

## The Book of Acts: Verse-by-Verse

---

### Study Note: Acts 10:9-17

- A “watershed” moment Peter’s ministry, as well as the Early Church.

Two Visions: 1. Cornelius has had a vision of a man named Peter coming to his home to explain the Good News to him. 2. Peter has a vision to prepare him to go to take the Gospel to his first fully Gentile audience.

- The Preparation for the Ministry: v. 9

“About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.”

The “following day”: The day after Cornelius had seen his vision (about 21 hours later). The three men dispatched by Cornelius were just approaching Simon the Tanner’s home by the sea.

The Holy Spirit’s Orchestration: He’s given Cornelius a vision of Peter coming to his home. Meanwhile, he is preparing Peter for this assignment. Everything comes together as the Spirit directs and the recipients of these visions obey him.

A “leap of faith”: As a God-fearer, Cornelius would have no qualms about a Jew coming to visit him. A Jew like Peter would resist being under the roof of a Gentile – even if he were a God-fearer.

Peter will need a special revelation. The Old Testament does indicate that the Gospel was for all people, but Peter is an orthodox Jew, with little to no appreciation of this reality.

In Peter’s case, general revelation will not do; he will need special revelation from the Holy Spirit.

- **Up On The Rooftop:**

At about noon, Peter went to the roof of Simon's home to pray. This was not a regularly observed time of day for public Jewish prayers, but some Jews used this hour for private prayers.

- **Why the rooftop?**

Two common types of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestinian homes: 1. Cave-like areas for living space with wood and stucco entrances.

2. A wood and stucco-type material with central open court. Rooms were attached to the court, opening onto it. The design allowed for an open court with airflow. Most of the cooking was done in these open, communal areas.

Beds or cots were placed on the upper level – largely open to the elements. During the very warm evenings this was particularly advantageous.

In the ancient Palestinian world, the roof was an essential part of everyday life. It was flat, with just enough slope to drain off the rainwater which was carefully collected into cisterns or large containers.

Rooftop areas provided an open second floor for storage and laundry. They also provided families and friends some larger areas to gather – especially in the evenings.

Since Simon had a successful tanning business, his home was probably one of the larger types. Peter likely went to the rooftop at the noon hour to pray and meditate.

- **Peter Has A Vision: v. 10**

"Peter became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the

meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance."

The Holy Spirit is orchestrating these events: He waits for Peter to get hungry – and then gives him a vision of lunch! Luke records that Peter "fell into a trance" while he was waiting on lunch to be served.

Trance: Greek word, "ekstasis" (English, "ecstasy"). In the Scriptures, a "trance" is what we might call a "wide-awake" vision, rather than a dream. Example of both: Genesis 15 – Abraham's vision and dream.

"After these events, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision.... "As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and suddenly great terror and darkness overwhelmed him..."

By saying that, "Peter fell into a trance" or an "ecstasy" Luke is indicating that something supernatural occurred – something entirely outside of himself takes place.

John McArthur: "God invaded his [Peter's] consciousness with a vision."

Saul/Paul's Experience: 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. "I will reluctantly tell about visions and revelations from the Lord. I was caught up to the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether I was in my body or out of my body, I don't know—only God knows..."

### **The Subject Of Peter's Vision: Vv.11-12:**

"He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

A "sheet" filled with animals: Greek word, othoneoe". That word can be translated as "sailcloth". (Peter is on the rooftop of a home that is located on the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea).

Did Peter see a bedsheet being lowered from heaven or a boat sail? We don't know, but it held all kinds of quadrupeds, reptiles, and birds.

Under Jewish Law, this represented animals that were both fit and unfit for consumption. A short list with some examples:

- **Clean Animals in the Bible**

1. Mammals That Chew the Cud and Part the Hoof: beef, veal, venison, lamb, and mutton.
2. Fish With Fins and Scales: Bass, Bluefish, Bluegill, Cod, and Trout.
3. Birds With Clean Characteristics: Chicken, Dove, Duck, Goose, Pheasant, and Turkey.
4. Insects: Crickets and Grasshoppers.

- **Unclean Animals in the Bible**

1. Animals With Unclean Characteristics: Hogs, Boar, and Bear.
2. Canines: Coyote, Dog, Fox, Hyena, Jackal, and Wolf.
3. Felines: Cat, Cheetah, Leopard, Lion, Panther, and Tiger.
4. Equines: Donkey, Horse, Mule, and Zebra.
5. Other Animals: Armadillo, Bat, Camel, Elephant, and Hippopotamus.
6. Fish Without Fins and Scales: Catfish, Eel, Marlin, Shark, and Swordfish.
7. Shellfish: Clam, Crab, Crayfish, Lobster, and Shrimp.
8. Soft-body Marine Life: Jellyfish, Octopus, and Calamari.
9. Sea mammals: Dolphin, Porpoise, Seal, Walrus, and Whale.
10. Birds of Prey, Scavengers and Others

Peter immediately recognized both the allowed and disallowed varieties of animals, fish, and insects. The voice telling him to "rise and eat" was contradicting every Mosaic code that Peter knew.

