

I Peter 1:14-16

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY’ [Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7].”

Initially, within the themes encountered in the opening verses of the Epistle of 1 Peter, it would quantitatively seem that issues pertaining to the dietary instructions of the Torah are completely missing. Indeed, in writing to his audience mainly spread across Asia Minor (1:1), the Apostle Peter’s thrust is about their spiritual sanctification, attitudes, and behavior (1:2-3), with the future realities of their salvation in view (1:4-9). Peter’s audience is blessed to know who Yeshua the Messiah is, as there were many who preceded them in history who were unaware as to the specific identity of the Savior (1:10-12). Because of how blessed Peter’s audience is—in knowing the Messiah Yeshua, receiving His salvation, and being sanctified by the Holy Spirit—he will admonish them, “prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Yeshua the Messiah” (1:13). From this, he will proceed to tell them not to follow in their former way of living (1:14), and specifically insist upon a manner of holiness rooted within the Tanach Scriptures (1:15-16).

All interpreters of 1 Peter 1:14-16 agree that ethical and moral holiness, specifically related to a repentance from idolatry (1:18) and various sexual lusts (1:14), is what is principally intended in Peter’s admonition. However, given the Torah quotations from Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, appearing in 1 Peter 1:16, the question of what role, if any, the kosher dietary laws might play in Peter’s view of holiness for God’s people, is something that needs to be evaluated.

1:14 As it appears in a Messianic version like the TLV, the Apostle Peter directs his audience, “Like obedient children, do not be shaped by the cravings you had formerly in your ignorance.” The term *epithumia* (ἐπιθυμία) can involve generally, “a great desire for someth., *desire, longing, craving*,” but more specifically, “a desire for someth. forbidden or simply inordinate, *craving, lust*” (BDAG).¹ As such, the plural *epithumiais* (ἐπιθυμιαίς) is probably better rendered as “lusts” (NASU) or “passions” (RSV), with some kind of sexual content implied. Although there are debates over the intended audience of 1 Peter—whether Peter’s audience was exclusively Jewish *or* a mix of both Jewish and Greek and Roman Believers—the statement of v. 14 would lend strong credence to the latter.² J.N.D. Kelly draws attention to the audience of 1 Peter being directed via some significant concepts rooted within both the Tanach, and elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures—with these important themes directed to a majority non-Jewish audience:

“His choice of word is significant, for to the Jew or Jewish-bred Christian **ignorance** conveyed much more than unawareness of the moral law. In the vocabulary of the OT (e.g. Ps. lxxix.6; Jer. x.25; Wis. xiv.22) and NT (e.g. Acts xvii.30; Gal. iv.8f.; Eph. iv.18; I Thess. iv.5) alike it is a routine characterization of the Gentiles ‘who know not God’. Its use here only makes sense if, as other texts

¹ BDAG, 372.

² Consult the entry for 1 Peter in the workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

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suggest (i.18; ii.9f; 25; iii.6; iv.3f.), the majority at any rate of the addresses are converts from paganism. It is not far-fetched to detect a further allusion to the Exodus-baptism typology in this warning. Egypt was to Jew the symbol of the pagan world; and just as the Hebrews, after the Exodus, were bidden to abandon their former Egyptian habits of life (Lev. xviii.2-4: just before the call to holiness in xix), so must baptized Christians cut free from their pagan past.”³

It is useful to consider the comparison between how Ancient Israel, admonished to be holy, was preparing to enter into the Promised Land—effectively having been in exile. Peter’s audience, stated to “reside as aliens” (v. 1), are regarded, as followers of Israel’s Messiah, to be living in a kind of exile on Planet Earth until the consummation of the Messianic Kingdom.

