JEWISH DIETARY PRACTICE IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

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Abstract

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The goal of this thesis is to examine the evolution of Jewish dietary practice in pre-rabbinic Judaism, with the goal of charting the variety of practices among Jewish communities from the Greco-Roman world through the rise of the early Christian movement.

This thesis is composed of three chapters on the following subjects: biblical dietary practice, food and culture for Jews, Greeks, and Romans, and dietary practice in early Christianity. The first chapter examines many of the texts which address food and food restrictions in the bible, including the Genesis narrative, Esther, and Daniel, and many of the prohibitions outlined in Leviticus in order to discern the variety of concerns regarding dietary practice expressed in the biblical texts. The second chapter looks at a variety of Jewish food practices under Greek and Roman rule and in the diaspora, and attempts to gauge what Greeks and Romans knew of Jewish food practices. The final chapter looks at texts from the New Testament in order to explore the ways in which food practiced was used to differentiate the early Christian movement from Judaism, and what food practice looked like in Jesus' time for both Jews and early Christians.

The research used many Hebrew bible sources, Pseudepigrapha, Apocrypha, and New Testament texts, writings from ancient Greek and Roman authors and many modern scholars in the fields of biblical criticism, ancient history, and food history.

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Introduction

Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are.
-- Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste, 1826.*

The shared meal elevates eating from a mechanical process of fueling the body to a ritual of family and community, from the mere animal biology to an act of culture.
-- Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto, 2008.*

Our society has a complicated relationship with food. Many of us watch others cook delicious and exotic meals on television reality shows far more often than we cook even a simple meal from scratch at home. The slow and local food movement has made us more aware of where our food comes from, and the amount of resources it takes to put a meal on our plate, even though our society buys a huge amount frozen meals and fast food. However, this has been a relatively new shift in American society. In the 1950's, the agricultural and commercial food industries invented all sorts of creatively prepared foods that could be stored for long periods of time and opened when needed. These innovations, made possible by modern science, offered the home cooks of the era a quick and easy way to prepare a nutritious meal for the family, and industrial meat processing facilities allowed even those people at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder to eat meat almost every day of the week.

Wheat, one of the oldest-cultivated plants in human history, has been engineered to be more drought resistant, use less water, and be easier to harvest. Initially, these innovations were touted as magical solutions to fix food shortages throughout the

world, and that these modified crops were better than the original in every way. We now know that such engineering comes at a cost. Today's strains of wheat are less nutritious than older varieties, and this deficit is compounded by industrial processing techniques that further remove the nutritious germ from the grain of wheat. The rise of diseases like Celiac's, gluten allergies, obesity, and cancer coincides with a rise in the consumption of processed food.

I have always been an adventurous eater, especially when traveling. My willingness to experiment with exotic foods has backfired on occasion, but the benefit of these foods is the social interaction that they afford with the people who cook these foods. Whether it is boiled quail eggs from an old woman pushing a cart outside the entrance to a Buddhist temple in Thailand, roasted sheep's neck in the Arab village of Abu Gosh outside of Jerusalem, or live shrimp at the sushi restaurant around the corner from my house in Culver City, each of these food interactions afforded me a glimpse into another culture, and a chance to ask the chef "What does this food mean to you?" Sitting down to eat at someone else's table (or food cart) also sends a powerful message of real interest and genuine appreciation of their culture. Deep down, my own issue with kashrut today is that it prevents such cultural interaction, and I wanted my rabbinic thesis to be an exploration of Jewish food practices in a time before halakha, before rabbinic Judaism, and before "Do you keep kosher?" became the one of the most defining question of Jewish observance.

The Jews of the Greek and Roman worlds, and especially those living in the diaspora, faced a situation not unlike that of many Jews in America today. We can choose how much we want to integrate into the society around us, and how much we

stay within the boundaries of our Jewish communities. Many of us, even those who keep kosher, have very few qualms about having dinner at a non-Jew's house, and Jews are hardly the only people with dietary restrictions. Vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, dairy-free, non-genetically modified, locally grown, ethically raised… These are just a few of the labels you might find in today's well-stocked grocery store. Jewish dietary restrictions have long defined what and with whom Jews will eat, but today Jews are looking for a food practice that matches the values which are the foundation of our religion. How can we repair the world if our hunger for meat threatens the very environment in which we live? How can we love our neighbor as ourselves when they have to pick vegetables covered in pesticides and herbicides? How can we teach our children our values if we do not sit down together at the dinner table?

Before we can figure out the future of Jewish dietary practice, we have to know our past. This thesis examines Jewish dietary practice in the bible, in the Greek and Roman worlds, and in early Christianity in order to chart a path of the evolution of Jewish food observance, as well as its impact on Jewish culture. The food laws in the bible are the foundation for all of Jewish food practice, and merit a closer look through the lens of cultural food norms and dietary practices. Stripping away many layers of interpretation and commentary, what does the text of the bible tell us about what Jews ate, and what were their concerns over food and diet? Moving forward through history, Jewish texts, and texts from their Greek and Roman neighbors give us a glimpse into how Judaism interacted with other cultures during a period of great social and religious change. And finally, I examine food and dietary restrictions in the Christian bible in order to explore how those restrictions defined who was a Jew, who was a Christian,

and the role of food and shared meals in the early Christian movement. I hope that this thesis offers helpful and insightful material to anyone interested in the history of Jewish dietary practice and in the continuing evolution of our relationship with food, and the natural world which provides our sustenance.

Chapter 1 - Biblical Dietary Practice

> **Cooking – of whatever kind, everyday or extreme – situates us in the world in a very special place, facing the natural world on one side and the social world on the other. The cook stands squarely between nature and culture, conducting a process of transformation and negotiation. Both nature and culture are transformed by the work. And in the process, I discovered, so is the cook.**
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> -- Michael Pollan, *Cooked: A Natural history of Transformation, 2014*

FIRST MEALS

Adam and Eve

Along with heaven and earth, and living creatures, in the creation story of Genesis 1 God also creates food (v.29), suggesting that Israelites believed that food had been important throughout the long history of human culture. God commands the first human beings to assert control over the earth, and to eat from all of its green plants and fruits with seeds.[1] Just as God has ultimate control over the world, so human beings should display their own dominance over God's creations. This blessing of control of plants and animals shows that human beings are indeed like God, since they were created in the image of God and are given power over the lives of plans and animals. Judith McKinlay, noting the provider-recipient relationship evident in this text, writes that "God [is] the provider and humankind [is] the receiver [of food]. It comes as gift, establishing a dependency, a grace requiring gratitude. God is notable careful to stress

[1] Genesis 1:28-30.
[2] McKinlay, Judith E.. "To Eat or Not to Eat: Where is the Wisdom in this Choice?." *Semia*

the divine role of provider."[2] Here in Genesis, food is given as a gift to the first human beings, a gift for which Adam and Eve must work after being expelled from the garden for, ironically enough, eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge. Adam (and Eve) apparently did not have to work for their food in the garden, since Genesis tells us that "the Lord God banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken."[3] Thus, humanity's obligation to produce its own food is a punishment for the sin of wanting to be like gods and eating from the tree of knowledge.

Cain and Abel

Meat consumption is entirely absent from the Eden narratives, where the focus is on the plants and vegetation present in the garden, and then, after the expulsion, on the obligation of humanity to till the soil for food. While human beings must grow their own food from the ground (as they will continue to do until the Noah story), God's preference for meat first appears in the story of Cain and Abel's sacrifices to God. Cain brought an offering of fruit, while Abel brought a choice sheep from his flock. God "paid heed to Abel and his offering, but to Cain and his offering He paid no heed."[4] Clearly, "meat, is nonetheless sacred and belongs to the sphere of the divine."[5] Later in the Torah, animal sacrifices will be a critical part of Israelite worship, including the consumption of the remainder of the sacrificial meat. Here we see the preference for animal sacrifice, but no mention is made of whether Abel's sacrifice was consumed by human beings or not. Israelites were not the only peoples of the ancient world to

[2] McKinlay, Judith E.. "To Eat or Not to Eat: Where is the Wisdom in this Choice?." *Semia* 86 (1999): 73. www.usc.edu/libraries (accessed August 21, 2013).
[3] Genesis 3:23, trans. JPS.
[4] Genesis 4:4-5, trans. JPS.
[5] Brenner, Athalya, and Jan Willem van Henten. "Our Menu and What Is Not On It: An Introduction." *Semia* 86 (1999): ix - xvi.

sacrifice to animals, in fact the practice was widespread in the ancient world. Author and food historian writes about the practice, and the importance of the smoke service as food for the gods: "Humans must eat to survive, but gods, being immortal, have no such animal needs…"[6] Offering an animal, one of God's creations, up to heaven also alleviates some of the fraught emotion that comes with taking a creature's life. Pollan views the ritual as the act that allows people to believe that the killing of the animal is necessary, not only for food, but for worship of their god, and that the smoke of their cook fire is the true food of the gods.[7] Ambivalence over the fact that animals die in order to provide us food is nothing new, and the ritual of religious slaughter allows the killing of an animal to become more than just substance of body, it is sustenance of soul and worship of God as well.

Noah

The first time God instructs humans to eat meat comes after the flood, when Noah offers a burnt sacrifice to God. The God who hungers for fleshly sacrifices and enjoys their pleasing aroma accords humans the right to enjoy the fullness of the earth, animals included: "Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all of these. You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it."[8] Though the later food prohibitions will expand this limitation well beyond the concern over blood, one already sees how Israelite literature is interested in the connection between food and God. Whether for God or for people, animal food differs from bloodless vegetation insofar as it must be transformed before it is acceptable for

[6] Pollan, Michael. *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation.*. S.l.: Penguin Books, 2014, 35.
[7] Pollan, 47.
[8] Genesis 9:3-4, trans. JPS.

consumption. In other words, meat eating introduces the cultural practices of converting animals into food, killing and cooking. As Athalya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten note, "'Raw' and 'cooked' in the Hebrew Bible clearly serve as markers of culture and civilization."[9] Indeed, as Israelite identity begins to coalesce, we see instances of separation between "our" food and "their" food, even as the evidence suggests that the Israelite diet was not so different from that of their neighbors.[10]

God gave Noah and his family permission to eat all the living creatures of the earth in language that echoes the first creation story. In Genesis, Adam and Eve are told to "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."[11] But later on God blesses Noah and his sons, saying "the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, and upon all wherewith the ground teemeth, and upon all the fishes of the sea: into your hand are they delivered."[12] The stories are similar, but Genesis 9 contains an element of fear and dread not present in the first creation story. While the animals are made to be under the dominion of Adam and Eve, they are afraid of Noah and his sons because God has granted them the right to consume animals for food. Perhaps Genesis 9 purposefully restates the language of Genesis 1 in order to couch this new permissive attitude towards the other creatures of the world in the same sort of parental instruction that God gives to Adam and Eve in the garden.

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[9] Brenner and van Henten, xi.
[10] Cooper, John. *Eat and be satisfied: a social history of Jewish food*. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1993, 1-3.
[11] Genesis 1:26, trans. JPS.
[12] Genesis 9:2, trans. JPS.

Abraham

Genesis 18:6 tells of the guests who visit Abraham with the news of his wife's imminent pregnancy. The meal Abraham prepares for them is of special quality, consisting of "choice flour" and a calf "tender and choice,"[13] as well as cheese curds and milk. The components of the meal do not appear to be out of the ordinary for the time and place. Cynthia Shafer-Elliott describes cheese and other dairy products as common features of the ancient near East diet, but asserts that meat was a much less rare presence at meals. "The Israelite diet was not based on meat because animals were valuable commodities. If and when it was served, usually for special occasions and hospitality,"[14] the mere presence of meat in a meal would almost certainly have made the meal a special and rare occasion, reserved for life cycle events and honoring guests.

More often, meals in the ancient Near East would include bread. As Schafer-Elliott observes, "Bread was consumed daily in antiquity, but the consumption of meat was a rare occurrence for the average family." [15] Indeed, in this text Abraham not only prepares meat, but asks Sarah to bake cakes as well. Abraham's guests eat the meal without any further comment, while Abraham waited for them under a tree. Does Abraham purposefully avoid sharing a meal with people whom he assumes do not share his monotheistic beliefs? Possibly, but that is not the focus of the narrative, which is much more interested in the effort Abraham puts into the meal and the air of subservience with which he comports himself, both indicating that he is a gracious and humble host. More likely, Abraham waited on his guests and discussed their travels

[13] Genesis 18:7, trans. JPS.
[14] Shafer-Elliott, Cynthia. *Food in ancient Judah: domestic cooking in the time of the Hebrew Bible*. Sheffield, U.K.: Equinox Pub., 2013, page 21.
[15] Shafer-Elliott, 136.

with them only after the meal was served because that was the custom in the ancient Near East.[16] To talk business before serving food would have been a serious faux pas. The Middle Eastern culture of hospitality was a crucial part of forming relationships with other people and other tribes, and to this day remains one of the most important parts of desert culture. In the introduction to their book, *Cooking with the Bible: Biblical Food, Feasts, and Lore*, Chiffolo and Hesse write; "In biblical times, an invitation to dine, whether with family and friends or with complete strangers, was taken most seriously. The Middle Eastern code of ethics held strongly to a belief that good hospitality was the command of The Divine, and the offer to partake of a meal was sacred."[17]

Abraham's story shows the value of hospitality, Shafer-Elliott notes, but scholars do not often consider the food that Abraham prepared for his guests.[18] The language used to describe the cakes of flour closely the language in Leviticus which describes the cakes used for offerings, and this language may be a later priestly insertion meant to lend weight to the quality of sacrifices required in the temple.[19] Even if this is the case, Abraham's meal for his host goes well beyond the gestures of hospitality expected by guests.

