

Milk and Meat

SILENCE!

Time and time again, God's people have been taught always to be ready to give an answer regarding our beliefs:

**But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.
(I Peter 3:15)**

But when I was put on the spot, all I could come up with was a long, embarrassing silence!

This happened at Strathcona Provincial Park on northern Vancouver Island where I was spending a few days helping out with the supervision of my daughter's Grade 7 class on their school trip. I had just returned to our breakfast table in the lodge cafeteria after a low-key (or so I thought) visit to the kitchen to ask the chef whether or not there was any ham in the tasty-looking omelettes. As I sat down, my daughter's teacher – Mrs. Schreiber, a very pleasant, polite and knowledgeable lady – first asked me if our church kept the "Jewish" dietary laws. A common question that is often asked of God's people. Nothing new. I knew what to answer. All was well. But then came question number two:

"But you don't have any problem eating meat and drinking milk together, as the Jews do?"

I knew that we did not have any doctrine or teaching against consuming meat and milk products together, so out came an automatic "No." But then I felt the need to expand on my answer. Without some brief explanation from me, Mrs. Schreiber and the others at the table would be left with the opinion that "John Plunkett's church" arbitrarily picks and chooses which parts of the Bible it will obey and which parts it will not. I searched my memory banks:

Why do we keep the one but not the other?

I didn't know.

Was there a real connection between the two?

I didn't know.

Was the milk-and-meat command part of the sacrificial law and therefore not required today?

I didn't know.

What were the scriptures concerning this subject?

I didn't know!

The pregnant silence reigned for what seemed like an eternity until, mercifully, one of the other dads at the table changed the subject with another of his hunting or fishing stories.

What about you? Would you have been ready with an answer on this subject? Does God expect His children to be ready with answers on such seemingly minor topics? Is this, in fact, a minor topic? If not, what importance does it hold?

Let us examine how and why the church teaching on this subject – of whether or not to consume meat and milk products together – differs from the Jewish teaching.

Origins

What were the origins of the Jewish teaching? This doctrine of not eating meat and milk together is one of the main Jewish dietary laws. But where did they get it? Did they get it from the Old Testament?

I looked it up in a couple of different textbooks on Judaism, and they all agreed with the Jewish Encyclopedia, which says this in its article on "Dietary laws":

Prohibition of Eating Milk and Meat Together:

The prohibition of eating meat and milk, or foods derived from them, is first mentioned in the Talmud (*Hul. 8:1*), but is traced back by the rabbis to the Biblical commandment: "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk" (*Ex. 23:19*). It applies, however, to the flesh of poultry as well as to that of mammals. Foods derived from the meat of mammals or poultry are known as *fleishig*; those derived from milk, such as cheese, rennet and pastry made with milk, are known as *milchig*. All other foods are neutral (*minnig* or *parve*), including fish, eggs, and all vegetables and fruits; accordingly, they may be eaten together with both milk and meat dishes. The latter, however, can be eaten only six hours apart. Scrupulous individuals are careful to have two sets of dishes, cooking vessels and table utensils, in order to remove any possibility of the contact of the tiniest part of one of the two kinds of food with the other.

Note that this doctrine was "first mentioned in the Talmud." But what is the Talmud and what authority does it hold? Is it, like the Bible, God's inspired word? No. It is not. The Talmud is an "encyclopaedia" of Jewish civil and religious law and it includes a set of man-made commentaries and interpretations of Old Testament scriptures. These commentaries date from the 3rd to the 6th centuries AD – many, many years after God had given His laws to Israel at Sinai.

The Jewish Encyclopedia says that it is the rabbis who trace their milk and meat doctrine back to Exodus 23:19. But did the rabbis trace it accurately? Let us take a look at this scripture:

The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.

We know that the scriptures are clear with regard to clean and unclean meats, but does this scripture actually say that meat and milk should not be eaten together? No, it does not. Then what does it say? It says that God's people should not seethe a kid in its mother's milk. "Seethe" is an old English word for "boil" or "stew" and a kid, of course, is a young goat.

Why would they do it?