Peter’s audience needs to be committed to God as *tekna hupakēs* (τέκνα ὑπακοῆς), “children of obedience” (American Standard Version). The analogy of God’s own being His children, should draw readers’ attention to an admonition such as Matthew 5:48: “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Children of God are supposed to go to Him as Heavenly Father (cf. Matthew 6:9), and are supposed to obey Him. The contents of v. 14 very much mirror that of Romans 12:2: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

1:15-16 Peter’s audience is directed, “But as the One who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct” (v. 15, CJB). The recognition that Peter’s audience has been “called” (*kalesanta, καλέσαντα*), given the content of his preceding message (vs. 3, 9), involves dimensions of both a being called by God into salvation, as well as a subsequent calling to sanctification. Perhaps based off of v. 15, the late First Century work *1 Clement* would admonish, “Seeing then that we are the portion of the Holy One, let us do all the things that pertain to holiness, forsaking slander, disgusting and impure embraces, drunkenness and rioting and detestable lusts, abominable adultery, detestable pride” (30:1).⁴ Vs. 15-16 are understandably approached by most interpreters as involving the imperative need for Peter’s audience to be ethically and morally holy, as J. Ramsay Michaels generally states,

“Holiness, which in many religious traditions epitomizes all that is set apart from the world and assigned to a distinctly ceremonial sphere of its own, is in Peter’s terminology brought face to face with the world and with the practical decisions and concerns of everyday life. A religious, almost numinous, quality characteristic of God (or the gods) and of priest, temples, and all kinds of cult objects is boldly translated here into positive ethical virtues: purity and reverence, and above all the doing of good in specific human relationships.”⁵

Peter’s main reason for directing his audience to be holy, is not just in the high value and preciousness of being sanctified; it is because “since the *Tanakh* says, ‘You are to be holy because I am holy’” (v. 16, CJB). Critical editions of the Greek

³ J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), 68.

⁴ Michael W. Holmes, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, third edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 85.

⁵ J. Ramsay Michaels, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Vol. 49 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 59.

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New Testament⁶ have noted references to Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; and 20:7 in 1 Peter 1:16:

LEVITICUS	I PETER 1:16
<p>For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy (11:44-45).</p> <p>Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (19:2).</p> <p>You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the LORD your God (20:7).</p>	<p>because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."</p>

It is surely useful to review and decompress each one of the passages from Leviticus that admonishes holiness, and consider some of the specific aspects of holiness anticipated of God's people. **Leviticus 11:44-45** are the summarizing verses for Leviticus ch. 11, the first major set of instructions on the dietary laws; **Leviticus 19:2** precedes the Leviticus 19:26 prohibition on consuming blood; **Leviticus 20:7** precedes an admonition in Leviticus 20:25 for making a distinction between clean and unclean meats. While there is a variance of instructions in Leviticus 19 and 20 which pertain to the sacrificial system of Ancient Israel and may be regarded as mainly concerning the pre-resurrection era—there are also instructions that can be legitimately followed within the post-resurrection era.

Interpreters have also had to recognize how the calling to holiness upon God's people, Jewish and non-Jewish, in v. 16, does involve their fulfilling a vocation that was originally given to Ancient Israel. Writing in the *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, Claudia Setzer notes, "As he who called you is holy, invokes the holiness God commends to Israel (Lev 19.2), a virtue that carries the idea of separation."⁷ Michaels also concludes, "They are Gentiles invited to stand before the God of Israel with the same privileges as the Jews and, more to the point in our passage, with the same responsibilities: 'Be holy because I am holy.'"⁸

⁶ Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), 786.

⁷ Claudia Setzer, "The First Letter of Peter," in *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, pp 437-438.

⁸ Michaels, 59.

Some of the ramifications of this, regarding ecclesiology, are considered in the examination of 1 Peter 2:9-11 appearing in the publication *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?* by J.K. McKee.

