

Reaching down for his Bible, Paul read the previous and next chapters, noting anything similarly conspicuous or possibly related to the unequal strength of the ox and the ass. Putting his Bible down again he closed his eyes as the answers began to resolve themselves.

Paul remembered the passage he had read the day before, a law about taking a wife as spoil in war (Deut. 21:10-14). If I would not unequally yoke together an ass and an ox for fear of going round in circles, why would I, a devoted believer in the one true God, marry a woman who was brought up worshipping idols? Would that give me success in life? Or would the effect be similarly disastrous?

Later, when writing to the Corinthian ecclesia, he divulged his treasure: "Do not be unequally

yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14-18). And as a result, 2,000 years later we can still ponder the same wisdom. Will we have success in our lives if we take a partner who does not serve the God we do? The answer is our own to make, either by listening to wisdom or by experience. Either way, wisdom just wants us to be happy.

Let's resolve to read less and listen more. Let's spend more time chewing than constantly putting more food in our mouths. Let's draw near to God to learn wisdom so that it can protect us from bad paths in the future. Let's love His precepts because they can make us happy in our daily lives, while all those around us serve up their own folly of negligence.

(Concluded)

Exposition

Seething a kid in its mother's milk

Malcolm Window

Some of the provisions of the Law of Moses may puzzle us or seem irrelevant. However, as with all Divine provisions, there is wisdom and point in them. There is also the opportunity to search out the matter to our spiritual benefit.

"MAY I PUT my casserole dish with my milk jug in the dishwasher?" "If I eat some meat which has become stuck in my teeth, am I then able to drink some milk, or do I need to wait another six hours?"

Such questions are directed at Jewish rabbis in response to their interpretation of the law, "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk". Rabbinical scholars have taken this passage and given it its widest possible literal interpretation. Not only is a young goat not to be cooked in the milk of its mother, but all meat and dairy products are kept separate on the basis of this law.

So important is this separation that a practising Jew will actually keep different utensils for mixing, storing and cutting dairy and meat products. Dishes such as lasagne, pizza or even the humble

hamburger—which combine cheese with meat—are off the menu for the conservative Jew.

While we might view such interpretations as extreme or strained, we cannot help but marvel at the zeal with which this misguided view is

followed. How do we respond to this command? Its importance is underlined when we realise that it is mentioned three times in Scripture. Obviously there is an important principle here, but what? Surely God's concern extends beyond His people's diet! There is a temptation in interpretation to break up the phrase into its various components, and assign a meaning to each. Milk = *a*, the kid = *b*, while the seething process can be represented by *c*. Therefore the passage means *abc*. The danger with such interpretations is that they are very subjective; three different minds could come up with three or more different meanings!

Does the context help?

There are a number of questions which help elicit the meaning. Is there a common context

each time this phrase is repeated? Does the Law make similar statements regarding sheep and cattle, or is this command restricted to the goat? If so, is there any special significance in this fact? Was there any special time when a goat might be seethed, or is this command to be interpreted as a general cooking instruction? Why is it that one was not to seethe a kid in its *mother's milk*? Why not just milk in general?

Firstly, consider the context behind each phrase. The first occurs in Exodus 23:

"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*" (vv. 17-19).

The next occurrence of the phrase comes in Exodus 34:

"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*" (vv. 23-26).

This phrase is repeated once more in Deuteronomy 14:

"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" (vv. 21-23).

The three passages are united by a common theme:

- Israel is reminded of its responsibility to appear regularly before God.

- Their assembly was to be characterised by a spirit of thankfulness, as evidenced by firstfruits and tithes.
- Special note is made of blood. The blood from the Passover sacrifice had to be entirely free from leaven, while ordinary meat had to be properly bled. Life-giving food was not to be viewed casually. The nation was redeemed from Egypt to serve God. Their lives were not their own.

What is the significance behind bringing the firstfruits to God and the paying of tithes? Why were Israel instructed to do this? What lesson did this teach?

