

GENERAL EPISTLES AND LATER NEW TESTAMENT

Hebrews 9:8-10

“Were the Kosher Laws Only in Place ‘until a time of reformation?’”

“The Holy Spirit *is* signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which *is* a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they *relate* only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.”

Hebrews 9:8-10, and its mentioning of “foods” (*brōmasin*, βρώμασιν), is a frequently referenced passage in various Christian theological works as a support to assert that the Torah’s dietary laws have been abolished for the post-resurrection era.¹ Few Messianic leaders and teachers have bothered to even examine Hebrews 9:8-10, to evaluate whether it is associated with the Torah’s instructions regarding clean and unclean meats, despite it being often listed alongside passages such as Mark 7, Acts chs. 10 and 11, Romans 14, Colossians 2:16-17, or 1 Timothy 4:1-5 (previously addressed).

The author of Hebrews discusses the limitations of the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices (9:1-7), necessarily surpassed in effectiveness by the Messiah’s priesthood and final sacrifice and cleansing for all (9:11-28). Understanding and appreciating the Levitical service is necessary, in order to more fully understand and grasp the vital importance of what Yeshua has accomplished:

“But when Messiah appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (9:11-12).

For those who are more conscious of the Torah’s instructions regulating the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system—which is precisely what is in view in the wider context of Hebrews ch. 9—is the reference to “foods” in vs. 8-10 associated with the kosher dietary laws observed by all in Israel, or more specifically with the priestly service? It goes widely overlooked, by many able Christian expositors, how the Torah did originally allow for the Levitical priests to eat various portions from the altar of sacrifice. Elsewhere, a figure like the Apostle Paul would acknowledge, “Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the *food* of the temple, *and* those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar?” (1 Corinthians 9:13; cf. 10:18). It needs to be seriously considered that the “foods” in view are intended to be understood in association with the Levitical service and priestly portion, not with the classification of clean and unclean meats for general eating by the people at large.

¹ This section has been adapted and significantly expanded from the commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic* (2006) by J.K. McKee.

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9:8 The author of Hebrews asserts, “the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing” (ESV). While some readers may misunderstand, or have difficulty, with what the writer is trying to communicate, he fully believes that the Levitical priesthood—having been established by God—was instituted by the work of the Holy Spirit, to bring forward the coming of the Messiah. He says, after all, “the Holy Spirit {is} indicating this...” (NKJV), employing the present tense participle *dēlountos* (δηλοῦντος), “making this clear” (Brown and Comfort),² although the NIV has the less-than-useful past tense, “The Holy Spirit was showing by this.” The Holy Spirit, for Hebrews’ First Century audience, was indicating, signifying, or showing something that they needed to seriously heed.

The challenge for various members of Hebrews’ audience, is that they were teetering in their faith in Yeshua, and still to an extent relied on the animal sacrifices for their atonement—as opposed to the once-and-for-all sacrificial work of Yeshua. The author states how “the way into the Holies has not yet been revealed while the first tent is still standing” (TLV). The clause of importance reads *tēs prōtēs skēnēs echousēs stasin* (τῆς πρώτης σκηνῆς ἐχούσης στάσιν), “the first tabernacle having standing” (Marshall).³ While often rendered in English versions as a verb, *stasis* (στάσις) is actually a noun. It technically refers to a present “standing” (YLT) of the Levitical priesthood in the hearts and minds of much of Hebrews’ audience, meaning that it “had cultic status” (*WBC*)⁴ which they looked to for atone and regulate their sins. This is something that the author of Hebrews wanted decisively changed for his audience, as they were instead to look entirely to Yeshua the Messiah and His sacrifice as “the way into the Holiest Place” (CJB).