Joseph

When Abraham's great-grandson, Joseph, dines with his estranged brothers in Egypt, we are told that "they [the Egyptians] served him [Joseph] by himself, and them [Joseph's brothers] by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves;

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[16] Shafer-Elliott, 141.
[17] *Cooking with the Bible: biblical food, feasts, and lore*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006, xiii.
[18] Chiffolo and Hesse, 139.
[19] Chiffolo and Hesse, 147.

for the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians."[20] The text goes out of its way to describe the unique seating arrangements at the meal, which David M. Freidenreich understands as an explanation of Egyptian unwillingness to share a table with Israelites, rather than the other way around. He goes on to remark that no biblical text other than Daniel encourages the Israelites to distance themselves from their neighbors in commensality.[21] According to Deborah A. Appler, meals in the bible often serve as devices to show the building of a communal bond between people.[22] It is clear in this particular meal that the various participants are not interested in establishing relationships of community with one another. The meal described here shows the boundaries between the Egyptians, the Israelites, and Joseph, whose true identity is concealed from both his brothers and the Egyptians. In order to see who is separating from whom, it helps to translate the verse and make its pronouns explicit. "They [i.e., the servants] served him [i.e., Joseph] by himself, and them [i.e., Joseph's brothers] by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him [i.e., Joseph] by themselves; for the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians."[23]

Three separate groups or individuals dine at the same time in this narrative: Joseph, members of his Egyptian court, and Joseph's brothers. Joseph has a place set apart for him not because he is a Hebrew but because he is of such high rank in the Egyptian court. In such royal banquets, the royalty or guests of honor often would sit at

[20] Genesis 43:32, trans. JPS.
[21] Freidenreich, David M.. *Foreigners and Their Food: Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic law*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, 17.
[22] Appler, Deborah A.. "From Queen to Cuisine: Food Imagery in the Jezebel Narrative." *Semia* 86 (1999): 55-71. www.usc.edu/libraries (accessed August 22, 2013).
[23] Gen. 43:32, trans. JPS, additions are my own.

a raised platform at the front of the hall, while the rest of the court would sit below. This is likely the case here, as we read in the verse "and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves." It appears customary for the Egyptians and Joseph to eat together but at separate tables due to their difference in rank, and this separation does not reflect any discomfort due to the fact that Joseph is also an Israelite. The author suggests that the Egyptian hesitation to eat with the Israelites is a prohibition for the Egyptians, not the Israelites. Determining who chose to separate from whom is not an easy thing to do, as there are many different scenarios played out in the biblical narrative. Freidenreich believes that the Bible "goes out of its way to describe the unusual seating arrangements"[24] in this particular story, but also wonders why "these texts fail to prohibit the consumption of meat prepared by non-Israelites or, for that matter, the practice of eating with non-Israelites?"[25]

Was separation the norm? Alternatively, was this separation a notable event for the biblical author? The story of Joseph and Potiphar offers several clues about the relationship between Egyptians and Israelites. Genesis 39:4 says that Potiphar "took a liking to Joseph. He made him his personal attendant and put him in charge of his household, placing in his hands all that he owned." This description certainly appears all encompassing, meaning that Potiphar felt such confidence in Joseph that he left his entire household in Joseph's hands. If true, then Joseph also controlled the kitchen and food preparation in Potiphar's house, no small task in a wealthy Egyptian household. One assumes, therefore, that the Egyptian Potiphar was not bothered by the fact that an Israelite was in charge of his household, including its kitchen(s). Potiphar's trust of

[24] Freidenreich, 17.
[25] Freidenreich, 18.

Joseph does not necessarily mean that Potiphar sat down to meals with him, but rather that he was comfortable leaving Joseph in charge of day-to-day operations in the household. Yet, a few verses later we learn that "he left all that he had in Joseph's hands and, with him there, he paid attention to nothing save the food that he ate."[26] Does this verse contradict the earlier description of Potiphar leaving his entire household in Josephs' hands? Freidenreich believes so, pointing to this verse as evidence that the Egyptians "adhere to commensality-based and, it would seem, preparer-based foreign food restrictions... not common among Israelites."[27]

I would suggest another reading of this text, based on a different understanding of the word *lechem*, translated as "food" by the JPS. A more accurate translation would say that "[Potiphar] paid attention to nothing save the bread (*lechem*) which he ate." Bread is a common expression in biblical texts which suggests a whole meal, or the concept of all the food one normally consumes for sustenance. When the people wandered through the desert, they voiced their complaint over the lack of food by saying "Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread and no water?"[28] Joseph uses food (*lechem*) to guarantee his purchase of cattle[29], and when King David invites Mephibosheth to dine at the royal table he says *yochel tamid lechem*, "you will forever eat bread."[30] Since Potiphar clearly ate more than just bread, this word appears here in the sense suggested above, as a metonym for his diet.[31]

[26] Genesis 39:6, trans. JPS.
[27] Freidenreich, 17.
[28] Numbers 21:5, trans. JPS.
[29] Genesis 41:16.
[30] II Samuel 9:10.
[31] Perhaps then the phrase is an expression or idiom for which we no longer have the context of meaning. If Potiphar trusted his entire household to Jacob, then perhaps

Joseph does seem to be particularly adept at food management, proving himself worthy to guide Egypt through the years of plenty followed by years of famine and receiving a place in the court second only to Pharaoh himself.[32] This story also supports the idea that Joseph had experience as a food manager in Potiphar's house.

LAWS AND BOUNDARIES

The stories from Egypt, Joseph's brothers and Joseph and Potiphar, begin to show the degree to which food constructs identity for ancient Israel, and how boundaries of food reflect and create boundaries between peoples. Mary Douglas writes in *Purity and Danger*, "The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious."[33] Therefore, the act of consumption brings the outside world inside an individual, literally, and creates concern over ingesting the impurities or undesired values of an "other," be it a society or land. The book of Leviticus contains a great deal of the food laws which eventually will provide the basis for the rabbinic notion of *kashrut*. Chapter 11 of Leviticus outlines the animals which Israelites may eat: "any animal that has true hoofs, with clefts through the hoofs, and that chews the cud – such you may eat"[34]; "these you may eat of all that live in water: anything in water, whether in the seas or in

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"he paid attention to nothing save the food that he ate" is meant to portray Potiphar as lazy and gluttonous for food, focusing all his attention on the meals in front of him. The very same verse that describes Potiphar this way also describes Joseph as "well built and handsome," and introduces the story of Potiphar's wife lusting after Joseph. Was she seeking the physical attention that her husband denied her for his love of food? The close connection of the two stories might support the idea.

[32] Genesis 41.

[33] Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. New York: Praeger, 1966, 142.

[34] Leviticus 11:3, trans. JPS.

the streams, that has fins and scales – these you may eat;"[35] "of these you may eat the following: locusts of every variety; all varieties of bald locust; crickets of every variety; and all varieties of grasshopper."[36] Any animal that does not fall into these categories, or that has died of natural causes, is prohibited for consumption.[37] This law governs only the consumption of meat, an oddity given that most Israelites subsisted on a mainly vegetarian diet. As John Cooper has observed, "the majority of the population lived on a diet of barley bread, vegetables, and fruit, supplemented by milk products and honey." Moreover, Cooper notes, "unless a family belonged to a section of the small priestly elite or court circles, meat was rarely eaten but was consumed at festive meals or tribal gatherings when the participants were given a share of the sacrificial feast, usually a portion of domestic animal such as a goat or sheep."[38] David Kraemer describes the importance of animals in the ancient world as workers for things other than food:

> Animals were of crucial importance for supplying other needs – oxen were work animals and sheep and goats provided wool and cheese. It would have been a significant decision to diminish one's small flock to eat the animal's flesh – a decision to be made only rarely. Thus, for common folk, the only occasions when meat might normally have been enjoyed were festivals and special celebrations (again, the meat would have served as a symbol of the unusual nature of the occasion).[39]

So, if people were nearly always eating food that was not subject to the bible's food laws, what purpose did the laws serve?

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[35] Leviticus 11:9, trans. JPS.
[36] Leviticus 11:22, trans. JPS.
[37] Leviticus 11:39, trans. JPS.
[38] Cooper, John. *Eat and Be Satisfied: A Social History of Jewish Food*. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1993, 3.
[39] Kraemer, David Charles. *Jewish Eating and Identity Through the Ages*. New York: Routledge, 2007, 16.

The animals prohibited in Leviticus 11 are described as "unclean," *tameh*, a legal term meaning "unfit" or "impure," and the reason for these restrictions closes the long list of laws. "For I the Lord am your God: you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not make yourselves unclean through any swarming thing that moves upon the earth. For I the Lord am He who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God: you shall be holy for I am holy."[40] In biblical law, bodily impurity abates over time or can be removed, but not so the impurity of forbidden animals. God has distinguished the clean from the unclean animals. Israel is to consume only the clean animals, not so that Israelites may separate themselves from the other nations of the world, but so that Israel can be holy as God is holy. In Leviticus 20, the dietary laws are reiterated in terms of holiness, but with the added concept of not following the practices of the people who occupy the promised land before the Israelite conquest. "You shall possess their land, for I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey. I the Lord am your God who has set you apart from other peoples. So shall you set apart the clean beast from the unclean, the unclean bird from the clean..."[41] Mary Douglas, author of *Purity and Danger* "sees a connection between the sacrificial altar and the Israelite kitchen. The land animals the Israelites were permitted to eat are the same types of animals required for sacrifices and reflect God's covenantal relationship with his people."[42] Thus, diet governed by biblical food laws connects Israelites to God more so than it separates them from other people. God created clean

[40] Leviticus 12:44-45, trans. JPS.
[41] Leviticus 20:24-25, trans. JPS.
[42] Shafer-Elliot, 21.

and unclean animals, so that Israelites might eat only the clean animals, and therefore be holy like their God is holy.

The food laws reflect the biblical desire for the Israelites to separate the holy from the profane, and to be reminded of this distinction in their everyday lives. Douglas' assertion that biblical food laws point to a connection between the altar and the kitchen is buoyed by the notion that for much of the biblical narrative meat may only be consumed after proper sacrifice at the temple by the priests, thus necessitating a religious component to any instance of meat consumption. The consumption of living flesh then requires a religious component in order to provide context and structure to taking the life of one of God's creatures and to offer the appropriate thanks to God by offering the animal as a sacrifice to God. Friedenreich agrees that biblical food laws were not meant to be superior to, or competitive with, any other system of food restrictions, but rather served the symbolic purpose of reminding Israelites to be holy in their food choices:

> Proper respect to foodstuffs, according to Leviticus 20:25, serves the *purely symbolic function* of expressing Israel's holiness through the enactment of divinely ordained classifications among animal species that are analogous to the divine classification of peoples… Biblical texts do not refer to such a contrast [between Israelite and non-Israelite consumption patterns], and thus ascribe no significance to the differentiating and segregating functions inherently latent in any set of food restrictions... Perhaps because, in fact, there were only negligible differences between Israelite and non-Israelite food practices in ancient Canaan.[43]

This understanding of the dietary restrictions is different from what Jewish eating practice has become in today's world of competing hekshering organizations and

[43] Freidenreich, David M.. *Foreigners and Their Food: Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic law*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, 24-25.

mountains of precise kashrut laws. Here the emphasis is on the internal awareness of one's own desire for holiness and purity, rather than the fear or distrust of the food of others.