Firstfruits and tithes

Firstfruits were the produce the land brought forth first. In giving them to God, the worshippers recognised they were really His in the first place; their total harvest was really a gift from God, and they were thankful for what He had given. The essence of this idea is clearly expressed in Deuteronomy 26:1-11. God had delivered Israel from Egypt; He had given them the land; He had granted them their harvest. In bringing the firstfruits to Jerusalem they acknowledged that they had indeed been blessed.

In Psalm 50 this concept is taken further. Not only is the harvest a gift from God; even the sacrifices one makes are God-given. There is nothing we can (in a material sense) give to God. We cannot come to God with a sacrifice and say, "Here, I've paid You back. Here's Your sacrifice, forgive my sin; I don't owe You any more!"

Look at how the psalmist expresses the words of God:

"I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before Me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is Mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: and call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me" (vv. 8-15).

The only thing that we can bring to God is an attitude of thankfulness, a life of obedience. Hymn 159 puts it rather elegantly in verse 3:

“Fear not to enter His courts in the slenderness
Of the poor wealth thou wouldst reckon as
thine;
Truth in its beauty, and love in its tenderness,
These are the offerings to lay on His shrine”.

Offerings for sin

What then, is the significance of a kid, or young goat? Why should the Divine Author focus our attention on this animal? “Thou shalt not seethe a *kid* in his mother’s milk”. Why not a calf, a lamb or some other grown animal? Or why not choose a different animal to highlight the point each time the phrase is repeated? Why focus on a young goat? Obviously something about this animal is central to a correct understanding of this command.

To an Israelite under the Law, reference to a kid of the goats would have been significant. This was the animal identified with the sin offering. Thus, in Leviticus 4:23, any ruler who sinned had to bring a male kid for a sin offering. In verse 28, if any commoner sinned, they were to bring a female kid for their sin offering. When the leaders of each tribe brought their offering at the dedication of the altar in Numbers 7, each leader brought, along with a number of other offerings, a kid as a sin offering. In Numbers 28 and 29, where we have the schedule of national offerings, it is the kid which predominates as the sin offering.

Any discerning Israelite would have immediately associated this command about seething a kid in its mother’s milk with an offering for sin. This link is especially strong in the light of Leviticus 6:25-30. The process set forth in this passage for sacrificing the sin offering was as follows:

- The sin offering (most frequently a kid) was killed at the altar of burnt offering.
- The fat was taken and burnt on the altar.
- The priests could eat of the offering in the holy place, boiling or seething the flesh of the sin offering in a vessel.
- The vessel had to be thoroughly cleaned, or, in the case of an earthen vessel, broken.
- The sin offering whose blood was brought into the most holy place, making atonement for the nation, was not eaten, but burned without the camp.

No personal merit

What, then, is made of the special reference to boiling a kid in its *mother’s milk*? Notice what God does not say. He does not make any general ban on boiling in milk *per se*. There is a specific

ban on boiling the meat of the sin offering in its *mother’s milk*.

The sin offering was not to be enhanced or made palatable through any provision by its mother. The prohibition made a powerful point about our redemption from sin. Forgiveness is not extended upon the basis of personal relationships or lineage. We cannot lay claim to our redemptive sacrifice as though it were our provision. And so, each time a young goat was eaten, stress was laid on this fact. It is God’s Son who purchases our reconciliation, not we ourselves. Salvation comes from God. Any opportunity to lay claim to redemption upon the basis of personal merit or family lineage was quashed with the command, “Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother’s milk”.

And so, when Israel came before God, bringing with them a bountiful harvest, the natural mind was put on notice: “No. You have not given God anything which was not His in the first place. Your obedience to this command does not place God in any obligation to you. Salvation is of God. Forgiveness is not something upon which you can insist as your right”.

The prophet Micah sums up the issue succinctly in 6:6-8:

“Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? *shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?* He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”.

Is there anything I can give for my sin? What if I made the ultimate sacrifice and gave up my firstborn? Would that be acceptable? No! We are saved by God’s grace, and so we serve Him in humility and fear.