Of course, it does need to be recognized how people giving a status to the Levitical priesthood for the full atonement of their sins does not require Hebrews to have been written *only* to an audience that knew about, or was witnessing, a functioning Temple in Jerusalem. F.F. Bruce thinks, “The present tense in this principal clause is a historic present, indicating primarily the procedure laid down by the Levitical law rather than the procedure which was still being enacted at Jerusalem while the author was writing.”⁵ We should remember how there are Jewish people today who look for the rebuilding of the Temple, and reestablishment of the Levitical priesthood, to once again provide them with a known system of atonement for their sins. (There might even be a few people in the contemporary Messianic movement who give the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system, more importance than it ought to have.) The crux of the matter is that if someone was relying upon the Levitical priesthood for some kind of redemption—especially after Yeshua the Messiah had come—**the revelation of the Heavenly reality could not be really understood or accessed.** Bruce is to the point in summarizing the limitations of the Levitical priesthood and its sacrifices:

² Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort, trans., *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1990), 776.

³ Alfred Marshall, *The Interlinear KJV-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 657.

⁴ William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews 9-13*, Vol. 47b (Nashville: Nelson Reference and Electronic, 1991), 47b:214.

⁵ F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 209.

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"The really effective barrier to a man or woman's free access to God is an inward and not a material one; it exists in the conscience. It is only when the conscience is purified that one is set free to approach God without reservation and offer him acceptable service and worship. And the sacrificial blood of bulls and goats is useless in this regard. Animal sacrifice and other material ordinances which accompanied it could effect at best a ceremonial and symbolical removal of pollution."⁶

9:9 Those who have received Yeshua into their lives, should be mature enough and able to understand that the Levitical system "is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly, gifts and sacrifices are being offered that cannot make the worshiper perfect with respect to conscience" (TLV). "All this is symbolic" (NEB) or "an illustration" (NIV), meaning that while the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices surely have value, they also have limitations; the redeemed in Yeshua are to understand them as portraying and typifying the work of Him as the Savior (10:1).

The Levitical priesthood cannot bring eternal salvation, and must not be standing in the hearts and minds of those who believe in Yeshua, as though the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices can provide final redemption. **Only the priesthood of Yeshua and Heavenly tabernacle should be standing in the hearts and minds of the redeemed for eternal salvation.** As the NLT paraphrases v. 9, "the gifts and sacrifices that the priests offer are not able to cleanse the consciences of the people who bring them." Redemption via the Levitical priesthood could only temporarily withhold punishments that were to be meted out upon Ancient Israel. Furthermore, the animal sacrifices and offerings would not be able to cleanse the conscience—perhaps also to be viewed as the thoughts, emotions, and reasoning abilities of anyone. The redemption of one's thought life can only be brought about by the sacrifice of Yeshua and the work of the Holy Spirit in a person. **This undoubtedly makes the priesthood of Yeshua superior to the Levitical priesthood.** As David A. deSilva further and validly observes,

"Direct access to God was still limited to one man, once a year, with a lesser degree of access being enjoyed by a limited number of priests. The spatial arrangements and limitations on participants the closer one got to God's mercy seat merely reinforced the consciousness of separation, of unholiness, of barriers between human beings and God. The cultus could not 'perfect the worshiper in regard to his or her conscience,' that is, could not bring the conscience to the divinely appointed goal of allowing the worshiper to stand in the very presence of God in anticipation of favor rather than in fear of destruction."⁷

With the transition in priesthoods and service from that of Levi to that of the Messiah, there is an unlimited access to the intimate presence of the Father for all redeemed men and women in Him—unlike the limited access those of the Levitical priesthood had at specific times of year. As Hebrews 10:19-20 will further explain,

"[W]e have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Yeshua, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh."

9:10 The limitation of the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices, as it was unable to offer purification to a person's conscience, is stated by the author of Hebrews: "These relate

⁶ Ibid., pp 209-210.

⁷ David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 300.

