

Triennial Torah Study – 6th Year 02/05/2015

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Ex 40	Jer 16-18	Prov 13	Acts 10
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The Finished Tabernacle Filled With God's Glory (Exodus 40)

God gave Moses explicit instruction regarding every detail of the building of the tabernacle. And the Bible makes two interesting statements regarding the care with which Moses *followed* these instructions. Verse 16 says, "Moses did according to all that the Lord had commanded him," while verse 33 simply says, "So Moses finished the work." Moses was a faithful man of God. He strove for excellence in everything God gave him to do. The book of Hebrews comments on his faithfulness, "Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant" (Hebrews 3:5).

The tabernacle was finally set up and its furnishings arranged on the first day of the first month, Abib or Nisan on the Hebrew Calendar, of the second year of Israel's journey out of Egypt (verses 2, 17). This was around 10 months after the people had arrived at Sinai and nearly two weeks before their second keeping of the Passover. When everything God had commanded had been completed, He came near in a dramatic descent that manifested His glory among the Israelites, filling the tabernacle with His glory so that even Moses could not enter. The appearance of God's glory is sometimes called the Shekinah or the Shekinah glory, coming from the Hebrew for "to dwell." *The Nelson Study Bible* states: "The glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle demonstrated His Presence with the Israelites, His significance to them, and His awe-inspiring wonder. The words of John 1:1-18 are appropriate to recall here. In the Incarnation, the glory of God was manifest not in a tent, but in His Son.... How wonderful that the Book of Exodus concludes with this image of the gracious God, hovering protectively over His people.... A faithful Israelite follower of God could see the tabernacle and realize that God was there in His splendor and power. And with Him the people advanced to Canaan, the land He had promised to them."

Jeremiah Not to Marry or Participate in Judah's Social Life (Jeremiah 16)

Jeremiah is commanded by God not to marry and have children while in Judah. He is also forbidden from taking part in social activities such as mourning and feasting. Both were to serve as a witness against Judah. “The prophet is ordered to behave in an eccentric manner [as prophets often were]...; celibacy was extremely uncommon, refusal to participate in funerary rites ill-mannered and disrespectful. Both actions had one meaning: There is no future here” (*New Bible Commentary*, note on verses 1-21). “The prohibition against marriage is to underscore the coming death and destruction that will face parents and children. Even burial will be denied the dead. The theme of lament is repeated in God’s refusal to allow Jeremiah to intercede on the people’s behalf (7.16; 14.11-12; 15.1). He is also forbidden to rejoice with them, for joy will be taken from the land during the impending destruction and exile”

(*HarperCollins Study Bible*, note on 16:1-13). Jeremiah 16:9 is a repetition of 7:34—and will be repeated again in 25:10.

Moreover, the restrictions imposed on Jeremiah actually served his well-being. He would not have been able to have a normal family life anyway with his commission and the animosity it brought. Furthermore, the near future was going to be calamitous—“so severe that the single state would be then (contrary to the ordinary course of things) preferable to the married (cf. I Cor. 7:8; 26:29; Matt. 24:19; Luke 23:29)” (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary*, note on verse 2). In times of great trial, worry over loved ones increases the pain of the circumstances. This being so, we can perhaps see how the prohibition against fraternizing in normal social contexts was also a great blessing to Jeremiah. It kept him from developing close friendships with those who were soon to suffer. Moreover, we should consider that many of the social customs of the people, such as those in Jeremiah 16:6, were derived from paganism.

Jeremiah would, of course, have to separate himself from such practices.

Verses 10-13 illustrate the falsity of the people’s confession of sin in chapter 14. For they here do not even know what sins they are guilty of—even though they have committed terrible idolatry worse than their ancestors! So punishment is certainly coming—they will be taken away to another land where they will learn through painful experience what it really means to be subject to paganism and cut off from the true God (16:13).