God’s gift

Hebrews provides a powerful insight into this passage of Scripture. The issue facing the Hebrews was a growing trend back to Judaism, with the Pharisaic sect encouraging the believers to reject the power of Christ’s covering and go back to the Law. And so, in his letter, Paul speaks of the greatness of Christ; that his offering supersedes everything that the Law could do; that works of Law could not bring redemption. In effect, this was the same argument God presented to Israel

when they brought their tithes and firstfruits. "Thou shalt not see the kid in his mother's milk." Salvation does not come from your hand; it is a gift from God.

In Hebrews 5:11-14 Paul chides his readers for leaving the meatier things of the Truth, such as ministering to others and their labour of love, and instead seeking to be established upon technicalities—supposing that the holding of doctrines made them righteous, rather than allowing those doctrines to bear fruit in action:

"we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil".

There is a great danger, he says in chapter 6, that you have tasted of God's grace and been totally unmoved; that you have had your sins forgiven, and yet been unappreciative of its power. Having tasted of God's blessings you should have responded by bringing forth a harvest to God. Instead you seem to thumb your nose at God's provision and seek to save yourselves! True appreciation of God's grace is demonstrated by a life which gives sustenance to others. One does not show gratefulness by tearing down and scratching at those around.

Abraham and Melchizedek

Paul's point is inserted into an overarching reference to the priesthood of Melchizedek. We might, perhaps, be tempted to think of this as an aside, with little relevance to his greater argument. However, the Melchizedek story, as outlined in Genesis 14, introduces us to

- a) the first Scriptural account of tithes, and
- b) the first assembly at Jerusalem.

Both of these themes are embedded in the context of each command, "Thou shalt not see the kid in his mother's milk". Surely, then, when Paul leaves Melchizedek to speak about milk and meat, he has the essence of this command in mind.

- In Genesis 14, we read about God's deliverance; Abraham, against impossible odds, was able to defeat the confederacy of Chedorlaomer.

- How did Abraham recognise this deliverance? He gave tithes of all (v. 20), a statement that amounted to saying, "God has given me these spoils of war, and I want to thank Him for it".
- In addition to this, Abraham came to Salem, the very site to which all Israel later gathered three times a year to eat God's feast.
- Abraham lifted up his hand to Yahweh, the possessor of heaven and earth (v. 22).

It is against this backdrop of thanks that the king of Sodom interjects. Despite having been totally overpowered by his enemies, he makes a claim that runs totally against Abraham's statement: "God hasn't really delivered all this wealth into your hand. It really all belongs to me. You have done well in fighting against my enemies; I'll tell you what, you keep the goods, and I'll have the people".

Abraham's reply reveals much about the tenor of the king of Sodom's offer: "I will not take a thread or even a shoe latchet from you. Not even in the smallest way am I going to look to you as my covering and my redeemer. No, God is the One Whom I serve, and if you claim this as your own then take it all, for there is but one deliverer, the most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth". And with that, Abraham surrenders all the wealth to the king of Sodom, preferring rather to rely on God for his salvation. And so God says in 15:1, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward".

This passage says a lot about what it truly means to have God as our Deliverer. Accepting God as our Saviour also means accepting Him as our Judge and Avenger. Why push and fight for our rights? God knows; God sees; God will reward. It requires an absolute belief that God will set things right, even though we give up all.

A clear perspective

Some years later, despite the fact that the king of Sodom had usurped what was rightfully Abraham's, we find him praying that the city of Sodom might not be destroyed for the sake of fifty, forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, or even ten, faithful men. At a time when covetousness might have clouded his vision, when envy and greed might have prompted a call for judgement, Abraham's great concern was for the deliverance of his nephew. Hebrews 13, alluding to this incident, says:

"Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have

entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body. Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, *The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me*" (vv. 1-6).

We know that our Judge and Redeemer will do what is right. Very shortly, our God will judge this earth in righteousness, and the wicked will no more pollute the earth. Zechariah 14 is a vision of the Kingdom age, when all nations will come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles:

"In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD'S house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite [read Sodomite?] in the house of the LORD of hosts" (vv. 20,21).

How we long for the time when God's judgments shall be in the earth! When no longer will people use God's grace as a means to trade for personal profit; when wickedness and evil will no longer be hidden behind a religious veneer. We long for the time when God's house will be called a house of prayer for all nations, and no longer will people rob God of the honour and praise due to His Name.