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only to food and drink and various washings—regulations for the body imposed until a time of setting things straight” (TLV). References are issued to *brōmasin kai pomasin kai diaphorais baptismois* (βρώμασιν καὶ πόμασιν καὶ διαφόροις βαπτισμοῖς), “foods and drinks and various baptisms” (JKM rendering). Noticing the author’s reference to *brōmasin*, “foods” (YLT actually has “victuals”), many commentators conclude that the kosher dietary laws of the Torah are in view. Yet there are others who are hesitant, given the specific presence of the sacrificial system in the train of the argument, and may be more comfortable with 13:9-10 following speaking more of the dietary laws. The chart below has classified interpreters who think that the reference to “foods” in v. 10 is to the kosher dietary laws, and those who think that it needs to be read a bit more carefully against the backdrop of the Levitical priesthood and service:

HEBREW 9:10	
“FOODS” = DIETARY LAWS	“FOODS” MAINLY ASSOCIATED WITH SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM
<p>“The reference to ‘food and drink’ probably has to do with the food-laws of Lev. 11.”⁸ F.F. Bruce</p>	<p>“Dietary rules and regulations on purification, such as those mentioned here, are not narrowly linked with the Day of Atonement. Sacrifice, however, will return to the centre of the following discussion....The point is not that the OT cultus can only perfect the officiant on the basis of certain foods, drinks, and purifications, but on the contrary that it cannot do so at all.”⁹ Paul Ellingworth</p>
<p>“The words of Hebrews 9:10 probably refer to sectarians for whom food laws and ceremonial washings retained great importance. The readers must remember the transitory nature of these things...and should not return to them.”¹⁰ Zane C. Hodges</p>	<p>“The Old Testament sacrificial system actually erected a barrier between the people and God (9:8), and mandated gifts and sacrifices on the part of the worshipper, which although commanded by God, were incapable of inward cleansing from sin. All of this was, of course, by God’s design in preparation for the new covenant.”¹¹ David L. Allen</p>

⁸ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 210.

⁹ Paul Ellingworth, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp 442, 443.

¹⁰ Zane C. Hodges, “Hebrews,” in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 801; cf. Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” in Frank E. Gaebelien, ed. et. al., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12:84.

¹¹ David L. Allen, *New American Commentary: Hebrews* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 468.

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<p>"Food and drink refer to the stipulations of the dietary legislation (e.g., Lev. 11); ceremonial washings to various purifying rites (e.g., Lev. 14; 15). External ('of flesh') regulations stand in deliberate contrast to the root problem of the inner being as represented by conscience."¹² Donald A. Hagner</p>	<p>"At best the sacrifices deal with minor matters of purification...In Jewish tradition, sacrifice has many functions, including worship, commemoration, inauguration, purification, as well as expiation."¹³ Pamela Eisenbaum</p>
<p>"The author criticizes regulations...as mere 'regulations of the flesh'—prescriptions concerned with food (Lev. 11; Deut. 14), purifactory washings of the body (Lev. 15; Num. 19), and drink—which are incapable of extending sanctifying power to the inner person."¹⁴ David E. deSilva</p>	
<p>"Our author goes on to say that that system imposed only human or fleshly regulations on matters of food and drink (presumably a reference to kosher food laws) and various sorts of ceremonial cleansings."¹⁵ Ben Witherington III</p>	
<p>"The food laws (Lev. 11; Deut. 14), libations to accompany sacrifices (Num. 6:15, 17; 28:7-8), various rites for bodily cleansing (Exod. 29:4; Lev. 8:6; 16:4), along with the sacrifices themselves, described as <i>regulations for worship</i> (9:1), are now depicted negatively as 'regulations of the flesh.'¹⁶ Peter T. O'Brien</p>	

William L. Lane is one commentator, who views what is listed in v. 10 somewhat generally. He does not commit to the view that the "foods" are a reference to the Torah's

¹² Donald A. Hagner, *New International Biblical Commentary: Hebrews* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 134.

¹³ Pamela Eisenbaum, "The Letter to the Hebrews," in Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, NRSV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 417.

¹⁴ deSilva, *Hebrews*, 301.

¹⁵ Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 267.

¹⁶ Peter T. O'Brien, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 315.

