

As all Bible students know, the three keys to understanding any difficult scripture are 1) context, 2) context, and 3) context. We often say that somewhat jokingly, but it really is true. Context is the key to understanding what God is saying.

So what is context? The dictionary¹ describes context as:

“. . . the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed.

- the parts of something written or spoken that immediately precede and follow a word or passage and clarify its meaning.”

From this definition, we see that context comprises more than just the text that precedes or follows a statement, but includes circumstances and events that may have preceded the statement. It is those circumstances and events that often ‘set the stage’ for what God is saying. In other words, it is the ‘culture’ in which the statement is made.

Seeing that context is more than just words preceding or following a statement, when we say “context, context, context” we are really talking about at least three different things: 1) the context of what God is doing or intends to do, 2) the context of the culture of the people to whom God is working with, and 3) the context or purpose of the scriptures immediately surrounding the scripture in question. Unless you consider all three of these contextual components, it is often difficult to come up with an accurate understanding of what a particular scripture is saying. To illustrate this point, let’s take a look at the passage in Genesis where Esau accused Jacob of stealing his birthright:

^{NKJ} **Genesis 27:36** And *Esau* said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!"

This passage is where Esau, after following his father Isaac’s instructions to cook meat for him before receiving the blessing, accuses Jacob of stealing the birthright from him. If we were to only consider the immediate text, we would assume that:

- Jacob’s name means ‘supplanter’
- Jacob stole the birthright from Esau
- Jacob stole the blessing from Esau

But as we study the context, we discover that:

- Jacob’s name actually means “heal-holder” (Gen 25:26)
- Esau sold the birthright for a bowl of soup (Gen. 25:31-33)
- God always intended for Jacob to have both the birthright and the blessing (Gen. 25:23; 28:3-4)

Thus we can conclude that Esau was not being honest with his father. The context is what reveals the truth; it makes all the difference in understanding a word or phrase.

Another place where context plays a huge role in understanding a scripture is where God supposedly forbids the people to “seethe a kid in its mother’s milk”. This is a significant passage because it is the basis for the Jewish prohibition against mixing meat products and milk products at the same meal. This

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“oral tradition” is quite significant and leads some to establish in their homes separate kitchens - one for the storage and preparation of meat products and the other for milk products. Some even go as far as having separate sets of dishes, pots and pans. It is a very detailed process requiring a lot of forethought and determination in order to avoid 'contaminating' one part of your meal with another. To further complicate matters, there is no established rule as to how much time must elapse between the consumption of meat and milk products. Thus what may be acceptable to one family may not be considered “kosher” by another.

To illustrate how divisive and exacting this process can be, I'll share a personal experience with you.

My wife and I have hosted a Feast of Tabernacles site for a number of years beginning in 1999. About a year before our first festival, we become aware of this practice of separating meat and milk and knew that some who would be attending followed that practice. As part of our festival plans, we wanted to host a banquet type meal for the entire group (about 300 people). Knowing that for some the mere presence of milk products on the same table as meat products would “defile” the whole table and all the food on it, we planned for the meal to be completely “kosher” according to Jewish standards.

My wife worked very hard preparing a menu and working with the kitchen staff to make sure everything was properly prepared. When we discovered that the facility's chef used to be the head chef at a “kosher” restaurant, we were thrilled thinking everything would come together and our event would be a success.

That evening, as everyone began to file in and take their places, we noticed some commotion at one of the tables. A person had discovered that the servers had placed small cups of cream on each table for after dinner coffee. According to that person, that table was defiled and therefore he could not eat at it. This triggered others to search their table as well, and we quickly found that all the tables had creamer on them. For the majority of attendees who do not observe the meat/milk prohibition, the presence of the creamer was not a problem, but for those few who did observe the prohibition, we had to set up new tables just for them.

Bottom line – the meat/milk prohibition is difficult to observe and can easily create a stumbling block to fellowship and interaction.

So is mixing milk and meat the intent of God's word? I don't believe so. How then did the rabbis draw this understanding out of the phrase “sieve a kid in its mother's milk”? Is it a case of misinterpretation or a case of mistranslation? Based on the context of the scriptures, it appears to me to be a case of mistranslation. When the phrase is translated correctly, it makes sense.

