

Meat Sacrificed to Idols, How does Paul's exegesis apply today?

Being a teacher in the Hebrew Roots movement and having a website promoting Bible study, I am often asked to give an opinion on a specific topic. Recently a question concerning meat sacrificed to idols and its relationship to eating Hallel food¹ was sent to my inbox. I personally do not like to answer inquiries concerning whether a person should or should not do something that is not clearly stated in Scripture, since I am not lord over anyone and think it is better solved between a person and God. However, I do recognize that people are trying to make conclusions when often there is not enough information available to make a good decision. Therefore I attempt to give additional information that is pertinent and sometimes share my practice to give some explanation as to how various concerns could be handled. However, it is important that when someone reads one of my responses on matters of disputable nature that all keep in mind there may be many answers and that no one answer may be applicable to all. These issues must be taken to God with sincere, Spirit led meditation on Scripture to find the truth. It is wrong to accept an answer just because you like a particular teacher. So I offer the following as information to assist your Spirit led review of this subject.

There are several considerations to be addressed when discussing meat sacrificed to idols. The Jews have made many decisions about Kosher rulings, and first we must understand that the majority of their decisions concerning Kosher are not pre-Yehoshua nor pre-Shaul (Paul). The entire Talmud, which declares many of the precedents used for modern Judaism was not even thought of during the time of Messiah, so if it states something contrary to the teachings of Yehoshua and Shaul, this is no basis on which to determine that the modern Jews/Pharisees have the proper interpretation and that Yehoshua and Paul were working contrary to long established beliefs.

Judaism has decided on many precedents since the first century, and often those seeking a deeper understanding of first century Christianity look at modern Judaism as if it were a snapshot of the first century AD. This of course creates numerous problems. Reality is better portrayed when we recognize that Judaism has changed over the last 2000 years as much as Christianity. Both Judaism and Christianity suffer much like the Genetic code. Slowly information is lost making the modern creature look quite different from the ancient animal. There are certain catastrophes that create these dramatic changes of existence and it will help to understand these changes before we continue with the subject.

The first major catastrophe experienced by Judaism was the destruction of the temple. This not only destroyed their holiest site, but also destroyed the jurisdiction of the temple priests. The temple priests i.e. Sadducees were in charge of the Jewish practice and the Pharisees were a sect of Judaism having their jurisdiction in the synagogue. These are the two most well know sects within

¹ Hallal food is food that has been inspected and approved by a Moslem food inspector much like Kosher food has been inspected by a Rabbi and approved for Jewish consumption. Simply put, it is Moslem Kosher.

Judaism, but there were others including those who dwelt in Qumran (assumed to be the Essenes)², the Zealots, and other minor sects. The picture of Judaism in the first century was much broader than what was later known after they standardized their teaching in the Talmud.

During the destruction of the temple the Sanhedrin was put into chaos and by some reports all the members were killed with the exception of one man, Yochanan Ben Zakkai³. After the destruction of Jerusalem, he being a member of the peace party in Jerusalem rather than one promoting the overthrow of Roman rule, was able to convince Vespasian to allow him to continue the Jewish religion in Yavneh⁴. He set up a yeshiva⁵ which later became the seat of the Sanhedrin. From this school came the history of Judaism as expressed in the Talmud. It is the story of those who survived with the doctrine of the survivors. The Talmud gives very little information concerning other sects of Judaism. As always, the winner gets to tell his story from his perspective. While Pharisaism did not overcome its competition by debate or even force, the remainder of first century Judaism was not able to express its story.

Now I must point out the exception to the previously mentioned scenario. Christianity was another surviving sect of Judaism. It was comprised of the followers of one who was claimed to be the Messiah of Israel. These Christians had written down their story, the New Testament⁶, prior to the destruction of the temple and had fled to the mountains when Jerusalem first was surrounded by armies. Hence they did not fight, nor were they wiped out. Their story is preserved in the New Testament as well as in other Christian writings. However, they were opposed by the Pharisees and because of their opposition, neither side had much good to say about the other.

The Pharisees continued for another 50 years before attempting another revolt. Rabbi Akiva was working on writing the Pharisee's story by assembling the rabbinic data which had been passed down over the years and compiling it into what later became known as the Mishnah. He being one of the head scholars of his time and well respected in the Jewish community facilitated the next great revolt by indorsing Bar Kokhba as Messiah.⁷ Hence many people followed Bar Kokhba to their grave attempting to restore Israel to Jewish autonomy. It is said that Akiva lost 50,000 students in that war. However, some remained to continue his work and ultimately compiled the Talmud. The Talmud is the view of those who survived two tragic defeats.