Verses 14-15 (repeated in 23:7-8) offer a glimmer of hope about the future. God will bring Israel back in a second Exodus (compare Isaiah 11:11). This is speaking not of the Jewish return from Babylonian captivity in ancient times, but of the return of all Israel from captivity at the end of this age. This should be clear from the fact that the Jewish return from Babylonian exile never overshadowed the Mosaic Exodus from Egypt—as God said this return would.

In the next verse, Jeremiah 16:16, God seems to return to the theme of immediate punishment, as hunting and fishing are elsewhere used as metaphors for captivity by enemies (compare Ezekiel 12:13; Amos 4:2; Habakkuk 1:15; Micah 7:2). Yet perhaps God is actually using similar imagery to describe the bringing back of His people mentioned in the previous verse. *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary* states: “It is remarkable, the same image is used in a good sense of the Jews’ restoration, implying that just as their enemies were employed by God to take them in hand

for destruction, so the same [i.e., hunters and fishers] shall be employed for their restoration. (Ezek. 47:9, 10). So spiritually... [God's ministers are "fishers of men"], employed by God to be heralds of salvation, 'catching men' for life (Matt. 4:19; Luke 5:10; Acts 2:41; 4:4...II Cor. 12:16)" (note on Jeremiah 16:16).

But before any future regathering, God's people are to receive "double" for their sins (verse 18). It is not clear exactly what is meant here. It may refer to the fact that God expects more from those to whom He gives special gifts so that Israel and Judah are to receive a more severe judgment than the rest of the nations (compare Luke 12:47-48; James 3:1). Some suggest that "double" is idiomatic for "fully" or "amply." Others maintain that the double punishment actually refers to two periods of punishment, the ancient captivity and the one to come later—just prior to the ultimate restoration promised in the preceding verses.

The point of verses 19-21 is also not exactly clear. These seem to refer to the time of Messiah's return, when the relationship between God and man is restored and all nations on earth come to know God and worship Him (compare Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:9). The word "gentiles" in verse 19 of Jeremiah 16 actually means "nations" and, in that sense, could include Israel and Judah. So the point may be the happy ending of Israel's future return, followed by all nations. However, the point may also be that while God's people have filled His land with foreign idols and are rejected (verse 18), many foreigners would come to forsake their pagan past and embrace the true God—that is, during the Assembly age (from apostolic times until Messiah's return). This would serve as a point of shame against God's own people (see Romans 11:11). Either way, we can still be thankful for the happy ending promised in verses 14-15 of Jeremiah 16 and throughout Scripture.

The Deceitful Heart of Man; Hallow the Sabbath (Jeremiah 17)

Rather than the law of God, rebellious idolatry—including pagan offering and *asherah* worship—is ingrained in the heart, the inner character, of the people of Judah, being passed down from one generation to the next (17:1-2). This is much like the sin of modern Israelite nations. Messiahmas trees and other pagan traditions are clung to so strongly as to be considered part of the very heart of the people—again, passed down through the generations.

For the people's rebellion, God will give their enemies the wealth of His "mountain [Jerusalem] in the field [of the nation of Judah]" and of all their "high places" (worship centers) in the land (verse 3). Indeed, even the people themselves will be given to their enemies—deported to a foreign land (verse 4). God's anger will burn "forever"—that is, against the sin as long as the sin persists.

God then contrasts trust in man with trust in God. In verse 5, two different Hebrew words are translated "man": "Cursed is the man [the person] who trusts in man [mankind]." The Jews should have realized this regarding their national and religious leaders. And we must understand this today. This does not mean we cannot place any trust in other human beings. But our ultimate faith and trust must not be in other people—or ourselves. Consider that God Himself gives human beings to guide and teach us. But He cautions that our allegiance must be to Him and His Word

first. “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). In fact, Scripture contains many warnings about false teachers who will rise up, some even within the fellowship of the true Assembly (20:29; 2 Peter 2:1-4). And God makes it clear that people will not be excused if they choose to follow what a man says above what God says. Human beings have no authority to change any of God’s directives. Those who rely ultimately on other people or themselves are inevitably cursed.

