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Peter's Vision

10: 9-23a

38-42 AD

Peter's vision DIG: How did God prepare Peter to take the gospel to Cornelius? Why was this necessary? Look at Leviticus 11:4-7, 13-19 and 29-30. With these restrictions, how do you think Peter must have felt when he heard the voice telling him to eat those animals? Why was it repeated three times? What would the new principle given in verse 15 mean to him? How does it fit in the context of Cornelius? What might Peter be feeling when the men sent by Cornelius showed up? How might the example of Yeshua in Luke 7:1-10 also encourage Peter to listen to these men?

REFLECT: What are some principles or beliefs you have held onto that have blocked your ability to reach out to people "different" from you? How would others around you feel if you moved beyond those limits? What new relationships has God given you recently? How has He brought these people into your life? How have you influenced each other? Has God opened your mind about some form of prejudice in your life? How has he led you to correct these tendencies? What might happen if you followed through on them?

While **Peter** was at **Joppa**, events were moving towards a new stage in **his** ministry as **God** prepared for the entry of **Gentiles** into the Messianic Community/Church (**to see link click Ah - Jewish Good News for Gentiles**). Two events led up to the decisive encounter. First, a Roman **centurion**, a **God-fearer**, was praying when **an angel** appeared and told **him** to **send men to Joppa and call for Simon, also named Peter (10:6)**, and the second, **Peter** was prepared to receive these **men** by **a vision** in which **he** was shown that **he** was no longer to distinguish between ritually **clean** and **unclean foods** (and therefore by implication, that **he** could feel free to eat with **Gentiles**).

The sheer length of this story (**10:1-48**) and the way in which it is in effect told twice (see the summary in **15:7-9**) indicate the very great importance that **Luke** attaches to it in the context of **Acts** as a whole. It deals with the decisive issue in the history of the early

Messianic Community, namely the recognition that the gospel is for **the Gentiles** as well as for **the Jews**. And it makes clear that this was not merely a human decision, but that it was the result of **God's** clear guidance.²¹⁸

Meanwhile, back at **Joppa**, **ADONAI** was preparing **Peter** for **his** monumental encounter. The primary question would be how **God** would deal with **him**. How would **He** succeed in breaking down **Peter's** deep-seated racial intolerance? The principle subject of this chapter is not so much the conversion of **Cornelius**, as it is the conversion of **Peter**.²¹⁹

The next day at Simon the tanner's house, as the messengers sent by Cornelius (see [Be - The Centurion's Vision](#)) were traveling and approaching the city, Peter went up to the rooftop to pray, at about noon, or the sixth hour (10:9). The group of men appear to have set off for **Caesarea** immediately for **them** to reach **Joppa** about **noontime (10:8)**. **A gemara (a rabbinical analysis of and commentary on the Oral Law) on Shabbat distinguishes two times for mincha (afternoon prayer) - the major, or early afternoon prayer time, which was recited around 12:30 pm, and the minor, or late afternoon prayer time, was recited sometime between 3:30 pm and sunset (Shab. 9b).**²²⁰ According to this view, **Peter** was **praying** an **early mincha**. **The rooftops** of their houses were flat, sloping slightly away from the center. **They** were used for a variety of purposes by day, including **prayer**. **He became very hungry and wanted to eat** something. Noon was not the usual meal time. The custom was to have a light mid-morning meal, and a more substantial meal in the late afternoon. If **Peter** had missed **his** mid-morning breakfast, it would explain **his** drowsiness all the more. **However, while his** hosts **were preparing** for the late afternoon meal, there was an unexpected delay, **he had a vision (10:10)**. As **ADONAI** was speaking to **Cornelius**, and as **Cornelius** had sent **messengers** to call for **Peter**, **ADONAI** was also speaking to **Peter**.²²¹ **He was praying. He was hungry.**



He saw the heavens opened, and something like a great sheet coming down, lowered by its four corners to the earth. So Luke is using figurative language here. It wasn't a great sheet, but it was *like* a great sheet. The TaNaKh frequently uses the phrase the four corners to symbolize the whole world (Job 37:3; Isaiah 11:12; Revelation 7:1). Apparently, because he was hungry, Peter's vision involved eating. In the vision (Greek: *ekstasis*) were all sorts of four-footed animals and insects and birds of the air (10:11-12). Leviticus 11 specifies that only those four-footed animals that chew the cud and have split hooves are *kosher* (*fit*) for Jewish people to eat. Peter's vision did not contradict any of the mitzvot regarding kosher eating; it corrected the rabbinic prohibition regarding eating with Gentiles.²²²

