

Acts 10:1-48

Pastor: Acts 10:1-48: Peter was shown a vision nullifying the dietary laws.

“Now *there was* a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the *Jewish* people and prayed to God continually. About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had *just* come in and said to him, ‘Cornelius!’ And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, ‘What is it, Lord?’ And he said to him, ‘Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now dispatch *some* men to Joppa and send for a man *named* Simon, who is also called Peter; he is staying with a tanner *named* Simon, whose house is by the sea.’ When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants, and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all *kinds of* four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, ‘Get up, Peter, kill and eat!’ But Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.’ Again a voice *came* to him a second time, ‘What God has cleansed, no *longer* consider unholy.’ This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky. Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon’s house, appeared at the gate; and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there. While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself.’ Peter went down to the men and said, ‘Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?’ They said, ‘Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was *divinely* directed by a holy angel to send for you *to come* to his house and hear a message from you.’ So he invited them in and gave them lodging. And on the next day he got up and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped *him*. But Peter raised him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I too am *just* a man.’ As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled. And he said to them, ‘You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and *yet* God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me.’ Cornelius said, ‘Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, and he said, “Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Therefore send to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon *the* tanner by the sea.” So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.’ Opening his mouth, Peter said: ‘I most certainly understand *now* that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Yeshua the Messiah (He is Lord of all)—you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. *You know of* Yeshua of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and *how* He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, *that is*, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to

testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.' While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 'Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?' And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Yeshua the Messiah. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days."

No reader of the Book of Acts should deny that the salvation, of the Roman centurion Cornelius, was doubtlessly important not only within the scope of Luke's historical record—but in how the good news of Israel's Messiah began to significantly expand beyond the First Century Jewish community.¹ The Lord used a critical vision so that the Apostle Peter could admit the fallacy of previous prejudices he held toward those of the nations: "God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean" (Acts 10:28b, ESV). The vision Peter received of the animals on the sheet, the voice directing him to kill and eat (Acts 10:13), and noting that God had cleansed something (Acts 10:15), has been widely interpreted throughout Christian history as abolishing the dietary laws of the Torah. Acts 10:1-48 is one of the main proof texts many Christians will direct today's Messianic Believers toward, often to just say that the Torah distinctions between clean and unclean animals are irrelevant for the post-resurrection era, but sometimes to claim that all external commandments of the Torah are irrelevant.

When discussions surrounding the kosher dietary laws arise, the Messianic movement has always had Peter's vision on its radar. When a well-meaning Christian family member, friend, colleague, or even ministry associate will either ask or present a view that *kashrut* has been nullified, Peter's vision of the animals on the sheet tends to be the most frequently referenced passage. In response, Messianic people will commonly jump through the actions following Peter's vision, directing others to the point of where Peter is invited to meet with Cornelius (Acts 10:20), and Peter's conclusion or interpretation of what he was shown (Acts 10:28) about God cleansing all human beings (Acts 10:34-35; cf. 11:17). While it is entirely correct to demonstrate how the purpose of Peter's vision was for the Apostle to lay aside any inappropriate attitudes he had as a Jewish man toward people from the nations—responsible Bible readers cannot just dart through or jump over the details of how God communicated this to him.

Admittedly, if the Lord had the intention of overturning the dietary code originally given to Ancient Israel in the Torah, a vision of sorts would have been one of the main ways by which He would have communicated this. A lack of recognizing this has contributed to Messianic people tending to just leap through what is stated in Acts 10:10-17, and then only focusing on what Peter's subsequent actions were. In reverse, your average Christian reader of Peter's vision may tend to focus too much on the components of the sheet and the animals, and ignore what Peter did after this. The burden of proof, for any proper interpretation of Peter's vision, is to evaluate both what the animals on the sheet represent **and** Peter's own actions and statements following the vision.

Many Christian commentators will agree that Peter's vision was primarily about people, as the Jewish Apostle was communicated by God that all people, namely non-Jewish idolatrous sinners, have been made clean by the sacrificial work of Israel's Messiah. Yet, they will also tend to add to this that the abolition of the Torah's dietary code is a necessary, secondary component. What has to be established, for the Messianic reader of Peter's vision, is that what God communicated was *exclusively* about people being made clean by the work of the Messiah, and that there was some sort of symbolism employed by the sheet, which probably eludes too many Bible readers and examiners.

On a general level for surveying the significance of Acts 10, John R.W. Stott notes,

"At all events, we who now read Acts 10 remember that Jesus had given Peter 'the keys of the kingdom' [Matthew 16:19]...And we have already watched him use these keys effectively, opening the kingdom to Jews

¹ This entry has been adapted from the *Messianic Kosher Helper*.

on the Day of Pentecost and then to Samaritans soon afterwards. Now he is to use them again to open the kingdom to Gentiles; by evangelizing and baptizing Cornelius, the first Gentile convert (*cf.* Acts 15:7).²

Reaching the nations at large with the good news of Israel's Messiah is what this scene is all about. In his commentary, I. Howard Marshall similarly states, "It deals with the decisive issue in the history of the early church [i.e., the Body of Christ/Messiah], namely the recognition that the gospel is for the Gentiles as well as the Jews, and it makes clear that this was no merely human decision, but that it was the result of God's clear guidance."³ Marshall goes on to conclude, though, "The obstacle to the mission to the Gentiles was that it would bring law-abiding Jews into contact with people who were reckoned unclean, and with their food which was also unclean. It is this obstacle which is overcome by the vision of Peter."⁴ According to many, this necessitated the abrogation of the kosher dietary laws. We will challenge some of these conclusions in our examination of Acts 10:1-48.

This analysis, using the record of the Book of Acts and associated Scripture passages, will demonstrate how the word given to Peter, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" (Acts 10:13), had far less to do with Peter actually eating unclean things, but instead joining into pagan idolatry and revelry—a real risk for First Century Jews associating with Greeks and Romans. Many of the early Jewish Believers could have thought: *If the good news is declared to Greeks and Romans, will they influence me more than I will influence them? How will I not be affected by their sinful ways?* No intention of abolishing the dietary laws is actually present in this scene, given Peter's own interpretation of the vision (Acts 10:28). But, an abolition on looking at these people as being quantitatively worthless was intended by the vision.

10:1-2 The narrative of Luke begins, "At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment" (Acts 10:1, NIV). Caesarea was the seat of the Roman government and administration for Judea (*cf.* 23:23-24), which Herod had built into a major harbor city (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 15.331-341), mostly inhabited by Greeks, Romans, and others, with few Jews (Josephus *Wars of the Jews* 3.409). The Roman Cornelius was a part of "the Italian Company" (Common English Bible), the term *speira* (σπεῖρα) defined by *LS* as "a body of men-at-arms, the Roman *manipulus*, = two centuries, Polyb.:—also a *cohort*, N.T.,"⁵ likely 600 soldiers in a larger legion of 6,000. Cornelius commanded troops which in all likelihood had been originally recruited in Italy, and were serving as an auxiliary force. One gets the impression that Cornelius may have even been retired, or at least approaching retirement, and also in all probability had been granted Roman citizenship. *IDB* offers the following summary on what being a Roman centurion involved:

"The commanding officer of a 'century,' nominally a hundred foot soldiers, in the Roman army. There were ten centurions in a cohort and sixty in a legion. The number of centurions in the legion seems to have remained the same, even when the number of legionary soldiers increased or decreased beyond the usual six thousand..

"Although theoretically the centurions were subordinate to the six legionary tribunes, and often deferred to them (Acts 22:26), yet the centurions were the actual working officers, the backbone of the army. The discipline and efficiency of the legion as a fighting unit depended on them."⁶

The historian Polybius would detail regarding centurions, "And they wish the centurions not to be so much bold and adventurous, as men with a faculty for command, steady, and of a profound rather than a showy spirit; not prone to engage wantonly or be unnecessarily forward in giving battle; but such as in the face of superior numbers and overwhelming pressure will die in defence of their post" (*Histories* 6.24).⁷ In

² John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 184.

³ I. Howard Marshall, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 181.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *LS*, 239.

⁶ F.D. Gealy, "Centurion," in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:547-548.

⁷ Polybius: *Histories*, trans. Evelyn S. Shuckburgh (London/New York: Macmillan, 1889). Accessible online at <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0234%3Abook%3D6%3Achapter%3D24>>.

the Apostolic Scriptures, centurions are often looked upon favorably to various degrees (Mark 15:44-45; Matthew 8:5-10; 27:54; Acts 22:25-26; 23:17-28; 27:6, 43). Yeshua's own sentiment of Matthew 8:11—"I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven"—is commonly referenced by interpreters about the figure of Cornelius recognizing the God of Israel, and later embracing Messiah faith. Also useful to keep in mind is the declaration made by the centurion present at His execution on Golgotha (Calvary): "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54). In terms of the composition of the Book of Acts itself, volume II (Acts 1:1) of a two-volume work along with the Gospel of Luke,⁸ what is recorded was probably transcribed subsequent to the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans, and as *IVPBBC* describes, would have conveyed something very important to its original, First Century recipients:

"If these events are before 41...Cornelius would probably be retired (centurions could retire by the age of sixty) by the war of 66-7. Nevertheless, most of Luke's Jewish readers after A.D. 70 would not be fond of Roman officers stationed in Syria-Palestine, and this account would challenge their prejudices. Recruits had all sworn oaths of allegiance to the divine emperor."⁹