Unclean animals were totally disallowed as food. Even "clean animals" had to be inspected both before and after being slaughtered to be acceptable as food.

Peter's Response: "Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." ("And I am not about to start violating them now!")

- **"Do Not Call Anything Impure That God Has Made Clean." vv. 15-16**

"The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven." – vv. 15-16

Is the Spirit contradicting the Scriptures?

- **Christians and Old Testament dietary laws:**

The endpoint of the Spirit's vision is to break down Peter's longstanding view that Jews are to have nothing in common with Gentiles. In this vision, the "clean" and "unclean" animals are symbols of the Jews and Gentiles. The latter group represents the "unclean".

The vision is meant to break down Peter's bigotry against the non-Jews, so that he can fulfil Jesus' command to take the Gospel to the "ends of the earth". (If he continues to believe the Gentiles are "out of bounds", he will not go to Cornelius' house.)

"Surely not, Lord." - The Greek word for "Lord" here is Kurie – denoting Lord, Master, or Supreme Ruler. Peter recognizes that God is speaking to him and telling him to do what was normally prohibited.

Many commentators say the vision is symbolic and all the Mosaic Rules on food remain intact. Shouldn't we ask, "Aside from breaking down the "wall of partition" between the Jews and Gentiles, does Peter's vision have any relationship to any other scriptures?"

Mark 7: The confrontation between Jesus and a contingent of Pharisees and teachers of the law. The issue: During a meal, the disciples did not follow the elders' tradition of ceremonially washing

their hands.

"They noticed that some of his disciples failed to follow the Jewish ritual of hand washing before eating. The Jews, especially the Pharisees, do not eat until they have poured water over their cupped hands, as required by their ancient traditions. Similarly, they don't eat anything from the market until they immerse their hands in water. This is but one of many traditions they have clung to—such as their ceremonial washing of cups, pitchers, and kettles. – Mark 7:2-4

The crux of the matter: These Pharisees and teachers of the law were angry that Jesus and his disciples were eating with unwashed, and therefore, defiled hands. It was not a matter of hygiene but a failure to adhere to purification traditions.

Jesus' Response: "You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote, 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.' For you ignore God's law and substitute your own tradition." – vv. 6-8

The Pharisaiac traditions have gone beyond the Mosaic Codes: They have substituted their religious-sounding rules for God's real codes.

**But Jesus doesn't stop there!** He calls the crowd to himself and says: "All of you listen and try to understand. It's not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart."

When they sequestered themselves in a nearby home, they asked him for an explanation. Here's what Jesus said: "Can't you see that the food you put into your body cannot defile you? Food doesn't go into your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer."

The Remarkable "Take-Away": "By saying this, he declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God's eyes."

With one fell swoop Jesus made it clear that the Old Testament distinction between clean and unclean wasn't about the foods! It was meant to point the Old Testament Jews to the real moral issue, their hearts before God.

The Apostle Paul: I Timothy 4:3-5:

"They will say it is wrong to be married and wrong to eat certain foods. But God created those foods to be eaten with thanks by faithful people who know the truth. Since everything God created is good, we should not reject any of it but receive it with thanks. For we know it is made acceptable by the word of God and prayer."

Paul is echoing a universal principle: "Everything God created is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving." As one person noted, "If 'everything' and 'nothing' are not universal enough, we can as well remove "universal" from our dictionaries."

If that is not clear enough, look at the New Living Translation of Romans 14:14:

"I know and am convinced on the authority of the Lord Jesus that no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat. But if someone believes it is wrong, then for that person it is wrong." – Romans 14:14 NLT

Okay, we've navigated some deep waters. I only bring these Old Testament dietary regulations up because there are so many that ardently insist that they are still firmly in place. Some, even make them prerequisite for salvation.

I think Paul's approach is much more sensible. If a particular food makes you feel you are being disobedient to God – don't eat it. On the other hand, you can't demand that every other believer adopt your personal standard. That's what the Pharisees did, and we saw how Jesus reacted to that!

As I said before, we know that the endpoint of the Spirit's vision is to break down Peter's longstanding view that Jews are to have nothing in common with Gentiles. In this vision, the "clean" and "unclean" animals are symbols of the Jews and Gentiles.

As we have seen in our more recent chapters of Acts, the Holy Spirit has been working towards breaking down Peter's resistance to taking the Gospel to those who are not like him. We saw it with Peter's ministry to the Samaritans, as well as the Greek-Messianic centers in Lydda and Joppa.

But now, Peter must make the largest leap so far. He must go to an entirely Gentile home and tell them the Good News that Jesus will save them as well as the Jews.

The Spirit's vision indicated that the cancellation of all distinctions between clean and unclean foods. Now Peter must see that vision as a simile for the cancellation of all distinctions between Jews and Gentiles.