Good Ingredients Are the Most Important Part of Any Recipe

This understanding also helps us better understand why the most common sources of food (bread, grains, vegetables) were left out of the biblical food laws. If the intent of the laws was indeed to facilitate a community of believers and adherents, it would make sense to avoid prohibiting or curtailing the consumption of the staple foods of the community. A better strategy would be to enshrine in law those food practices already being followed by the local community. Marvin Harris "argues [that] food prohibitions are not arbitrary, impractical, irrational, useless, or harmful; rather, they can be explained by nutritional, ecological, or financial choices. He concludes that the food prohibitions in Leviticus were 'mostly codifications of pre-existing traditional food prejudices and avoidances.'"[44]

If we examine biblical food laws as merely the enshrinement of existent Israelite food practice, we can learn not only what Israelites ate, but also what they abhorred as foreign and strange. For example, Schwartz dispels several myths regarding the prohibition of pork. He maintains that pork carried no more risk of disease in the ancient days than any other meat, and that those diseases that could infect humans are rare in free-range pigs that eat a natural diet. Pigs are no dirtier in their behavior than scavenging chickens or water buffalo; their meat is no fattier than lamb; nor does it spoil faster than fish. Schwartz proposes that pork was prohibited for two reasons, one

[44] Shafer-Elliott, 24.

practical and one cultural. The practical reason is that pigs were simply not suited to the nomadic lifestyle; they cannot travel long distances on their own and they eat the same foods as other more productive animals such as goats. The symbolic answer is that "the pig represented everything oppressive and foreign. The enemy from the south, the Egyptians deified the pig while the Greeks, in an attempt to Hellenize the Jews, marched pigs into the Temple and forced the Jews to eat pork."[45] Thus choosing not to eat pig represents a rejection of the very cultures which had oppressed the Jews in the past.

Another way of understanding biblical food laws is the categorical approach. This approach relies upon a "perfect" animal in each category of living things described in the creation story, and anything that does not meet the criteria of that category is unfit for consumption. Douglas explains, "We can conclude that holiness is exemplified by completeness. Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused."[46] This ideal of not mixing different classes of things can help us understand many of the levitical laws: not wearing a clothing item made of more than one type of fiber, not planting two types of crops in the same field, and laws of separation from clean and unclean individuals. Both the notion of separation of unlike items and the idea of a thing conforming to its class or category play major roles in Jewish dietary practice. For the category of fish, a fit sea creature must adhere to the "complete" or perfect example of that category; it must swim and have fins and scales. Any sea

[45] Schwartz, Oded. *In Search of Plenty:* A *History of Jewish Food*, London: K. Cathie, 1992, 19.

[46] Douglas originated this approach to the laws of purity in her chapter titled *The Abominations of Leviticus*, in her book Purity and Danger, page 67.

creature lacking those features, such as shellfish, eels, or crustaceans does not meet the requirements for its category, and is considered unfit. The same idea applies to land animals, the ideal animal being one that chews the cud and having a cleft hoof. Any animal that chews its cud[47] is an herbivore. By requiring an animal to ruminate, the Bible effectively excludes predatory and scavenging animals. The cleft hoof rules out any animals that have claws with which to seize prey. All the animals fit for consumption by the Israelites must be vegetarian in their own diets. It is worthwhile to examine the question of how much seafood ancient Israelites might have consumed, and to what degree they might have encountered forbidden species. Kraemer argues, "In theory, Israelites could have enjoyed unlimited quantities of permitted fish. But, in practice, they can have consumed relatively little."[48] This is due to the geographic area in which the Israelites likely spent most of their time, in the central hilly land far from the coastal areas. In fact, Kraemer argues that these laws hardly affected Israelite food practices, since they rarely controlled or spent time in coastal areas. We can imagine Israelites only rarely encountering sea life other than fresh water river fish, and therefore having an aversion to such strange, unfamiliar, and highly unappetizing creatures like lobsters, eels, and clams.

Douglas plays on the idea that the biblical authors disliked things that cannot easily ascribed to one category of thing or another. While an eel swims in the water, it

[47] The technical term for chewing the cud is "ruminate," from which we also get the definition of ruminate as "to think deeply about something." From the Latin meaning "chewed over," it refers to an animal with multiple stomachs with which to process tough to digest grasses and hay. The animal repeatedly brings the food up out of one stomach before swallowing it down to the next stomach for the next phase of digestion. Much like an individual might repeatedly bring up an idea while it becomes further and further developed.

[48] Kraemer, 16.

does not have easily discernible scales or fins like a fish. The lobster lives in the sea, but has legs and does not swim. Each of these examples, the eel and the lobster, represent an animal that is "incomplete" or "imperfect" in its category, and therefore unfit for consumption. Shafer-Elliot notes the discomfort over animals that do not fit neatly into their category, "in other words, forbidden foods are seen as ambiguous and therefore threatening. Avoiding these threatening foods reduces chaos and disorder."[49] She likens the categories of animals to social categories of the peoples of the world, with Israel as God's chosen people, the best and most complete example of a people. In a world where Israelites must constantly interact with their non-Israelite neighbors, rules governing social behaviors mitigate the fear of inappropriate mixing. Purity laws, laws regarding modesty and interactions between men and women, and laws limiting what kinds of interactions Israelites can have with non-Israelites all serve to keep society well-ordered. As David Kraemer puts it, "if Jews live only among themselves, having little or no regular contact with non-Jews, then they have little cause to worry about the possible intermixture of prohibited flesh, and they similarly have little reason to concern themselves with problems relating to 'gentile' foods."[50] When faced with a multitude of choices, biblical food laws offer a sense of security and comfort through the removal of those choices that are potentially dangerous or threatening.

Too Much of a Good Thing…

Today, kashrut laws serve partially as an exercise in self-control and self-limitation. Did any ancient Israelites worry about their self-control regarding food

[49] Shafer-Elliott, 21.

[50] Kraemer, David. "Problematic Mixings: Food and Other Prohibited Substances in Rabbinic Legislation." *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 8, no. 1 (2005): 35-54.

choices and healthy eating habits? Probably not in the same way many of us view our own diets, but there is clear evidence in the biblical text that overeating was, if not a genuine concern in ancient Israel, at least a danger that Israelites were aware of. In one of his final speeches to the Israelites, Moses addresses his poetic retelling of the many sins of the Israelites to the heavens and the people. The poem begins by extolling the glories of God and God's creations, including Israel. However, the shift in tone from praise to condemnation comes in a reference to food.

> He set him atop the highlands, to feast on the yield of the earth; He fed him honey from the crag, and oil from the flinty rock, curd of kine and milk of flocks; with the best lambs, and rams of Bashan, and he-goats; with the very finest wheat and foaming grape-blood was your drink. So Jeshurun grew fat and kicked – you grew fat and gross and coarse – he forsook the God who made him and spurned the Rock of his support.[51]

The poem continues to describe the many sins of the Israelites and the wrath of God which they incurred on many occasions. Where the poem shifts tone offers a clue as to what most concerns the biblical authors. All seems well with the Israelites[52] until the end of verse 14, which contains a list of delicious foods prepared for the children of Israel by God.[53] The turn comes with a strange description for wine, "the blood of grapes."[54] This is one of only two occurrences of this particular way of describing

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[51] Deuteronomy 32:12-15, trans. JPS.

[52] The word used here for Israel is "Jeshurun," apparently another name for either the people of Israel or the land of Israel. It occurs in the bible only four times, three times in Deuteronomy; chapters 32 and 33, and once in Isaiah 44:3. The term may come from the root meaning "straight" or "upright."

[53] Note the explicit combination of milk and meat in this verse, "Curd of kine and milk of flocks; with the best of lambs, and rams of Bashan, and he-goats." The Hebrew here is *im,* very clearly meaning "with" in the same meal, as the following verse goes on to suggest Israel's over-indulgence and forsaking of God.

[54] The Bavli does not address this image of the blood of grapes, but rather takes this opportunity to describe how easy grape harvesting and winemaking will be in the world to come. Ketubot 111b states that a single grape in the world to come will yield

wine[55], and gives the violent image of grapes being slaughtered like animals. The grape's "blood" not only conjures up images of sacrifice, but also figuratively turns a potentially holy act (drinking wine, or *Kiddush*) into a sacrilegious and profane act—namely, consuming blood.

In both Genesis and Deuteronomy, the blood of grapes signifies the pollution of something holy, perhaps due to overconsumption. Jacob's blessing to his son Judah compares him to a lion, the king of beasts, and declares that he tethers the animals of his flock to vines. Not only does Judah wash his clothes in wine, but "his eyes are darker than wine; his teeth are whiter than milk."[56] This is the language of excess, of a person obsessed with wine to the point where he will chain his animals to the vineyard rather than letting them graze, and who drenches his clothes in wine. We can only imagine how much wine the person Jacob describes might drink regularly. The concept of insatiable hunger and thirst appears frequently in the bible, and often characterizes weakness in those who suffer these feelings. Esau's hunger causes him to sell his birthright to his brother Jacob in exchange for a pot of stew.[57] The Israelites begin complaining to Moses about their hunger almost as soon as they leave Egypt[58]; they are bitter over missing the food they had back in Egypt[59]; and they nearly rebel against

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thirty kegs of wine, from reading the word for "foaming" as *homer*, one *homer* in rabbinic measures being equal to thirty *se'ahs* or jugs.

55 The other is in Genesis 49:11, a scene in which Jacob gives his dying blessings to his sons. However, the blessings sound more like curses. Our verse refers to Jacob's son Judah, and includes the blessing "He washes his garment in wine, his robe in blood of grapes."

56 Genesis 49:11.

57 Genesis 25:30.

58 Exodus 16:2.

59 Numbers 11:4.

Moses and Aaron because they are thirsty.[60] Having enough food and water was of critical importance to the Israelites. These instances all relate moments of weakness, and many of these texts end with a violent punishment from God. Perhaps having food and controlling hunger was as important, or even more important, as legislating what kinds of foods were acceptable to eat.

Were the biblical authors attuned as we are today to the dangers of overeating or of unhealthy foods? Do the biblical food laws constitute an ancient diet book, backed by religious authority? This is merely one theory among many for the reasoning behind the bible's laws regulating animal slaughter and food consumption. The theory that food taboos reflect societal pressures and fears is weakened by the research of Freidenreich, Shafer-Elliot, and others who suggest that the ancient Israelite diet was not so different from that of neighboring communities, and was most influenced by local customs and availability of produce and animals. Many of the popular myths of the origins of modern kashrut fail to hold up under scrutiny. Pigs were no more dangerous to eat than other animals in antiquity, and plenty of "bottom feeder" fish are perfectly kosher.[61] One explanation for why some animals are fit for consumption while some are not is Mary Douglas' notion of completeness[62] as akin to holiness. An animal must be complete and perfect in its category in order to be acceptable as food to human beings. Nevertheless, this explanation fails to address other biblical laws. For example, why not boil a kid in

[60] Numbers 20:2.
[61] Whitefish, carp, tilapia, halibut, flounder, sole, cod, haddock, flounder, grouper, and more are all kosher "bottom feeder" fish, or detrivores (animals which consume detritus).
[62] Douglas, 67.

its mother's milk? Why not consume the blood?[63] The introduction to *Semeia* 86, which addresses food and drink in the biblical world, notes that scholars have only recently taken an interest in ancient food and food preparation.[64] This recent interest in biblical meals parallels a renewed interest in cooking, and in locally sourced ingredients which are healthy, environmentally sustainable, and ethically produced and distributed. Naturally, looking at the meals of the bible should give scholars some insight into the role of food and food production in society, and the values which our food should represent. Why have scholars of all types, and especially biblical scholars, begun to think about food as an important cultural and societal marker, and what can we learn by examining our most ancient food traditions?

In the relatively short history of biblical food criticism, a great number of theories and explanations have been proposed in order to explain the mysterious laws about food. Clearly, there is no single explanation for the food laws of the bible, and to boil them down (so to speak) to a simple understanding of clean and unclean only does

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[63] In the book *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation*, author Michael Pollan attempts to trace the history of cooking as a distinctly human enterprise and the biggest distinction between human beings and animals. The first chapter is dedicated to barbeque, arguable the oldest and simplest form of cooking, requiring only four ingredients; animal, wood, fire, and time. In one story he visits one of the oldest barbeque restaurants in the country (and arguably the world) in Ayden, North Carolina. The Skylight Inn is famous for "whole hog" barbeque, and the author describes in vivid detail how he and the proprietor, Ed, prepared the pig carcasses for the cook fire. "'You never want to eat blood,' Ed explained. The injunction is biblical: Blood is the animal's soul, and that belongs exclusively to God." (page 75) Pollan also relates several times that "In ancient Greece, the word for "cook," "butcher," and "priest" was the same – *mageiros* – and the word shares an etymological root with "magic." (page 4) He makes the case that virtually all traditional religions and traditions incorporated communal meat eating at a religious ceremony overseen by a male leader, akin to the priestly sacrifices in the bible. Clearly, whether in ancient Greece, ancient Israel, or the barbeque pits of North Carolina, cooking meat is something magical, special, holy, and fraught with violence.