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dietary instructions, but neither does he direct readers to v. 10 being specifically associated with the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system. In Lane's estimation,

"No special emphasis is intended in the reference to 'food and drink and various ceremonial washings'...These terms are representative of *δικαιώματα σαρκός* [*dikaiōmata sarkos*], 'regulations for the human order'...which were imposed at Sinai but which have lost their validity under the new covenant."¹⁷

While it is common for various commentators and readers of v. 10 to focus on the author of Hebrews' reference to "foods," the writer actually connects **three things** together: *brōmasin kai pomasin kai diaphorois baptismois* (βρώμασιν καὶ πόμασιν καὶ διαφόροις βαπτισμοῖς), "food and drink and various baptisms" (NRSV), or "food and drink and various ceremonial washings" (NIV). It is not too responsible for readers to simply single out the dietary laws of the Torah as being irrelevant, but then overlook "drink." Ellingworth specifically notes, "Drinks were forbidden under the OT law not in themselves (as unclean foods), but for particular groups such as Nazirites (Nu. 6:3) on certain occasions (as for priests on duty, Lv. 10:9)." He does think, though, "'Foods and drinks' is, however, a set phrase, with no special emphasis on the second element."¹⁸

The major problem is that often prejudiced against the Torah's dietary laws, not enough Christian examiners are able to adequately associate the writer's reference to "foods and drinks and various washings" to the Levitical priesthood and its regulations. Readers who are trying to stay true to both the text of Hebrews, as well as to what the Torah directs regarding the Levitical priesthood, should logically expect "foods and drinks and various washings" to be connected to the Levitical priesthood and incumbent Tabernacle service. Donald Guthrie makes the critical point, regarding drinks or alcohol consumption, that "Some difficulty arises from the fact that the Mosaic law laid down no regulations about any drink taboos, unless the Nazirite vow is taken into account (Nu. 6:3)."¹⁹ This is an important factor to consider, because a Nazirite vow can only be kept when a Tabernacle/Temple is operating in Jerusalem. Likewise, the food and washings mentioned by our author can only be observed when a Tabernacle/Temple is operating.

All a Messianic Jewish commentator like David H. Stern has proposed, is that "on 'food and drink' in the Temple see Leviticus 23,"²⁰ a chapter of the Torah which mainly addresses the appointed times or *moedim* (מוֹעֲדִים).²¹ This is not entirely useless, as what he has done is direct readers' attention, albeit indirectly, to various sacrifices and offerings that are presented before the Lord during the observance of festivals such as Passover or *Sukkot* (Tabernacles), among others. This should enable readers of Hebrews to think of "foods" in terms not of what people eat generally, but what the Levitical priesthood would have been associated with specifically.

¹⁷ William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews 9-13*, Vol. 47b (Nashville: Nelson Reference and Electronic, 1991), 225.

¹⁸ Ellingworth, 443.

¹⁹ Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 184.

Noting the statement "regulations for the body," though, Guthrie would seemingly agree with the common thought that the dietary laws are probably referenced in v. 10.

²⁰ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995), 694.

²¹ Consult the mini-book *Moedim: The Appointed Times for Messianic Believers* by J.K. McKee.

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The first area listed by the author of Hebrews, “**foods**” (*brōmasin*, βρώμασιν), has far less to do with the classifications of clean and unclean meats in the Torah, and instead far more to do with the Levites being able to partake of the animal sacrifices. Leviticus 7:1-6 notably states how the Levitical priests were allowed to eat the meat of the guilt offerings offered before God:

“Now this is the law of the guilt offering; it is most holy. In the place where they slay the burnt offering they are to slay the guilt offering, and he shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar. Then he shall offer from it all its fat: the fat tail and the fat that covers the entrails, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, which is on the loins, and the lobe on the liver he shall remove with the kidneys. The priest shall offer them up in smoke on the altar as an offering by fire to the LORD; it is a guilt offering. Every male among the priests may eat of it. It shall be eaten in a holy place; it is most holy.”

Deuteronomy 18:1 further prescribes, “The Levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the LORD’s offerings by fire and His portion.”

