that should guide human legislators 4) the work of Christ, and 5) the prophecies in types of things to come in the kingdom of God. Leviticus expands upon the commands that God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai, as they were directed to the Israelites. For

this reason, it is important to understand that this book cannot be understood apart from Gods purpose for His people.

It has been suggested, then, that this is the distinct element in which Moses is provided with the information that lends itself to the expansion of dietary limitations for the people of Israel. The production of Mosaic law outlines the construction of Moses directive, and so this segment not only evidences Gods love, but Gods law, too (20). This became the basis for Jewish dietary laws that would be maintained throughout the transformations in medieval religious traditions and developed into the modern day constructs (21).

What should be recognized is that Mosaic laws not only prescribed factors for consumption, but also determined limitations on the treatment of crops, animals and other elements. "... treat nature, or certain natural beings or objects, in the Mosaic laws. There are restrictions on cutting ... and many laws pertain to dietary restrictions. Another law forbids killing a mother and her offspring, ..." (22). These laws, then, became the foundation for Jewish rabbinical order regarding consumption, based on the view that the Mosaic laws were the directives of God presented to his people by Moses (23).

The LORD spoke again to Moses and to Aaron, saying to them, " Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ' These are the creatures which you may eat from all the animals that are on the earth (Leviticus 11: 1-2)

And here is a summary of the list of the foods they can and cannot eat:

Acceptable and Unacceptable Foods

Land Animals Any animal that divides foot and chews the cud such as:

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ox

sheep

goat

deer

gazelle

roe buck

wild goat

ibex

antelope

mountain sheep

and whatever walks on its paws. They cannot eat the following animals:

rock badger

rabbit

pig

Lev. 11: 3-8, 27

Deut. 14: 4-8

Fish Any fish that has fins and scales. Lev. 11: 9-12

Deut. 14: 9-10

Birds Any birds not excluded such as:

red kite

falcon

raven

ostrich

owl

sea gull

hawk

little and great owls

cormorant

white owl

pelican

carrion vulture

stork

heron

hoopoe

bat

Lev. 11: 13-19

Deut. 14: 11-20

Insects All the winged insects that walk on all fours are detestable to you.

Lev. 11: 20

Swarming Things These creatures include:

mole

mouse

great lizard in its kinds

gecko

crocodile

lizard

sand reptile

chameleon

Lev. 11: 29-30

Moses is credited with the writing of Leviticus, and in this way acts as mediator himself. He is the mediator between God and the Hebrews, as well as mediator between God and all people. It was Moses who went upon Mt. Sinai in order to gather the Ten Commandments, and so Moses becomes the

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ultimate mediator, since it is he alone who is privy to the word of God and then transcribes those words and presents them to the people. Moses is the sole intermediary, and is therefore the most important mediator in the Bible. The priests and others who will follow in his footsteps act in much the same way by disseminating the information of God to their congregations.

In this way, Leviticus is about worship of God through the application of Gods law. Just as Moses serves God by making the difficult journey he has in order to receive the word of God, so too are others compelled to follow in his path. We too are exhorted to make our own sacrifices, if they serve to honor God as the sacrifices of Moses did.

Sacrifice is also instructed by God, and in Leviticus, examples of offerings include such things as burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, and guilt or trespass offerings. It was through the presentation of these gifts that the presenter showed his loyalty and devotion to God.

However, when offering blood, this was an even higher form of offering, and signified that the provider of the offering was actually surrendering his own life to God. Holiness is also discussed in Leviticus, and according to this book is demanded by God. People were expected to be obedient to God, in addition to kind, honest, just and compassionate.

The final book of the Old Testament/Torah, is that of Deuteronomy. In this book, Moses presents himself as a great orator, and this is accomplished through a series of speeches that he makes. It is indeed very interesting to note that Moses, who was first introduced in the Bible as never being a man of words, appears now in this book as a great orator. In fact, being such an

orator becomes an important part of his legacy in supporting his restrictions, including the Mosaic dietary restrictions. It is in this chapter that Moses provides readers, through his excellent oration skills, an example to follow. Like Moses, we each must grow and understand our own lives, and must come to realize our limitations and our gifts and use them in a way that pleases God.

The Mosaic dietary restrictions, then, stand as one of the constructs of participating the word and life under God. These books of the Bible are extremely important, because in terms of Moses, they establish his history and his dedication to God. Moses grew to be a great leader and vitally important messenger of God despite significant odds. From the moment of his birth, Moses was able to stay out of harms way, and in the end, became one of the most important historical figures of all time. These books highlight the many aspects of Moses, and in doing so, provide us with many important lessons. Moses as historian, deliverer, mediator, leader and orator all have important lessons to teach us. Not only do these five books teach us more about Moses and his own personal history, but they also teach us a great deal about the will of God.

The Messages of Exodus

The description of the New Moon as a ripe grain relates both the hope of change and to the past, the belief that grain is both a substance that supports life and a factor that influenced slavery. The deprivation, the absence of this grain, could in itself cripple the people of Israel, who depended on grain for their very life. Just as people dependent on the

cyclical nature of the moon and sun, they also depended on the grain to support their existence. The tenuous nature of the moon, then, and its absence are reminders of the instability of their situation and the need to follow the word of God in order to maintain their protection, safety and nourishment.