A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat" (10:13). The rabbis taught that when God speaks in heaven, "the daughter of His voice" the *bat-kol*, or an echo, is heard on earth. After the last of the prophets, it was considered that God provided the *bat-kol* to continue to give guidance to the people (Tractate Yoma 9b). How does ADONAI speak to us? He can speak to us through our circumstances, through mature believers, certainly through His Word. Yet, Ha'Shem can also speak through a still small voice (First Kings 19:11-13). The prohibition against eating unclean animals constitutes a central Jewish belief, and devout Jews frequently chose martyrdom rather than eating forbidden food. Many in Isra'el were fully resolved and confirmed themselves not to eat any unclean thing. So, they chose rather to die, that they might not be defiled with meats, and that they might not profane the holy Covenant, so then they died (First Maccabees 1:62-63; also see Ezekiel 4:13-14; Daniel 1:8). As any pious Jew would have been, Peter was horrified. He was hungry, but not *that* hungry to eat non-kosher food, so he immediately protested.

Peter protested immediately: Certainly not, For never have I eaten anything unholy or unclean (10:14). He had zealously kept the dietary commandments all his life, believing that YHWH required eating *kosher*. His strict adherence reflected his devotion to pleasing ADONAI. Yet, he had put God in a box. How could Peter throw that lifelong habit away? What was he to think? It is important to understand that Yeshua was not abolishing the dietary commandments in the Torah. That would not be consistent with His own words: I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah - not until everything that must happen has happened (Matthew 5:18; Luke 16:17 CJB). In the Dispensation of Grace, we have freedom in Messiah. Today there are many Messianic Jews and Gentiles who choose to keep kosher. There is nothing right or wrong about doing so. It is merely a matter of personal choice.

Peter resisted the message so strongly that *the bat-kol* came to him, a second time saying: **What God has made clean (kosher), you, you Peter, must not consider unholy.** God had made all **animals kosher** fulfillment of the statement of **Yeshua** found in **Mark 7:18-19**. And because the context is eating **food** it shows that **the vision** included both **food** as well as its application of Gentiles later in the passage. **ADONAI** has made Gentiles **clean, but** also in the immediate context, **He** has made *unkosher animals kosher*.

Now in **Matthew 15:15-20**, **Messiah** predicted that **He** was going to make all meats **clean**. **Yet** in the **Matthew** account this was particularly addressed to **Peter** at that time, and now **Peter** must learn the lesson once again. All meats are now **clean**. In other words: **What God has made clean (kosher), you, you Peter, must not consider unholy.** The dietary regulations were so ingrained into **his** life that **he** still could not comprehend what was happening. Those **unclean animals** would cause contamination. **This happened three times** for emphasis, **and suddenly the sheet was immediately taken up to heaven (10:15-16)**. At this point, **Peter** believed that **God** was speaking to **him** only about **food**. But this was only the first part of an analogy that **the Lord** would apply to **the Gentiles** shortly. Why was **ADONAI** making those changes at that time? Because **the Gentiles** were coming into the Church, **breaking down the wall of division** as symbolized in the Temple (**Ephesians 2:14**).

As **Peter** was coming out of **his vision**, he didn't have it all figured out. **He was puzzled about what he had seen might mean.** Just then, **the men sent by Cornelius found the tanner's house and appeared before the gate.** The arrival of **the men** at this point is clearly providential. **They called out and began to ask whether Simon, also called Peter, was staying in this place as a guest (10:17-18).** **Peter** did not hear **them** because **he** was still on the roof of **the house** puzzling about **his vision, his puzzling,** however, was short-lived.

But while Peter was mulling over the vision, the Spirit of God spoke directly to him and said: Look here, three men are looking for you. So get up at once, go downstairs, and go with those men without hesitating, because I Myself have sent them (10:19-20). At this point, **God** had not told **Peter** that **his** visitors were **Gentiles!** **God** used **an angel, the bat-kol, the Ruach ha-Kodesh,** and two **visions**, one to **Cornelius** and one to **Peter** so that nothing was left to chance. Here was the situation that **the vision** was meant to prepare **Peter**.