[64] Brenner and van Henten, ix.

disservice to those who wish to better understand our religious ancestors' relationship with food. Today's kashrut practices, though held up by certain authorities as the ultimate expression of the Torah's commandments, bear little in common with the food practices described in our holiest text. I hope that this chapter will bring to light some of those practices and the cultural milieu in which they likely arose in order that our understanding of Jewish dietary practice not be limited to one understanding of what food is proper and what food is not.

Chapter Two – Food and Culture: Jewish, Greek, and Roman

Before drawing knife across throat, the Greek priests would sprinkle water on the sacrificial animal's brow, causing it to shake its head in a gesture they chose to interpret as a sign of assent. Indeed, viewed in the coldest light, many of the elements of ritual sacrifice begin to look like a set of convenient rationalizations for doing something we feel uneasy about, but need or want to do anyway.

-- Michael Pollan, *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation*, 2012

Introduction

Alexander the Great injected Greek culture and values into the realms he conquered and established an empire based on his own upbringing. As a boy, he was tutored by Aristotle, and upon his father's death inherited a powerful empire. Alexander's conquest of the Persian empire and other lands resulted in Greek culture becoming the dominant cultural force from the eastern Mediterranean rim all the way to India. Alexander conquered the land of Israel around 332-331 BCE and from that point forward the Greek influence on Jewish culture began its centuries-long development. The Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires, as well as the Romans who replaced them and inherited much of their cultural and intellectual legacy, introduced to the east new ideas about citizenship, peoplehood, and individual identity, often shaping the cultural expression of local ruling classes and at times calling upon subject peoples to assimilate

How did this spread of Greek culture influence Jewish dietary practice? This chapter examines Jewish dietary practice in the context of the Greco-Roman world by considering both Jewish texts and texts from Greek and Roman authors

Jerusalem: From Persian to Greek

The book of Ezra begins with a description of how God stirred the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that Cyrus would be inclined to let the Jews return to Jerusalem.[65] Cyrus was famously well regarded by the inhabitants of his diverse empire and by the Jews especially, who recorded his deeds and their rebuilding efforts in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. While the Persian empire allowed the Jews to return to their homeland, by then the Jews had already faced the difficulty of maintaining their cultural distinctiveness while surrounded by foreigners. David M. Freidenreich notes that biblical works from the Persian era or set in the Persian period (6th to 3rd centuries BCE) such as Ezra and Nehemiah "reflect the anxieties of a community in competition with foreigners and at risk of losing its sense of distinctiveness."[66] While this sentiment is evident in diverse Jewish texts of the time, Jewish-Persian texts focus mainly on the issue of intermarriage, and almost completely ignore the issue of dietary restrictions.[67] What can we infer from this concern over intermarriage and the lack of concern over Jewish dietary practice in Persian works? Legal codes often prohibit most vociferously those actions which are most troubling and worrisome, or which occur most frequently. Perhaps the lack of concern over Jewish food laws indicates that Jews in those times

[65] Ezra 1:1.

[66] Freidenreich, David M.. *Foreigners and Their Food: Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, 31.

[67] Consider Esther feasting with the king, or the feasts in 1 Chronicles 16 which depict food being distributed freely to the people, or the meal Solomon shares with the queen of Sheba in [2] Chronicles 9.

were not strict adherents to the biblical food laws, but were clearly worried about the effect of intermarriage on the Jewish community. Ezra tells us that the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem, which Nebuchadnezzar took and put in the temple in Babylon, were restored to the site of the new temple.[68] In light of today's worry over mixing meat and milk dishes, bringing vessels used for idolatrous practices into the holy temple seems like an unthinkable breach of the barrier between holy and profane.

The Jews' return to Jerusalem and rebuilding of their temple was only one of the triumphs that Ezra and Nehemiah celebrate. In order for that return to be possible, the Jews had to maintain their identity and cultural distinctiveness during years of exile. During the feast to inaugurate the newly rebuilt temple, Ezra describes the people eating of the Passover sacrifice, including the priests, their families, and all the children of Israel who had "separated themselves from the unclean nations of the land."[69] Here one sees the conflation of purity, separation, and food which will become more evident in the Greco-Roman period. In this setting, proper food (the meat of the sacrifice at the temple) is the reward for those who have maintained their faith and identity. Going forward, food will be one of the main means of separation from the surrounding community, and one way in which Jews will demonstrate their distinctiveness.

Jewish Identity and Food

Between the Babylonian exile and the rise of the rabbis—to wit, the so-called Second Temple period—was a period of great diversity of Jewish experience. Many Jews came to occupy lands beyond the land of Israel and were forced to reconcile Jewish religious expressions with the realities of Diaspora existence, in particular their

[68] Ezra 5:14-15.
[69] Ezra 6:21.

estrangement from the Temple in Jerusalem. Such Jews erected synagogues in which to gather, and liturgy to replace the sacrifices, and so made their faith "portable." There was likely no usage of Judean that parallels today's notion of a Jew as an adherent to the Jewish faith. Daniel R. Schwartz notes that "prior to Ecclesiastes – that is, prior to the Hellenistic period – Hebrew seems to have had very few abstract nouns in –*ut*, which corresponds to the Greek –*ismos*. Neither does the Hebrew verb *lehitgayyer*, "to convert," appear in the Bible."[70] There was no Juda*ism*, per se, only Judeans.[71] Before the exile, it was impossible to separate the Jewish religion from the Jewish homeland. After the exile, Jews had to contend with a new meaning of the term Judean and the creation of a Judaism encompassing ancestry, belief, and practice, and they had to defend this new identity while living either outside their homeland, or within a homeland governed by foreign authorities. In the face of powerful foreign rulers, Jews had to find ways to maintain their identity and distinct sense of peoplehood using other means. Dietary practice was one of the main ways in which Jews established, defended, and maintained their Jewish identity in the Greco-Roman world.

Philosophy of Food

Our use of the word *Epicurean* today refers to "a person devoted to sensual enjoyment, especially that derived from fine food and drink."[72] This holdover from the ancient Greek philosophical school is a fine example of the way in which Greek thought

[70] Frey, Jorg, Daniel R. Schwartz, and Stephanie Gripentrog. *Jewish identity in the Greco-Roman World*, Leiden: Brill, 2007, 93.

[71] For more on this topic, see Prof. Joshua Garroway's essay in the Jewish Annotated New Testament titled *Ioudaios*, on the difficulty of translating "Jew" or "Judean" from ancient texts.

[72] Abate, Frank R., and Elizabeth Jewell. *The New Oxford American Dictionary*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

regarding eating and drinking continues to influence the way many people (including Jews) understand their relationship to food. The Greek philosopher Epicurus taught that pleasure was indeed the ultimate good, including partaking of fine foods and drinks. However, his teachings have been overly simplified in today's modern definition. His school valued social pleasure, friendship, companionship, and health rather than the more fleeting carnal pleasures. Because of this desire for food to constitute only part of a pleasurable social occasion, an Epicurean of ancient Greece might say that *what* one eats is not as important as *with whom* one eats. Greek and Roman values of food and dining certainly did make their way into Jewish practice, including reserving the full *Birkat ha-Mazon* blessing after the meal for only those meals share with three or more people. Perhaps not eating alone is a value that Judaism borrowed from Epicurieanism.

One well-documented example of such influence is the modeling of the Passover Seder on the Greek *symposium*, a gathering of elite men in society to eat, drink, and discuss important matters. The Passover Seder contains many of the same rituals as the symposium: drinking many glasses of wine, leaning comfortably on cushions, discussions at length of important matters, entertainment[73], and dipping vegetables. The Jewish version allows for the participation of every member of the family, encouraging men, women, and children alike to join in the seder. Additionally, while the symposium was about men gathering to discuss issues and then celebrate with

[73] Various authorities connect the afikomen to different Greek customs. It is likely related to the Greek word *epikomon*, which is used to describe several types of after-dinner entertainment; slaves dancing and singing, playing games, or even going to a neighbor's house in order to enlist them in merry-making. The Mishnah (Pesachim 10:8) forbids afikomen after eating of the Passover sacrifice. This prohibition likely refers to these sorts of Greek revelry practices, and not to dessert after the meal.

debauchery, the Passover seder is about remembering the past and discussing the meanings of the Exodus. Hellenistic Jews took something secular and turned it into something distinctively Jewish. Their successful model continues to be the single most popular Jewish practice today, as referenced by the recent Pew study, likely because it takes place in the home with the participation of the entire family.

The comparison of Greek and Roman food rituals to Jewish ones goes in the opposite direction as well, and we can learn a great deal about how Jews were perceived by the outside community in terms of their food practices.[74] The Greek historian Plutarch (circa 46 – 120 CE) records a discussion at a dinner party about Jewish food practice, and compares the Jewish Sabbath celebration to the celebration of the festivals for the god of wine and parties, Dionysus (or Bacchus to the Romans).[75] One anonymous Roman recorded by Brevis compared Sabbath observance to the celebration of the day dedicated to Saturn: "It has been sufficiently known that the star of Saturn is cold and therefore the food among the Jews on the day of Saturn is cold."[76] These texts suggest that Jews drank wine and ate cold food on Shabbat, and Greeks and Romans were aware of some particular Jewish food practices, though they were often misunderstood.

Late Biblical Texts

[74] As mentioned in the previous chapter, Pollan notes that the Greeks, much like the temple cult in Jerusalem, also combined the role of priest and butcher.

[75] Stern, Menahem. *Greek and Latin authors on Jews and Judaism Volume 1: From Herodotus to Plutarch*. Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974, 557.

[76] Stern, Menahem. *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism Volume 2: From Tacitus to Simplicius*. Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of sciences and humanities, 1980, 654.

Food laws in the Torah make up only a handful of the commandments, making it difficult to discern an overall attitude towards food in the Torah. Later biblical works, and texts from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, offer more insight into Jewish attitudes toward food and dining. Proverbs 23 offers this advice when dining with authority figures: "When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food."[77] Rashi does not comment on the possible identity of this ruler, instead saying that one should not eat a stingy person's food, and one should leave an ignoramus' table in favor of studying with a wise teacher.[78] If we accept the traditional view that Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs, then the ruler (*moshel*, a ruler or governor) would likely be another Jew, making Rashi's commentary more understandable in the context. However, as Alter points out[79], the book of Proverbs contains sections from many different and unknown sources, ranging from ancient Israelite to Persian and Hellenistic. In the context of Jews living under foreign rule, the warning takes on a very different meaning. If we imagine the author of Proverbs 23 writing under Persian or Greek rule, he would likely be a member of the Jewish elite, since he knows the texts and can read and write, and thus is writing for other elites. Such people often were present in the court or the halls of the ruling authorities, and might very well have been invited to dine at their tables. It is interesting that Proverbs 23 begins by assuming that the reader will sit to eat with a

[77] Proverbs 23:1-3.
[78] Rashi on Proverbs 23.
[79] Alter, Robert. *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes : A Translation with Commentary*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010, 183-184.

ruler[80] rather than forbidding such behavior, or allowing for it with language such as "*if* you will sit down to eat with a ruler." Though the author of Proverbs accepts that his reader will eat and drink at the tables of foreigners, he is nonetheless worried about the potential consequences of such an encounter. Desiring the foreigner's food of lies[81] certainly sounds like the author is afraid that the food will merely be an entrée (in both senses of the word) into the foreigner's culture. This is a trope that we will see play out in many different texts.

Esther

Esther makes no attempt to protest eating and drinking with the king and other members of the court of Shushan, though fear for her life and the lives of her people may have been strong motivation. She even goes so far as to sleep with the king and hides her identity in order to save her people. Yet, she is praised throughout Jewish history as a heroine, and the rabbis go to great lengths to whitewash her behavior. The Septuagint offers another reading of Esther's place in the royal court in an addition described by Freidenreich as a prayer offered by Esther denying her participation in Persian meals.[82] This conflicting addition either was excised from the version present in the bible, or was added to the Septuagint as a reflection of the attitude towards Jewish dietary practice in Alexandria at the time the Septuagint was written. This addition complicates the understanding of Jewish dietary practice even further when compared to the text of the Letter of Aristeas. The high priest Eleazar calls King Ptolemy "his true

[80] Proverbs 23:1: *ki teshev lilchom et-moshel*, "when you will sit down to eat with a ruler."
[81] Proverbs 23:3.
[82] Freidenreich, 35.

friend"[83] and the Jews are well represented at the king's banquet celebrating the completion of the translation[84], eating and drinking alongside the king and all of his court. Freidenreich asserts that the insertion of Esther's prayer in the Septuagint comes from a Jerusalemite sometime between the second and first centuries of the common era[85], which may offer a sense of how Jews in different parts of the ancient near east felt about eating and drinking with the ruling classes.