Cornelius was no pagan, as Luke describes how he was "a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God" (Acts 10:2, RSV). The description used of "devout and God-fearing" (NIV) is similar to that seen in Psalm 115:11¹⁰; 118:4¹¹; 135:20¹². Some versions take *phoboumenos ton Theon* (φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν) to mean that Cornelius was "a religious man" (NEB) or "a deeply religious man" (Phillips New Testament), with some examiners thinking that he was just spiritual and felt some sort of a pull or appeal to the God of Israel and Judaism.¹³ More frequently, and we should think rightfully so, "revering God" (TLV) is understood for Cornelius being a "God-fearer" (CJB/CJSB),¹⁴ meaning that he was among those who recognized the God of Israel but had not gone through the process of circumcision and of becoming a full proselyte to Judaism. As F.F. Bruce indicates of God-fearers, their range of observance of Torah instructions was often wide-sweeping—in many cases including observance of *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת) or the Sabbath, as well as *kashrut* or the dietary laws—frequently just coming short of ritual proselyte circumcision:

"Some of them attended synagogue and were tolerably conversant with the prayers and Scripture lessons, which they heard read in the Greek [Septuagint] version; some observed with more or less scrupulously such distinctive Jewish practices as sabbath observance and abstinence from certain kinds of food. Cornelius's attachment to the Jewish religion appeared particularly in his regular prayer to the God of Israel and acts of charity to the people of Israel. We may say, indeed, that he had every qualification, short of circumcision, which could satisfy Jewish requirements."¹⁵

⁸ Consult the entries for both the Gospel of Luke and Book of Acts in the workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*, which are notably listed consecutively.

⁹ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 350.

¹⁰ "You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield" (Psalm 115:11).

¹¹ "Oh let those who fear the LORD say, 'His lovingkindness is everlasting'" (Psalm 118:4).

¹² "O house of Levi, bless the LORD; you who revere the LORD, bless the LORD" (Psalm 135:20).

¹³ Cf. Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in Frank E. Gaebelien, ed. et. al., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 9:385.

¹⁴ The Common English Bible has, "He and his whole household were pious, Gentile God-worshippers," for v. 2a.

¹⁵ F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 216; also David G. Peterson, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), pp 326-327; Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 386 thinks that Cornelius "has engaged only in acts of piety, such as almsgiving and pray...suggest[ing] some exposure to the synagogue."

In the view of Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 486, taking a more minimalist view,

"Cornelius is not said to have attended synagogue services or to have obeyed some of the laws of the Torah. This may be due to the selectivity of Luke's reporting, or it may indicate that Cornelius was a God-fearer more in general terms as a sympathizer. It would not have been easy for a leading Roman military officer in Caesarea to demonstrate publicly his sympathies for the Jewish people and their faith."

Do consult the further statements made in the FAQ, "God-fearers."

There is an excellent chance that the centurion Cornelius, a Roman—given how it will be acknowledged that he observed traditional times of prayer (v. 3)—was one who most probably attended services at a local synagogue, and who was Torah observant to the degree that being a centurion allowed him. Cornelius is lauded in the narrative of Acts 10:2 as being “liberal in charities to the people, and always prayed to God” (Goodspeed New Testament), things which are listed as being significant virtues by Tobit 12:8-9 in the Apocrypha:

“Prayer is good when accompanied by fasting, almsgiving, and righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than much with wrongdoing. It is better to give alms than to treasure up gold. For almsgiving delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin. Those who perform deeds of charity and of righteousness will have fulness of life.”

To be sure, Cornelius’ generosity and beneficence, as a Roman, to the Jewish people, is something significantly highlighted with the Apostle Peter to be shown his forthcoming vision. Cornelius was no run-of-the-mill pagan by a longshot; he recognized Israel’s God as the One True God, and his gratitude toward the Jews who presented him with the goodness of the Creator was reciprocated by tangible acts of kindness. And, there is an excellent chance that Cornelius, as a God-fearer, was one who was keeping some form of kosher or a kosher-style diet—a factor which can certainly change the common orientation of the vision Peter will be shown in Acts 10:10-17. The view of Marshall is that the faith practice of Cornelius, in association with the Judaism of the time, was actually one which was substantial:

“The allegiance of Cornelius [to Israel’s God] was far from being nominal, as was shown by his giving of alms to the poor and his frequent prayer...He was not a proselyte, *i.e.* a Gentile who had fully accepted the Jewish religion by undergoing circumcision, but merely a ‘God-fearer’...such people were regarded as still pagans by the Jews in Palestine, but there appears to have been a more liberal attitude in the Dispersion. Possibly therefore, Cornelius had become a God-fearer before he came to Palestine.”¹⁶

Later in Acts 10:22, when Peter is introduced to the company sent by Cornelius, it is stated: “He’s a Roman army officer, an upright man and a God-fearer, a man highly regarded by the whole Jewish nation” (Acts 10:22a, CJB/CJSB). Cornelius is not presented as someone who was unethical, immoral, or unreasonable. *Cornelius is presented as someone who was most ideal and prepared for hearing about Yeshua the Messiah*, an upstanding figure who was generous to the Jewish people, and on some level for some reason—perhaps having been affected by war, as a member of the Roman army—was able to sympathize with their condition as a minority in the Empire. Eckhard J. Schnabel takes the portrayal of Cornelius a little further, suggesting, “It is possible...that his generosity extended to the soldiers in his unit and the Greeks living in the city.”¹⁷ Yet as will be seen, as David G. Peterson points out, “Despite his prayers and gifts to the poor, in orthodox Jewish terms he is still technically ‘unclean’, and Peter is unwilling to come to his house and eat with him.”¹⁸

Those who encounter the Book of Acts, while reading an historical record of the First Century *ekklēsia*, are also encountering an important arrangement of themes and concepts to communicate God’s working in the lives of diverse groups of people. It can go overlooked how via the character of Cornelius, the vision that Cornelius is shown, and the actions taken by Cornelius—are in fact quite similar to those which have been presented in association with the Jewish Believers who have been described in the preceding narrative. John T. Squires astutely details,

“For Luke, their {God-fearers’} narrative importance is undeniably strategic...Cornelius does ‘many charitable acts,’ as did the disciple Tabitha (9:36...), and ‘prays to God constantly,’ an activity typical of the messianic community (1:14; 2:42; 6:6; 7:59; 9:11, 40; 10:9; 12:5; 13:3; 14:23; 20:26; 21:5). Cornelius sees a vision of an angel of God, another phenomenon experienced by community members (see 5:19). The angel gives Cornelius a command to send to Joppa for Peter (10:3-6), in the same way that the angel commanded the apostles to go to the temple (5:20) and the Lord in a vision commanded Ananias to go to ‘Straight Street’

¹⁶ Marshall, *Acts*, pp 183-184.

¹⁷ Schnabel, 485.

¹⁸ Peterson, 324.

to find Saul (9:11). The validity of Cornelius' piety is strengthened both by the angel's confirmation of the effectiveness of his prayers and charity (10:4) and the fact that his commands are carried out by a devout soldier (v. 7). This devotion insures that what Cornelius orders to be done is consistent with the divine will."¹⁹

In the context of Luke-Acts being composed in the 60s-70s C.E. (less likely in the 80s C.E.), Ben Witherington III observes, "It may be said that Luke goes out of his way to make clear that neither Jesus nor his followers were antagonistic toward the Roman presence in the East or elsewhere, and that in fact even Roman soldiers found this new movement appealing and worth joining."²⁰ The scene of Peter's vision opens with no small word regarding its main, non-Jewish protagonist Cornelius: "He was a devout man who, with his whole household, revered the true God, performed many a compassionate deed on behalf of the Jewish people, and was constantly offering prayer to God" (Acts 10:2, God's New Covenant-Cassirer).

10:3-8 The centurion Cornelius was one who observed traditional Jewish times of prayer at the ninth hour or around 3:00 PM, a time when it is attested he received a vision: "One afternoon around three o'clock he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius!'" (Acts 10:3, CJB/CJSB). This is the time when, according to the Torah, the evening offerings would be in the process of being performed (Exodus 29:39; Leviticus 6:20; cf. Judith 9:1).²¹

Cornelius is alarmed, and speaks to the situation presented him, as v. 4 records, "he stared at him in terror, and said, 'What is it, Lord?' And he said to him, 'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God'" (Acts 10:4, RSV). The messenger, being sent to Cornelius by God, is notably not the first time in Holy Scripture when the God of Israel had gone out after someone from the nations generally (i.e., Joshua 6:25). Cornelius' prayers of piety are noted as going up before God as a memorial, but may be properly likened unto sacrifices (cf. Leviticus 2:2, 9, 16; 5:12; 6:15). The thought of Psalm 142:2 could be in view, "I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare my trouble before Him." Later in the writings of the Apostle Paul, for sure, the service (Romans 12:1-2) or monetary offerings (Philippians 4:18) of Messiah followers, are compared as though they were sacrifices of the Levitical order.

Cornelius is directed, "Now send men to Joppa and call for Simon, also named Peter" (Acts 10:5, TLV). It is probably not unimportant that Joppa is the same city where Jonah boarded the ship bound for Tarshish, as he chose to first abandon God's assignment to him (Jonah 1:3).²² *In a way, the circumstances of the Prophet Jonah's past disobedience to God—in trying to escape the declaration of God's judgment upon the pagan Nineveh—will be redeemed by the Apostle Peter's eventual obedience to Him, and the declaration of the good news to the centurion Cornelius.*

As is relayed to Cornelius, "He's staying with Shim'on the leather-tanner, who has a house by the sea" (Acts 10:6, CJB/CJSB). The status of Simon as a tanner, one who would work with animal skins in the process of making leather, is important to recognize. Those who would be constantly working with dead animals were regarded as consistently unclean (cf. Numbers 19:11-13). Peterson comments how, "Peter does not seem to have been bothered about close contact with such a person, but had come part of the way toward meeting with people regarded as ritually unclean and eating with them."²³ The issue should be raised why Peter could apparently associate with Jewish persons who were *consistently* ritually unclean in their profession, like Simon the tanner, but yet exhibited some (stringent) caution in associating with non-Jewish persons—like the **upstanding** Cornelius, a supporter of the Jewish people—who were apparently defiled and unclean because they were Greco-Roman, and with whom socializing was inconvenient at best.