As had **Cornelius**, **Peter** obeyed, although **he** probably still didn't fully understand what was happening. Nevertheless, **he went down to the men.** **He** was probably shocked when

he opened the door and saw **three Gentiles** standing there! Nevertheless, **he** said: **Here, I'm the one you're looking for. What is the reason for your coming?** Because of what **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** had told **him**, **he** was quite willing to listen to **them**. Nevertheless, **their** reply must have astonished **Peter**, "**Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well-spoken of by all the Jewish people, was directed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear a message from you**" (10:21-22). This was new information for the reader, **Luke** having saved it up for this point to add to the literary and dramatic effect of the story. **Peter** began to see the ramifications of **his vision**. **He** was to witness to this **centurion** whom **Ha'Shem** had directed to **him**.

Notice how perfectly **YHVH** coordinated the entire episode. For while **Peter** was **praying** and seeing **his vision**, **the men from Cornelius** were approaching **Joppa (10:9-16)**; while **Peter** was **puzzled about what he had seen might mean**, **they** arrived at **the house (10:17-18)**; while **Peter** was **mulling over the meaning of the vision**, **the Ruach** told **him** that **the men** were **looking for him** and **he** must **not hesitate to go with them (10:19-20)**; and when **Peter** went down and introduced **himself** to **them**, **they** explained to **him** the purpose of **their** visit (10:21-23).²²³

Because it was too late for **them** to return to **Caesarea** that day, **Peter** invited **them** to spend the night as **his guests (10:23a)**. Under normal circumstances, a truly scrupulous **Jew** would never invite a **Gentile** to stay with **him**. **Jubilees 22:16** reads, "**Separate yourself from the [Gentile] nations, and do not eat with them. And do nothing according to their works. Do not associate with them, for their works are unclean. And all their ways are a pollution and an abomination and uncleanness.**" So, the fact that **Peter** invited **them** to spend the night as **his guests** hints that **he** was beginning to understand the message of **the vision**. By entertaining those **Gentile guests**, **Peter** went against the customs and traditions of **Isra'el**, **but** not against the Word of **God**. Possibly, at that very moment, **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** flooded **Peter's** heart with an understanding that although the **TaNaKh** said that **His people** were not to become like **their** pagan neighbors, it also said that **YHVH** wanted **His people** to be a light to **their** neighbors who didn't know **Him**.²²⁴ Through the descendants of **Abraham**, **all the families of the earth [would] be blessed (Genesis 12:3b)**. There may also be some intended irony here, since **Peter** had earlier protested how meticulous **he** was about **food** while staying in **the house** of a **tanner** who in trade made **him** **unclean**!

A closer look at visions and dreams: **God** uses a variety of ways to communicate with humans such as through **visions**, signs and wonders, angels, Biblical shadows and patterns, and many others. One of the most common means used in the Bible to convey **His** will is

through **dreams** (**Numbers 12:6**). The word **dreams** and its singular version occur the most times in the book of **Genesis** (33 total occurrences) followed by the book of **Dani'el** (27 times). Both words occur only eight times in the entire Covenant. Interestingly, only **Joseph** (**Genesis 40:12, 13, 18, 19, 41:25-32**) and **Dani'el** (**Dani'el 2:16-23, 28-45, 4:16-24**) were blessed with the ability to correctly interpret **dreams**.

Dreams occur when a person sleeps while **visions** usually happen during waking hours. Scripture, however, is sometimes not fully clear whether **God** is communicating with someone via a **dream** or a **vision**. For example, **Dani'el 2:19** states that a secret was revealed to the prophet in a 'night **vision**.' It is unknown whether **Dani'el** was or was not sleeping when the event occurred. Another example of **dreams** is found in **Dani'el 7:1-2**. Did **Dani'el** see **visions** just before **he** fell asleep and then experienced **dreams**, both of which came from **God**? On the other hand, while **he** was dreaming, did **he** see vivid **visions** of four great world empires that **he** then wrote down when **he** awoke? The Bible seems to indicate **visions** can happen both during waking and sleeping hours.