The second area that our author lists is “**drinks**” (*pomasin*, πόμασιν). This obviously cannot be connected to the kosher laws, because the Torah’s dietary instructions do not prohibit the consumption of alcohol. But, the Torah does issue instruction concerning how priests on duty were forbidden to drink:

“The LORD then spoke to Aaron, saying, ‘Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die—it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations’” (Leviticus 10:8-9).

It is also possible that the reference to “drinks” pertains to the option of one taking a Nazirite vow, as the man or woman making the vow had to abstain from alcohol or grapes (Numbers 6:2-4). The same person making this vow also had to offer certain sacrifices when it was completed:

“Then on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest, to the doorway of the tent of meeting. The priest shall offer one for a sin offering and *the* other for a burnt offering, and make atonement for him concerning his sin because of the *dead* person. And that same day he shall consecrate his head, and shall dedicate to the LORD his days as a Nazirite, and shall bring a male lamb a year old for a guilt offering; but the former days will be void because his separation was defiled” (Numbers 6:10-12).

Also not to be discounted are the many references in the Torah seen to the drink offering, which were to be offered before the Lord at specified times throughout the year.²²

The third area, “various ceremonial washings” (NIV) or “baptisms” (NRSV; *baptismois*, βαπτισμοίς), is actually a very general statement, likely made in reference to required ritual bathing which those participating in the Tabernacle service had to go through before approaching the altar or any of the holy objects. These various immersions took place to purify someone “from the profane sphere before entering a holy area, from

²² Cf. E.E. Carpenter, “Sacrifices and Offerings in the OT: Mosaic,” in *ISBE*, 4:266-269.

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something under a taboo" (*ABD*).²³ The high priest himself was commanded to bathe before going before the Lord on *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement:

"He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and the linen undergarments shall be next to his body, and he shall be girded with the linen sash and attired with the linen turban (these are holy garments). Then he shall bathe his body in water and put them on. . . He shall bathe his body with water in a holy place and put on his clothes, and come forth and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people and make atonement for himself and for the people" (Leviticus 16:4, 24).

When readers of v. 10 see the statement "foods and drinks and various washings," **and consider it in the context of an operating Levitical priesthood**, they should be able to see how these areas have distinct applications. The author of Hebrews says that these were "regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation" (NASU), *dikaiōmata sarkos mechri kairou diorthōseōs epikeimena* (δικαιώματα σαρκὸς μέχρι καιροῦ διορθώσεως ἐπικέιμενα). He repeats his usage of *dikaiōma* (δικαίωμα) from v. 1, where he stated, "Now even the first *service*²⁴ had regulations of divine worship [*dikaiōmata latreias*, δικαιώματα λατρείας] and the Earthly sanctuary" (author's rendering from *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*). It cannot go overlooked how such regulation, *dikaiōma*, regards "an action that meets expectations as to what is right or just, righteous deed" (*BDAG*),²⁵ an indication these were requirements of godly origin. Yet, with the coming of Yeshua the Messiah onto the scene of history, what is the importance or significance of them? While they are to surely be regarded as a part of God's revelation in His Word, they are not as important as the One who came to die and offer permanent atonement for human sin.

The regulations of "foods and drinks and various washings," to be employed in association with the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices, are labeled as *dikaiōmata sarkos* (δικαιώματα σαρκὸς). While these instructions are of Divine origin, they do have a limited, fleshly or carnal influence. This is witnessed in the diverse renderings of *dikaiōmata sarkos* as "regulations for the body" (RSV/NRSV/ESV, NASU), "external regulations" (NIV), "outward ordinances" (NEB), "regulations for the ordering of bodily life" (Kingdom New Testament), or "regulations concerning outward life" (CJB). Bruce is fair to observe how the "purifications undoubtedly had great hygienic value, but when they were given religious value there was always the danger that those who practiced them might be tempted to think of religious duty exclusively, or at least excessively, in terms of externalities."²⁶ Indeed, while highly valuable, the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial service had a major limitation: sacrifices would have to be offered over and over again for the procurement of atonement. This is why Yeshua's singular sacrifice for fallen

²³ Lars Hartman, "Baptism," in *ABD*, 1:853.