As the TLV renders Acts 10:7, "When the angel speaking to him had left, he called two of his servants and a soldier from among those attached to his command." What appears in the source text as *straiōtēn*

¹⁹ John T. Squires, "Acts," in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1235.

²⁰ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 347.

²¹ Cf. Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 14.65.

²² "But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD" (Jonah 1:3).

²³ Peterson, 328.

eusebē (στρατιώτην εὐσεβῆ), “devout soldier” (RSV/NRSV/ESV, NASU, NIV/TNIV), is somehow left out from the TLV, which a Messianic version like the CJB/CJSB has, albeit expanded, as “one of his military aides, who was a godly man.” Members of Cornelius’ close inner circle, apparently beyond his family, were also God-fearers to some degree. It is stated, “He told them what had happened and sent them off to Joppa” (Acts 10:8, NLT).

10:9-12 Following Cornelius’ compliance to send a party to go fetch Peter, “About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray” (Acts 10:9, NIV). Peter’s prayers at this time might perhaps mirror the sentiment of Psalm 55:17, “Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur, and He will hear my voice.” More likely, though, the consistent prayer routine of the Prophet Daniel, as noted by Daniel 6:10,²⁴ is the discipline that Peter had. With Peter soon to be shown the vision of the sheet, and with Cornelius’ company on the way and soon to arrive, Bruce interjects the important thought,

“A God-fearer had no objection to the society of Jews, but even a moderately orthodox Jew would not willingly enter the dwelling of a Gentile, God-fearer though he were. No doubt some of Peter’s inherited prejudices were wearing thin by this time, but a special revelation was necessary to make him consent to visit a Gentile.”²⁵

Peter was praying right when his hosts were getting ready to serve a meal, and so it is not surprising to see that he became hungry *and* that this condition was used by God to communicate something to him: “He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance” (Acts 10:10, NIV). The term *hekstasis* (ἑκστασις) is noted to be “**a state of being in which consciousness is wholly or partially suspended, freq. associated with divine action, trance, ecstasy**” (BDAG).²⁶ Peter “had a visionary experience” (Common English Bible). As will be seen regarding the sheet that he will see, Marshall thinks not only that “Peter’s hunger may...have shaped the nature of his vision,” but goes on to say, “and it has been suggested that, if there was an awning over the roof of the house to shield people from the sun, this may have helped to create in Peter’s mind the image of a large *sheet* that was being lowered from the sky by four ropes.”²⁷

The details of what is described, concerning the sheet and the various creatures or animals, have to be noted, given any potential symbolism for evaluation. It is stated that Peter “saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air” (Acts 10:11-12). While the term *othonē* (ὀθόνη) can mean “*fine linen*,” it can also mean “*a sail*” (LS),²⁸ with the NEB actually having, “a thing coming down that looked like a great sheet of sail-cloth.” The vision of the sheet could not have just been induced by Peter’s hunger, but perhaps with him also seeing a ship passing by, as Joppa was a seaside town.

Given how Peter will later state to Cornelius, “God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean” (Acts 10:28b, ESV), the animals on the sheet had to serve as being representative of something. Messianic people will commonly conclude that the various creatures on the sheet represent pagan idolaters, and not just, generically, meats classified as unclean according to the Torah. But, how is this something which can be substantiated?

On this sheet were “all the four-footed beasts and creeping things of the earth, and the birds of the sky” (Lattimore).²⁹ Readers do not get the complete impression that many of the things, which would be regarded as unclean (*tamei*, טמא) according to the Torah—“all kinds of animals, snakes, and birds” (Contemporary

²⁴ “Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously” (Daniel 6:10).

²⁵ Bruce, *Acts*, 217.

²⁶ BDAG, 309.

²⁷ Marshall, *Acts*, 185.

²⁸ LS, 544.

²⁹ Grk. *panta ta tetrapoda kai herpeta tēs gēs kai peteina tou ouranou* (πάντα τὰ τετράποδα καὶ ἑρπετὰ τῆς γῆς καὶ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ).

English Version)—were a standard part of the *unclean* Mediterranean diet of the First Century C.E. Within the Apostolic Scriptures, a similar list of such creatures notably appears in the Apostle Paul’s opening words to the Romans, when he describes the plight of fallen humanity and their depression into idolatry:

“Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures³⁰” (Romans 1:22-23).

Also important to be considered for what “all sorts of four-footed animals and reptiles and birds of the air” (TLV) might symbolically represent, is what the Prophet Ezekiel was shown regarding the sin of his contemporaries in Jerusalem:

“So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts *and* detestable things³¹, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around” (Ezekiel 8:10).

One does not have to go outside of the Biblical record to see that the creatures, which Peter saw on the sheet, can be legitimately associated with pagan idolatry.³² While modern Christian readers are conditioned to associate the creatures and animals on the sheet with pigs and various forms of shellfish, which they like to eat—it might be far better to think of the unclean and common creatures in terms of the snakes and dogs of Egyptian religion, the eagles and birds of prey of the Greek and Roman lore, and the golden calf worshipped by the Israelites themselves.

10:13-16 With an apocalyptic scene in view, with Peter being shown a vision (cf. Revelation 4:1), “A voice came to him, ‘Get up, Peter, kill and eat!’” (Acts 10:13). It may appear that just killing or slaughtering animals for a meal, i.e., the Goodspeed New Testament paraphrase, “Get up, Peter! Kill something and eat it!”, is what is being depicted. And indeed, most Christian readers and examiners interpret *anastas, Petre, thuson kai phage* (ἀναστὰς, Πέτρε, θύσον καὶ φάγε), “Rise up, Peter, slay and eat” (A. Marshall),³³ as only involving butchering meat for eating consumption. One may get the concession, though, that Peter’s refusal to comply (Acts 10:14) is rooted not only in his adherence to God’s Torah, but also that eating unclean things would be to the detriment of his identity as a Jew. William H. Willimon thinks,

“...Peter shows his loyalty to the sacred dietary laws and refuses. Only these laws stood in the way of assimilation (and thus, destruction) of [Jews] as Jews. They identified, demarcated faithfulness in the midst of incredible pressure to forsake the faith, drop one’s particularities and become a good citizen of the Empire. A little pork here, a pinch of incense to Caesar there, and it will not be long before the faith community will be politely obliterated.”³⁴

While Peter’s refusal in Acts 10:14 would be based in his apparent hunger, we need to seriously consider the possibility that something more is intended by “kill and eat” than just consumption of unclean meat. Take notice of some of the fuller definitions of the verb *thuō* (θύω), commonly just rendered as “kill” in Acts 10:13, which cannot go overlooked:

- *LS*: “to offer part of a meal to the gods...to sacrifice, offer sacrifices... to celebrate with offerings or sacrifices.”³⁵
- *BDAG*: “to make a cultic offering, sacrifice...celebrate, but perh. only when an animal is slaughtered in connection with a celebration.”³⁶
- *Liddell-Scott-Jones*: “sacrifice, slay a victim...celebrate with offerings or sacrifices.”³⁷

³⁰ Grk. *peteinōn kai tetrapodōn kai herpetōn* (πετεινῶν καὶ τετραπόδων καὶ ἑρπετῶν).

³¹ Heb. MT *kol-tav'nit remes u'beheimah sheqetz* (כָּל־תַּבְּנִית רֶמֶשׁ וּבְהֵימָה שְׁקֵצַת).

³² Mark S. Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 69 fn#37 indicates that “The use of animal symbols to represent categories of human beings is common in apocalyptic literature. Outside the biblical canon, the most striking example is found in Enoch’s Book of Dream Visions (Enoch 83-89)”; Aaron Eby, *Biblically Kosher: A Messianic Jewish Perspective on Kashrut* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2012), 42 makes light of *Leviticus Rabbah* 13:5 regarding various unclean animals representing pagan nations at large.

³³ Marshall, *The Interlinear KJV-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English*, 377.

³⁴ William H. Willimon, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Acts* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 96.

³⁵ *LS*, 372.

³⁶ *BDAG*, 463.

- *A Reader's Greek New Testament: "sacrifice, slaughter, kill, celebrate."*³⁸

Thayer indicates how *thuō* is used in "the Septuagint mostly for זָבַח [*zavach*], also for שָׁחַט [*shachat*], to slay,"³⁹ which would involve animal sacrifices presented before God at the Tabernacle/Temple, and the terms are certainly involved for pagan sacrifices as well. The direction, "Get up, Kefa, slaughter and eat!" (CJB/CJSB), may very well have cultic ramifications **involving participation in pagan worship and revelry**—given Peter's strong revulsion to what is stated (Acts 10:14). It would be akin to, "Peter, slaughter, eat, and join the party...!" That *thuō* can very much involve slaughtering animals, for participating in pagan sacrifice, revelry, and associated debauchery, is something seen later in the narrative of Acts, when the priest of Zeus at Lystra believed that Paul and Barnabas were Hermes and Zeus, and directed that a sacrifice be offered to them:

"The priest of Zeus, whose *temple* was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice [*thuō*] with the crowds...*Even* saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice [*thuō*] to them" (Acts 14:13, 18).