The **dreams** of several people in the TaNaKh are recorded in Scripture. They include **Ha'Shem** telling King Abimelech in a **dream** that Sarah was a married woman (**Genesis 20:3**), **Jacob** had a **dream** at Bethel where he saw a **stairway** with **the angel of God** going up and down on it (**Genesis 28:12-15**), and twenty years later, **ADONAI** spoke to **him** in a **dream**, saying: **Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you** (**Genesis 31:11-12**); **Laban** had a **dream** warning **him** not to harm **Jacob** (**Genesis 31:24**), **Joseph** had **dreams** of **his brothers bowing down** to **him** and **his** whole family doing the same (**Genesis 37:5, 9**); and **the cupbearer** and **baker** both had **dreams** in prison with **Joseph** (**40:1-19**); **God** spoke to a **man** through a **dream** that the Israelites would defeat **the Midianites** (**Judges 7:13-15**); **Job** had **dreams** and **visions** from **ADONAI** (**Job 7:14**); and **King Saul** had a terrifying **vision** of the prophet Samuel described to **him** by the medium at Endor (**First Samuel 28:6-19**).

Still others whom the Bible records as having special **dreams** include Egypt's **Pharaoh** dreaming of **seven good-looking cows and seven ugly emancipated cows** (**Genesis 41:1 -7, 15-32**); **the LORD** appeared to **Solomon** in a **dream** to allow **the king** to ask for anything **he** wanted (**First Kings 3:5**); in the year of King Uzziah's death, **Isaiah** saw a **vision** of **ADONAI** sitting on **His** throne (**Isaiah 6:1-2**); **Ezeki'el** had a **vision** of the throne of **YHVH** (**Ezeki'el 1:1-28**), **he** also had a **vision** of the Temple in Jerusalem (**Ezeki'el 8:1-18**), a **vision** of the Millennial Temple (**Ezeki'el Chapters 40-48**), and a **vision** of the return of **the Sh'khinah** glory returning to it (**Ezeki'el 43:3**); **King Nebuchadnezzar** had

a **dream** of a huge statue representing the **four** kingdoms of the end times (**Dani'el 2:3-4**) and **Dani'el** had a **dream** about **four beasts** that represents those same four kingdoms (**Dani'el 7:1-8**), and a **vision** of a **ram** and a **goat** depicting the rise of the antichrist (**Dani'el 8:1-12**).

In the B'rit Chadashah, **the magi** who came to worship **Jesus** **dreamt** of being told not to visit Herod the Great on **their** way back home (**Matthew 2:12**). The details of what **Joseph**, **Jesus'** stepfather, **dreamt** on three different occasions is recorded in the New Testament (**Matthew 1:20-23, 2:12-13, 19-21**). And in a fourth **dream**, where **he** is warned not to live in Judea, is also referenced (**Matthew 2:22**). **Pilate's wife** had a disturbing **dream** about **her husband's** judgment of **Christ** (**Matthew 27:19**). **The Lord** told **Ananias** in a **vision** to go find Sha'ul of Tarsus and lay hands on him, resulting in Sha'ul regaining his sight (**Acts 9:10-17**), and **Paul** saw **Messiah** four times in **visions** (**Acts 9:3-6, 16:10, 18:9-10, 22:17-18**). Not only that, both **Paul** (**Second Corinthians 12:4**) and **John** (**Revelation 4:1-11**) took a trip to heaven in a **vision**.

But, some **dreams** or **visions** were **false**. **Isaiah** said: **Say to the seers, "Do not see," and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us and speak smooth words. [You] prophesy illusions. "Get out of the way! Turn away from the path! Let's hear no more about the Holy One of Isra'el (Isaiah 30:10)!**

Jeremiah said the same thing: **Thus say ADONAI-Tzva'ot, "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into illusion, speaking a vision of their own heart and not out of the mouth of ADONAI (Jeremiah 23:16).**

And **Ezeki'el** also warned against the **false prophets**, **"They have prophesied emptiness and predicted falsely, who say, 'ADONAI says.' ADONAI has not sent them, yet they hope for confirmation of their word. Did you not see an empty vision and speak a false omen, when you say, 'ADONAI says' - when I have not said" (Ezeki'el 13:6-7).**

Today, ADONAI speaks to us with a soft whisper of His voice (First Kings 9:11-12), circumstances in our lives, the counsel of mature believers, and, of course, the completed canon of Scripture, the Word of God.

*Father, I take **Your** clear Word as a warning when **You** say: **If, however, you fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well. But if you show favoritism, you are committing sin and are convicted by the Torah as transgressors (James 2:8-9). I confess my sin of letting tastes and preference***

*control my behavior toward other people equally created in Your image. May I not just realize my fault; may I act on the change in attitude.*²²⁵