119 MINISTRIES

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Meat Sacrificed to Idols

Though this may seem to be an insignificant issue to many, ***whether or not we can eat meat sacrificed to idols*** is a question that we've received quite often. Because most people don't live next to a Temple sacrificing animals to false pagan gods…the more modern question seems to be on the topic of halal food.

Halal is an Arabic word meaning "lawful" or "permissible". Halal food is meat that has been slaughtered in the manner prescribed by sharia law. For meat to be halal it follows a prescribed method of slaughtering all meat sources excluding fish and other sea life. This method of slaughtering animals consists of using a well sharpened knife to make a swift, deep, incision that cuts the front of the throat, the carotid artery, and windpipe and jugular veins. The head of the animal that is slaughtered using halal methods is aligned with the prescribed manner. In addition to the direction to be halal, *permitted animals should be slaughtered upon utterance of Islamic prayer in the name of god*. Slaughterer allows the animal to lay on their right side while facing toward MECCA, both the slaughterer, and the animal. Slaughterer says out loud, "Bismillah, Allahu akbar." (In the name of God the Greatest).

Because of all this it is largely interpreted that such practice could be defined as sacrificing meat to idols or to false gods. We would not necessarily disagree with that understanding. In many respects, halal foods would indeed be meats sacrificed to idols. Namely, the fact that the meat is butchered in conjunction with a prayer to another god, that assists in suggesting that halal food is indeed meat sacrificed to idols. Ultimately this meat ends up in grocery stores and those following the whole word of God now have a choice to make.

Is it wrong to purchase and consume Halal meat?

Meaning not whether not it's a preference or something that somebody might be interested in avoiding, but is it a sin? Does it break the Torah?

First, the meat must agree with the actual criteria of it being defined as food, as defined by God in Leviticus 11. If it passes the Leviticus 11 test, then we must determine whether or not it is against the Torah to eat meat sacrificed to idols, which is, right or wrong, how we are going to define Halal meat for the sake of this teaching. As with anything, the Torah is freedom-giving, unchanging truth. Psalm 119

is a great testimony to that understanding.

Thus, first we will test whether eating meat sacrificed to idols is compatible with the Torah. Then we will determine what the New Testament, or the Brit Hadasha, teaches on this matter, because we cannot add or take away from the Word of God, Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32

Deuteronomy 4:2

> You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord (YHWH) your God (Elohim) that I command you. (NASB)

And Deuteronomy 12 likewise says about the same thing:

Deuteronomy 12:32

> Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it. (ESV)

The back of the bible must agree with the front of the bible. First the Torah; as for eating meat sacrificed to idols, the Torah has TWO specific mentions of it. Exodus 34

Exodus 34:11-16

> "Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord (YHWH), whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God (Elohim)), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods. (ESV)

In Exodus 34 it should be noted that it is not clearly taught in the Torah that eating meat sacrificed to idols is a *"Thou shalt not do type of commandment".* HOWEVER, WITHOUT QUESTION IT IS CERTAINLY ASSOCIATED WITH SOMETHING YAHWEH HATES, and accuses those eating meat sacrificed to idols as whoring after other gods. This is where we must entertain some critical thinking.

How many have heard that context is everything?

The Torah also commands "Thou shall not kill" (*Exodus 20:13)*. However, there are examples of justified killing in the Torah.

Does the bible contradict itself?

The commandment "Thou shall not kill" in the *context of not murdering an individual*, the unjust taking of another man's life.

Are we suggesting that we can eat meat sacrificed to idols according to Torah?
We're not saying that just yet…but note this in context.

Exodus 34:15

> …lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods

> and **sacrifice to their gods** and you and **you are invited**, you **eat of his sacrifice**, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods. (ESV)

In early biblical times when a covenant was made with another man or a god, an animal died; and they ate of that animal. For more on this see our teaching "The Threshold Covenant" at www.TestEverything.net.

Thus, there are several things in play here in Exodus 34. One here, is making a covenant with those who worship false gods. And then one takes part in sacrificing to their gods as part of the covenant. And then to solidify the covenant one eats of that sacrifice. Yahweh calls this "SPIRITUAL ADULTERY", to whore after their gods. What this means, is that what is being defined as evil here, is glorifying false gods, sacrificing to them, and then eating of that sacrifice. This is considered idolatry and this is the context of Exodus 34.

Here is the question:
What about if someone eats of the sacrifice, because it is being sold in the meat markets, yet does NOT take part in making a covenant with false gods, and actively sacrificing to them? Is that then wrong?

Well, according to this example in Exodus 34 we would have to say either *"maybe"* or really *"we don't know"*. What it means is that the Torah is not clearly teaching against such a circumstance. We CANNOT PROVE that the Torah would be against eating meat sacrificed to idols in such a context.