The book of Esther is full of scenes of eating a drinking, and the story's pivotal moments take place at feasts. While neither Esther nor the author of the book expresses any qualms about sharing a feast with the Persian king, her decision to fast before attempting the dangerous rescue of her people is striking. In the midst of the excess of the court of Shushan, Esther asks the Jews to fast and pray for her for three days before she goes to see the king and save her people.[86] As a Persian queen, Esther eats and drinks with the court, but as a Jewish heroine, she must refrain from food and drink perhaps in order to purify herself and her mission, or perhaps because she must rid herself of the trappings of Persia.

Daniel

Another biblical author accepts that Jews will eat and drink with foreigners, but makes no attempt to hide the fact that sharing a table with them is a dangerous situation for Jews. The book of Daniel was likely redacted during the beginning of the Hasmonean revolt, between 167 and 164 BCE[87], a dangerous time for the Jewish

[83] Letter of Aristeas line 41, R.H. Charles 1913.
[84] Letter of Aristeas line 181, R.H. Charles 1913.
[85] Freidenreich, 35.
[86] Esther 4:16.
[87] Freidenreich, 35.

community. Daniel's story begins with the fall of Jerusalem, the sacking of the temple, and the beginning of the Babylonian exile. King Nebuchadnezzar asks that intelligent and attractive young men to bring to his royal court for instruction. These young captives will eat the king's food and drink the king's wine for three years while being instructed in the ways of the Babylonians.[88] Freidenreich points out a double meaning of the word for "food" in Daniel, the Persian loan word "*pat-bag.*"[89] In Hebrew *pat* is a piece of bread, but *patbag* in Persian means a ration or allotment of food, thus the food offered to the youths could be bread, or general foodstuffs. The fact that the food comes directly from the king's own portion suggests great honor, and likely a variety of both forbidden and prohibited food. Daniel refuses it due to his desire not to be "defiled" by this foreign food and wine.[90] His refusal of the king's food contrasts with the attitude towards food expressed in the book of Esther, and suggests some expansion of Jewish dietary restrictions beyond prohibited animals. "Even if one assumes that meat was a primary component in royal rations… the Hebrew Bible contains no prohibition against gentile preparation of meat from permitted animals; it also contains no prohibition against foreign wine."[91] Two aspects of Jewish dietary practice that loom large in rabbinic Judaism are thus absent from biblical text except for Daniel.

So, which is the normative practice in the Greco-Roman world in which Daniel was likely redacted, eating with foreigners or not eating with foreigners? Does Daniel adhere to the customs of his author in refusing the king's food, or does he go beyond the letter of the law in order to prove his merit as a Jewish hero? I believe the latter is the

[88] Daniel 1:1-5.
[89] Freidenreich, 36.
[90] Daniel 1:8.
[91] Freidenreich, 36.

more apt interpretation of Daniel's strict dietary requests. When refusing the king's food, he asks instead for vegetables (assumed to be raw) and water.[92] The same servants who would have brought him the king's food also bring the vegetables and water to Daniel, so we might not think that his concerns are with the identity of the food's preparers. However, the difference between the prepared meals from the king's table and the raw food from God's creation is vast. Daniel is worried about contracting some sort of impurity from his gentile cooks, but does not have the same concern over raw vegetables and water, foods straight from nature and unaltered by the processes of cooking. God rewards Daniel and his companions for their piety by making them healthier and stronger than all the other captive youths, thereby solidifying Daniel's place as a heroic example of maintaining one's Jewish identity in foreign lands.

The difference between Persian and Greek understanding of identity cannot be understated. In the Persian worldview, one's identity comes from his birth and is unchangeable, so Jews were in little danger of their individual Jewish identity disappearing.[93] If the Jews knew that Persians would always be Persians, and that Jews would always be Jews, then what harm can come of sharing a table, or a meal, or even a family with the Persians?[94] This concrete separation between Persian and Jew actually allows Persian and Jewish individuals to interact more freely with one another and

[92] Daniel 1:12.

[93] This is not to say that there were not plenty of other dangers Jews had to face during the Persian conquest and under Persian rule.

[94] The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are vehemently against intermarriage, but make no mention of commensality restrictions or concern. Current scholarship guesses the books were first composed during the reign of the Persian King Artaxerxes I around the year 458 BCE. Such a date and place of composition would fit with this comparison between Persian and Greek. Ezra and Nehemiah's concern over intermarriage tells us that it was likely occurring during the time the books were written.

associate more closely with less fear of assimilation. Other books from the Persian period, like the book of Esther, also reflect a similar attitude towards relationships and interaction with foreigners.[95]

The Greeks however, understood identity differently. Identity was less about birth as it was about education. One could become Greek by learning the language, studying the texts and philosophies, and engaging in Greek cultural life. Jews under Greek rule had, perhaps for the first time, the option to cease being Jewish and become sometime else. Of course, for Jews who wanted to maintain their community's distinct identity, this was an extremely dangerous situation. If every interaction with Greeks made a Jew more like the Greeks, then Jewish authorities would seek to limit that interaction and put as many restrictions on it as possible. Naturally, it is impossible to keep people completely separate. Therefore, Greeks and Jews mingled and exchanged ideas, and the dominant Greek culture made a large influence on Judaism despite the concerns over the loss of Jewish identity.

THE APOCRYPHA

Tobit

The books of Tobit and Judith both describe Jewish heroes who defeat evil forces. Tobit, copies of which were found in the caves of Qumran, was likely composed sometime between the years 225 and 175 BCE, though its provenance is unclear.[96] It tells the story of Tobit, a pious Jew exiled to Nineveh after the Assyrian invasion in 721

[95] Darius, king of Persia, was famous for his diverse empire that included dozens of different peoples, and his tolerance of them. This trend continues with Cyrus, whom the Jewish people hold in very high esteem since he allowed them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

[96] Fitzmyer, Joseph A.. *Tobit*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003, 51-53.

BCE. A devout follower of God, Tobit is known for making sure that indigent dead are buried properly. Fredeinreich puts this work in the category of Hellenistic works from Judea which all have main characters who reject the food of foreign authorities, alongside 2 Maccabees, Daniel, and the aforementioned addition to Esther.[97] Here he describes the difference between Persian and Greek values of identity, and the consequences for Jews living under each civilization:

> It is no coincidence that such a prohibition emerges during the Hellenistic era, as the implications of consuming food prepared by foreigners or engaging in commensality with non-Jews were greater in the Hellenistic world than they had been in earlier periods. Whereas Persian culture regarded identity as an inexorable consequence of ethnicity (that is, genealogy), Hellenism is characterized by the notion that identity is malleable, determined by one's education in the Greek language and enculturation into Greek society.[98]

In the first section of the book, Tobit is a first-person narrator. Describing how he gained favor in the Assyrian court, Tobit says, "Now when I was carried away captive to Nineveh, all my brethren and my relatives ate the food of the Gentiles; but I kept myself from eating it, because I remembered God with all my heart. Then the Most High gave me favor and good appearance in the sight of Shalmaneser, and I was his buyer of provisions."[99] One day, at the feast of Shavout, Tobit is reunited with his wife and son, presumably after the confusion of the exile. Tobit describes the occasion with the comment that "a good dinner was prepared for me and I sat down to eat."[100] When he saw the abundance of food on the table, Tobit instructed his son, Tobias, to go out and find "whatever poor man of our brethren… who is mindful of the Lord, and I will wait

[97] Freidenreich, 43.
[98] Freidenreich, 38.
[99] Tobit 1:10-12.
[100] Tobit 2:1.

for you."[101] Even in this moment of great joy and celebration, Tobit shares his own blessings with those less fortunate, as long as they are pious Jews. This moment of joy turns to sorrow, however, when Tobias brings back news that a Jew has been strangled and his body left in the market place. Tobit leaves his meal without tasting it and hastens to bury the body, recalling a verse from the prophet Amos; "Your feasts shall be turned into mourning, and all your festivities into lamentation."[102] After burying the body, Tobit sleeps outside in his courtyard, not in his house, due to his ritually unclean state.

This story of feasting turning to mourning sets off a chain of events which send Tobias, Tobit's son, out on a quest to reclaim his father's silver and free a young woman from tortuous demons who kill her husbands. However, the story's foundation is Tobit's purity, piety, and desire to fulfill the commandments of honoring God and taking care of his fellow Israelite neighbors. His piety is portrayed in three ways; his burying bodies left in the streets, his charity to the poor, and his resistance to eating the food of the Assyrians during his captivity. In Tobit, food restrictions are elevated to the level of charity and burial, two of the most important commandments and customs in Jewish life. Its setting during the Assyrian exile only heightens the importance of food restrictions, and Tobit sends the message that even in captivity and exile, the Jews must maintain their own cultural and religious distinction by adhering to Jewish dietary laws and abstaining from eating the food of Gentiles.

Judith

[101] Tobit 2:2.
[102] Amos 8:10.

The book of Judith parallels the book of Esther in many ways. In both, a Jewish heroine saves the lives of her people by getting close to a non-Jewish ruler. Esther participates fully in the feasts thrown by Ahashuerus in order to gain the king's favor and save her people from Haman's scheme. Judith is a beautiful Jewish widow living in the village of Bethulia, in the Judean hills, when the people of Israel are warned by the high priest Joakim to prepare for an attack by the Assyrian king Nebuchadnezzar. When the king's general, Holofernes besieges Judith's village, the people begin to lose hope. Judith exhorts them to trust in God, "helper of the oppressed, upholder of the weak, protector of the forlorn, savior of those without hope."[103] Not content to leave matters to God alone, Judith sneaks off with her handmaid into Holofernes' camp, and befriends the invading general by promising to divulge information which will help the Assyrian army defeat the Jews.

Judith put on her fine jewelry and "made herself very beautiful, to entice the eyes of all men who might see her,"[104] then she leaves the city and makes her way to the Assyrian camp, bringing her own wine, oil, grain, fruit cake, and cooking utensils.[105] She tells the soldiers who find her that the Israelites are running out of food and water, and are planning to consume foods prohibited by God; first fruits, tithes, cattle slaughtered without offering to the priests in the temple, as well as wine and oil.[106] Judith tells this to Holofernes, suggesting that once the Israelites break their covenant with God, the army will be able to defeat them. Holofernes is intrigued by Judith's story, and invites her to his tent to share a meal. She comes, but brings her own food for herself and will

[103] Judith 9:11.
[104] Judith 10:4.
[105] Judith 10:5.
[106] Judith 11:11-13.

not eat of Holofernes' food or wine.[107] After several days, Holofernes throws a banquet and drinks too much wine. Once he has passed out, Judith takes his sword and decapitates him. She stuffs his head in her food bag and takes it back to the Israelites, who use it to frighten off the Assyrian army.

Dietary restrictions are a theme throughout the entire book of Judith. It is the false reason that Judith gives to Holofernes as to why he will be able to conquer them, and the separation she maintains from Holofernes even while getting close enough to him to remove his head with his own sword. Freidenreich writes that the "food restrictions function in *Judith* as a plot device" though the book's use of dietary restrictions is more of a statement of their importance to Jewish life than a mere vehicle with which to move along the plot of the story. Holofernes' statement to Judith in chapter 12 offers an insight into the dietary concerns contemporary to the unnamed author of this work; Holofernes tells Judith "If your supply runs out, where can we get more like it for you? For none of your people is here with us."[108] His concern, presumably the concern of the author rather than that of an invading Assyrian general, is not the ingredients of the food, but rather the nationality of the people who produced or prepared it. Freidenreich makes this argument, and assumes that this comment is representative of the understanding of Jewish food laws in the author's community.[109] By applying dietary restrictions beyond the scope of the biblical commandments and extending the prohibition to food prepared by foreigners, the authors of Judith took a major step in broadening those restrictions.

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[107] Judith 12:2.
[108] Judith 12:3.
[109] Freidenreich, 43.

Maccabees

The books of 1 and 2 Maccabees tell the story of the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid empire, which we celebrate today during the festival of Hanukkah. However, the Judean resistance took many forms before turning to open rebellion. The Seleucid army sought to control and Hellenize Judea, under Antiochus IV's motto, which he appropriated from Alexander the Great, that "all men must become one people."[110] His attempted Hellenization of Judea elicited a negative reaction from the local population, and their resistance was ultimately recorded in the books of 1 and 2 Maccabees as a symbol of Jewish strength and the power of faith.