At the direction to "slay and eat" (Acts 10:13, YLT), Peter exhibits great revulsion: "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean" (Acts 10:14, RSV), or "profane and unclean" (*Lattimore*). Peter's words are very much thought to echo those of Ezekiel, when he was directed by God to cook bread on his own burning feces (Ezekiel 4:14).⁴⁰ Peter, like Ezekiel, expresses his fidelity to the Torah's dietary code, by stating that he has not consumed any meat *koinon kai akatharton* (κοινων και ακαθαρτον), "common and ritually unclean" (HCSB). Witherington draws readers' attention to how it is not just unclean (*akathartos*) meat referred to by Peter, but also common or defiled (*koinos*) meat as well. In his estimation, "[Peter] refers to both the common (κοινων) and the unclean (ακαθαρτον). The former probably refers to something that could be defiled by association with something unclean, the latter to something inherently unclean."⁴¹ Here, *koinos* (κοινός) would **"pert. to being of little value because of being common, common, ordinary, profane"** (*BDAG*).⁴² The scene of 1 Maccabees 1:47-48, and the defilements introduced by Antiochus Epiphanes, need to be weighed:

"[T]o defile the holy precinct and holy ones, to build altars and sacred precincts and houses to idols and to sacrifice swine and common animals [*thuein hueia kai ktēnē koina*, θύειν ὕεια καὶ κτήνη κοινά]" (NETS).

The sacrifice of pigs and the forced consumption of pork, often gets a high amount of attention in Messianic evaluation of the Maccabean crisis. What probably does get overlooked, is that it was not just pigs sacrificed on the Jerusalem altar, but also various "common animals" or *ktēnē koina*, such animals probably being technically clean animals like cattle, sheep, and goats—all used in Greek religion for sacrifice—but unqualified in some way, not up to the Torah's sacrificial standard. It also cannot be ignored how in conjunction with the animal sacrifices, pagan debauchery and temple prostitution were in full play:

"[T]he temple was filled with debauchery and reveling by the Gentiles, who dallied with harlots and had intercourse with women within the sacred precincts, and besides brought in things for sacrifice that were unfit" (2 Maccabees 6:4).

It is later noted that the Jewish martyr Eleazar refused to pass off his meals as though they were those of the unauthorized, pagan sacrifice:

"Those who were in charge of that unlawful sacrifice took the man aside, because of their long acquaintance with him, and privately urged him to bring meat of his own providing, proper for him to use, and pretend that he was eating the flesh of the sacrificial meal [*apo tēs thusias kreōn*, ἀπὸ τῆς θυσίας κρεῶν] which had been commanded by the king" (2 Maccabees 6:21).

³⁷ *BibleWorks 9.0: LSM Lexicon (Unabridged)*. MS Windows 7 Release. Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2011. DVD-ROM.

³⁸ Richard J. Goodrich and Albert L. Lukaszewski, *A Reader's Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 273.

³⁹ *Thayer*, 294.

⁴⁰ Consult the entry for Ezekiel 4:9-17 appearing in the *Messianic Kosher Helper*.

⁴¹ Witherington, *Acts*, 350.

⁴² *BDAG*, 552.

When the Apostle Peter refused to sacrifice and eat things which were both common and unclean, it could very easily have been for more reasons than just being faithful to the dietary laws. As the historical record of the Maccabean crisis showed, many Jews fought and died for keeping the Sabbath/*Shabbat*, circumcision, and *kashrut*. When asked to sacrifice and eat (Acts 10:13), Peter refused (Acts 10:14) on more than just the grounds of obedience to the kosher laws themselves—but knowing what he could be getting himself into if he cast them aside. In the record of the Maccabean crisis, sacrifices of common and unclean animals were associated with idolatry and temple prostitution.

Peter’s refusal is noted to be a bit misguided, as the voice which had commanded him to sacrifice and eat (Acts 10:13), now communicates to him, “What God has cleansed, you must not call common” (Acts 10:15, RSV) or “profane” (NRSV), *ha ho Theos ekatharisen, su mē koinou* (ὃ ὁ θεὸς ἐκαθάρισεν, σὺ μὴ κοίνου). This statement is most frequently interpreted by lay readers, as well as many Acts commentators, as nullifying the distinctions between clean and unclean animals in the Torah. Yet there are those, who when noting Peter’s later statement of Acts 10:28, will make the concession that Peter’s vision pertained to both a nullification of the kosher dietary laws and a cleansing of all human beings in Israel’s Messiah. Some, however, do dismiss the thought that the cleansing of human beings is what could be intended or included. The following chart notes some of the significant views expressed regarding what is communicated in Acts 10:15:

PETER’S VISION	
EXCLUSIVE ABOLITION OF THE KOSHER DIETARY LAWS	ABOLITION OF THE KOSHER DIETARY LAWS and THE CLEANSING OF HUMAN BEINGS
<p>“The effect of the vision was thus to announce to Peter that the distinction made in the Old Testament between foods that were ‘clean’, and therefore fit for human consumption, and those that were unclean, was now cancelled, so that in future Jewish Christians could eat any food without fear of defilement....Not all commentators have been able to see the relevance of the dream to Peter’s immediate situation, and some have been tempted to treat the dream allegorically, as declaring all <i>men</i> clean, so that Peter need not be afraid of going to a Gentile household. This allegorical interpretation is forced and artificial, although it can find a basis in 11:12 and 15:9, and thus some have argued that the dream is a secondary addition to the story.”⁴³ I. Howard Marshall</p>	<p>“although the vision challenged the basic distinction between clean and unclean foods, which Peter had been brought up to make, the Spirit related this to the distinction between clean and unclean people, and told him to stop making it. That Peter grasped this is clear from his later statement: ‘God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean’ (28).”⁴⁴ John R.W. Stott</p>

⁴³ Marshall, *Acts*, pp 185-186.

⁴⁴ Stott, *Acts*, 187.

<p>“The abolition of Jewish ceremonial barriers was pressed home in the vision with special reference to food-laws, but Peter soon grasped that its range was much wider [referencing Mark 7:19—discussed previously].”⁴⁵ F.F. Bruce</p>	<p>“The response of God in v. 15 indicates that Peter must not call common or profane what God has made clean. If indeed this vision is intended as a parable about people, rather than animals, then the verb here may refer to Christ’s death and its effects....Luke does not specifically say that the food laws have been abolished <i>per se</i>; what he focuses on is the fact that no <i>person</i> was to be treated as unclean any longer. This of course had implications for the keeping of the food laws...but that was a secondary issue yet to be worked out...”⁴⁶ Ben Witherington III</p>
<p>“Peter must acknowledge God’s right to determine what is clean and to redefine boundaries for the gospel era...The clean and unclean provisions of the law were temporary, designed to keep Israel a holy and distinct people, until the time when Jews and Gentiles could receive the forgiveness of sins and sanctification on the same basis...Peter recognises that he should no longer allow the levitical laws to keep him from associating with Gentiles (v. 28).”⁴⁷ David G. Peterson</p>	<p>“The exchange between God and Peter only indirectly concerns traditions regarding clean and unclean foods, even though this is surely what prompts him to ‘puzzle greatly’ and ponder the meaning of his vision (vv. 17, 19a). Comprehension unfolds only with additional information: Peter’s vision concerns his mission to fulfill God’s purpose that unclean (=uncircumcised) Gentiles will also share Israel’s blessings.”⁴⁸ Robert W. Wall</p>
<p>“God has declared all animals to be clean, an assertion that implies the abolishment of the dietary laws.”⁴⁹ Eckhard J. Schnabel</p>	<p>“The food laws underscore Israel’s separation from the nations. By making unclean food clean, God is showing how table fellowship and acceptance of Gentiles are more easily accomplished in the new era...God uses the picture of unclean food now made clean to portray Gentiles now made clean. That such previous lawbreaking visions point to the act being carried out also shows that food and people are in view here.”⁵⁰ Darrell L. Bock</p>

Ajith Fernando indicates some of the controversial components which can crop up among examiners of Peter’s vision, describing, “Peter will soon realize that he may not consider any group of people common or unclean...(v.28). Scholars disagree on whether food laws were indeed abrogated by this vision. Some think, however, that the vision dealt primarily with food laws rather than with interaction with Gentiles.”⁵¹

⁴⁵ Bruce, *Acts*, pp 218-219.

⁴⁶ Witherington, *Acts*, pp 350, 354.

⁴⁷ Peterson, pp 330-331.

⁴⁸ Robert W. Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in Leander E. Keck, ed. et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 10:163-164.

⁴⁹ Schnabel, 491.

⁵⁰ Bock, 390.

⁵¹ Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 321.