² The Qumran sect is not named in any of their documents. We hear of the Essenes from Josephus (antiquities 13-15&18, Jewish Wars 1,2&5)

³ More information can be found in *Dictionary of Ancient Rabbis* editor Jacob Neusner p 239

⁴ Yavneh, also spelled Yabneh and Jabneh is a town in the southern coast of Israel's close to the Mediterranean. It became the center of the Jewish religion after the destruction of Jerusalem. A council was held there between 90 and 100AD to determine the Canon of the Tanakh (Old Testament)

⁵ School of Rabbinical learning much like a seminary.

⁶ There are several dates given by scholars for the finishing of the New Testament. Since the destruction of the temple is never mentioned in any of their writings, when it would be considered a triumph for Yehoshua's prophecies, it is only reasonable to assume that it was written prior to the event.

⁷ (Y Taanit IV, 8) tells his endorsement of Bar Kokhba

Now to continue with that other Jewish group called Christianity. It was started by Jews. They had as much right to the title of Yehudai⁸ as Hillel, Shammai or Yokhanan Ben Zakki. The church in Jerusalem was the primary church since it was the home base of all the disciples. They went out from there and started many churches. In the mid 60s AD Yaakhov HaTzadek aka James the Righteous or James the brother of Jesus was killed by a militant group of Jews at a Passover gathering in Jerusalem. James was well respected by those who did not believe that Yehoshua was messiah as well as by those who did. But his murder was done by those who did not believe in Yehoshua. Hence this began a distrust between the two groups. This was accentuated by the Jewish Christians leaving Jerusalem during the Roman siege in 70AD.

There are laws given in the Torah establishing proper sacrificial procedures and proper techniques for slaughter. There are commands given concerning what animals we may eat, and those we may not eat. There are commands given which forbid us to offer sacrifices to idols or false gods. I have found no command forbidding the consumption of a clean animal set before you by a merchant when it is not known whether or not it was a sacrifice to an idol. The question arises as to how these separate laws work together and what we are required to do in respect to verification of proper procedure when others are participating?

To answer these questions consideration must be given to, "Who has the right to establish the proper practice in relationship to Biblical instruction?" Is there any innate quality or position of the Pharisees that establishes them as the proper exegetes concerning Biblical practice? We must establish, "To whom each law applies and whether we have the responsibility to determine if others are following the laws that apply to them?"

With these questions and considerations in mind we should discuss a little bit about a change in the community during the time of Messiah. Historically, Israel, was an agricultural society. The Feasts were even aligned with the harvest time and almost all exchange of goods was done with animals. The Levites were supported by the tithe which was a donation of a tenth part of the flock, and the grain. The festivals, the poor, and the widow were also supported in such a fashion. The only exchange of money (literally silver) was a small fee given to the temple each year. In today's currency this amounted to less than \$10.

During the first century Israel was making a transition from an agrarian society to a more specialized professional society. Lydia was a dyer of purple, Paul made tents, Matthew and Zacchaeus were tax collectors, Peter and Andrew were fishermen, and the list could continue. Due to the professions of these individuals, were they to be excluded from the sacrificial and Israelite tax system? How could they give a tenth of their crops and flocks if they had none? Likewise, if they had no flocks, were they required to purchase all their food on the hoof, or was it permissible for them to buy it already slaughtered in the market place? All of these questions brought about other questions and showed a need to establish some acceptable practice.

Israel is commanded not to sacrifice animals to other gods. However, does this

⁸ Hebraic way of saying Jew

commandment forbid them from any and all association with those who do? This was a problem in the first century since Israel was dominated by the Roman Empire. The Roman world was closing in on them and they had to make some decisions concerning how they could continue to obey God and still operate within the society at large. Hillel and Shammai had debated this issue in the first century BC and the official interpretation of Hallacha⁹ had sided with Shammai stating that Jews could not associate with Gentiles. (Peter's vision--"how unlawful it is to consort with Gentiles" Acts 10:28) Hence they had formed a group (Judaism) which was required to be removed from the larger culture. This made it very problematic to have any type of influence with the culture at large. How can Jewish people present the laws of God to the gentiles when they cannot have anything to do with them?

Hillel was very upset by this decision and proclaimed that Israel had denounced its purpose and made it impossible for Messiah to come. (paraphrased) Acts 15 was a review of this precedent made around 50 years earlier and reversed the decision by siding with Hillel rather than Shammai. The Acts 15 decision becomes much clearer when we recognize that it was a revisit to the Hillel/Shammai debate. They were making rules concerning how much change a Gentile had to make prior to being accepted into the assembly, not making a dismissal of any previous biblical commandments concerning food, morality or anything.