Much of the Israelite resistance centered on worship, and such worship (both for Jews and Greeks) centered on food. As noted above, many cultures including the Israelites and Greeks used animals for both ritual slaughter and consumption. The opening of 1 Maccabees describes the situation in Judea:

> All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath. 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.[111]

The text lists the sacrifice of pigs next not circumcising boys, suggesting the enormous importance of these acts for Jewish identity. From this text we can surmise how traumatizing this Greek occupation must have felt, and the fact that many Jews chose to

[110] Yusseff, M. A. *The Dead Sea scrolls, the Gospel of Barnabas, and the New Testament*. Indianapolis, Ind.: American Trust Publications, 1985, 31.
[111] 1 Maccabees 1:43-48.

go along with the Greek laws. The books of the Maccabees recall the violence and martyrdom undertaken by those who opposed Hellenization and/or Greek oppression. Given the importance placed on eating food sacrificed to idols, Freidenreich says that the Maccabees' refusal to eat such food aligns with the understanding in the Hellenistic world that dietary restrictions are a principle means of maintaining Jewish identity.[112] First Maccabees sets up the conflict between the Jews and the Greeks, but also differentiates between those Jews who went along with Greek practices, and the brave ones who paid the ultimate sacrifice for maintaining their traditions:" Many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die."[113]

Second Maccabees, recalls the gruesome martyrdom of Eleazar, "one of the scribes in high position, a man now advanced in age and of noble presence."[114] Eleazar was forced to eat forbidden pig meat, but in brazen rejection of the Greek laws, he spat out the meat and walked over to the torture rack voluntarily. In an era when one was defined by what one ate, Eleazar chose to die rather than compromise his identity. The Greeks used food to try to break down Jewish resistance, but adherence to strict food laws became a rallying point for the Maccabees, and a symbol of the willingness to die for their cause. Today Jews celebrate Hanukkah and remember the triumph of a small army over a mighty one, but we often gloss over the violent resistance to assimilation that characterizes these books.

ALEXANDRIAN JEWS

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[112] Freidenreich, 41.
[113] 1 Maccabees 1:62-63.
[114] 2 Maccabees 6:18.

Philo

Many Jews in the land of Israel, like the Maccabees, fought against Hellenization. Jews in the diaspora, Jews had a more complicated relationship with the surrounding culture. Many Jews embraced the ideals of Greek society, while at the same time seeking to maintain their own cultural distinctiveness. We see evidence of such cultural blending in the work of Philo, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher from Alexandria. Philo rewrote the stories of the bible for a Greek Jewish audience, and attempted to unite Jewish texts with Greek philosophy. For instance, in retelling the creation of the world, Philo describes the fact that an animal's head, its most important part, has seven openings (two eyes, two nostrils, two ears, and one mouth) "through which as Plato says, mortal things find their entrance, and immortal things their exit."[115] God instructs Adam and Eve as to which trees they may use for food, and Philo compares this instruction to the careful diet which a trainer gives to a wrestler in order to gain strength and energy.[116] In these two examples, Philo makes use of images which would be recognizable to the Greek residents of Alexandria as employing distinctly Greek practices, while Jews who were assimilated into Greek culture would also identify the distinct Jewish aspects of these texts.

Philo approaches the Jewish dietary laws through his Hellenized worldview, attempting to reconcile the philosophy of his time with the laws of the Torah. He describes his experience at a banquet overflowing with delicious food and drink, and how he gave in to the temptation of smells and sights rather than using logical reason to

[115] Yonge, Charles Duke. *The Works of Philo Judaeus, the Contemporary of Josephus, translated from the Greek*. London: George Bell & Sons, 1890, 35.
[116] Yonge, 87.

keep from overeating.[117] The body is fed by earthly food, while the soul is nourished on reason, which Philo states "God rains down out of his sublime and pure nature, which he calls heaven."[118] Now, in Philo's view, the food that one consumes is no longer about one's cultural or religious identity, but about nourishing the body so that the soul may pursue the higher cause of seeking reason, science, and knowledge, all ideals which Greek society held in high regard. Hellenized Jews like Philo tried to meld these two worlds together in order to participate fully in the society around them, and perhaps also to justify their faith in terms which their gentile neighbors might respect.

Philo writes about the intellectual side of eating and of the value of self-restraint, but he also attempts to justify certain biblical prohibitions. For instance, he notes that the law prohibits the camel from being eaten but questions the law: "If we considered this sentence as it is expressed in its literal sense, I do not see what reason there is in it when it is interpreted."[119] We do not see such direct questioning of the Torah in works from Judea. Even though Philo is quick to give his own reasoning for the law, the willingness to question the plain meaning of the text is a bold statement in Jewish thought. Of course, Philo only raises this question in order to answer it from his educated Greek philosophy, and he compares animals which chew the cud to "the soul of the man who is fond of learning, when it has received any speculative opinions by hearing them, does not abandon them to forgetfulness, but quietly by itself revolves over every one of them again in its mind in all tranquility."[120] Philo cares deeply for the texts and dietary practices of his Jewish tradition, given how much ink he spills in

[117] Yonge, 158.
[118] Yonge, 59.
[119] Yonge, 415.
[120] Yonge, 415.

reframing them for an Alexandrian audience, but he also aspires to unite Greek philosophy with traditional Jewish practices and exist fully as both a Jew and a citizen of Alexandria. His interpretations of biblical laws into a new world of Greek philosophy shows the unique ability of Judaism to survive and even thrive while taking on and adapting to the culture in which Jews live throughout the world.

Greeks and Romans on Jews and Judaism

Menachem Stern's monumental compendium of citations from ancient authors contains many insights into how Greeks and Romans viewed Jews, Jewish laws, and Jewish customs. Some of these insights reveal how Greeks and Romans viewed Jewish dietary practice, and how much they knew of Jewish practice and custom.

In some cases, it seems that people outside of the Jewish community did not know or understand their seemingly strange customs. The Greek Plutarch, for example, records a discussion of Jewish dietary restrictions held during a symposium he attended alongside his brother Lamprias, and others.[121] Polycrates, a guest at the symposium, asks the diners "do they [the Jews] abstain from eating pork by reason of some special respect for hogs or from abhorrence of the creature? Their own accounts sound like pure myth, but perhaps they have some serious reasons which they do not publish."[122] Other diners echo Polycrates' confusion regarding the prohibition of swine, and use the opportunity to deride the Jews. Callistratus says that "the beast enjoys a certain respect among that folk; granted that he is ugly and dirty…" but he allows for a comparison to other peoples' and their dietary restrictions; "...still he is no more absurd

[121] Stern, Menahem. *Greek and Latin authors on Jews and Judaism Volume 1: From Herodotus to Plutarch*. Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974, 545.

[122] Stern, *Volume 1*, 555.

in appearance or crude in disposition than dung-beetle, crocodile, or cat, each of which is treated as sacred by a different group of Egyptian priests."[123] Callistratus is aware of the fact that other religions have their own prohibited animals, much like the Jewish prohibition of pork, but nevertheless he takes the opportunity to poke fun at the Jews with his remarks. Other ideas from the symposium include the notion that the pig, with its snout used for digging up the ground, taught Jews how to plow the earth before planting, that the Jews honor the pig in the same way that Egyptians honor the field-mouse, or the Zoroastrians honor the hedgehog, that pigs carry many of the skin diseases which the Jews are afraid of contracting, or that their dirty living conditions produce inferior meat.[124] Callistratus and the other symposium guests are worldly enough to be aware of the variety of animals either honored or abhorred by various peoples, and they are also aware that Jews do not eat pork, but they do not know why this is so, or what other laws characterize Jewish dietary practice.[125]

Other authors betray a limited awareness of Jewish practices. Petronius (c. 27-66 AD) lived and worked in the highest levels of the court of Nero, ruler of Rome. He wrote: "The Jew may worship his pig-god and clamor in the ears of high heaven, but unless he also cuts back his foreskin with the knife, he shall go forth from the people and emigrate to Greek cities."[126] He also makes the mistake of believing that the Jews revere the pig as a god, but he places this observance below circumcision in terms of importance to being accepted by the Jewish community. Sextus Empiricus, a

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[123] ibid.
[124] Stern, *Volume 1*, 555-556.
[125] The two other features of Jewish observance that make the most appearances in these volumes are Sabbath observance and circumcision.
[126] Stern, *Volume 1*, 444.

philosopher from the 2nd century CE appears to understand Jewish dietary restrictions in the same way that other nations refrain from eating the animals that they worship:

> A similar behavior may be found in respect of food in people's worship of their gods. A Jew or an Egyptian priest would prefer to die instantly rather than eat pork, while to taste mutton is reckoned an abomination in the eyes of a Libyan, and Syrians think the same about pigeons, and others about cattle.[127]

Sextus Empiricus does not use the Jews' dietary restrictions as a chance to make fun of them, as other authors in these texts do, but he fundamentally misunderstands the reasoning behind the Jewish dietary restriction that he describes. As with the dinner party described by Plutarch, Sextus Empiricus displays a worldly (or at least well read, which would have also been a mark of a successful or high-born individual) knowledge of the various people of the world befitting a man of his high rank and stature in society.

At least one scholar, Porphyry, felt some sympathy towards the Jews. Porphyry lived from the early third century to the beginning of the fourth century CE, and wrote on topics including Judaism, vegetarianism, and a defense of his native paganism against Christianity. He posited a logical reason for the Jewish prohibition of pork: pigs did not live in areas where the Jews lived, so the animal was foreign to them.[128] It is unclear whether his statement is true or not, but his logic is sound. Porphyry's sympathetic attitude towards the Jews is best depicted in a text comparing the Syrians, Hebrews, Phoenicians, and Egyptians. According to Porphyry, at some point each of these peoples was forced to eat the very animal which they refrain from eating. He describes these acts as terrible, and idolizes those brave individuals who stood up to

[127] Stern, Menahem. *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism Volume 2: From Tacitus to Simplicius*. Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of sciences and humanities, 1980, 159.
[128] Stern, *Volume 2,* 434.

those evil forces and be killed rather than submit to their will.[129] His admiration for those who stand up for their own beliefs may reflect his sympathy for these persecuted groups, just as Christianity was sweeping its way across the land and his own pagan religion was quickly becoming the minority.

Julian, emperor of Rome from 361 to 363 CE, wrote about Judaism and had some knowledge of Jewish practices and texts.[130] Though he is opposed to Christianity and is aware of that religion's Jewish roots, he nevertheless makes some positive statements about Judaism. Julian respects and admires how stringently Jews follow their laws, even more so than the Romans who are often indifferent about their religion and customs. He wrote that while the Jews would choose death or starvation "rather than taste pork or any animal that has not the life [meaning, blood] squeezed out of it immediately; whereas we [Romans] are in such a state of apathy about religious matters that we have forgotten the customs of our forefathers."[131] Julian sees something admirable in the Jews that is lacking from his own empire, of which he was the last pagan ruler. He also displays the most knowledge about Jewish dietary custom, noting that not only to Jews abstain from pork, but they do not eat any animal which still contains the blood, which he knows contains the life of the animal according to Jewish tradition.

Conclusion

Few factors unify Jewish dietary practice throughout time and place in the Greco-Roman world. It was an era of great change in the world, and in Judaism as well.

[129] Stern, *Volume 2,* 435.
[130] Stern, *Volume 2,* 502.
[131] Stern, *Volume 2,* 551.

However, we see that one of the main features of Jewish dietary practice included the prohibition against pork. Harder to discern is whether or not that prohibition was more important to Jews than, for example, prohibitions against seafood, birds of prey, or other unfit animals. Daniel, Tobit, and Judith represent a desire for Jewish food laws to serve as proper barriers and boundaries between the Jewish people and their neighbors, and are all represented as heroes for maintaining their practices in dangerous situations. Should we take from these books the lesson that separation from the society around us is an important part of Jewish dietary practice? Or should we follow Esther's example, and know that as long as we maintain a Jewish identity internally, we can do whatever is necessary to survive and provide for our fellow Jews?

After examining many different texts in this chapter, I think there is no clear answer. There was a vast spectrum of Jewish practice and of degrees of Jewish assimilation into the surrounding culture, much like in the Jewish world today. While there were many different ways to practice Jewish dietary restrictions, two particular rules appeared in almost all of the texts; not eating pork, and not eating foods sacrificed to idols. These were perhaps the most visible and egregious violations[132] of Jewish dietary practice during the Greco-Roman period, and so were recorded in the majority of texts on the subject. However, much of the details will be left unclear until the rabbis come and expand greatly on biblical laws. In the next chapter, we will examine how Jewish dietary practice evolves as Christianity begins spreading across the ancient near East.

[132] I am reminded of a friend, a Conservative rabbi, who would differentiate between *treif* (cheeseburger, turkey and cheddar sandwich, etc) and HIGH *treif* (lobster, shrimp, pork, etc). I always thought of this distinction as the inverse of *kosher* versus *glatt kosher.*

Chapter 3 – Dietary Practice in Early Christianity

> **And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common."**
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> – Acts 10:10-15

Introduction

Jerusalem during the Second Temple era was home to a variety of Jewish sects existing and practicing Judaism alongside one another. Following the death of King Herod around 4 BCE, Judea was split by the Romans into three parts, each to be governed by one of his sons. The longstanding priestly establishment, meanwhile, controlled the Temple. Groups like the Saducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and later the Zealots and Sicarii, were mentioned by Josephus and other ancient authors, though few of their own writings (save the Qumran texts) are extant. These groups offered alternative Jewish practices, often in protest to the Romans, as well as the governing Jewish authorities. Jerusalem and the province of Judea experienced religious and political turmoil during much of the Second Temple era, in the latter days of which Jesus of Nazareth arrived from the Galilee preaching a message of apocalyptic transformation and Jewish restoration.