Those who place faith and trust in God, on the other hand, are blessed. They are compared to fruitful trees, as in Psalm 1:3. They do not need to fear times of physical drought—as Judah was experiencing when Jeremiah prophesied—because the Almighty God is there to sustain them. He will ensure their fruitfulness on a physical level and, more importantly, on a spiritual level—granting them abundant eternal life in the end.

Failure to discern this is a problem of the heart—a person’s inner thoughts and feelings. God declares that the heart is *deceitful*—the original Hebrew word here coming from the same root as the name Jacob (the designation for unconverted Israel)—and “desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 7:9). For the latter expression, some margins have “incurably sick.” It is like a mental illness: “Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead” (Ecclesiastes 9:3). Romans 8:7 tells us that “the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.” Clearly, the human mind needs spiritual healing, which God ultimately will bring (see Jeremiah 31:33).

Lest any think that the heart is so deceitful that even God can’t see what it’s about, God assures us that He is quite aware of it and, knowing to what degree each person is culpable, is able to deliver just recompense to everyone (17:10).

The discussion then moves from those who trust in human beings to those who trust in wealth apart from right living. A “nest egg” won’t ultimately save anyone (verse 11). God is our only real source of hope (verse 12).

Those who depart from the Lord, “the fountain of living waters,” shall be “written in the earth” (verse 13). This apparently refers to being written in sand, which signifies no permanence at all—as opposed to being “written in heaven” (Luke 10:20) in the “book of life” (Revelation 13:8; 20:12, 15). Perhaps Jeremiah 17:13 explains why Yeshua, after declaring Himself the source of living waters (John 7:37-38) and being rejected as such by the religious leaders of His day (verses 45-53), “wrote on the ground” when these religious leaders came to entrap Him the next morning (8:1-9).

Jeremiah prays for his own spiritual healing (Jeremiah 17:14). He knows that his message will provoke further scorn, beyond what he has already suffered. In verse 15, he declares that his persecutors are essentially inviting the day of doom in their mocking. In verse 16, Jeremiah points out that he himself has not desired the coming of that day. He has taken no joy in pronouncing judgment on the people—certainly not on the nation as a whole. However, he does ask for

vindication—that he would be protected (verse 17) and that his persecutors would suffer the judgment they themselves called for (verse 18), the “double destruction” here being what God had already foretold (see 16:18).

The remainder of chapter 17 is devoted to God’s admonition about keeping the Sabbath holy. In verses 19 and 20, Jeremiah addresses the “kings” of Judah. It may be that Jehoiakim’s son Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) was a coregent with his father at this time (a possibility we will later give more attention to). The people, be they kings or commoners, are told to stop violating the Sabbath—to stop bearing burdens and doing work on God’s Holy Day (verses 21-22). This should be understood within the teachings of Yeshua Messiah. He explained that it was acceptable and within the keeping of the Sabbath to take care of emergencies, to visit the sick and to carry one’s bedroll on the Sabbath (Luke 13:15; 14:5; Mark 3:4). Indeed, He spoke against the extreme limitations the Pharisees placed on the Sabbath and on all of God’s laws (Matthew 23:4).

But there are clearly things we should *not* be doing on the Sabbath, as the Fourth Commandment and Isaiah 58:13 make clear. The burdens Jeremiah spoke of referred to the typical errands of the people—for instance, lugging wares home from the market. And the work the people were doing referred to their regular business or household responsibilities. This should all have ceased so as to observe God’s holy time—from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. Sadly, Israel and Judah both had a terrible record when it came to keeping God’s Sabbath. Ezekiel 20 makes it clear that the two main sins of Israel in the past were idolatry and Sabbath breaking—and that they had been severely judged for these. Now their continued violation of the Sabbath would be met with judgment again (see Ezekiel 22:8, 14-16, 26, 31).

The Sabbath was very important. Besides being enjoined in one of the Ten Commandments, God had given the Sabbath as a special sign between Him and His people (Exodus 31:12-17). It identified Him as the true God, the Creator. If the people had continued in its faithful observance, perhaps they would have continued to worship the Creator rather than elements of creation as the pagan world around them did.

