

## Acts 10:9-20

From the book "Take Hold" by Ariel Berkowitz

This passage, like the previous one from Mark, is often used to demonstrate that the dietary teachings of the Torah have now been cast aside, i.e., believers in Yeshua have no responsibility to live by them. We do not agree with the traditional Christian understanding. Rather, we hope to demonstrate that the dietary teachings are not even in question in this passage.

First, note that Peter is put into a trance whereupon God gives him a vision. It is obvious that God is intending to teach him something very important. But the context implies that the instruction that he is about to receive is intended for his immediate situation. The vision, as the text indicates, is one where a cloth is spread out with all sorts of unkosher foods on it, somewhat like a picnic blanket coming down from heaven. A voice from heaven accompanied the food, bidding Peter to eat it. In the vision, Peter responded that he had never eaten such food and that he was not about to do it now!

Fortunately, the Spirit of God provides for us the correct understanding of the vision Peter received. Verse 19 tells us that Peter took a while thinking about the vision. He did not understand what it meant. Surely, if it was really intended to teach him to change his eating habits, this perceptive man of God would have realized it. But the Spirit of God had something else in mind. Just as Peter was contemplating that meaning of the vision, we read in verse 19, "The Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you. But arise, go downstairs, and accompany them without misgivings; for I have sent them Myself.'"

The Spirit of God interrupted Peter's attempts to figure out the vision by giving him the correct interpretation. While Peter may have been thinking that the vision was about his eating habits, in reality, the vision was about people! Up to this point in his life, Peter - Like so many Jewish people - was accustomed to avoiding any table fellowship with gentiles. Non-Jews were, more or less, treated as if they were unkosher food and to be avoided. Now, however, God wanted Peter to have close intimate fellowship with a gentile, a Roman army officer named Cornelius. Peter would have naturally been very reluctant to do such a thing. To encourage him to pursue this relationship - even to the point of entering Cornelius' house - God gave this vision to Peter. The meaning was not for Peter to change his eating habits, but to change his fellowship attitudes. God wanted Peter to do what many Jews of the day would have considered the unthinkable - visit with a Gentile.

The meaning of the vision is summarized in verse 28 where we read, "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.'" Notice that, at this point, Peter is very clear concerning the meaning of the vision he received from God. God told him "not to call any man unholy or unclean." Therefore, the issue was people and not food.

Unclean foods are still unclean foods (Leviticus 11). The point of the vision was to teach Peter to understand and relate to people in a way that he had not previously understood.

This passage does not teach that the dietary instructions of the Torah to be changed. Rather, it is a passage in which God was teaching Peter to reach out to non-Jews for the sake of the Messiah. At the same time, Peter is never told by the Holy One to change his own eating customs and practices.