Jesus would have encountered a variety of Jewish sects, possibly in the Galilee but certainly in Judea. The New Testament describes his interactions with different Jewish groups. In an atmosphere of competition and diversity, Jesus' message attracted other Jews to become his followers. Initially, the Jesus movement consisted of Jews only, but once his followers began to convert Gentiles to the Jesus movement and requiring them to submit the traditional rites of initiation (e.g., circumcision), the new religion faced the difficult dilemma of articulating its relationship with Judaism. Was it the exemplary kind of Judaism? Was it a completely separate religion? Did one have to be Jewish first in order to be fully Christian? And for the purposes of this research, with whom should Christians eat, and what foods should they eat?

These last two questions are important because food and dining appear frequently in the gospels' descriptions of Jesus' teaching and ministry. As David Freidenreich writes,

> Many of Jesus' parables draw on food imagery, such as salt, yeast, mustard seeds, and banquets, and he speaks of bread and wine as his body and blood. Jesus miraculously feeds large crowds, and he draws criticism for dining with sinners as well as for the fact that his followers do not fast.[133]

Food, feasts, and fasts play such an important role in the New Testament, yet no single verse or story unambiguously sums up the attitude of Jesus and/or his followers toward the Jewish dietary laws. Jesus interacts with and criticizes other Jews for their overly legalistic behavior regarding food practice, but does not advocate abandoning strict Jewish food laws. Only the later followers of Jesus begin to promote such radical notions of abrogating the law. Still, the role of food and drink in the New Testament and

[133] Levine, Amy, and Marc Z. Brettler. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2011, 521.

other texts from the same period tell us a great deal about food practices in the early centuries of the Common Era.

Food Norms & Food Extremes in 2nd Temple Judaism

Judaism at the time of Jesus featured cultural norms regarding food. Prior to the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE, the practice of bringing animal sacrifices for ritual slaughter and consumption played a major role in Jewish life. These sacrifices were indeed special not just for their religious significance, but also because the consumption of meat was likely an uncommon occasion for most Jews, and indeed for most people in the ancient world who did not have great wealth. E. P. Sanders writes that Jews were no different from their pagan neighbors in this dual-purpose consumption of meat: "Pagans and Jews alike preferred to have an animal do double duty: one sacrificed it and then ate it. This points towards relative scarcity of meat."[134] Though some Jews would only eat meat that had been sacrificed at the temple, the creation of these Jewish table-fellowship communities outside of the sphere of the temple suggests that many Jews began to create Jewish practices that did not rely upon the priests. The Pharisees took the ideas of purity and commensality and ritualized them in order to create holy moments around food without the formality and centralized control of the temple and the priesthood. In effect, they established the idea of *mikdash m'at*, the "small sanctuary" of the dining table even while the temple still stood. Sanders writes that "scholars are almost unanimously of the opinion that the Pharisees ate ordinary food at their own tables as if they were priests in the temple."[135]

[134] Sanders, E. P. *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies*. London: SCM Press ;, 1990, 280.
[135] Sanders, 131.

This desire to take control of Jewish rituals back from the priesthood comes from a desire to compete for power as well as an increased importance on the role of the shared meal in Jewish practice. Andrew J. Overman writes that the entire Pharisaic movement centered on meals: "The Pharisees developed a system centered on the application of the laws of purity around the home and table. Tithing, Sabbath observance, and Torah study were central features of the movement."[136] The Pharisees' emphasis *on mikdash m'at* also encouraged Jewish practice to flourish elsewhere in the Diaspora, with the individual table having replaced the temple's altar.

Other Jewish groups took the ritualized meal to an even more extreme degree. The Essenes, and their most stringent sub-sect at Qumran, left a legacy of meticulous ritual purity, both of the body and the foods which sustain the body. Josephus tells a story about priests from Jerusalem imprisoned in Rome who survived only on figs and nuts presumably because they swore not to eat meat that had not been properly sacrificed, or other foods that had not been properly tithed.[137] In his *War of the Jews* Josephus relates the tale of some Essenes who were expelled from the group. After being kicked out of the Essene sect, Josephus tells us that they chose to starve to death rather than break their oath to only eat pure food in a pure state.[138] The story of the priests recalls Daniel, who only ate raw food and vegetables which could not be rendered impure by Gentile cooking. But the Essenes who (allegedly) chose to die rather than transgress their Essene oath contradict the biblical injunction that one

[136] Overman, Andrew J. *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: the Social World of the Matthean Community*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990, 36.
[137] Whiston, William. *The Antiquities of the Jews by Flavius Josephus*. Online Project Gutenberg: David Reed and David Widger, 2013, *Life of Josephus,* ch. 13-14.
[138] Whiston, *Jewish War* 2:143-144.

should live by the commandments, not die by them.[139] Josephus tells this story to illustrate their extreme piety, though clearly it was neither the norm nor the expectation at the time. Nevertheless, Sanders understates matters when he says "there were some food extremists in first-century Palestine."[140]

All of these groups with their varying food practices lead us to the same question; namely, why did Jewish groups in first century CE put so much emphasis on dietary practice and restrictions? The best answer is that these laws and customs kept Jewish people distinct from their neighbors and from the governing powers that controlled their lands, while still allowing Jews to participate (to varying degrees) in the food culture of the Roman world. Sanders puts dietary restrictions "alongside the Sabbath as being especially important. The reason, again, is that they define Jews as being distinct from others. Food laws, like Sabbath laws, are also subject to public scrutiny."[141] By making food practices distinct from other groups in a way that ensures outwardly recognizable Jewish identity, the leaders of the various sects tried to ensure the distinctive nature of the Jewish community.

Jesus' Message of Purity Inside and Out

Jesus, in all likelihood, kept the Jewish dietary laws of the time. He is referred to as "rabbi" by his followers[142], which is a general honorific for a wise, respected, and learned Jew rather than a title of a particular office or position. He frequently dines and argues with Pharisees, a behavior which they would likely only tolerate from another observant Jew, since their movement focused on ritualized commensality. Amy-Jill

[139] Leviticus 18:5
[140] Sanders, 24.
[141] Sanders, 23.
[142] Mark 9:5, Mark 11:21, John 1:38.

Levine makes the same argument for Jesus' Jewish identity; "Jesus himself was halakhically obedient: he wears fringes (*tzitzit* – See Num 15.38-39; Deut 22.12) to remind him of the Torah (Mt. 9.20; Lk 8.44; Mt 14.36; Mk 6.56); he honors the Sabbath and keeps it holy; he argues with fellow Jews about appropriate observance (one does not debate something in which one has no investment)."[143] While his later followers would approach Gentiles with message of Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus himself mostly proselytized to his Jewish brethren only. In the gospels, he is only ever depicted sharing meals with other Jews. Though Jesus is frequently depicted as sharing a table with moneylenders and sinners, the Anchor Bible clarifies the Greek term *hamartoloi*, which is often translated as "sinners," but which the Anchor Bible translates as "non-observant Jews:" "The older, common translation of "sinners" simply will not suffice. The sense here is far from the use in Paul denoting those separated from God by rebellion. The synoptic use of the term often means "Gentile" (cf. Mark 14:41, Gal 2:15). The charge of "nonobservance" would obviously derive from a Pharisaic view of the Law and its oral tradition."[144] In Mark 2:16-18, Jesus is criticized by the Pharisees for eating with tax collectors and sinners (really just non-observant Jews), yet Jesus does not back down. He even tells his followers not to fast on a fast day appointed by the Pharisees. However, he stops short of telling the Pharisees or his own followers that they no longer need to follow Jewish food laws or commensality restrictions. Jesus is comfortable dining with lapsed or non-observant Jews, but it is only after he is dead

[143] Levine, Amy, and Marc Z. Brettler. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2011, 502.

[144] Marcus, Joel. *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, 315.

that some of his followers will abandon Jewish food practices and commensality restrictions.

Jesus' conservative attitude toward Jewish law is expressed most famously in the Sermon on the Mount depicted in Matthew 5, in which Jesus preaches the following:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.[145]

The Matthean Jesus confirms his identity as an observant Jew and ensures his followers that he does not intend to dismantle Jewish law. In fact, Jesus upholds the laws of Torah and he goes even farther by advocating an observance of the Torah that is more stringent than what the Torah, and even perhaps the Pharisees, require. For example, whereas the Torah prohibits murder, Jesus prohibits anger or insults towards another person.[146] The Torah prohibits adultery; Jesus says that "everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart."[147] These proclamations indicate that, in the view of Matthew at least, Jesus indeed follows Jewish law, but he also makes observance and good behavior reliant upon an individual's inner self, rather than laws regulating only external behavior.

In fact, this is the criticism which Jesus directs most often towards the Pharisees. Jesus does not criticize the fact that the Pharisees are ritually observant, in fact he respects that fact as a fellow observant Jew. Instead, he points out the incongruous

[145] Matthew 5:17-19.
[146] Matthew 5:21-22.
[147] Matthew 5:28.

practice of tithing their produce with diligence, and meticulously cleaning themselves and their dinnerware, while at the same time neglecting the more important spiritual and moral matters of the law:

> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith… You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the place, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside may also become clean.[148]

Jesus' critique of the Pharisees in Matthew is not that they needlessly follow Jewish law (as the argument will be made later in Christian history), but that they follow the letter of the law without following the spirit of the law. As in his earlier statement in Mark 5, Jesus does not attempt to abrogate the law. Instead, he criticizes those whose adherence to the law highlights the hypocrisy of their lives and behavior. Also important to note is that Jesus advocates internal and external purity, rather than the replacement of Jewish ritual with Christian ritual. In the milieu of a high priest appointed by Roman governors and the corruption of the temple's religious authority, this accusation by Jesus seems all the more plausible and objectionable to the authorities.

Food Practices in Jesus' Time

In those days of the Roman empire, group meals for fellowship organizations were a common fixture of society. Some Jews, as always, "wanted to fit into the common culture, as long as doing so did not involve blatant idolatry. Some Jews participated in the main socializing aspects of Gentile city life – theatres, gymnasia and civil

[148] Matthew 23:23-36.

government."[149] Participating fully in the social life of the city also included festive dining clubs like that of the Pharisees described above, though other civic groups gathered for the purposes of networking, collegiality, and philosophical discourse. "Festive meals were a common feature of the life of voluntary associations of all sorts."[150] These high-society dinner parties known as *symposia*, on which the rabbinic Passover seder is modeled, were a level of society many of Jesus' followers would never attain; however, Meeks notes that "for the poor, moreover, the Christian community provided a more than adequate substitute for the sort of friendly associate, including common meals, that one might otherwise have sought in clubs, guilds, or cultic associations."[151] Like the American Jews who opened their own country clubs in the 1950's after having been denied entry into their local clubs, the first Christians began their movement by starting their own supper club for the poor and outcast of society.

It is this very willingness to welcome people to the table that, according to some gospel authors, draws the ire of Jesus' fellow observant Jews. While the Pharisees sought to bring more ritual purity to Jewish life, as reflected in their dining practices, they saw Jesus' willingness to engage with the unsavory "sinners and tax collectors"[152] as reprehensible behavior. When confronted with that accusation in Mark's gospel, Jesus answers in a parable: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."[153] The parable characterizes Jesus as the physician, bringing healing to those in need with

[149] Sanders, 281.
[150] Meeks, Wayne A.. *The First Urban Christians: the Social World of the Apostle Paul*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, 158.
[151] Meeks, 69.
[152] Mark 2:16.
[153] Mark 2:17.

his presence and his knowledge, except that his patients are not physically suffering, they are spiritually suffering from sin. If the suffering of sinners and tax collectors is due to their transgression of Jewish laws and social mores, then the solution is not necessarily to follow Jesus, but rather to observe Jewish law in both deed and in one's heart. Jesus' message of integrity runs counter to the behavior of the overly legalistic Pharisees, with whom he frequently argues.

The aforementioned disputation narrative comes from Mark, and it is worthwhile to note that Mark, just as the other gospels, expresses its own peculiar view of the role of Jewish law in Jesus' ministry. Overman describes Mark in this way: "Mark portrays Jesus as a powerful and innovative figure who overrules or dispenses with the traditions and laws of Israel. Jesus can repudiate these laws and traditions in favor of the presence of the kingdom as he has announced it."[154] The stories from Mark all depict Jesus as one who does come to replace the law, even while Jesus' own statements and his depiction in Matthew do not go as far in making the same claim.