In this study I hope to show that when properly translated, we will find the "do not seethe a kid in its mother's milk" passage to mean that God's people are not to delay in bringing their first-fruit offerings, specifically the firstborn of their herds and flocks, to the three Biblical festivals. I will do this by following the “context, context, context” process where we 1) discover God's mind toward the matter, 2) seek to understand the underlying culture behind the matter, then 3) see what the text immediately surrounding the text is really saying.

God's Mind on the Matter

Let's begin by finding the mind of God in regards to the matter of mixing meat and milk. Would God impose such a difficult practice on His people? I believe not. In fact, God says quite the opposite. He says that following His way is not difficult. He says -

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 30:11** ". . . this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. ¹² It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should



say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' ¹⁴But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.

So observing the Torah should not be a burdensome task. Yet some might take exception to that statement in today's society where most people are not Torah observant. Sabbath and Holy Day keepers often face challenges when it comes to keeping a job, going to school or college, and many other tasks were God's people have to mix with those who are not following His Torah. But we must remember that the Torah was given to Israel as a nation of people. The entire nation was to be governed by God's law and thus it is assumed that everyone would be Torah observant.

Yet if universal Torah observance were the case, the process of maintaining two kitchens or counting the minutes between the time you swallowed your last bite of meat and the time you can have a cup of coffee with cream is difficult and is not consistent with God's word that states the Torah is "not hard" and the Torah is "very near" to you.

Furthermore, the scripture gives us examples that show that separating meat products from milk products is not God's intent and desire. Abraham – the "Father of the Faithful" – had no issues with mixing meat and milk when he entertained his three guests (who we recognize to be representatives of YHVH).

Genesis 18:1-8 shows us that when Abraham's guests appeared, he quickly prepared a meal that included meat, bread, butter, and milk. Obviously God would not have included those details in the story of Abraham's hospitality if mixing meat and milk was something He abhorred.

Thus the context of God's word showing that He never intended for the Torah to hard and difficult. That leads us to conclude that the prohibition of mixing meat and milk is not from God. It is out of character with the purpose of the Torah and the examples found within it.

So where did the tradition come from? It came out of this passage -

^{NKJ} **Exodus 23:17-19** ¹⁷ "Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD. ¹⁸ "You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning. ¹⁹ "The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God. **You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.**

This passage is in the context of the Biblical festivals. Three times each year the people are to go to Jerusalem to observe the festival. If anytime after the most previous festival they had had enjoyed a harvest or had an increase in their herd or flock, they were to bring the tithe of that harvest along with the firstborn males of that increase to that festival as an offering, but the Jewish sages took the last sentence in that passage to create the law forbidding the mixing of meat and milk.

This instruction is also found in Ex. 34:26 – again in the context of the Biblical festival, and a third passage is found in Deuteronomy, but it seems to be in a slightly different context –

Let's look -

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 14:21** " You shall not eat anything that dies *of itself*; you may give it to the alien who *is* within your gates, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner; for you *are* a holy people to the LORD your God. **You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.**

This time, the commandment appears to be in the context of eating what I call 'road kill' - meat that is not slaughtered or that dies of itself. If you did not investigate further, you would believe that since eating an animal that was not slaughtered would keep you from being 'Holy' and therefore eating meat with milk would be much the same. But it that what God intended? To understand the meaning, we have to go no further than the very next verse -



²² " You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. ²³
 "And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.

By putting the passage in the context of verse 23 it – like the previous passage in Exodus – is in the context of the festivals where you are to bring your offerings to Jerusalem. We should remember that God did not divide the scriptures into chapters and verses – MAN did so.

Let's continue to gain context by looking at the word 'boil'. The Hebrew word translated 'boil' ('seethe' in the KJV) is 'bashal' (בָּשַׁל – Strong's 1310) which means "to ripen; to grow ripe". 'Bashal' is first used in Gen. 40:10 where it is translated "ripe". The word "in" is derived from the prefix "beit" (in, with) which is attached to the word for "milk". So it could be read ' You shall not ripen a young goat with its mother's milk'. So what does it mean to 'not ripen a young goat ...'?