In verse 25 of Jeremiah 17, God states that even at this last moment He could change His mind and stay the punishment against Judah—allowing Jerusalem to remain standing and the line of David to continue to rule from it—if they would just start hallowing the Sabbath. Of course, this would have required keeping it properly from the heart—not the hypocritical way in which the people engaged in various ritual practices. But they would not. Nor will the nations of Israel do so today. Thus, punishment was coming in Jeremiah’s day—and it is likewise coming in the not-too-distant future. The warning of destruction with which the chapter ends is essentially a quote from the prophets Hosea and Amos—concerning ancient *and* future calamity (see Hosea 8:14; Amos 1:4-2:5).

With such strong declarations from God about the Sabbath, it is utterly foolhardy to think and teach, as many do today, that the Sabbath can be changed to Sunday or that it no longer matters.

It obviously mattered a great deal to God—and still does. It should likewise matter to us. (To learn more, send for or download our free booklet [Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest.](#))

Clay in the Potter's Hands (Jeremiah 18)

God here uses the example of a potter forming clay vessels. Almost a century earlier, Isaiah had written, "But now, O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand" (Isaiah 64:8). Thus, the potter and clay was a familiar image of God's absolute authority over His creation. But "the message God intended to communicate through this illustration was not, as some have thought, one of divine sovereignty. It was a message of grace. Judah had resisted the divine potter. Yet even now God was willing to begin anew and reshape His people into that good vessel He had had in mind from the beginning" (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader's Companion*, 1991, note on Jeremiah 18:6). God desires that all Israel be saved (Romans 11:26)—in fact, all mankind (1 Timothy 2:4).

In verses 7-8 of Jeremiah 18, we see what Jonah well knew when he "dragged his feet" in bringing God's warning message to Nineveh (see Jonah 3:10). If people will repent at God's warning of destruction, He will call off the destruction. But the opposite is also true. If God pronounces good on a nation and it turns to evil, He will bring punishment on it instead (Jeremiah 18:9-10). So there was a warning inherent in the potter-and-clay analogy as well. But the main focus here was on mercy. God was fashioning disaster but was willing to start over with the people if they would soften their hearts and allow Him to work with them.

"But when Jeremiah preached this good news the people continued to resist the heavenly potter! It was too late to surrender their passion for idolatry and sin. What a tragedy! In the coming invasion the people who were unwilling to change would be crushed by suffering. The few survivors would become workable clay in His hands" (note on verse 6).

In verse 12, it is interesting to consider that people here see obedience to God as hopeless—perhaps viewing it as impossible. It may be that the false prophets had corrupted them by a message of "cheap grace"—teaching that since they supposedly couldn't obey God, the only thing to do was mouth confessions and rely on their sacrifices and other acts of piety. This is not so different from what is often espoused in modern mainstream Christianity. Furthermore, the people's concept of God had been corrupted by pagan teachings so that they were essentially appealing to pagan gods while believing they were trusting in the true God. He is astonished that they would forsake Him and His ways for false religion. "Snow water of Lebanon" (verse 14) refers to the waters from high Mount Hermon, which looms over the northern part of the land of Israel (*Lebanon* actually means "White Mountain"). These waters sank into the ground and emerged in the form of many springs, providing most of the water for the Jordan River to water the Promised Land. God likewise provided their physical and spiritual needs. Why would they look elsewhere?

Since the people have forgotten God and forsaken His ways, the land will be desolate and the people taken captive and scattered (verses 15-17). God will turn His back on His people (verse 17), just as they had turned their backs on Him (2:27). While this was, no doubt, difficult for God, being a loving Father (compare Hosea 11:8), the evil of the people had to stop. Today some might call this needed approach “tough love.” Indeed, the need for intervention was made even more pressing by the people’s mistreatment of each other and of God’s servants.