The spectrum of interpretations of Peter’s vision will range from those (1) thinking that only people have been cleansed by the Messiah’s work, to those (2) thinking that people and unclean meats have been cleansed—to those (3) only thinking that unclean meats have been cleansed, even to those (4) who think that Peter’s vision nullifies all external instructions of the Mosaic Torah.⁵² What is to be especially noted, in cataloguing some of these opinions, is that the widespread Messianic view that Peter’s vision pertains exclusively to the cleansing of human beings, *is well on the map* of interpretive options. Lloyd J. Ogilvie is one who does interpret Peter’s vision as pertaining to the cleansing of human people, with no indication or thought associated with the Torah’s dietary code:

“The Lord was not contradicting Leviticus and Deuteronomy, or giving Peter a new diet, but getting through to him about the people he should love and reach with the gospel. The vision was parabolic, and like the Lord’s parables during the incarnation, it had a simple and salient point. The church was not to call non-Hebrews common and make the body of Christ exclusively Hebrew. That took more than a parabolic vision to register on Peter’s thinking. The Lord usually follows a concept with an experience in which our thinking and behavior can be altered by enacting the truth. And while Peter was having the vision, the Lord was also arranging for the situation in which the apostle would see more than a vision. He would see a Gentile centurion and his family uncommonly blessed.”⁵³

The most important point, that Ogilvie has made, is that what the vision was intended to communicate and be acted upon, is something which will be detailed in the verses immediately following—witnessed especially in the dialogue between Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:23-33). And, this is where those who believe Peter’s vision pertained exclusively to the cleansing of human beings, do find their textual support. Interestingly enough, Schnabel, who has expressed an animals-exclusive view for Peter’s vision, still notably does indicate how,

“The verb ‘made clean’ (ἐκαθάρισεν [*ekatharisen*]) is used in the LXX for the pronouncements of the priests concerning persons who had been impure and who, after the appropriate purification, were then declared clean (cf. Lev 13:6⁵⁴, 13⁵⁵, 17⁵⁶).”⁵⁷

Such a Torah-based term, albeit from the Septuagint, is used to declare defiled **human people** as purified (Acts 10:15)—when coupled with the recognitions that the animals on the sheet represent pagan idolatry (Acts 10:12), and that the direction to “sacrifice and eat” probably involves joining into pagan revelry and debauchery (Acts 10:13)—**should necessarily focus readers of Acts 10 from this point onto Peter’s subsequent actions regarding human relations**, not what he eats.

The Apostle Peter was shown the vision of the sheet three times, and immediately following this it was taken back up into Heaven or the sky (Acts 10:16). Peter was notably not rebuked by God *for refusing* to “slaughter and eat” (Acts 10:13), but instead was directed to recognize how *something* was declared to be purified or undefiled (Acts 10:15), leading to him being extremely puzzled (Acts 10:17). Presumably, Peter being shown the sheet three times, meant that he was at some sort of loss involving what was being communicated. *And indeed, not every interpreter today agrees on what was being communicated.* Peter being shown this vision three times may be thought to somehow parallel how he denied the Lord three times (John 18:17, 25-27), and also how he made three affirmations about having love for the Lord (John 21:15-17). In

⁵² John B. Pohill, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in Wayne Grudem, ed., *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 2103, is one who represents this latter view:

“Verse 15 is the key: God was overturning the old clean/unclean distinctions and dietary laws in general, along with all other ‘ceremonial’ laws in the Mosaic covenant (including laws about sacrifices, festivals and special days, and circumcision).”

⁵³ Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *The Preacher’s Commentary: Acts* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 179.

⁵⁴ “The priest shall look at him again on the seventh day, and if the infection has faded and the mark has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean [Heb. MT: *v’tiharo*, וְטִהַרְוּ; Grk. LXX: *kathariei auton*, καθαριεῖ αὐτόν]; it is *only* a scab. And he shall wash his clothes and be clean” (Leviticus 13:6).

⁵⁵ “[T]hen the priest shall look, and behold, *if* the leprosy has covered all his body, he shall pronounce clean [Heb. MT: *v’tihar*, וְטִהַרְוּ; Grk. LXX: *kathariei auton*, καθαριεῖ αὐτόν] *him who has* the infection; it has all turned white *and* he is clean” (Leviticus 13:6).

⁵⁶ “[A]nd the priest shall look at him, and behold, *if* the infection has turned to white, then the priest shall pronounce clean [Heb. MT: *v’tihar*, וְטִהַרְוּ; Grk. LXX: *kathariei*, καθαριεῖ] *him who has* the infection; he is clean” (Leviticus 13:17).

⁵⁷ Schnabel, 491.

the view of Keener, “The point of the vision, that God can declare anything clean, applies especially to the *Gentiles Peter is about to meet (10:28; 15:9). Repetition of a revelation is not unusual (1 Sam 3:4-10).”⁵⁸

10:17-23 After seeing the vision three times, the narrative describes how “Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen” (Acts 10:17a, NRSV), or “quite at a loss” (Moffat New Testament), having “doubted in himself” (Wesley New Testament). The verb *diaporeō* (διαπορέω) is defined by the *Louw-Nida Lexicon* with, “to be thoroughly perplexed - 'to be very perplexed, to not know what to do, to be very confused.’”⁵⁹ Noting this definition, Fernando states, “While God led Peter clearly, he was earnestly seeking to find God’s will.”⁶⁰ In the view of Robert W. Wall, “Peter’s failure to ‘get’ his vision is not the result of hardened resistance or spiritual obduracy...but reflects the sheer difficulty of deciphering the symbols of God’s message.”⁶¹ Twentieth and Twenty-First Century readers of Peter’s vision almost never take this into consideration: if Peter had to deeply think over the vision that he had experienced, why do we not see more contemporary readers of his vision more carefully think through what he saw, and then what he did? The conclusion that Peter’s vision was about the cleansing of human people in Israel’s Messiah, and not an abrogation of the Torah’s dietary laws, is based precisely in the need for readers to “slow down” a bit, and reflect upon Peter’s vision and following activities.

As Peter was contemplating what he was shown, the company sent by Cornelius arrived at the home of Simon the tanner (Acts 10:17b), inquiring for Peter (Acts 10:18). “Now while Peter was mulling over the vision, the *Ruach* [Spirit] said to him, ‘Look here, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitating, because I Myself have sent them’” (Acts 10:19-20, TLV). Peter complies, going down, and says, “Here I am, the one you’re looking for. What is the reason you’re here?” (Acts 10:21, HCSB). The party tells Peter, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man⁶², who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say” (Acts 10:22, ESV).

Peter’s first action after his vision, and after encountering those sent by Cornelius, was to provide a place for them to stay: “So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging” (Acts 10:23a, NRSV). This is noted by some paraphrased versions to be, “So Peter invited them in and entertained them” (Goodspeed New Testament), or “Peter invited them in and made them feel at home” (The Message). It would seem logical, given Peter’s apparent hunger (Acts 10:10), that they all ate a meal together. Bruce concurs, “By this time the meal which Peter had called for was ready, and he brought the men in to share it.”⁶³ This would have been a kosher meal, provided for non-Jewish guests, in the home of a Jewish Believer—something which was not always culturally for certain, but frequently religiously as well, expedient (Acts 10:28a). “The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along” (Acts 10:23b, TNIV), indicating that he was not the only Jewish Believer who went with the party to visit Cornelius.

10:24-26 “On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends” (Acts 10:24). Peter must have been a little shocked seeing so many people gather together to see him, although by now, having socialized somewhat with the messengers sent by Cornelius, he would have heard a little about Cornelius, his family, and his friends. For some reason or another, “As Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him” (Acts 10:25, TLV). While technically speaking, the verb *proskuneō* (προσκυνέω) can involve “*prostrating oneself before kings and superiors,*” it also notably does mean “*to make obeisance to the gods, fall down and worship, to worship, adore*” (LS),⁶⁴ and is used throughout the Septuagint to describe the worship due to the God of

⁵⁸ Keener, *IVPBB*, 351.

⁵⁹ [BibleWorks 9.0: Louw-Nida Lexicon](#). MS Windows 7 Release. Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2011. DVD-ROM.

⁶⁰ Fernando, 321.

⁶¹ Wall, in *NIB*, 10:164.

⁶² Grk. *phoboumenos ton Theon* (φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν).

⁶³ Bruce, *Acts*, 220.

⁶⁴ *LS*, 693.

Note how there is debate over whether in the Hebrew Tanach *shachah* (שָׁחָה) or *chavah* (חָוָה) is the actual verb intended for worship. Cf. Edwin Yamauchi, “חָוָה,” in *TWOT*, 1:267.

Israel. As will be seen by Peter’s response to Cornelius, rendering *proskuneō* as “fell prostrate” (CJB/CJSB), “fell at his feet in reverence” (NIV), “fell at his feet in order to honor him” (Common English Bible), or “made obeisance to him” (Goodspeed New Testament), **does not** at all do this scene proper justice.