The Torah is apparently concerned around the ACTIVE SACRIFICING AND EATING TO FALSE GODS. There is not a mention anywhere in the Torah of any concern of eating meat sacrificed to idols outside of the context of the actual Temple covenant making worship of false gods. Some may not like that distinction, and yet that is the pattern or context that forces us to make that distinction. We are simply noting that difference of context.

Understanding that *differentiation of the context will explain why the New Testament seems to be teaching two different things on this matter*. But, like we said, CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING. The other instance on this topic found in the Torah, is Numbers 25.

Numbers 25:1-2

> While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, **and the people ate and bowed down to their gods**. (ESV)

Again, here the context is about SACRIFICING TO THE FALSE GODS… THEN EATING IT… THEN BOWING DOWN TO THE GODS. Here, Numbers 25, does NOT SPECIFICALLY STATE that, EATING MEAT SACRIFICED TO IDOLS OUTSIDE OF THE CULTIC PAGAN FALSE GOD WORSHIP is inherently wrong. Again, what *appears to be wrong*, is the blatant spiritual prostitution of actively engaging and prostrating oneself in false god worship. What this means is that the Torah clearly states any meat sacrificed to idols is very wrong, but, ONLY in the context and setting of actively worshipping false gods. What the Torah does NOT say, nor can we force it to say, is that eating meat sacrificed to idols while having no regard for false gods nor worshiping them in any capacity is a violation of God's law. We will not find that anywhere in the Torah that says eating meat sacrificed to idols, in and of itself is wrong. For it to be wrong it must be combined with the willful worship of false

gods. Again, we understand that some may not welcome that distinction. We are simply noting what the Word of God specifically states and what is does NOT state. Remember Deuteronomy 4:2

Deuteronomy 4:2

> You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you. (NASB)

Not only do we not want to take away from the Word of God, we do know want to add to it either. Knowing that, let us proceed to the Brit Hadasha on this topic. In Acts 15 James issues a decree to converted gentiles and the decree is repeated in Acts 21.

Acts 15:19-21

> Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath." (NASB)

Acts 21:25

> But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication." (NASB)

Some might say here that James clearly said they should abstain from eating meat sacrificed to idols. However, we will say it again, CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING. Just as in the Torah, we read that eating meat sacrificed to idols was wrong in the CONTEXT of active false god worship, and we find that Acts 15 is no different. The converted gentiles just came out of a system that engaged in pagan false god worship. Active worship included going to the Temple, sacrificing, eating of that sacrifice, drinking its blood and engaging in Temple prostitution. That is why James mentions all of these things. James is telling converted gentiles that a true believer must first stop worshipping false gods before learning the Torah which is the next instruction found in verse 21.

Acts 15:21

> For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath." (NKJV)

Thus, James is not necessarily saying not to eat meat sacrificed to idols. He is in fact saying not to eat meat sacrificed to idols in the CONTEXT OF ACTIVE PAGAN GOD WORSHIP. Nowhere in the Torah do we find a literal clear command to not eat meat sacrificed to idols. We are only given the command to not to worship false idols. We find the same pattern in Revelation 2. Eating meat sacrificed to idols is tied to sexual immorality—all things found in pagan Temple worship.

Revelation 2:20-21

> But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. (NASB)

It might seem like that distinction is splitting hairs, but it appears to be a biblical distinction. Remember, the word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword. There is no room to go to the left, or to go to the right. We must be very careful to not add to or take away from the word of God, but remain

fully in the context in which instruction is given.

Deuteronomy 4:2

> You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord (YHWH) your God (Elohim) that I command you. (NASB)

Paul teaches on this matter and arrives to the very same conclusions. Paul teaches that if one goes to the meat market and buys and eats of meat sacrificed to idols that it should be of no concern. WHY? Because false gods are nothing! FALSE GODS ARE ONLY MADE TO BE SOMETHING WHEN WE ARE WORSHIPPING THEM, ESTEEMING THEM, GLORIFYING THEM, MAKING THEM TO BE IDOLS IN OUR LIVES. However, if we know that false gods are nothing, which they are, then by that very definition we are not worshipping false idols when we eat of their sacrifices. Something that is nothing—can't be something. That seems to be just like common sense but that is basically Paul's point and appears to fit in the context of the two examples in the Torah. However, Paul does mention something very important to consider. In Romans 14 on this topic, he mentions that some, that are weaker in the faith, may not understand the Torah that well yet and may become offended. He states it might be better to not eat meat at all, rather than offend a brother or a sister. And to that, we would agree. It is always best to maintain shalom, to maintain peace, than intentionally cause strife in the Body of the Messiah. He also mentioned that it could cause others to interpret that it is okay to go to the Temple and worship false gods and eat of their sacrifices. Thus, if there is such risk then one should refrain from eating such meat.