If we were no longer forbidden to associate with Gentiles, then we needed to know how to behave in relationship to Torah while proceeding with our interactions with the Gentiles. For example, could we buy food from a Gentile, and if so, how much do we need to know about what we are buying? Could we eat with a Gentile and how much do we need to know about what we are eating? Israel was forbidden to eat certain meats. Does our association with Gentiles override this Biblical command? Today it seems the majority of the church answers "Yes" to this last question, and I strongly disagree. We have not been given permission for disobedience, we have only been given permission, or a command to interact with the Gentile as long as it does not conflict with the previous given Biblical commands of God. We are not to go to their services and make offerings to their gods, or participate in orgies with their temple prostitutes. These are all forbidden in Torah. However, there is no statement in Torah concerning buying meat whether it be from an Israelite or a Gentile. In the first century we find a situation in which Israel was being forced to purchase food away from home in lands dominated by Gentiles. Some Israelites even had to purchase food for their daily existence. What was required of these Israelites and how much time did they need to spend researching the practices of their merchants?

Today, Judaism has a system set in place to deal with such questions. During the time of Yehoshua (Jesus), there was no system in place. There was a need recognized by the followers, but overlooked by the priests and leaders in the schools of law since they were supported by the masses and did not have to work in order to supply their needs. Only those who had no grain or livestock had to consider whether they could buy an animal already slaughtered or if they should seek out an animal on hoof. Slaughtering is time consuming and if you need to support yourself by means other

⁹ Hallacha is a Hebrew word meaning the way we walk. It was considered the standard Torah precedent or the allowable practice when considering the Legal commandment.

than raising flocks, you may not have time for such a time consuming practice. Specialization was taking over and how was the Jew to cope?

The problem with purchasing an animal that had been slaughtered arose concerning the verses giving rules for a Kosher kill. Does the buyer have to determine if the animal had been killed according to proper Jewish Hallacha on slaughtering or does the fact that they are buying from a Gentile exempt the eater from the need to establish its legal slaughter? The eater can obey the commands that God has given him without regard to whether the Gentile properly obeyed the commands of God. After all, are we as people of God suppose to inspect the actions of our neighbors or are we to do what is right before our neighbors? Is it not presumptuous for us to assume we have the right to determine whether those of a different nation are following our laws?

The legal edicts for killing an animal are given to the one killing, just as the legal edicts for eating an animal are given to the one eating. Remember that an Israelite could sell an animal to a Gentile that was improper for the Israelite to eat. I suppose full disclosure was required since the Israelite was not to misrepresent his product, but the Israelite was not required to enforce his laws upon the Gentile. It was the responsibility of a Gentile to determine if it were proper for him to eat. However, the Torah of God has always been applicable to all His creation. This just shows it is the individual's responsibility to follow Torah, not the responsibility of those who know Torah to enforce it on all others. Considering this, if the one eating is not the one killing, is he responsible for the actions of someone of whom he was not in control? If an Israelite priest had not drained the blood properly and then returned the meat to the worshiper to eat, was the worshiper responsible for an improper kill? My own thinking would say no, the priest is responsible for his actions, and the worshiper is responsible only for his personal actions. This being the case, a purchaser of meat would not be responsible for the seller's impropriety in its slaughter even if it were sacrificed to Athena. However, he should not eat if the animal had died on it own or it was told to him that he was buying an animal sacrificed to a false god.

I believe that the new Testament statements concerning eating animals purchased in the market place was only stating the obvious about the need to establish every detail about the animal that was offered. "Do not ask questions for conscience sake" was not a reversal of any law. Rather, it was an attempt to keep people from forcing others to submit to their personal strict observance to God's law when the seller had not even submitted to God. I do not think this means we can eat animals that have not been drained of their blood or that we can eat roadkill that someone picked up and decided to sell. We can see the blood, and we should know our butcher well enough to determine that he is not selling us carrion. However, if we are traveling to a pagan country, we should feel free to purchase the butchered clean animals since not to do so would slow the journey or the time spent in eating to a snail's pace. This seems to be the decision expressed in the New Testament and does not seem to be in conflict with any previously given law of God. Could the disciples have traveled throughout the world spreading the good news of Yehoshua HaMashiakh if they had to butcher their own food? Maybe if they became vegetarians.

This decision is in conflict with the Jewish prescribed practice today, but this is modern Jewish Hallacha, not Torah. If this is Hallacha, then where is the jurisdiction that substantiates the Pharisaic interpretation as superior to the group following Yehoshua? I find no Scriptural basis to

determine that the Pharisee is the proper exegete of Scripture. I could argue for a Sadducee's jurisdiction, but it seems to me that the Pharisee's (Elders in the gates) were placed below the Priests¹⁰ for the purpose of court decisions. Until the temple was destroyed, this was the case. Once the temple was destroyed, then the elders in the gates jurisdiction depended in which gates one stood.