That worship of the Apostle Peter, as though Peter were Divine, was apparently intended, is obvious from Peter’s strong refusal toward the action Cornelius displayed. Peter rebukes Cornelius, “Stand up; I am only a mortal⁶⁵” (Acts 10:26, NRSV), or “Stand up, I am a human being too!” (Phillips New Testament). *Peter is not God*. In the view of Schnabel, “The homage of the Roman centurion is a pagan element that Luke did not eliminate from his story despite his otherwise positive description of Cornelius,”⁶⁶ meaning that even with Cornelius’ apparent condition as a God-fearer, a friend of the Jewish people, and as one who observed God’s Law on some important level—there were still some pagan ideas and concepts needing to be corrected. The Apostle Peter’s response in refusing worship, is notably the same as the servant in Revelation 19:10 and 22:8-9, where the Apostle John tries to give the angel worship. In the later narrative of Acts, Paul and Barnabas refuse worship as Hermes and Zeus by those at Lystra (Acts 14:11-15). The exact opposite response takes place regarding Herod, though (Acts 12:20-23).⁶⁷

10:27-29 Many people had come together to meet the Apostle Peter (Acts 10:27). And so, Peter opens with a rather important word. As it appears in many contemporary English versions, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit any one of another nation” (Acts 10:28a, RSV). Peter’s statement in Acts 10:28a has begged some important discussion, as the term *athemitos* (ἀθέμιτος), most often rendered “unlawful” (RSV/ESV/NRSV, NASU)—to be clearly differentiated from the term *anomos* (ἄνομος)⁶⁸—more specifically “**pert. to not being sanctioned, not allowed, forbidden,**” or “**pert. to violating canons of decency, wanton, disgusting, unseemly**” (BDAG).⁶⁹ The thought of Stott is, “the word describes what is ‘taboo’. But now Peter felt at liberty to break this traditional taboo and to enter Cornelius’ house, because God had shown him that no human being was unclean in his sight.”⁷⁰ Peterson also says, “Association with Gentiles was a cause of defilement in Jewish tradition...rather than being strictly defined as such by the law of Moses. It was ‘unlawful’ (*athemitos*) in the more general sense of being against their custom.”⁷¹ A valid alternative rendering for *athemitos* would be “forbidden” (Phillips New Testament, NEB/REB, Kingdom New Testament, Common English Bible), with paraphrases including “[this] is something that just isn’t done” (CJB/CJSB) or “this is highly irregular” (The Message).⁷²

Peter told those gathered to hear him, “You yourselves know that it is not permitted for a Jewish man to associate with a non-Jew or to visit him” (Acts 10:28, TLV), as socializing—especially over some sort of a meal—is definitely witnessed in Jewish materials from the broad First Century to be forbidden or not permitted:

“And you also, my son, Jacob, remember my words, and keep the commandments of Abraham, your father. Separate yourself from the gentiles, and do not eat with them, and do not perform deeds like theirs. And do not become associates of theirs. Because their deeds are defiled, and all of their ways are contaminated, and despicable, and abominable” (*Jubilees* 22:16).⁷³

⁶⁵ Grk. *egō autos anthrōpos eimi* (ἐγὼ αὐτὸς ἄνθρωπος εἰμι).

⁶⁶ Schnabel, 496.

⁶⁷ For a further review, consult the sub-section, where it is asked, “To worship Yeshua as God is to worship another god. This is idolatry. How can you worship Yeshua as God? We are only supposed to honor or bow down to Yeshua,” from the article “Answering the ‘Frequently Avoided Questions’ About the Divinity of Yeshua,” appearing in the publication *Confronting Yeshua’s Divinity and Messiahship* by J.K. McKee.

⁶⁸ “without law, lawless” (LS, 74).

⁶⁹ BDAG, 24.

⁷⁰ Stott, *Acts*, 189.

⁷¹ Peterson, 333.

⁷² The Amplified Bible has, “You yourselves are aware how it is not lawful or permissible,” for Acts 10:28a.

⁷³ O.S. Wintermute, “Jubilees,” in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 98.

Another notable view is that “Dwelling places of gentiles [in the Land of Israel] are unclean” (m.*Ohalot* 19:7),⁷⁴ yet concurrent with this, it is even to be noted how observant Jews were not permitted to enter into the home of lesser-observant Jews (m.*Demai* 2:2-3). One could expect, though, many Diaspora Jews being more progressive or liberal about socially interacting with their Greek and Roman neighbors.⁷⁵

What Peter alludes to, in Acts 10:28a, is not at all a violation of the Torah or Law of Moses proper, but rather of various Jewish traditions and prejudices against the nations at large. Surely, while the idolatry, immorality, and sinfulness of those of the nations needed to be avoided, the Torah does not contain any flat prohibition against socializing—much less a prohibition against telling those of the nations at large about the goodness of Israel’s God! Schnabel is keen to indicate, “The Mosaic law did not forbid Israelites from eating with Gentiles. Jews were only forbidden from eating impure food, which they could do by eating only the vegetables at a meal with Gentiles. Nor did later Jewish tradition uniformly and unanimously stipulate a prohibition concerning Jews visiting Gentiles.”⁷⁶ So, there is every reason to think that Peter’s statement, “it is forbidden for a Jewish man to mix with or visit a Gentile” (Kingdom New Testament), was not the view of every single First Century Jew. Peter’s statement, however, does bear significance regarding what he was about to do as it surrounds the declaration of the good news to Cornelius and those gathered—especially given Cornelius’ place as a centurion. Schnabel further observes,

“Peter knew that Cornelius was a Roman officer (v. 22), a position in which regular contacts with pagan deities and pagan rites could not be avoided. Thus, Peter’s point that since he is a practicing Jew he should not really be associating with a ‘Gentile’ (v. 28e) may be a polite way of saying that he should not be consorting with an officer of the Roman army and his friends, who would likely be defiled by idolatry, despite their piety and good reputation among local Jews.”⁷⁷

The Apostle Peter’s imperative word, which controls much of what has thus far taken place, is that “God showed me that I should call nobody ‘common’ or ‘unclean’” (Acts 10:28b, Kingdom New Testament). It is quite preferred to render the Greek *kamoi ho Theos edeixen mēdena koinon ē akatharton legein anthrōpon* (κάμοι ὁ θεὸς ἔδειξε μὴδὲνα κοινὸν ἢ ἀκάθαρτον λέγειν ἄνθρωπον), as “**God has shown me that I should not call any human being common or unclean**” (PME), with a special emphasis placed on *anthrōpos* (ἄνθρωπος) being “**a person of either sex, w. focus on participation in the human race, a human being**” (BDAG).⁷⁸ Peter’s remark, about “God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean” (NRSV), is something which will be picked up on later in Acts, when he will testify before the Jerusalem Council, “He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9).

The very thing that the Apostle Peter *did not say* to Cornelius, his family, and his friends, is, “God has shown me that I should not call any four-footed animal, reptile, or bird, common or unclean”—even though this is the frequent conclusion made from Peter’s vision (Acts 10:10-17). Not enough readers or examiners of Acts 10:1-48, give proper weight to the Apostle Peter’s *own interpretation* of the vision that God showed him. There are commentators who do recognize, in various degrees, that the issue of Peter’s vision is the cleansing of all human beings before God, but they often consider it *secondary* to unclean meats being regarded as clean.⁷⁹ There are some commentators, however, who will concede that it at least appears that Peter’s vision was *primarily* about the cleansing of all human beings before God:

- Stanley B. Toussaint: “The command to eat unclean animals meant that he was **not to call any man impure or unclean.**”⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 980.

⁷⁵ Cf. Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), pp 25-29.

⁷⁶ Schnabel, 496.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 497.

⁷⁸ BDAG, 81.

⁷⁹ Cf. Bruce, *Acts*, pp 222-223.

⁸⁰ Stanley B. Toussaint, “Acts,” in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 381.

- Aijith Fernando: “A big shift has taken place in Peter’s thinking, for he now realizes that no longer are the typical Jewish distinctions among people significant. They have been rendered void once for all. In this episode Jew and Gentile have come together.”⁸¹
- Ben Witherington III: “Here it becomes evident that Peter has now concluded his vision was not just about food but also or perhaps primarily about persons. No person should be called common or unclean.”⁸²
- Gary Gilbert: “Peter applies his vision of animals to human associations.”⁸³

When Peter’s statement of Acts 10:28b is given proper weight, there is a legitimate, textual basis, for one to conclude that Peter’s vision was *exclusively* about the cleansing of all human beings—especially those mired in idolatry.

The importance of Peter’s vision, as involving the cleansing of all human beings via the sacrificial work of Yeshua, is why he could tell those gathered, “That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for” (Acts 10:29a), or “So the minute I was sent for, I came, no questions asked” (The Message). He then proceeds to ask why he was sent for (Acts 10:29b).

10:30-33 Cornelius, the Roman centurion, proceeds to tell the Apostle Peter and all those who have gathered, the precise circumstances which have arisen, directing him to summon Peter:

“Cornelius replied, ‘Four days ago at this very hour, at three o’clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. He said, “Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.” Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say” (Acts 10:30-33, NRSV).

What is important not to overlook here is the emphasis seen on Cornelius’ personal piety: “God has heard your prayer and remembered your acts of charity” (Acts 10:31b, CJB/CJSB). The noun *eleēmosunē* (ἐλεημοσύνη), “*mercy, pity,*” or “*the benefaction itself, a donation to the poor, alms,*” is noted by *Thayer* to be the Septuagint equivalent of the Hebrew “חֶסֶד [chesed] and צְדָקָה [tzedaqah].”⁸⁴ On the whole, in spite of some limitations (Acts 10:25-26), the God-fearer Cornelius may be said to embody the key thrusts of Deuteronomy 10:12: “Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”

10:34-38 Peter opens his words to those gathered, by somewhat repeating what he had been shown by God (Acts 10:28): “It’s become clear to me...that God really does show no favoritism. No: in every race, people who fear him and do what is right are acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34-35, Kingdom New Testament). This should not be taken as a kind of universalism, where all people are automatically going to be “saved,” presumably because they perform actions consistent with the ethos laid forth in Holy Scripture. What Peter emphasizes was that he once had a prejudice toward those of the nations—those who were immoral idol worshippers, and unclean—which has needed to be replaced by a favorable tenor of thinking well of those of the nations at large, who will perform acts of goodness and kindness consistent with the ethos laid forth by the God of Israel. Peter had once shown partiality, in violation of God’s Torah (Deuteronomy 10:17; cf. Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25), attitudes he has now repented of. Wall’s observations are useful to note, as he takes what Peter says and tries to apply them for more contemporary circumstances:

“Those believers who think themselves among God’s ‘elect’ are often inclined on this theological basis to think that God has not chosen anyone else who disagrees with their beliefs or customs. We pin labels on

⁸¹ Fernando, 322.

⁸² Witherington, *Acts*, 353.