²⁴ Grk. *Eiche men oun [kai] hē prōtē* (Εἶχε μὲν οὖν [καὶ] ἡ πρώτη); almost all versions insert "covenant," in spite of the fact that *diathēkē* (διαθήκη) does not appear in the Greek source text. While this rendering has chosen "service," as this would be an encapsulating term for the first *priesthood/tabernacle/ministry* (Levitical) to be compared and contrasted to the Messiah's priestly service (Melchizedekian), it is notable that the 2011 Kingdom New Testament by N.T. Wright actually has "The first Tabernacle had..." for 9:1.

See the further discussion provided on Hebrews 8:13 in the book *The New Testament Validates Torah* by J.K. McKee, as well as in his commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*. Also consult the further discussion present in the article "What Is the New Covenant?", appearing in *The New Testament Validates Torah*.

²⁵ *BDAG*, 249.

²⁶ Bruce, *Hebrews*, pp 210-211.

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humanity, and His priestly service, is superior to the previous Levitical service (9:22-28).²⁷ However, it is the limitations of the various external ordinances that are highlighted by the author of Hebrews; claiming that these instructions have, or had, no value at all, is a conclusion drawn by too many modern commentators. Tim Hegg properly directs our attention on how,

"There is nothing wrong with food, drink, or washings! What our author wants to put his finger on, however, is that these things are external and do not necessarily have a direct influence upon the internal...It would be easy (indeed, many have) to take this verse entirely out of context and derive from it that God is not interested in regulations regarding food, drink, and washings. To make such a claim is to assume God has changed, for He certainly took interest in these things when He gave Israel the Torah! The obvious point is simple[:] that these things, while given by God for the good of His people, nonetheless were not given to affect a change in one's heart. Indeed, this is why our author allots them as 'regulations for the *body* (literally "flesh")'. In point of fact, to believe these external things do, in fact, change one's heart, is to hold error and to give into idolatry."²⁸

There is certainly a conflict of ideology present in approaching and interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews, when *baptismois*, "washings" or "baptisms" (NRSV), is very much given same degree of attention as *brōmasin* or "foods." Such immersion rituals from the Torah, are precisely those upon which common evangelical Christian traditions regarding "Believer's baptism" are based.²⁹ Any kind of negative disposition toward such "washings" or "baptisms" is seldom witnessed in resources on Hebrews—even though a negative disposition on "foods" will be witnessed—which may be observed to demonstrate an unfair scale on the part of a number of Christian examiners. It is appropriate for today's Messianic Believers to insist upon a reevaluation of what *brōmasin kai pomasin kai diaphorois baptismois* involves, in terms of its placement within the specific context of the Levitical priesthood and service, compared and contrasted with the Messiah's priesthood and service.

Such instructions are considered to be imperative *mechri kairou diorthōseōs* (μέχρι καιροῦ διορθώσεως), which is invariably translated, "until a/the time of reformation" (NASU, RSV/ESV), "until the time comes to set things right" (NRSV), "until the time of the new order" (NIV), "the moment when everything will be put into proper order" (Kingdom New Testament), or perhaps most preferably as will be explained, "until a time of setting things straight" (TLV). In the thought of Stern, who renders this with, "until the time for God to reshape the whole structure" (CJB), "The author expresses the view

²⁷ "And according to the Law, *one may* almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Messiah did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment, so Messiah also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference* to sin, to those who eagerly await Him" (Hebrews 9:22-28).

²⁸ Tim Hegg, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Author, n.d.), 162.

²⁹ Consult the chapter "The Waters of Immersion," appearing in the book *Torah In the Balance, Volume II* by J.K. McKee (forthcoming).