Let's see!

The Offering of the Firstborn

As mentioned earlier, the meaning behind "do not boil a young goat in its mother's milk" pertains to the offering of the firstborn at the festivals. Let's then, review the Torah instructions concerning this very special - but much overlooked – offering.

When God went about the process of removing the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery, He sent nine plagues. The plagues served a number of purposes; the primary purpose being to reveal the greatness of the God of Abraham to the children of Israel and to the Egyptians. Speaking of Pharaoh and his unwillingness to heed Moses' instructions, God said:

^{NKJ} **Exodus 7:4-5** "But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies *and* My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments.⁵ "And the Egyptians shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them."

Of the nine initial plagues, only the first three affected the Israelites. That's not the case with the tenth plague – the death of the firstborn. It was the game changer. It would cause Pharaoh to not only release the Israelites, but to force them out quickly. It would apply to both the Israelites and the Egyptians. If a family of either people failed to follow Moses' instructions, all the firstborn of that household would die. Here are the instructions given to Moses to pass on to all the inhabitants of Egypt -

^{NKJ} **Exodus 12:3-6** "Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth *day* of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of *his* father, a lamb for a household ...⁵ 'Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year ...⁶ 'Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.

With these instructions, God began to re-establish² the concept that **the death of a lamb can preserve the life of the firstborn.**

To make that concept crystal clear, He gave these instructions.

^{NKJ} **Exodus 13:2; 11-15** . . . "Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, *both* of man and beast; it is Mine." ...¹¹ " And it shall be, when

² The concept began when God killed an animal to provide coverings for Adam and Eve and was clearly established when a ram was exchanged for the life of Isaac.



the LORD brings you into the land ...¹² you shall set apart to the LORD all that open the womb, that is, every firstborn that comes from an animal which you have; the males shall be the LORD's.¹³ ... all the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem.¹⁴ "So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What *is* this?' that you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.'¹⁵ 'And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.'

God was saying that the firstborn male child of every Israelite woman and the first-born male of the female livestock belonged to God. If that animal was a 'clean'³ animal, it was to be dedicated to God for sacrifice, but if the animal was 'unclean' it was to be redeemed since unclean animals could not be used for sacrifice.

In regards to a male child, he was to be redeemed since God forbids child sacrifice⁴. God continued to clarify this later on in the book of Exodus:

^{NKJ} **Exodus 34:19-20** "All that open the womb *are* Mine, and every male firstborn among your livestock, *whether* ox or sheep.²⁰ "But the firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb. And if you will not redeem *him*, then you shall break his neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed.

God made a distinction between the clean and unclean animal - an unclean animal must be redeemed with a clean animal (a lamb), or it must be killed.

Firstborn sons were also to be redeemed, and the firstborn of the clean animals along with the redemption animals for the unclean animals plus any redemption money was to be taken before YHVH at the festivals. That's why God made the statement "none shall appear before Me empty-handed". That was their "holy day offering". The only money involved was the redemption money for the firstborn male Hebrews.

^{NKJ} **Exodus 23:17-19**¹⁷ "Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.¹⁸ "You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning.¹⁹ "The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.

Though this is a reference to the first fruits offerings, it would apply to the firstborn as well. The Hebrew words for 'first fruits' and 'firstborn' both come from the root word 'bekowr' (בְּכֹרֶת – Strong's 1060) which can be both 'first fruits' and 'firstborn'. This implies that you are to bring any "first" that is set apart for sacrifice. In regards to the 'first' of the firstfruits, the Hebrew word from which we get 'first' is ...'reshiyth' 'reshiyth' (רִשְׁיִת – 7225) which means 'first', 'best', and 'chief'.

Though the 'bekowrim' (first fruits, firstborn') could be offered or redeemed at any of the festivals, we find that it was to be done at the nearest festival after it turned a month old.

