

The Prohibition of Meat and Milk Mixing in the Same Meal: A Brief Theological and Medical Approach to a Jewish Dietary Law

Elias E. Mazokopakis

ABSTRACT

According to Jewish dietary laws, known as Kashrut, the meat and milk mixing in the same meal is prohibited. This article examines this prohibition from a theological and modern medical viewpoint.

Keywords: Jewish Diet, Kashrut, Meat, Medicine, Milk, Theology.

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E. E. Mazokopakis, MD, PhD, DD*
Department of Internal Medicine, Naval
Hospital of Crete, Chania, Greece
(e-mail: emazokopakis@yahoo.gr)

**Corresponding Author*

I. INTRODUCTION

Food is an important part of religious observance and spiritual ritual for many faiths including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Undoubtedly Judaism has the most and strictest rules regarding food, and the set of Jewish religious dietary laws that define a *Kosher* diet, i.e. food fit for consumption, is called *Kashrut*. One of the laws of Kashrut is the prohibition of combining dairy and meat at any time. The aim of this article is to present, investigate and interpret possible causes of its origin, both from a theological and medical viewpoint.

II. THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

The prohibition of combining dairy and meat at any time comes rather from the phrase of Masoretic Text (MT) “לֹא-תֵבֶשֶׁל גְּדִי בְחֵלְבֵי אִמּוֹ” (lō- tē-baš-šēlgā-dība-hā-lēb ’im-mōw) generally translated as “do not cook a kid (young goat) in its mother’s milk” which appears a total of three times in the Torah’s Books (Exodus 23:19 & 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21). While the Torah speaks specifically of a kid, rabbinic interpretation extended the prohibition to all meat and fowl, but not to fish. Milk includes all dairy products. The Talmud interpreted the triple repetition as an indication that three distinct activities are prohibited: cooking meat and milk together, eating such a mixture and deriving any benefit from such a mixture (Hutt, 1994). In order to make the separation as complete as possible, Kashrut requires separate utensils, dishes and cutlery for meat and dairy foods and to wash and store them separately (Hutt, 1994). Moreover, up to six hours must pass after eating meat products before eating dairy products. However, meat may be eaten half or one hour after dairy products (with the exception of aged cheese, which also requires a six-hour interval). In addition, prior to eating meat after dairy, one must eat solid food and the mouth must be rinsed.

Although the Pentateuch does not explicitly explain a reason for this dietary law, several reasons have been expressed: Canaanite cultic practice, pagan ritual custom, cruel and insensitive practice, testing obedience, meat representing the finite physical body which ultimately ends up in death while milk represents the quintessential life-giving force and so on. However, none of these explanations is reliable. Moreover, there is not a credible explanation to justify why the required time to consume dairy after meat is longer than the required time to consume meat after dairy (six hours versus half or one hour). For Rabbis, the phrase “do not cook a kid in its mother’s milk” belongs to the laws of the Torah called *Chukim* which were given to be observed without reason.

Some Biblical scholars believe that the explanation for this prohibition is hidden in the different translations of the original Hebrew Bible. It must be noted that the original Hebrew Bible was written in Paleo-Hebrew, which did not contain vowels and was closely related to the ancient Phoenician writing system (Gleason, 2012). Septuagint (or LXX), a translation written over time by 72 Jewish scholars at Alexandria between 260 and 150 BC, was not only the first translation of the original Hebrew Bible into

the Greek language (Koine/Hellenistic Greek) but one of the most ancient and accurate translations (Gleason, 2012; Kalantzakis, 2006). It differs somewhat from the MT, a later translation of the original Hebrew Bible into Modern Hebrew which was written by Jewish scholars (Masoretes) from the 6th to the 10th century AD (Gleason, 2012; Kalantzakis, 2006). Historical research reveals that MT displays remarkable deviation from the original Hebrew Bible, since the Masoretes had received a partly corrupted text, added vowel points, which did not exist in the original text, and used an alphabet borrowed from Assyria (Persia), which is radically different from the alphabet of the original text (Gleason, 2012). Consequently, according to the Septuagint, the above verse of MT in the corresponding Pentateuch's Books of Exodus (23:19 & 34:26) and Deuteronomy (14:21) is assigned as follows: "οὐχ ἐψησεις ἄρνα ἐν (τῷ) γάλακτι μητρός αὐτοῦ", which could mean on the one hand "do not cook a kid in its mother's milk" (first translated version; with the article "τῷ"), and on the other hand, "do not cook a lamb that still suckles her mother's milk" or "do not cook a lamb before it starts eating solid food" or "do not boil a young goat which is at its mother's milk" (second translated version; without the article "τῷ"). These two translated versions are also supported by the Christian sophist and rhetorician *Procopius of Gaza* (465–528 AD) who considers this order as an obstacle to the execution of a violent and merciless act (Procopius of Gaza). However, the professor of Biblical Studies Stefan Schorch suggests the second version as more accurate because it is entirely coherent with the text-historical, grammatical, literary and literary-historical evidence (Schorch, 2010). In my opinion, the second translated version is also strengthened by the fact that the Passover sacrifice was a one-year-old male lamb or goat (see Exodus 12:5) and not a suckling lamb or goat. Moreover, it is known in the Old Testament God's love and care for animals (see Leviticus 22:27-28; Deuteronomy 22:4.6-7 25:4; Numbers 22:27-33; Psalms 103:14). From the above mentioned it is obvious how a specific interpretation of a biblical phrase can affect the formation of a religious diet, such as the Jewish diet. It is of course self-evident that the acceptance of the second translated version would make the prohibition of mixing meat with dairy products by the Jews untenable.

III. MEDICAL APPROACH

Is there a medical reason for the prohibition of meat and milk mixing in the same meal?

It is obvious that Pentateuch does not mention any hygienic reason for this prohibition. However, we can use modern medical knowledge not to justify the existence of biblical dietary laws of the past, but to investigate any benefits of their observance in modern times. So, from a modern medical point of view, meat (mainly red meat) and dairy products are two, high in protein and saturated fats, foods of animal origin and their combination at the same meal should be avoided mainly because of (a) the total high level of saturated fats and cholesterol received through their consumption, which is responsible for cardiometabolic diseases, (b) its contribution to a positive energy balance via increased gluconeogenesis, especially when energy demand is low, (c) the significant acid load which it poses to the kidneys, (d) possible indigestion as a result of the reduced production of gastric juice and inhibition of gastric emptying due to the release of the satiety peptide hormone cholecystokinin (CCK) from mucosa cells in the duodenum and the jejunum, and (e) hypnagogic effect of both which can sometimes be undesirable (Forouhiet *al.*, 2018; Ekmekcioglu, 2020; Pesta & Samuel, 2014; Mazokopakis, 2019; Peuhkuri *et al.*, 2012). However, a long-term high protein diet increasing the release of other -except CCK- satiety hormones in the gut, such as glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) and peptide YY (PYY), and reducing the concentrations of orexigenic hormones, such as ghrelin, could be used as a potential tool for weight loss (Pesta & Samuel, 2014).

IV. CONCLUSION

The Jewish dietary law which prohibits the mixing of meat with milk in the same meal is based on a biblical phrase of MT. However, this phrase may contain a translation error and therefore have a completely different meaning. Pentateuch does not mention any medical reason for this prohibition.

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