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that sacrifice and priesthood are indeed necessary, that the Mosaic system was **imposed until the time for God to reshape the whole structure**, literally 'until a time of reformation,' and thus prefigured the system established by Yeshua the Messiah."³⁰ That the writer of Hebrews has the post-resurrection era in view cannot be denied by any objective reader of his epistle. Ben Witherington III, who has a very negative view of the validity of the Torah or Law of Moses in the post-resurrection era (contra. 8:7-13; 10:14-18), still correctly acknowledges,

"The implication is that humans were not truly or fully put right with God or truly cleansed inwardly by the old order of atonement. The coming of Christ is the actual time of reformation, the real putting right of fallen human beings. Our author is not just talking about the reshaping or reformulating the structure of Israelite religion; he is concerned with putting right human beings themselves, though the former is true as well."³¹

A highly useful sentiment to keep in mind, regarding the priesthood of the Messiah, is seen in *Testament of Levi* 18:9 in the Pseudepigrapha: "In his priesthood sin shall cease and lawless men shall rest from their evil deeds, and righteous men shall find rest in him."³² The *kairou diorthōseōs*, is concerned with nothing less than "the new order [arriving] by which things are set aright" (God's New Covenant-Cassirer).

The term that has been customarily rendered as "reformation," actually clarifies things for the reader very well. The term *diorthōsis* (διόρθωσις) means "a making straight, restoration, reform" (LS),³³ also involving "properly, in a physical sense, a making straight, restoring to its natural and normal condition something which in some way protrudes or has got out of line, as (in Hippocrates) broken or misshapen limbs" (Thayer).³⁴ First and foremost, this "set[ting] things right" (NRSV) or "setting things straight" (Williams New Testament) relates to the coming of Yeshua into the lives of men and women who desperately need spiritual renewal and restoration with God. Secondly, by the time the author of Hebrews made these statements in the First Century, the Saddusaical priesthood had become desperately corrupt and a sign of utter wickedness that could only be corrected by Yeshua's priesthood coming on the scene and providing total redemption for all people. Translating the Hebrew verb *kun* (קָנָה), the Septuagint employs the verb form of *diorthōsis*, *diorthoō* (διορθόω), in Isaiah 62:7: "For you have none like him, if he should restore [*diorthoō*] Ierousalem and make it a boast on the earth" (NETS), referencing Jerusalem's future glory. **This is the level of setting things straight that Yeshua's work has inaugurated!**

The priesthood as it existed during the time of Yeshua and the Apostles desperately needed help. *Things needed to be set straight*. The language used in v. 10 comes closest to what Peter says when the Holy Spirit was poured out at *Shavuot*/Pentecost, when speaking about the "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21). Yeshua coming into the world has indeed set things straight, but this does not mean that God's people cast aside, for

³⁰ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 694.

³¹ Witherington, *Hebrews-James-Jude*, 268.

³² H.C. Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 795.

³³ LS, 204.

³⁴ Thayer, 152.

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example, something like the kosher dietary laws, which contextually are not mentioned in v. 10—even though eating a kosher-style diet can surely not bring any person eternal salvation. Yeshua Himself says in Mark 7:15, “there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man.” The *chairou diorthōseōs* inaugurated by Yeshua enables cleansing to occur *at far more* than just a physical or ritual level.

Ellingworth takes a relatively moderate view of what has just been examined, remarking that “Hebrews’ language raises the question whether such regulations remain in force. . .The strong implication is that they do not; but the author does not say so explicitly. In any case, polemic against any of his readers who may have voluntarily maintained such practices lies beyond his horizon.”³⁵ For Messianic Believers today who are kosher-friendly, this is the best sort of perspective that any of us should expect from various Christian teachers and pastors, who while not approving of our view that the dietary laws were not abolished by either Yeshua, or by the author of Hebrews, fairly recognize that there are bigger matters of faith deserving of far more attention. Hebrews 9:8-10 describes “foods” in the context of the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices, which would have involved the priestly portions of animal sacrifices for their eating. While Hebrews 9:8-10 is often applied to the kosher dietary laws, viewing it in context with the Levitical priesthood and service is something that has been (too often [deliberately?]) overlooked.

³⁵ Ellingworth, 444.