^{NKJ} **Numbers 18:16-17** "And those redeemed of the devoted things you shall redeem when one month old, according to your valuation, for five shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which *is* twenty gerahs.¹⁷ "But the firstborn of a cow, the firstborn of a

³ Leviticus 11:2-44

⁴ see my article "Yeshua – a Sacrifice, or Not! (<http://www.amiyisrael.org/articles/Yeshua-SacrificeOrNot.html>)



sheep, or the firstborn of a goat you shall not redeem; they *are* holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar, and burn their fat as an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the LORD.

So it was important that the redemption take place at whatever festival came after the animal was a month old. Of course, clean animals (which could not be redeemed) had to be offered as sacrifice at the same time. Though sacrificed, it appears that the offerer could eat from his sacrificed animals during the festival.

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 14:22-23** " You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. ²³ "And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.

Whether they were consumed by the priests or by the offerer, the firstborn were to be brought to the festivals as an offering or sacrifice. And as we saw earlier, it was to be done at the festival just after they turned a certain age; for the firstborn 'unclean' animal, it was 1 month; for the firstborn 'clean' animal, it was 8 days

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 22:27** "When a bull or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall be seven days with its mother; and from the eighth day and thereafter it shall be accepted as an offering made by fire to the LORD.

Bulls, sheep, and goats are CLEAN animals and are to be offered at the next festival after they turn 8 days old. Though these animals could mingle among the rest of the herd for seven days – on the eighth day he would be separated from them. This is made clear in Deuteronomy -

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 15:19** "All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to the LORD your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock."

To 'sanctify' means to 'set apart' – 'make holy'. The herdsman could not receive any profit or use from the animal; it was totally dedicated to sacrifice. The importance of the dedication of the firstborn was so important to God that He considered it a curse of sorts to in any way delay their dedication.

^{NKJ} **Exodus 22:29-30** "You shall not delay *to offer* the first of your ripe produce and your juices. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me. ³⁰ "Likewise you shall do with your oxen *and* your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me."

This passage is included in a list of grievous sins that include bestiality, idol worship, and afflicting the widow or the orphan - sins God said He will come after you with a sword.

The prompt dedication of the firstborn was very important to God. You should not hesitate in any way to make the dedication of, or pay the redemption for your firstborn. Why? Because they are all reminders of God's Passover sacrifice and the redemption of His people. They should remind us of the freedom we have as part of God's people. Offering these in sacrifice should bring us great joy as we acknowledge our redemption and our blessings as we attend God's pilgrimage festivals –

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 12:5-7** "... you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. ⁶ "There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. ⁷ "And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to



which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.

Thus we see the importance of the firstborn offerings to God, and why we should not delay to give that offering. So – why did God say three times to His people -

You shall not boil ripen a young goat in with its mother's milk

(Exodus 23:19, Exodus 34:26, Deuteronomy 14:21)

Because it is important to God that we not delay in bringing the firstborn offerings to God

So ...

What Does the Text Really Mean?

Simply this –

God expects His people to be urgent in bringing their offerings to Him. The natural weaning time for a lamb is from four to six months, and except for the period between Sukkot and Passover, the time frame between the festivals is much less than six months.

God is simply reminding His people to not wait until the animal is weaned to bring him to the festival for sacrifice, instead - dedicate him as a sacrifice at 8 days old and bring him to the next festival in the series. This fits perfectly within the context of each passage. If the passage had been translated like this -

“You shall not delay to bring your firstborn offering to the festival. “

There would have been no question – AND, there would not have been any oral tradition requiring the separation of milk and meat. There would be no rabbinic requirement to:

- wait a certain number of minutes between eating a hamburger and an ice cream cone,
- refrain from putting butter on your bread while eating roast beef,
- avoid putting a steak and coffee creamer on the same table, and ,
- no need to maintain a 'kosher' kitchen.

Why? Because mixing meat and milk is OK! Our God – the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is an awesome God! His ways are Holy, just, and good! All He requires from us in regards to food is to not eat things that He describes as 'detestable'.

So how do we avoid misunderstanding scriptures such as this? By simply follow the three aspects of Biblical Understanding, which are – Context, Context, Context!

Shalom Aleichem