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While principally focused on various dimensions of what it means to be morally or ethically holy, Kelly's summation of Peter's quotation(s) from Leviticus are important to review:

"[Peter] rams home his insistence on holiness with the authority of the Bible: it is written, 'You are to be holy, for I am holy.' These words run like a refrain through Leviticus (xi.44; xix.2; xx.7; 26); indeed, because of its preoccupation with holiness the legal section Lev. xvii-xxvi has been designated the Holiness Code. The conception is of crucial importance in the whole Bible and looms large in this letter. Basically, 'holy' (Heb. *qādōsh* [קָדוֹשׁ]) means 'separate', 'marked off', the opposite of what is common or profane; the idea comes to birth in the awareness of the numinous, which is the primal religious experience. In the Near Eastern religions generally holiness was understood as a dangerous, quasi-naturalistic power or explosive force inheriting in cult objects, places, activities or persons. In the OT, however, it is God Himself, in His awful majesty and perfection, who is in the authentic sense the Holy One. This shift of emphases derives, of course, from the unique encounter of the Hebrew people with the living, personal God. But the result is that, according to OT thinking, holiness normally has an ethical element present in it; it expresses the nature and will of One who reveals Himself as righteous, merciful and loving. The Holiness Code itself provides an illustration, for mixed up with ritual injunctions it contains a mass of commands of profoundly moral import. It was the work of the prophets, with their enhanced insight into God's will, to enrich and deepen this ethical element, stressing, e.g., His desire for obedience (Jer. xi.6ff.), justice (Is. i.10-17), and mercy (Hos. vi.6); while the Psalmists (e.g., xv; li) exposed the hollowness of worship without moral purity and penitence.

"In harmony with the original meaning of the term, but with this altogether different perspective, the OT takes it for granted that God imparts holiness to whatever objects or people He appropriates to Himself. Thus Jerusalem is holy (Is. xlvi.2); so is mount Zion and the Temple on it (Is. lxiv.10). Above all Israel is holy because God has chosen it as His people and dwells in its midst (e.g. Num. xv.40; Dt. vii.6; xxvi.19; Lev. xvii-xxvi). This language passed to Qumran; the sectaries called themselves holy (e.g. 1QM iii.5; xvi.1), and the community as a whole was 'the congregation of saints' (1QM xii.7; 1QSb i.5). The NT writers, as we have seen and as 1 Peter presently shows (esp. ii.4-10), took over and developed these conceptions. For them the Church is God's holy people, and its members are 'saints', i.e. holy in virtue of being called by God; and, like their Jewish predecessors, they are conscious of the moral challenge this holiness presents. The main differences are that God's chosen are no longer limited to a particular race but comprise all who accept Christ by faith, and that their understanding of God's will for them has been given a fresh dimension by the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah."⁹

An even more detailed approach to v. 16, referencing Leviticus, is provided by C.E.B. Cranfield in his commentary on 1 Peter:

"The Christian life is next characterized as a life of holiness, and God's holiness indicated as its motive. BUT LIKE AS HE WHICH CALL YOU IS HOLY, BE YE YOURSELVES ALSO HOLY IN ALL MANNER OF LIVING; BECAUSE IT IS WRITTEN, YE SHALL BE HOLY; FOR I AM HOLY (Lev. 11.44, 19.2, 20.7, 26) 'Holy' is another key-word. It will be worth our while taking some trouble to understand it. In the

⁹ Kelly, pp 69-71.

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Old Testament its root meaning is 'marked off', 'separated', 'withdrawn from ordinary use'. In the surrounding heathenism holiness was conceived in a thoroughly naturalistic way. Certain places, objects, persons, were felt to be charged with a mysterious power which removed them from the sphere of the ordinary; there was a difference, an otherness, about them. This was regarded as communicable, rather like an infection that can be caught or an electric current that can be conducted. To approach or touch anything holy, unless one had been immunized (as a priest who was himself holy), was highly dangerous. The opposite to 'holy' was 'profane' or 'common', which denoted that which was safe for an ordinary person to touch and use. In the heathenism surrounding Israel 'holy' was applied predominantly to objects, acts and persons, and only rarely to the actual deity; but in the Old Testament it is of Yahweh himself that it is chiefly used; and the holiness of places, objects and persons is hardly ever understood in a merely impersonal, mechanical sense. It is this difference that radically distinguishes the Old Testament conception of holiness from the heathen. So, for instance, we misunderstand the holiness of the Ark, if we think of it simply as a ritual-object charged with an impersonal, material element or force; its holiness lay, rather, in its being the throne of the invisible King. Even 2 Sam 6.6.f., does not reflect the naturalistic idea of holiness (though at first sight it certainly seems to do so) for that which destroys Uzzah is not thought of as an explosion of an impersonal force with which the Ark is charged, but rather as a personal reaction on the part of Yahweh. This distinction is significant—though, of course, it is true that the passage does reflect a very primitive and imperfect knowledge of God. The uniqueness of the Old Testament conception of holiness lies not, as is often maintained, simply in its ethical content, but rather in the fact that holiness is not thought of in an impersonal, mechanical or naturalistic way, but as derived from the personal will of God and therefore involving an encounter with the personal demands of the living God, who claims the absolute allegiance of his people.