⁸³ Gary Gilbert, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in Levine, Amy-Jill, and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, NRSV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 219.

⁸⁴ *Thayer*, 203.

The TLV renders Acts 10:31b with, “your prayer has been heard and your *tzedakah* remembered before God.”

our disagreeable opponents to disenfranchise them: they are ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative’ or ‘homosexual’ or ‘Jewish’ or ‘Lutheran’ or ‘female’ or ‘laity’ or ‘black’ or ‘divorced.’ Yet, what has become crystal clear to Peter is that to do so is not the prerogative of pious Israel or anyone else: It is God alone who judges the living and the dead (10:42). One of the most surprising features of Acts is the diversity of people God calls to be included among God’s people—all of whom are symbolized by uncircumcised Cornelius.”⁸⁵

One of the most difficult ideas that Peter had to clearly get beyond was somehow thinking that those of the nations at large, widely meant less to the Creator God, than His own Jewish people. Those of the nations can certainly be *dektos* (δεκτός), described by AMG to be “a verbal adj. from *déchomai* [δέχομαι]...to accept, decide favorably. Elected, acceptable, one of whom there is or has been a favorable decision of the will. Particularly used of the sacrifice although not to distinguish it from unacceptable sacrifices, but to specify it as the object of divine approval (Phil. 4:18; Sept.: Lev. 1:3, 4; Prov. 11:1; 14:35; Is. 56:7; Mal. 2:13).”⁸⁶ People should not be evaluated by their ethnic background—which Peter was guilty of doing—but rather by their character (Micah 6:8). Even people raised in paganism, can be of a generally good disposition.

Peter reports to those gathered, “He sent the message to the Israelites, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all” (Acts 10:36, HCSB). This Yeshua is notably referred to by Peter as “Lord of all” (*pantōn Kurios*, πάντων κύριος), which is Christologically important, given how it is a title for the God of Israel appearing in the Tanach:

“Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth [*Adon kol-ha’eretz*, אֲדֹנָי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ] is crossing over ahead of you into the Jordan” (Joshua 3:11).

“The angel replied to me, “These are the four spirits of heaven, going forth after standing before the Lord of all the earth [*Adon kol-ha’eretz*, אֲדֹנָי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ]” (Zechariah 6:5).

“The mountains melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth [*Adon kol-ha’eretz*, אֲדֹנָי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ]” (Psalm 97:5).

Peter continues, stating, “You know the message that has spread throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the immersion that John proclaimed. You know how God anointed *Yeshua* of *Natzeret* with the *Ruach ha-Kodesh* and power—how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with Him” (Acts 10:37-38, TLV). Apparently, enough was known factually of the figures of John the Immerser/Baptist and his activities, but most especially Yeshua of Nazareth, His teachings, and His miracles, by figures such as the Roman Cornelius. The emphasis on Yeshua being anointed has an Isaianic basis, and one which would be appealed to in Luke’s Gospel, his first volume:

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn *in Zion*, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified” (Isaiah 61:1-3).

“‘THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.’ And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:18-21).

⁸⁵ Wall, in *NIB*, 10:171.

⁸⁶ Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 404.

The scene of the Apostle Peter, one of Yeshua's original Jewish Disciples—declaring of Him to the Roman centurion Cornelius, his family, and his friends—was sure proof of what was stated about the Savior of Israel: “A light of revelation to the nations [Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; cf. 60:1-3]’ and the glory of Your people Israel” (Luke 2:32, TLV).

10:39-43 The Apostle Peter and his associates are stated to be “witnesses to all He did, both in the Judean countryside and in Jerusalem,” with it further acknowledged, “They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree” (Acts 10:39, TLV), such a “they” contextually having to be the local political and religious leaders. Following Yeshua's death, Peter communicates how following the Messiah's resurrection, that He appeared to select witnesses—notably those like himself—who would be used to speak of Him in the future regarding His salvation:

“[B]ut God raised Him up on the third day and caused Him to be visible—not to all the people, but to us, witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God. We ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. And He commanded us to proclaim to the people and to testify that He is the One ordained by God as Judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:40-42, TLV).

Yeshua being the Judge of the living and the dead is a theme deeply rooted in the Apostolic Writings (John 5:22, 27; 2 Timothy 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5). What Peter says in the narrative is, “All the prophets bear witness to him, that everyone who puts his trust in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43, CJB/CJSB), but it is most likely that there was some discussion which occurred regarding various prophetic passages from the Tanach. It has been suggested, at least, that prophecies spoken of by Peter included: Isaiah 33:24; 53:4-6, 11; Jeremiah 31:31; Daniel 9:24.⁸⁷

10:44-48 “As Peter was yet speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those hearing the Word. And the faithful of the circumcision were amazed, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the nations also” (Acts 10:44-45, LITV). By this time in the First Century C.E., various Greeks and Romans who had proselytized to Judaism (Acts 6:5) had been welcomed into the Messianic community, but this was not necessarily so of God-fearers or outright pagans. If there were some repeat of the events that had taken place previously at *Shavuot*/Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13), then “speaking with tongues and exalting God” (Acts 10:46) would have presumably involved “foreign tongues” (Phillips New Testament) or “languages” (LITV) which were discernible, declaring of the goodness of Israel's God and His intention to reach far beyond Judea.

Seeing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on those from the nations, “Peter answered, ‘Can anyone refuse water for these to be immersed, who have received the *Ruach ha-Kodesh* just as we did?’ So he commanded them to be immersed in the name of Messiah *Yeshua*. Then they asked him to stay for a few days” (Acts 10:47-48, TLV). Recognizing how Cornelius and his party had already heard of both John the Immerser/Baptist and Yeshua of Nazareth, Peter and the Jerusalem Believers would have had to maintain some kind of contact with them. However, as witnessed in Acts 11:1-18 and the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 following, the Apostle Peter being shown a vision from God about the inclusion of those from the nations within the Kingdom, was met with controversy and disdain from many of the Jewish Believers.

10:1-48 application Most frequently, today's Messianic handling of Peter's vision of Acts 10:1-48 has tended to teeter itself on Peter's statement of Acts 10:28b, about God cleansing human sinners, with not a huge amount of examination on the surrounding narrative or other statements made. This is not to say that Peter's evaluation of the vision of the sheet, “God has shown me that I should call no one unholy or unclean” (Acts 10:28b, TLV), with the vision pertaining to the cleansing of *just* human people in Israel's Messiah, is at all incorrect; it is to say that today's Messianic Believers—who will regularly interact with people who believe that Peter's vision abrogates the kosher dietary laws—need to be much better equipped to explain their position.

⁸⁷ Marshall, *Acts*, 193.

There are five different Messianic resources we will consider, each of which in interpreting Peter's vision does not conclude that it abolishes *kashrut*. Yet, what are some of the strengths and weaknesses that they possess, and how might the lengthy analysis we have just provided, interject some well-needed resolution on the details of Peter's vision, which may have been glossed over by others?

Commenting on Acts 10:17-19, David H. Stern draws the following conclusions in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*. This is a resource which is generally found in just about every Messianic congregation and Messianic home, as well as in the libraries of many Christian pastors and laypeople friendly to the Hebraic and Jewish Roots of the faith:

"...What could [the vision] possibly mean? Would God, who established his covenant with the Jewish people and gave them an eternal *Torah* at Mount Sinai, and who is himself unchangeable (Malachi 3:6), change his *Torah* to make unclean animals *kosher*? This is the apparent meaning, and many Christian commentators assert that this is in fact the meaning. But they ignore the plain statements of a few verses later which at last resolves Kefa's puzzlement, 'God has shown me not to call any person unclean or impure' (v. 28:&N). So the vision is about persons and not about food.

"God has not abrogated the Jewish dietary laws. Yeshua said, 'Don't think that I have come to do away with the *Torah*' (Mt 5:17-20&NN)...In Kefa's vision the sheet lowered from heaven contained all kinds of animals, wild beasts, reptiles and birds; yet I know of no Bible interpreters who insist that eagles, vultures, owls, bats, weasels, mice, lizards, crocodiles, chameleons, snakes, spiders and bugs must now be considered edible..."⁸⁸

Stern's remarks about Yeshua not abolishing, but fulfilling, the *Torah* (Matthew 5:17-19), are of course most useful, because a great deal of Jewish opposition to Yeshua's Messiahship will be focused on whether or not He kept Moses' Teaching. Stern's observations about few, if any, Bible interpreters, insisting that people eat various (endangered) birds of prey, reptiles, poisonous snakes and insects, and other vermin, should be well taken by the evangelical Christian reader of his commentary. At most, the unclean meats eaten by your average Christian (or Reform Jew for that matter) are going to be limited to pork and various forms of popular shellfish. Yet while Stern has correctly concluded that the vision was about people, not about meats, why would the cleansing of human people even be crafted in terms of unclean animals present?

A similar position is represented in the 1996 book *The Genesis Diet* by Gordon S. Tessler. While an overall excellent resource for introducing people, particularly evangelical Christians, to what the dietary laws of Scripture are all about—it is not what is communicated here that is necessarily the issue; it is the details that are left out:

"[T]he sheet on which there were unclean animals, birds, and creeping things, represented all the **unclean nations, the Gentiles**, to which the Jew should go and preach the gospel of the kingdom of God; for the blood of Jesus made a way for all men to become spiritually clean! The command in the vision to 'Rise, Peter, kill and eat,' was not to eat unclean things that are forbidden in the Scriptures, but to enter the heathen nations and the houses of the Gentiles, in order to present the gospel to all those who would receive it."⁸⁹

Tessler apparently takes the view that "kill and eat" (Acts 10:13) was actually akin to "go and preach the gospel." We should take issue at such a metaphorical extrapolation, and stay a little more true to the text, given Peter's revulsion (Acts 10:14).