But why would anyone ever consider cooking a young goat in its mother's milk? Why did God bring this to the Israelites' attention? Why would they even think of doing such a thing? And even if they did, what would be wrong with it?

According to various Bible commentaries, the pagans of that era and of that area had a fertility rite, which involved boiling a kid in its mother's milk and sprinkling the broth as a magic charm on their gardens and fields. This was done in the hope of increasing the yield of their crops. Here is what the Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge says about Exodus 23:19:

The true sense of this passage seems to be that assigned by Dr. Cudworth, from a MS. comment of a Karaïte Jew. "It was a custom with the ancient heathens, when they had gathered in all their fruits, to take a kid, and boil it in the dam's milk; and then in a magical way, to go about and sprinkle all their trees, and fields, and gardens, and orchards with it, thinking by these means, that they should make them fruitful, and bring forth more abundantly in the following year. Wherefore, God forbade his people, at the time of their in-gathering, to use any such superstitious or idolatrous rite."

God was warning His people against following this heathen custom. It actually had nothing to do with the dietary laws.

Importance today?

Can any importance be attached to this seemingly outdated command? Does it have any significance today? How many of God's people today even keep goats?

The late Herbert Armstrong taught that if a command is repeated in the Holy Bible, then that command is doubly important. This command is actually repeated twice – so we might consider it to be trebly important! Let us take a look at the appropriate scriptures and their context. Before we leave the 23rd chapter of Exodus, let us look at the context of verse 19:

**Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty:) and the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field. Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD. Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread; neither shall the fat of my sacrifice remain until the morning. The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.
(Exodus 23:14-19)**

From verse 14 up to and including verse 19, God is giving instructions concerning what to do and what not to do on His Feast days. The first repetition of this command is in Exodus 34:26 and, again, the context is dealing with the proper keeping of God's Feast days:

The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep. Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, as I commanded thee, in the time of the month Abib: for in the month Abib thou camest out from Egypt. All that openeth the matrix is mine; and every firstling among thy cattle, whether ox or sheep, that is male. But the firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb: and if thou redeem him not, then shalt thou break his neck. All the firstborn of thy sons thou shalt redeem. And none shall appear before me empty. Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest: in earring time and in harvest thou shalt rest. And thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end. Thrice in the year shall all your men children appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year. Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven; neither shall the sacrifice of the feast of the passover be left unto the morning. The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring unto the house of the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk. (Exodus 34:18-26)

The third and final occurrence of this command is in Deuteronomy 14:21, and again the context is second tithe and the proper preparation for, and observance of, God's Feasts:

Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien: for thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk. Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always. And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the LORD thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: and thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household, and the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee. (Deuteronomy 14:21-27)

Through these commands, God was telling His Old Testament church to keep His holy days in the ways He told them to, not in the ways that the Canaanites and Egyptians commonly kept their days. We can apply the principles of these commands to God's New Testament church today – not misinterpreting them as the Jewish rabbis have done. God's people today should keep His annual holy days as He commands us to, not by trying to duplicate the methods and trappings of the world's old heathen observances: Christmas, New Year, Valentine's Day, Lent, Easter and Halloween. We can also apply the principle to God's weekly feast day, the Sabbath, by keeping it in the way that God commands us to – not by trying to duplicate Satan's counterfeit day of worship – Sunday.

Still in force?

If you were so inclined, would it be permissible for you to boil a kid in its mother's milk? It isn't likely that you would want to, but if you did, you would be "tempting" God (Deuteronomy 6:16; Malachi 3:15) and breaking one of His laws – a law which is just as binding today as are the laws regarding the holy days and tithing.

Finally, what about eating meat and milk products together? Is it permissible? Yes. In fact, it always has been. Our Elder Brother and Example, Jesus Christ, mixed the two in a meal prepared for Him by Abraham and Sarah, hundreds of years before Moses:

And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;... And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat. (Genesis 18:1, 8)

Is it likely that Jesus Christ would have broken one of His own laws in the presence of His human servants?

It is amazing what God will reveal to us if we try to dig a little deeper into His Word. Let us get to know God's Word better and better by studying it every day. Then if and when we're asked, we will be better able to give effective answers regarding our beliefs.

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