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Luke and Paul on Food Rendered Common by Contact with Gentiles
Acts 10:10-28; Galatians 2:11-15; Romans 14:1-4

Luke and Paul on food rendered common by contact with Gentiles DIG: Is there a biblical mitzvah forbidding Jews from mingling with and even eating with Gentiles? What do orthodox Jews believe about food prepared by a Gentile or without Jewish supervision today?

REFLECT: Who is "ritually unclean" in your neighborhood? Have you ever had a "Peter's sheet" moment with another race? Do you avoid eating certain foods for "religious" reasons? How willing are you to oppose the stereotypes of your culture to reach others for Messiah?

There is no biblical mitzvah forbidding Jews from mingling with or eating with Gentiles.

One of the rigors of First Century Temple Judaism was a prohibition from eating in the homes of Gentiles, or from eating food that was prepared by them. Though we have little information on the exact nature of the prohibition, it is largely inferred from **Acts 10:28**, **Galatians 2:12** and **Romans 14:2**. **It seems to also be reflected in the Mishnah where we read, "The dwelling places of Gentiles are unclean" (m.Oholot 18:7).**

The Torah of Moshe contains no such mitzvah. There is no biblical mitzvah forbidding **Jews** from mingling with or even **eating** with **Gentiles**. There are prohibitions in regard to **eating idol** sacrifices **(Exodus 34:15)**, but **YHVH** never made a mitzvah stating that one may not enter **a Gentile** home or **eat** with **a Gentile**. **Those laws and traditions came from the Oral Law** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click Ei – Oral Law**) **as rabbis tried to build a fence around the Torah to protect Jews from the possibility of ritual contamination. One of the matters of concern to the Sages in the Mishnah was the very real possibility that Gentile homes contained corpses buried beneath them or within them.** Entering such a structure would,

indeed, be ritually **unclean** according to the Torah **(Leviticus 118 and 43)**. **Foods** stored in a home where **a dead body** was kept would also be contaminated **(Numbers 19:14-15). In order to preclude such possibilities, the Sages of the First Century instituted a prohibition against eating with Gentiles. Even though there was a Court of the Gentiles in the Temple courtyard, according to the mainstream Jewish interpretation (in First Century Isra'el) of the mitzvot of clean and unclean, Gentiles were classified as unclean and to be avoided in their dwelling places and socially.** Even worse was the likelihood that **Gentile food** had been offered, in part, to **an idol**. For all the above reasons, entering **Gentile** homes was considered contaminating, and **eating their food** was not a possibility.



But things changed after **Peter's vision of something like a great sheet** coming down from **the heavens** with **all sorts of ritually unclean animals** on it (see the commentary on **Acts Bf – Peter's Vision**). **A voice came to him** saying: **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 today? **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; Dani'el 1:8).** As any pious **Jew** would have been, **Peter** was horrified. **He** was hungry, **but** not *that* hungry to **eat** *non-kosher* **food**.

Peter protested immediately: **Certainly not, for never have I eaten anything unholy or unclean (Acts 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).** However, in the Dispensation of Grace, we have freedom in **Messiah** to eat kosher or not. Today there are many Messianic **Jews** and Gentiles who choose to eat 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* fulfilling 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 (Acts 10:15-16).** At this point, **Peter** believed that **God** was speaking to **him** only about **food**. But that

was only the first part of an analogy that **the Lord** would apply to **Gentiles** shortly. Why was **ADONAI** making those changes at that time? Because **the Gentiles** were coming into the Church **(Ephesians 2:14),** and **Peter** had the keys to the Kingdom (see **The Life of Christ Fx – On This Rock I Will Build My Church**).

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 (Acts 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 (Acts 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" (Acts 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**.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for the greatness of **Your** love that willingly opened the door of heaven not only Jews, but to all who love and profess **You** as their **Savior and Lord. For you are all children of God through trusting in***

Messiah Yeshua. For all of you who were immersed in Messiah have clothed yourselves with Messiah. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female – for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua (Galatians 3:26-28).

*How great it is that neither **Jews** nor **Gentiles** come in as second class citizens of **Your** Kingdom; but rather **You** have created a new Body made up of both **Jews** and **Gentiles**. **For through Him we both have access to the Father by the same Ruach. So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. You have been built on the foundation made up of the emissaries and prophets, with Messiah Yeshua Himself being the cornerstone. In Him the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple for the Lord. In Him, you also are being built together into God's dwelling place in the Ruach (Ephesians 2:18-22).** Praise **Your** infinite and enduring love . We look forward to praising **Your Great Name** throughout eternity! In the holy name of **Yeshua** and by the power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

Notice how perfectly **YHVH** coordinated the entire episode. For while **Peter** was **praying** and seeing **his vision**, **the men from Cornelius** were approaching **Joppa (Acts 10:9-16)**; while **Peter** was **puzzled about what he had seen might mean, they** arrived at **the house (Acts 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 (Acts 10:19-20)**; and when **Peter** went down and introduced **himself** to **them**, **they** explained to **him** the purpose of **their** visit **(Acts 10:21-22)**.[185]

Because it was too late for **them** to return to **Caesarea** that day, **Peter invited them** to spend the night as **his guests (Acts 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**.[186] Through the descendants of **Abraham, *all* the families of the earth [would] be blessed (Genesis 12:3b).** In the final analysis, **Peter** understood that **God had shown him not to call any person common or unclean (Acts 10:28).**

Paul reported that **Simon Peter** was still not completely settled on the issue of whether or not it was permissible to **eat** with **Gentiles** (see the commentary on **Galatians Bb – The Antioch Incident: How Can You Force Jews to Live Like Gentiles**). **The Jewish customs** referred to by **Paul** were **rabbinic traditions forbidding Jews to eat with Gentiles.** In the home-setting of the early congregations where the breaking of bread together was a regular function of Shabbat, such scruples meant complete separation between **Jewish** and **Gentile** believers. **Peter** "lived like a **Gentile**" in as much as **he** feely fellowshipped with, and **ate** with, **Gentiles** after **his** vision of **the sheet**. But under the influence of **certain men from James, Peter** apparently had second thoughts.

It is a similar question of table-fellowship between **Jewish** and **Gentile** believers that lies behind the Torah questions of **Romans 14** (see the commentary on **Romans Dg – Torah Questions**). The man of weak faith who eats only vegetables is most likely **the Jew** who will not eat meat or wine (though it is technically kosher) from a **Gentile** table. And the man of strong faith who eats everything is **the Jew** who has accepted the ruling that kosher foods are not made common (and therefore forbidden) simply because they have been prepared by **Gentiles** or because they were in the possession of **Gentiles**. To this day, **the halachah of orthodox Judaism holds that food prepared by a Gentile without Jewish supervision is not kosher. Wine made without Jewish supervision is likewise considered forbidden on the basis that some of it might have been poured out as a libation to an idol.** But that's next (see **Bs – Luke and Paul on Food Rendered Ritually Unclean by Idols**).[187]