In Paul's letters he does clearly state that it is okay to eat meat sacrificed to idols as the Corinthians must have been struggling with the idea of such meat entering the meat markets. This would be very similar to halal in our very own grocery stores.

1 Corinthians 8:8

> Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. (ESV)

And repeats this conclusion in Chapter 10

1 Corinthians 10:25

> Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. (ESV)

Paul can only say this because when the context is considered, no Torah commandment forbids it. So let's back up a little bit and describe the context of what's going on in the first century with the Corinthians. We have meat that was sacrificed to idols, and that meat enters into the meat markets in which it can't be distinguished from meat that was not sacrificed to idols. So, we have some people who are avoiding meat altogether, and Paul mentions this in Romans 14 as well. But Paul can only reach the conclusions that he did because when context is considered, no Torah commandment forbids it. No Torah commandment forbids eating meat sacrificed to idols.

However, Paul does give the recommendation not to, especially in the context of knowing and being in the presence of an unbeliever. Lest you offend others and or cause the unbeliever to make it appear that you are sacrificing to false gods or esteeming false gods. Though Paul starts off in chapter 8 saying that false gods are nothing, yet, some do not know this.

1 Corinthians 8:7-9

> However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. (ESV)

Eating meat sacrificed to idols is not sin as long as it's not being done at the temples and worshiping gods in the process. It is not against the Torah, it is not against the laws of God. But the more important reality is this…*not everyone understands that, we need to be sensitive to that*. Such meat, may offend others, and we should want to avoid offending others. What is against Torah is worshipping false gods. An individual can eat meat sacrificed to idols in which others were doing the worshipping, yet the same individual is not actively worshipping false gods. This is the biblical distinction. That is why James could say what he said and why Paul could say what he said.

It is all about the context of how, when, and where the meat sacrificed to idols is being eaten.

It is about worshipping false gods, or simply eating dinner, knowing that false gods are nothing. Acts 15 and the verses in Revelation are all about taking direct part in sacrificing unto idols in the sun god Temples and eating the meat there. Taking part directly in Temple prostitution and drinking blood. This is certainly a violation of the Torah. We saw such examples in the Torah of how this was wrong. Paul speaks in another context – what to do once the meats that is not eaten in the Temples by the pagans is sold to the meat markets? Can we eat it? Is it wrong? In Paul's understanding it is not. Paul finds no violation in Torah with eating meat sacrificed to idols outside of taking direct part of worshiping false gods in the Temple. He simply cautions us to avoid offending others or giving others a false *interpretation that actual participation and worshiping false gods is okay.*

This teaching often generates some fair questions, so let's address some of those.

Are we not to abstain from all appearance of evil? (1 Thessalonians 5:22)

Yes, and that's probably Paul's point to some degree. However, the meat in the marketplace that was sacrificed to idols looked exactly like meat that was not sacrificed to idols. There is no visible difference that would constitute as being an "appearance of evil." This is actually exactly why those that mistakenly believed (in Romans 14) that they should not eat any meat at all, because they were not sure of the origin of the meat. Paul simply comments that if one only eats vegetables because of this belief, that one should not pass judgment on them. 119 Ministries holds to the same position as Paul. We should not look down on the person who eats the meat, nor the person who does not.

Please explain why Yeshua tells the assemblies of Pergamos (Revelation 2:14) and Thyatira (Revelation 2:20) that amongst the things He has against them is the eating of things sacrificed to idols.

In the Ancient Near East, sacrificing to gods at the pagan cultic temples was often associated with temple prostitution. Contextually, that is how one can discern that the context in Revelation and Acts 15 is related to sacrificing at the temples of false gods.

A good book on this subject is The Lifting of the Veil Acts 15:20-21.

If we prefer to not eat anything that was sacrificed or dedicated to idols, is the inference then that

we are "weak"?

According to Paul, yes. But it does not appear that he meant that as an insult. In Hebraic thought, those that are well studied are considered strong, as in having a strong foundation. Those that were less studied were considered weak, as in having a weak foundation. Paul's point is that those with such convictions simply have not studied out the Torah on the matter.

The end conclusion is this, we believe that Paul taught the Torah, and we can see and understand how Paul arrived to his conclusions based on the Torah, and his conclusions do appear to make the most sense. We expect that if Yeshua selected him for the role of teaching the nations (Gentiles) the Torah, then he must have had fairly good understanding.

We hope that this study has blessed you...*and remember continue to test everything***.**

Shalom

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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