The call for a rejection of anything fermented is a reminder to follow the word of God. God brought man from Egypt and was able to save the Israelites from slavery, and in return, there are specific requirements, one of which is to avoid eating anything requiring fermentation. This is clearly linked to elements in the past, especially the belief that the fermentation process, whether the fermenting of wine or the fermentation process required for the leavening of bread, are things that take time, that can complicate the ability of the Israelites to move quickly in avoidance of retribution from the Egyptians. Participation in avoidance of leavened bread, for example, brings the people of Israel to a point of remembrance, where they are able to gain a greater appreciation of their situation and the gains they have because of God's word.

The importance of remembrance can not be avoided in this chapter of Exodus, primarily because of the newness of the Jewish faith in God and the tenuous nature of their perspective at this time. Moses tells the people of Israel, for example, that they must recognize the powerful hand of the Lord and how he brought them to where they are. The result of this is that when children ask why they must reject leavened bread (Exodus 13: 14), they must be reminded of how God delivered them from Egypt and how quickly their struggle was brought to fruition. The people of Israel must constantly

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embrace the changes that have occurred in order to maintain their focus on their process of deliverance.

These same elements are also brought into view when considering the pilgrimage festival and the sacrifice of the lamb for the donkey. By handing over the first born of every womb, whether man or animal, and redeeming the first born donkey with a lamb, God is asking for a sacrifice that will provide a sign of the value placed on his actions. The death of the Egyptian should not be diminished simply because they are Egyptian, their deaths marked a call by God for compliance and the rejection of this call by the Egyptians. Gods hand is both merciful and mighty, and this is the message that extends from the requirements for participation in the faith (Exodus 13: 10-17).

The violence used against the lamb is representative of the violence used against the people of Egypt, including the son of the Pharaoh, because of the unwillingness of the people of Egypt to embrace Gods directive or to understand and open them to the will of God. Inherent, then, in this view is the belief that Gods mercy comes to the faithful, and God does not protect those who do not embrace a faith in God.

God also recognized that the people of Israel were at a very fragile point in their development as a community of God, and so there were some actions taken in Exodus 13 that relate to the process of change and the need to protect the people of Israel from their own doubts. For example, in Exodus 13: 17-18, God did not lead the people of Israel to the land of the Philistines, because he believed that this would provide them with too great a

temptation to reject the faith in God. In protecting the Jews, he also knew that the land of the Philistines would lend itself to doubt and fear, and many would return to the slavery of Egypt rather than face the unknown.

Much of this chapter relates to the promises made by the people and Gods request for compliance in order to maintain their faith. Inherent in this view is the belief that God recognized the tenuous nature of the faith of the Jewish people and their struggle for identification following their freedom from slavery. For many, slavery may have seemed favorable to the freedom that they experienced, because of the lack of expectation and the conflicts that arise from the unknown. God put into place structure based on compliance with rituals because of the importance of maintaining the people and their focus in order to maintain their strength and focus.

In Acts 27: 25, Paul states: "...Keep up your courage, men, for I believe God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told." Paul recognized that God would maintain his promises to the faithful, and Gods expectations are presented in order to determine a faith in God, a faith that could not be lost even if significant struggle were to occur. Moses demonstrated this kind of faith in the midst of his slavery and his struggles and this kind of faith was expected of the new people of Israel.

The focus on Gods will and Gods work in Exodus is clearly defined by the needs of the people of Israel and their newness as a collective. The identification of certain rituals, including the rejection of unleavened bread and the call for participation in sacrifice were all shaped by the need for a faith. These rituals, then, have been maintained in many of the traditions of

Judaism in the modern era, and are defined by recognition in the values placed on choice, collective identity and faith in God through the constructs of his limitations.

Conclusion

Moses is indeed a diverse person, both man as well as vessel for God. What is so important about Moses is that he is representative of all of us, in that we are all vessels of God and should live our lives by following the examples set forth by Moses. Throughout the Bible Moses provides this example by the way he lives. He too struggles with the hardships that we all face, and yet he is able to overcome his struggles by turning over his life to God.

Moses excels at all of his roles, but not because of divine intervention. Moses has to work for what he accomplished, and in most instances, there was another path that would have proved easier and more rewarding from a personal standpoint. For instance, merely choosing to lead the Israelites out of Egypt was an important decision in his life, and one that proved to force him to confront many hardships as well as putting him a position to best express the will of God. Clearly, Moses concerns himself more with fulfilling the role that God has bestowed upon him rather than fulfilling his own personal desires.

According to the historical accounts, God led the exiles from Egypt to the foot of the mountain called Sinai. There He made a covenant with his people in the form of the Torah. According to most versions every Jewish soul that would ever be born was present at that moment and agreed to be bound by the laws in this covenant. It is this agreement which is the very heart of the

Jewish movement and faith, including the continued application of Mosaic dietary laws.

ENDNOTES

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