In the book *Holy Cow!* by Hope Egan, originally released in 2005, the appendix study "Man Alive! There's More!" by D. Thomas Lancaster, briefly asserts that the correct interpretation of Peter's vision comes from Peter himself. While useful, and while we agree, what is stated does not really attempt to evaluate the details of Peter's vision or actions that much further:

"Peter explains the vision as thus: 'God has shown me that I should not call any *man* common or unclean.' (Acts 10:28, emphasis mine) That is, one should not designate one group of human beings as

⁸⁸ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995), pp 257-258.

⁸⁹ Gordon S. Tessler, *The Genesis Diet: The Biblical Foundation for Optimum Nutrition* (Raleigh, NC: Be Well Publications, 1996), 95.

ritually pure and another as ritually impure. The vision is not literally talking about eating or cannibalism. Instead, the clean and unclean animals were understood metaphorically to represent human beings.”⁹⁰

Aaron Eby’s 2012 book *Biblically Kosher* is to be commended among Messianic resources, in that it did actually try to address what the unclean animals in Peter’s vision of the sheet represented. Noting that Israel is described as a sheep in Jeremiah 50:17,⁹¹ similar extrapolations are referenced from the Midrash, with the attention of readers directed toward the common symbolism present in apocalyptic visions such as those of Daniel 7:

“As a prophetic parable, the animals on the sheet symbolically represent different nationalities of humans...For example, a *midrash* (an ancient Jewish commentary) notes that the list of pure and impure animals in Leviticus mentions four specific impure animals: the camel, the hyrax (or rock badger), the hare, and the pig (Leviticus 11:4-7). In this *midrash* [Leviticus Rabbah 13:5], the Jewish sages bring proof texts to explain that these four animals allude to the four nations that would ultimately rule as empires over Israel: Babylon, Persia/Media, Greece, and Rome. They make similar connections with other animals mentioned in Scripture, including snakes, scorpions, lions, and leopards. Israel is often compared to a sheep, based on Jeremiah [50:17]...[T]he components of [Peter’s] vision are typical of Jewish symbolism. It is a prophetic parable. Taking this vision at face value (as if God wanted Peter to eat reptiles) without interpreting the symbolism would be like reading Daniel 7 and believing it to be about literal monstrous beasts with multiple heads and horns.”⁹²

Ultimately, not enough is probed regarding the direction issued to Peter, “kill and eat,” which is where many contemporary Christians conclude that God must have been abrogating *kashrut* via the vision given to him.

In his 2009 publication *Why We Keep Torah: 10 Persistent Questions*, Tim Hegg,⁹³ while noting some truths about Jewish non-association with outsiders being present only in Rabbinical tradition and not properly the Torah itself (Acts 10:28a), holds to a precarious position on the details surrounding Peter’s vision. He concludes that the direction “kill/slaughter/sacrifice and eat” (Acts 10:13) communicated, was to test Peter’s fidelity to the Written Torah, and that it was used it as an object lesson in order to point out how considering those of the nations as common and unclean was not based in such a Written Torah. In Hegg’s estimation,

“In Peter’s vision, he...assesses the Torah commandments correctly, and refuses to transgress them. Furthermore...he is never rebuked for his refusal, and in the vision, he never eats from the sheet full of animals...Peter rightly determined that the sheet full of unclean animals presented an unfit scenario for fellowship. Yet this latter presumption was not based upon Torah, but upon rabbinic ruling. Therefore, Peter is corrected by the Divine voice. God was teaching Peter that in precisely the same manner in which he determined what was fit to eat and what was not (by applying the words of God’s Torah), so he should determine whether or not to fellowship with the Gentiles. He had used the word of God to determine what was fit to eat. Would he also use the word of God to determine his relationship with the Gentiles?...The heavenly voice...was not asking Peter to walk contrary to Torah, but rather to *apply* the Torah in this particular situation. Where in the Written Torah could he find solid grounds for entering the house of a Gentile? Where in the Written Torah could he find solid grounds for denying the request of Cornelius? Peter realized that there were not. God had not created the Gentile ‘unclean.’”⁹⁴

⁹⁰ D. Thomas Lancaster, “Man Alive! There’s More!” in Hope Egan, *Holy Cow! Does God Care About What We Eat?* (Shelbyville, TN: Heart of Wisdom, 2012), 111.

⁹¹ “Israel is a scattered flock, the lions have driven *them* away. The first one *who* devoured him was the king of Assyria, and this last one *who* has broken his bones is Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon” (Jeremiah 50:17).

⁹² Eby, pp 42-43.

⁹³ The material quoted in this 2009 work is noted as being adapted from Tim Hegg, *Fellow Heirs: Jews & Gentiles Together in the Family of God* (Littleton, CO: First Fruits of Zion, 2003), pp 65-72.

⁹⁴ Tim Hegg, *Why We Keep Torah: 10 Persistent Questions* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2009), 73.

While some of these Messianic explanations and observations, given for Peter's vision, are useful, there are details which too frequently get left out of a kosher-friendly evaluation of Acts 10:1-48, and where various detractors have, at times, exploited our weaknesses. To summarize some of the conclusions drawn from our preceding examination of Acts 10:1-48:

1. The terminology for "four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air" (Acts 10:12), finds its closest Biblical parallels in descriptions of pagan idolatry. Romans 1:23 states that the nations at large, "exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." The idolatry of Ezekiel 8:10 is presented in terms of the Prophet being shown "every form of creeping things and beasts *and* detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel...carved on the wall all around." Rather than contemporary Christians thinking that on the sheet was pulled pork or oysters-on-the-half-shell, for some Sunday afternoon picnic following church—the creatures Peter was shown would have more likely featured those worshipped by all the pagan powers which had oppressed Ancient Israel in the Tanach, and the Jewish people of the Second Temple period. With "common" or defiled animals also mentioned, pagan rituals involving technically-clean animals as well, should not be overlooked.
2. The direction to Peter to "slay/slaughter and eat" (Acts 10:13, YLT, CJB/CJSB), had cultic dimensions to it, witnessed in uses of the verb *thuō* elsewhere in Acts, and in the Apocrypha. Peter's revulsion, to slaughtering or sacrificing unclean animals, need not be limited to the clean and unclean elements of kosher, but how it could have further involved participating in pagan rites. Such pagan rites are seen later in Lystra, when the local priest wanted to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas as Hermes and Zeus (Acts 14:13, 18), which also involved significant revelry. During the Maccabean crisis, the sacrifice of pigs and common animals not only involved abominations of pagan worship (1 Maccabees 1:47-48), but also the turning of the Temple Mount into a haven of prostitution (2 Maccabees 6:4). It is appropriately thought that the direction to Peter to "slay/slaughter and eat" would have involved him effectively joining in to such revelry and debauchery, as much as it would have seen him violating the kosher dietary laws. And notably, Peter was not rebuked for proceeding to not slaughter/sacrifice, even in a mental condition of trance, by the voice.
3. When Peter is told, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common" (Acts 10:15, RSV), *ekatharisen* is based on a Septuagint term which appears in describing the purification of people (i.e., Leviticus 13:6, 13, 17). So, given Peter's later explanation of "God has shown me that I should not call any human being common or unclean" (Acts 10:28b, PME), it should be rightly concluded that God cleansing idolatrous human sinners, is indeed in view, especially given Peter's immediate interactions in welcoming the party sent by Cornelius and eating with them (Acts 10:18-23).
4. Peter was welcomed into the home of the Roman centurion Cornelius, who was notably a pious God-fearer (Acts 10:1-4, 30-31), respected by much of the Jewish community (Acts 10:22), and who in all likelihood observed some form of kosher. Yet, Cornelius' regular associations with the Roman government, given his military position (even if retired), would have caused Peter to think that Cornelius was defiled and engaged in some form of pagan worship. Would Peter going to meet Cornelius result in him joining into pagan feasting and revelry? According to God, all people are to be viewed as clean, i.e., forgiven, as a definite consequence of the sacrifice of Israel's Messiah, Yeshua. What actually happened upon Peter's arrival was the exact opposite of what he probably expected, as the Holy Spirit was poured out (Acts 10:44-48), all were saved, and there was somewhat of a repeat of the events of *Shavuot*/Pentecost (Acts 2).

In all discussions surrounding the topic of the Torah's dietary laws between today's Messianic Believers, and their evangelical Christian brothers and sisters, what Peter's vision of Acts 10:1-48 truly

represents and communicates, will definitely be at much of the center of talk. We should all agree that Peter's vision was most imperative, so that he could cast aside any ungodly prejudices he carried regarding those of the nations (likely picked up again in the scene of Galatians 2:11-14).⁹⁵ Likewise, we should all agree that Peter socializing with Greeks and Romans, whom God had declared clean, did not mean joining into pagan feasting and revelry. Much will come down to whether or not Christian readers will be open to the creatures on the sheet being associated with pagan worship, the cleansing being exclusively concerned with human beings, and Peter's own interpretation having the weight it deserves. Much will also come down to Messianic people having a broader scope of answers to other passages in the Apostolic Scriptures, where eating unclean things is presumably permitted (i.e., Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8; 10:14-22), and evaluating these places for their original setting and intention, and how much or how little that is actually the case.

⁹⁵ Consult the entry for Galatians 2:11-14 in the *Messianic Kosher Helper*.