

## The Acts and Torah of the Apostles Study Guide

### Chapter 10

We have reached a key point in the task of living out Yeshua's command to make disciples of people from all nations, not just their fellow Jews. In order for that to happen, there was one major obstacle that had to be overcome—the common perception that Gentiles were considered to be unclean in the same way that disease, exposure to death and certain foods made you unclean, even though that belief was not supported by Scripture. At the end of chapter 9, we were given a clue that God was about to overcome that perception when Peter went to stay at the home of Simon the tanner, whose profession that involved working with dead animals made him ceremonially unclean.

#### 10:1-8

The scene shifts up the coast to Caesarea, to the home of Cornelius who was a God-Fearer, meaning he was a Gentile who believed in the God of Israel, but had not gone through formal conversion to Judaism. Not only did his prayers reach God, but his alms (charitable giving) “ascended as a memorial before God.” Thus Cornelius was an exemplary person to represent God's pleasure in reaching the Gentiles with the Good News of Salvation in Yeshua.

#### 10:9-23

Meanwhile, Peter went to the rooftop specifically at the 6th hour (noon) to pray. Just as we have seen twice previously, the Apostles were still abiding by the manner of prayer that was the protocol of the day. In other words, they did not abandon their Jewish cultural and religious heritage.

While Peter was there, he had a vision of all kinds of animals on a sheet, which means it included those that were unclean or not kosher (“fit”) to eat. He was told by a (heavenly) voice to kill and eat those animals. But he refused to do so because he had always obeyed God's commandments in the Torah not to eat such animals. The voice then declared, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy” (v. 15). And to make sure that he saw and heard what was being communicated, the vision was done a total of three times.

Naturally Peter was perplexed by this vision and was no doubt trying to figure it out (v. 17). It is reasonable to think that he was wondering if God had suddenly changed His mind about the dietary laws and they were no longer valid. But he also had no specific evidence indicating that was the case. The representatives of Cornelius found Peter and, together, they all went to Caesarea.

#### 10:24-29

Upon arrival, Cornelius treated Peter in a worshipful manner, but Peter made it clear that he should be treated like any other man (v. 25-26). This occurrence illustrates the importance of not putting leaders on a pedestal and leaders should not let other people treat them like stars. Pride is a sin that can easily find its way into the lives of believers and Peter's example is a reminder that we all need to resist it.

Peter acknowledges that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with a Gentile (v. 28). The key to the discussion that follows is understanding Peter's use of the word “unlawful” and what that

has to do with the two visions experienced in this chapter. Is it the Law found in the Torah or something else?

In order to understand the nature of ritual cleanness and the dietary laws we have to consider what is written in the Torah. Leviticus 20:22-26 shows that the issue of holiness is based on separation, and that there are things in this world that are pure and acceptable to God, and things that are not. He desires that we maintain true holiness in our lives, which requires separation from those things that are not acceptable to Him. In this passage God identified nations that had practices that He abhors, and thus Israel, His chosen people, were called not to act like them. Thus God established a manner in which they could demonstrate their commitment to holiness, By refraining from eating certain foods—keeping kosher—they could show their acceptance of His authority, based on His terms for what is acceptable and unacceptable.

But God’s warning was about not acting like other ungodly nations. It was not about associating with Gentiles in any way by being in the same home or eating a meal together. Yet that is how this aspect of the Torah evolved over time as the elders of Israel, which consisted mainly of the Pharisees and Sadducees during the second temple period, reached the conclusion that Gentiles as a whole were unclean and thus had to be avoided entirely, even though the Torah itself never made that prohibition. They justified this application on God’s warnings in the Torah about not acting like other ungodly nations. So the elders of Israel tightened that principle and codified it with additional restrictions, that prohibited Jews from associating with Gentiles in any way, including being in the same home or eating a meal together. It was all summed up in the conclusion that Gentiles were unclean in the exact same way that pigs and lobsters and snakes were unclean, and thus had to be avoided entirely. So when Peter said in verse 28 that it was “unlawful” for him to associate with a Gentile, it was a reference to the rabbinic law, not the actual Law or Torah of Moses.

And this illustrates the fact that it is easy to develop false doctrines when you rationalize things beyond the actual commandments of God. And you can also see how Peter continued to be influenced by this rabbinic error even after being genuinely redeemed and mature in His faith.

This passage should lead us to ask ourselves if there are any things that have crept into our walk of faith that are man-made traditions, not the pure message of God. It can be a very painful experience for us personally because we hold on to traditions tightly and we value them. But the example of Peter is that when we are accurately informed of the actual truth of the matter, we ought to release them and carry on in faithfulness to what we learn to be true. And so that is what Peter does by declaring “God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean” (v. 28).

### 10:30-48

Cornelius retold his vision to Peter in verses 30-33. Peter responded by showing how clearly he then understood what God was communicating in this complex process, namely that all people are welcome to God if they fear Him, just like Cornelius (vv. 34-35).

In light of the context of this chapter, we can see that Peter’s vision was not actually dealing with the dietary laws of the Torah. He understood that all people are welcome to God if they fear Him. So, we can see that the passage is not communicating a principle regarding food, but it is about people. Moreover, there is no evidence in Scripture of any believers, including Peter, ever ceasing to eat in a kosher manner. In fact, at the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, the leaders ruled that Gentiles needed to abide by some basic kosher principles so that they

could fellowship and share meals with Jewish believers, which means they continued to keep kosher.

So this passage is consistent with Yeshua's declaration: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill" (Mat 5:17).

This passage is a reminder to us of the importance of reading God's Word in context, and not drawing conclusions that are based on human traditions. In this case, the passage is not communicating a principle regarding food; it is about the importance of reaching out to people who are different than us and even considered to be taboo.

- v. 36-43 – Once Peter had gained this new understanding, he immediately accepted that calling by giving a testimony about the person, works and message of Yeshua, culminating with a clear statement that whoever "believes in Him has received the forgiveness of sins."
- v. 44 – It is apparent that everyone who heard that message for the first time believed it and the Holy Spirit came upon them, which is an indication they were saved at that moment. This would include Cornelius. This act has significance because even though he was called a God-fearer and one who prayed and gave alms at the beginning of this chapter, his righteous works were insufficient to save him. If it was possible to be saved by being religious or doing good works, Peter would not have been needed to visit his home and preach the Good News. So Cornelius became a member of the believing community like anyone else—through faith in Yeshua.
- v. 45-48 – Then for the first time, we read about Gentiles participating in the full blessings and responsibilities of being disciples of Yeshua, including receiving the Holy Spirit, being baptized and participating in the fellowship of the believing community.