“Under the prophetic influence the ethical element in ‘the holy’ was emphasized; for, since holiness was derived from God’s personal will, its significance was naturally governed by God’s self-revelation as righteous, merciful, etc. But the ethical content never exhausted the meaning of ‘the holy’, and the seriousness of the moral commandments derived, not from their intrinsic excellence, but from the holiness of the God who gave them. In the Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26) ethical and ritual commandments stand together as the inviolable standards of men’s intercourse with God. The holiness of the Lord denotes the absolute authority with which He confronts man.

“But the word ‘holy’ was also applied to Israel. The sentence quoted by Peter occurs more than once in the Holiness Code, and we may compare many other passages. The application of ‘holy’ to Israel did not mean a blurring of the contrast between God and Israel, but rather that He had laid hold upon them to be His special people, set apart for His service. The contrast was still there; in fact, the holiness of the Holy One of Israel constituted a continual threat to their very existence, for it implied His judgment of their sins. The holiness of Israel derived from God’s choice, but it involved the obligation on their part to be and to do what was in accordance with the character of the Lord their God. In other words, they were committed to the continual effort to express in their life the reality of their election by obeying God’s laws and avoiding the defiling ways of the heathen. It involved such things as not keeping back a hired man’s wages overnight, not reaping the corners of one’s field or gathering the gleanings but leaving them ‘for the poor and for the stranger’, not stealing or dealing falsely, and not going up and down as a tale-bearer among the people. These and many like things were in the Holiness Code. It even included the thoughts and

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feelings: 'Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart', 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'¹⁰

Both Kelly's and Cranfield's detailed analyses of v. 16, and the Leviticus references to holiness, are enlightening and encouraging. They surely mention key aspects of the behavior of God's people that need to be steadfastly remembered and observed. Yet neither one of these commentators, even with Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; and 20:7 in view, ever talked about whether or not the Torah's instructions regarding diet, or clean and unclean meats, plays some role in the actions of Believers in Israel's Messiah.

1 Peter 1:14-16 application While most examiners of 1 Peter 1:14-16 tend to focus their attention on Peter's appeal to Leviticus, entirely in moral or ethical terms, there are those who will acknowledge how the Leviticus passages are concerned about physical forms of holiness, beyond just sexuality or idolatry. While in the post-resurrection era, various changes are undeniably resultant of Yeshua's sacrifice for sin (i.e., Hebrews 7:12), and the promise of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27) will involve a supernatural transcription of God's Instruction onto the hearts and minds of His people, in a way widely unexperienced before—does this mean a negation of all physical aspects of holiness? I. Howard Marshall, while being accurate about the need to honor the Leviticus instruction, might go a little too far in almost exclusively seeing it applied in an ethical manner:

"Although [his audience] are in large part Gentiles, they have come into the people of God. What was said to Israel in the Old Testament is now applicable to them. To be sure, the way in which the command is to be kept has altered. In Leviticus God was concerned with the ritual of the sacrificial system as well as with ethical requirements. But Peter freshly applies it in accordance with the basic principle of living in a way that is appropriate for God's people."¹¹

Ben Witherington III, in rightfully noting Peter's appeal to various statements in Leviticus, is more to the point in concluding that in his view, "the new covenant" does not involve a significant quantity of Torah instructions to be regarded as valid.¹² Witherington concludes that while the Leviticus instructions do include dietary regulations, that Peter's vision nullified these commandments for the post-resurrection era:

"If indeed Peter's audience is mostly Jews, then the use of Leviticus here will come as no surprise. What is a surprise is that Peter no longer thinks that the rest of Leviticus is also incumbent upon the audience, because there is now a new covenant, which does not mean a mere renewal of the old one. Only some of the moral stipulations of the old covenant are carried over into the new, as Peter himself learned through a vision, as Acts 10 tells the tale."¹³

Certainly, Peter's vision of the sheet in Acts chs. 10 and 11, and Peter's subsequent actions of going to the home of the centurion Cornelius, should be

¹⁰ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The First Epistle of Peter* (London: SCM Press, 1950), pp 35-37.

¹¹ I. Howard Marshall, *IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1 Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 53.

¹² Consult the thoughts present in the article "What Is the New Covenant?", appearing in the book *The New Testament Validates Torah* by J.K. McKee.

¹³ Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1-2 Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 98.

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addressed when evaluating what he meant when quoting from Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; and 20:7. While commonly approached from the perspective of unclean meat now being regarded as clean, our analysis of Acts 10:1-48 and Acts 11:1-18 has defended the approach that, “Rise, Peter; slaughter⁴ and eat” (Acts 10:13, PME), involved Peter not just killing various unclean animals for consumption, but Peter actually sacrificing them in a pagan, festal manner. With a scene such as Ezekiel 8:5-13 in the background, the animals on the sheet have an idolatrous quality to them, and the thrust of Peter’s vision is not so that he can be granted permission to eat unclean meat, but rather recognize how the animals are representative of those from the nations engaged in idolatrous activities and feasting—people who have been made decisively clean by the work of Israel’s Messiah (Acts 10:28), who he is not to fear interacting with in ministry activities.

Not to be underemphasized here, is how Peter’s reference to Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; and 20:7, is involved with his agreement and accession to the Acts 15:19-21 Apostolic decree, regarding the new, non-Jewish Believers coming to faith. These stipulations did not only require abstinence from idolatry or sexual promiscuity, but also strangled meats and blood—which places it well within the Torah’s guidelines regarding clean and unclean meat. While salvation for all people clearly came through the grace of the Lord Yeshua (Acts 15:11)—with the Apostolic decree to be considered, Leviticus appealed to, and Peter’s word, “to obey Yeshua the Messiah and be sprinkled with His blood” (v. 2) in immediate view—even if it was a secondary thought, it is not inappropriate to recognize how the Apostle Peter would have wanted his audience to discipline their eating along the lines of God’s Torah. 4 Maccabees 1:34-35 in the Apocrypha astutely asserts how avoidance of various unclean meats, is actually intended to instill discipline and self-control in other, far more important areas of one’s life:

“Therefore when we crave seafood and fowl and animals and all sorts of foods that are forbidden to us by the law, we abstain because of domination by reason. For the emotions of the appetites are restrained, checked by the temperate mind, and all the impulses of the body are bridled by reason.”

A mature Believer, who desires to be holy as God is holy, **should be able to balance inward and outward aspects of holiness.** Regardless of where anyone personally stands on the continued validity of the dietary laws, much will be determined by how, “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God” (1:22-23). How will today’s Messianic Believers, in their keeping a kosher style of diet, be treated by those who place love as being the most important quality of those who trust in Yeshua (Jesus)? If at all criticized or treated unfairly, will we choose to reciprocate in His love, or with some degree of malice?

⁴ Grk. verb *thuō* (θύω); rendered as “slaughter” in CJB; basically meaning “sacrifice, slaughter, kill, celebrate” (*A Reader’s Greek New Testament*, 273); more fully meaning “to make a cultic offering, sacrifice,” “to kill ceremonially, slaughter sacrificially,” “celebrate, but perh. only when an animal is slaughtered in connection with a celebration” (*BDAG*, 463).

The rendering “slaughter” is useful to keep in mind, given the further scene witnessed in Acts 14:13.