I am with Messiah and his teachers, establishing them as the elders in the gates. Hence I find no need to support the later Pharisaic interpretation concerning the eating of meats. This becomes a problem with Jews who recognize their Messiah. They have been established under Pharisee hallakah and may desire to continue. I will support them in this, but do not feel compelled to join them with a conviction, nor continue after they leave. If I moved to Israel, I might voluntarily adopt their practice, but not because I think Paul was wrong. I am willing to change if I were given a Scriptural argument showing how the Torah actually forbids eating meat that had previously been killed by a Gentile.

As to further implications, I think it could be concluded that we should not be Torah Police. This was the problem with the Pharisees. They were out looking for a reason to draw men unto their position. They were extending their authority beyond their jurisdiction which only included the city where they resided and those residents who came and asked for their decision. The authorization of a policeman is totally absent in Torah. The citizen was to bring in the offender and ask for justice. The policeman actually represents the state, rather than the individual who is harmed. The Pharisees in the first century were seeking followers. They were accosting the disciples and contradicting their teacher. They were usurping authority. I think Yehoshua often criticized them not because of their judgment, but because of their audacity. We could learn a lot from this. We in the Hebrew Roots movement often go in where we are not asked to correct those who are not looking for our opinion. We need to work within the jurisdiction we have been given and share where we are asked outside our circle not in contention with the leaders. Convert a leader rather than stir up his congregation.

This may have been a very long answer to say that I do not find any forbiddance of eating meat killed by a Gentile in the Torah. Yet I fear if we do not consider the various problems of the day, we may totally misunderstand the progression of thought used to determine how such decisions were made and then come to faulty conclusions about how we should progress with future problems. I think the church at large has misunderstood the problem so it misinterpreted the answer leading it to think that God's commandments had been repealed. This is a logical application when we do not understand the situation of the day. We then reinterpret according to our own situation.

Now, concerning your statement,

“My personal feeling about eating Halal food is that I would probably abstain from a meat if I knew it was Halal (offered to Allah), solely because I do not consider Allah to be “nothing,” like perhaps a stone idol, but rather a formidable “principality.”

¹⁰ The priests in the temple at the time of Yehoshua were Sadducees. This was a transliteration into Greek from Hebrew of the word Tzadokim which referred to the Sons of Zadok

I believe you are either giving Allah too much credit, or too little credit. I agree, he is not an idol, but were the Greek gods? They had idols that represented them, but stories that personified them. No one thought the stories were about the statues. Rather the stories were about some being that had later been represented by the idol in the temple where they were worshiped.

Allah is either the true creator God who is being falsely identified as "the God of Abraham, Ishmael and Esau," (Exodus 3:15) or a false god who has been elevated to the position of YHWH. I know that the true God probably was the God of Ishmael and Esau, but YHWH never referred to Himself as the God of Ishmael and Esau. In either of these cases I would not have much problem eating their food. If they offered it to Allah, and he were a false god, then I would think it okay under the same circumstances as any other idol, however, if it were merely a misnomer of YHWH the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then it would not bother me anymore than eating with others who sometimes misuse titles, i.e. The God who "always heals," or the God "who makes me rich." I do not know of anyone using those titles, but I do know of teachings that falsely proclaim these characteristics. Now you could state that putting Halal on the package is an admission of sacrifice to Allah. That might be something to consider, but I would only be concerned if someone were pointing that out to say that you are participating in Allah worship.

As a side note, I know of no Jewish hallachic decision that considers Allah a different God from YHWH. Many Jews in our area will eat at the local restaurant serving Halal food treating it as equivalent to Kosher where applicable. However the mixture of meat and milk is not forbidden in Halal, so the Hallal designation would not be accepted as a blanket stamp of approval. Those who are strict orthodox Kosher will not accept Halal food because of the improper blessing given over it when it was slaughtered. The Jew says the blessing must be given when the animal is killed. Christian interpretation states that the blessing at the meal time is sufficient to sanctify the food.¹¹ There are a few other differences between Halal and Kosher. For example, a camel is considered clean by Halal standards and there may be other animals that slip through which are forbidden in Torah. Most are detectable by reading or looking it over. For those in the Hebrew Roots movement, most do not separate milk from meat, nor do they demand that a blessing be said prior to the killing of the animal. Hence, Halal food may not be considered a concern if the animal were clean. The purpose of this response is not to persuade anyone to a different position concerning Allah or eating Halal food. I am only trying to add some perspectives to the thought process. Hopefully this will help us all grow in our walk with our Heavenly Father, and not create new arguments with which to beat others over the head.

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¹¹ This could be the subject Paul is addressing with Timothy, ^{NKJ} **1 Timothy 4:3^b**... *and commanding* to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵ for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." This is speaking only of those things God has previously explained as being food, not everything that the pagan calls food. It says "those who believe and know the truth." This indicates the animals that are known to be edible by those who know the truth of God i.e. Torah.