After the parable of Jesus as healer comes another interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees over the law. In this case, Jesus and his followers walk through a grain field during Shabbat, and because they are presumably very hungry, they begin to pick and eat heads of grain.[155] The Pharisees see this and once again accuse Jesus and his followers of breaking the laws of Shabbat. Jesus answers them by quoting from the Hebrew bible, with the sarcastic accusation that the Pharisees themselves have not read this particular selection from I Samuel, otherwise they would understand why Jesus appears to break the laws of Shabbat. "And he said to them, 'Have you never read what

[154] Overman, 85.
[155] Mark 2:23.

David did when he and his companions did when they were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.'"[156] Except that in the actual text, David is depicted alone and merely holds the showbread in his hand.[157] The high priest Ahimelech (not Abiathar) confronts David about the bread, and allows David to have it. The strangeness of the story and the misquoted Hebrew bible might suggest that neither Jesus nor the Pharisees (nor Mark for that matter) have complete knowledge of the Hebrew bible, or it might suggest that the story is a complete fabrication merely intended to depict the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the enlightenment of Jesus, who ends his defense by stating that "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."[158] This statement, bold as it is, does go so far as to declare that Sabbath laws are invalid, but rather that the Sabbath should serve humanity's needs, rather than the other way around.

Variety of Food Laws in the New Testament

Each of the Gospel writers tells the story of Jesus differently, and likewise each deals with Jewish law differently. The issue of food in the early Christian movement offers an excellent means of comparison by which we can examine the variety of opinions within the New Testament towards observance of Jewish law.

Perhaps the best text for our purposes appears in Matthew chapter 15. In the beginning of the chapter, Jesus is approached by Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem,

[156] Mark 2:25-28.
[157] 1 Samuel 21:1-7.
[158] Mark 2:27-28.

who question him for allowing his disciples to eat without washing their hands (a typical Pharisaic practice). Jesus answers in a long speech of his own interpretation of the commandments and quotes Isaiah when accusing the Pharisees of hypocrisy.[159] When Peter asks Jesus to explain his teaching, Jesus says, "Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles."[160] Jesus made a strong statement about food and purity in declaring that anything that goes into your body through your mouth eventually comes out and goes into the sewer, and so cannot impart impurity to human beings Since whatever enters the body, according to Jesus' speech, ultimately leaves it, how can food defile a person? He makes a very compelling argument, according to Matthew's gospel, for the abrogation of Jewish dietary restrictions, but stops short of making that claim. Instead, he turns his attention inward, to the words that come out of a person's mouth which originate in their heart. Matthew was concerned about what came out of one's mouth in the form of words, and he cared that his followers ate according to biblical food laws, but he was against the worry over ritual purity taught by the Pharisees.

Mark is also concerned about what comes out of his followers' mouths, but takes the quote from Matthew one step further. Mark 7:18-19 tells the same story, but with a slightly different ending;

> He said to them [his disciples], "Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

[159] Matthew 15:1-9.
[160] Matthew 15:17-19.

The New Revised Standard Version of the New Testament includes the conclusion in a parenthetical statement not present in Matthew, and the story as a whole is not present in Luke. The Jewish Annotated New Testament offers several explanations for this difference in the versions in Matthew, edited by Aaron M. Gale, and Mark, edited by Lawrence M. Wills; that it was only from Mark's own practice of rejecting Jewish food laws, or it was added later during the time of Paul. The fact that such a broad interpretation of Jesus' teaching remained in Mark underscores his approach to Jesus' teachings. Overman explains that "For Mark, since purity is an internal matter, relating to issues of the heart, one need not worry any longer about the rules of ritual purity. Mark, therefore, in a sweeping fashion reminiscent of his view of the Sabbath law (2:27), declares that 'all foods are clean.'"[161]

We should be hesitant about accepting Mark's version of the story and declaring that the early Jesus movement eschewed Jewish dietary practice completely, especially since the New Testament itself contains another version of this same text that makes no such bold claims.[162] Instead, we should read these two stories as James D. G. Dunn does.

> So here too there is a degree of ambiguity in the Jesus-tradition on matters of law and traditional *halakha*. Clearly there is preserved here a consciousness of eschatological newness which almost certainly stems from Jesus himself. And also an awareness of a degree of incompatibility between this eschatological new and the traditional old. But the debate

[161] Overman, 83.

[162] Jonathan Klawans in his essay *The Law* included in the Jewish Annotated New Testament (page 517) drives this point home: "Scholars are nearly unanimous in rejecting this passage's authenticity: if there were a firmly established teaching of Jesus abrogating food laws, it is difficult to explain why this continued to be a controversy among the early followers of Jesus (e.g., Acts 10.9-16). Nevertheless, the legal statements attributed to Jesus in the Gospels fit within the broad range of ancient Jewish discourse on the law, precisely because that discourse was wide-ranging and diverse."

> is still at the stage of asking how the two can be retained together without the one destroying the other (or both)….[163]

Matthew's gospel does not interpret Jesus' speech here as allowing the early followers of Jesus to eat anything they want; he teaches that the followers of Jesus should also follow the traditional Jewish dietary restrictions outlined in the Torah. Instead, he tells his followers not to follow the strict (and in his opinion, unnecessary) laws of the Pharisees. In Matthew, Jesus accuses the Pharisees of only caring about external purity, rather than internal purity of self. Overman makes the same conclusion and brings Mark, who we will examine next; "Jesus sets the traditions which the Pharisees and scribes follow over against the commands of God. In following their tradition they have neglected the law of God. Both Matthew and Mark seem to agree that this is because the Pharisees and scribes have focused on external matters, failing to realize that it is really internal matters, issues relating to one's thoughts, attitudes, and desires which cause defilement in a person."[164]

Paul Preaches to the Gentiles

The debate to which Dunn refers came to the fore when Paul began taking the message of Jesus' death and resurrection, and the salvation available through baptism, to non-Jewish communities in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece. For the first time, new adherents to the Jesus movement had to ask whether they should observe Jewish law in order to become Christian. Jesus had preached only to Jews, and such an issue therefore never came up. Jesus' immediate followers followed the laws of Torah, even if they rebelled against the strictures of the Pharisees. According to Paul, however, the

[163] Dunn, James D. G. *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990, 21.
[164] Overman, 82.

message of Jesus' death and resurrection ought to be taken outside the Jewish community.[165] He claimed that Gentiles could be initiated into the new movement without circumcision and observance of the Law, including the dietary laws, but other leaders of the movement disagreed. The issue of Gentile admission to the early church, whether it was permissible and on what terms, thus emerged as one of the defining issues in the first three decades of Christianity.

Emblematic of this struggle is the incident at Antioch mentioned in Galatians 2:11-21. Paul claims that he came to Antioch where, initially, he dined with Peter alongside Gentiles. Soon thereafter, however, Peter removed himself from dining with the Gentiles because some men from James came, presumably preaching a stricter adherence to Jewish dietary laws and ritual purity practices.[166] Paul, outraged at Peter's decision, chastises him in front of the entire group; "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ."[167] Paul and Peter are both Jews, and so they follow the Jewish laws even though Paul admits that their new faith believes that salvation comes only through belief in Jesus. The new faith has not yet thrown away the Judaism from which it sprung, and still struggles with how to admit members who are not Jews, and with whom they previously might not have shared a table. However, the Gentiles in this story are referred to by a Greek word that means something along the lines of "those

[165] Paul did not go alone on his mission, and the Anchor Bible comment on Matthew 5:20 states that "It is reasonable to assume that those who followed Paul's footsteps during his journeys were Jewish Christians from Jerusalem who were concerned that Gentile converts should first embrace the Law." (page 57)
[166] Dunn, 154.
[167] Galatians 2:15-16

who had become mixed up with the Jews."[168] Clearly there had been some commensality and comfort between the Jewish Christians and their non-Jewish coreligionists, but Peter was swayed by the men from James to back away from this population at mealtime. Though the movement followed Jesus' preaching that goodness and purity come from within a person, they had not fully embraced life without Jewish dietary restrictions.

This issue of the role of law is addressed in the Jerusalem council described in Acts 15 and Galatians 2:1-10. The council is formed in reaction to the "certain individuals [who] came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'"[169] The conflict over the instruction by these nameless individuals sparked a major disagreement in the church, and the community decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to meet with the church elders in order to decide a guiding policy regarding the observance of Jewish law and the admission of Gentiles into the new faith. The depiction in Acts portrays an amicable process of unanimous agreement, while the version in Galatians shows Paul arguing with Cephas and other Jews who "joined him in this hypocrisy."[170] Here, Paul has to remind the community of his election to lead the church, and a strong reminder that many of them, Paul included, were born as Jews, but that they now believe that salvation comes only through belief in Jesus. In Acts, Peter is the one who stands up to the crowd and argues for the rejection of the commandments. Peter's argument however, is less about Jewish-Christian identity, than it is about faith and

[168] Dunn, 150.
[169] Acts 15:1
[170] Galatians 2:13

belief in Jesus: "Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?"[171] By asking this question, Peter simultaneously shifts the conversation away from law, and towards the notion of salvation through faith alone. Additionally, he chastises those who support observance by referring to the commandments as an impossible burden to bear, one that neither they nor their ancestors have managed to fulfill. His statement suggests that there has always been some degree of interpretation and elimination of certain commandments, and Acts 10 interprets that imperfection as evidence that the commandments cannot be the means by which individuals can be saved.

Paul's letter to the Romans expresses the concerns over the variety of dietary practices amongst the churches he founded, and passes judgment upon those who still feel compelled to follow the Jewish dietary laws (even though he likely follows those same laws himself). "Welcome those who are weak in faith," Paul writes to the Roman Christian community, "but not for the quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables."[172] Perhaps recalling Daniel's decision to only eat raw vegetables while imprisoned, Paul seems to have moved to a position of accepting and tolerating a variety of dietary practices in the Christian community. "Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them."[173] Paul wanted the diverse Christian community of Jews and Gentiles alike to respect one another's

[171] Acts 15:10
[172] Romans 14:1-2
[173] Romans 14:3-3

individual dietary practice, and not try to push their own beliefs onto the other group. He tried to keep order and unity within the Christian community while allowing for each group to maintain its previous customs and traditions. In this way, Paul helped to lower the barriers to entry into the new Christian faith in order to gain converts. Though he admits that salvation does not come through observing the commandments, he does not attempt to make the claim that Jesus has come to supersede all of the commandments in the Torah, knowing that such a proclamation would likely drive away a significant portion of the Jewish followers and be fatal to the fledgling Christian community.

By instructing that all of the followers should share the same table, Freidenreich argues that Paul made absolutely clear the decision that no matter what his or her dietary practice was; all of these individuals were united in their belief in Jesus.[174] With whom you eat is just as important as what you eat. By encouraging his followers to remain flexible in their practice and acceptance of others, Paul set Christianity on the path that would ultimately result in the abrogation of Jewish law, even if the decision was not made in his own time. Jesus' emphasis on internal purity reflected in outward purity later became a focus only on internal purity, while the Pharisaic traditions of hand washing and ritual purity eventually found their way into the rabbinic halakha.

[174] Food and Table Fellowship by David M. Freidenreich in the Jewish Annotated New Testament, page 523

Conclusion

> **Cooking gave us not just the meal but also the occasion: the practice of eating together at an appointed time and place. This was something new under the sun, for the forager of raw food would have likely fed himself on the go and alone, like all the other animals.**
>
> -- Michael Pollan, *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation*, 2013

As we go forward in the process of constant evolution of our Jewish practice, progressive Judaism must take a broader and deeper look at our own food practices throughout history. To be kosher, that is, to be fit for consumption, our food needs to reflect the deepest values of Torah: respect for one another, and respect for our world. Food cannot be considered kosher if it is served in a Styrofoam package, or picked by workers making less than minimum wage. Our meat cannot be kosher if the animals are treated inhumanely, and our grains cannot be kosher if they are modified to remove their nutrients in order to make them easier to process. As consumers and as Jews, we have a duty to stand up to the injustices of a commercial food and agricultural industry that does not have the best of intentions towards our bodies, or our world.

The shared meal is indeed a foundational aspect of human culture, and how we partake of our meals is an important sign of the health of our community beyond nourishing our bodies. As I have explored in this thesis, food is much more than the simple ingestion of calories necessary to function, food delineates between cultures and ties us to the very soil of the earth. Choosing to eat together, or to share food between different cultures, is one of the most critical steps towards engaging others, and

conversely the inability to share a dinner table makes other shared ventures even more challenging. By exploring Jewish dietary practice in a variety of settings, I hope to have added a sense of the progression of Jewish history to the ongoing debate about ethical and religious food choices in progressive Judaism.

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