In Jeremiah 18:18, we find the people again plotting against the prophet, whereupon he cries out to God (verses 19-23). Jeremiah has done all he could to intercede for them, and yet they are trying to bring him down (verse 20). So he now cries out for God to act in terms that seem to violate Messiah’s instruction that we love our enemies and pray for them (Matthew 4:43-48). But we should suspend such judgment, not really knowing all the facts. It is likely that Jeremiah understood the truth of the second resurrection—that these people would be given an opportunity for salvation at a later time—and that he was here asking that God not provide a *present* atonement so as to relent from *present* destruction (as God had said earlier in Jeremiah 18 that He would upon repentance), for the sake not only of himself but of God’s message. “Some have questioned the bitter prayer for vengeance. But those Jeremiah inveighs against have not only slandered him, but distorted the truth and so brought judgment upon the entire nation” (note on verses 19-23).

Moreover, God Himself may have inspired His prophet with this call for judgment. *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary* states: “In this prayer he does not indulge in personal revenge, as if it were his own cause that was at stake; but he speaks under the dictation of the Spirit, ceasing to intercede, and speaking prophetically, knowing they were doomed to destruction as reprobates; for those not so, he doubtless ceased not to intercede. *We* are not to draw an example [of how to pray concerning our enemies in general] from this, which is a special case” (note on verse 21). In any case, as with other calls for vengeance in Scripture, what is expressed is that the perfect vengeance of God is awaited rather than any hint of personal acts of revenge being taken by God’s servant (see Romans 12:17-21).

The Psalms of David contain several calls for God to exact vengeance. Regarding these, the *Tyndale Commentary* remarks, “We may summarize [these] as the plea that justice shall be done and the right vindicated” (note on Psalms 1-72, p. 26).

First Part of Major Solomonic Collection Cont’d (Proverbs 11:1-27)

6. *What the Lord Abhors (11:1-21)*

“In 11:1-21 a group of proverb collections are held together by the inclusio formed by ‘the Lord abhors’ and ‘he delights’ in vv. 1,20 [NIV].

“MORAL INTEGRITY AND GOD’S JUDGEMENT. *Type: Chiastic (11:1-4)*....Verse 1 describes God’s abhorrence of fraud, and v. 4 answers it with the promise that the wrongfully gained wealth of the wicked will do them no good in the day of judgment. Between these verses vv. 2-3 assert that humility and integrity, rather than their opposites, are the best guides in life” (NAC).

In its note on verse 1, *The Bible Reader’s Companion* says: “Leviticus 19:35-36 forbids the use of ‘dishonest standards,’ weighted to favor the merchant rather than the seller [he buys from] or buyer [to whom he sells]. The Jewish Talmud calls for meticulous efforts to keep this command, decreeing that ‘the shopkeeper must wipe his measures twice a week, his weights once a week, and his scales after every weighing,’ to keep any substance from throwing them off. We can’t be too careful trying to be fair with others.”

As previously noted, the language of Proverbs 11:4 is similar to that of 10:2.

- “SALVATION FOR THE RIGHTEOUS. *Type: Thematic, Parallel Proverb Pair (11:56)*....These two proverbs parallel each other and describe the respective fates of the righteous and the wicked...
- “DEATH OF A SINNER. *Type: Inclusio, Proverb Pair (11:7-8)*....As the text stands, these two proverbs are bound by the inclusio of the word ‘wicked’ in v. 7a and v. 8b.... In addition, these verses assert that God brings utter destruction to the wicked and imply a promise of eternal life to the righteous” (NAC).

As earlier noted, v. 7 contains language similar to that of 10:28.

“DESTRUCTIVE LIPS. *Type: Chiastic, with an Afterward (11:9-13)*....Verses 10-11 are an obvious pair in parallel, whereas vv. 9,12 are bound by the theme of the slanderous gossip of the wicked against restrained silence of the righteous....Verse [13] is an afterword on the subject of the tongue” (NAC).

Verse 10 may seem odd in light of the unpopularity of God’s servants among the nations of the world. However, despite persecution, it does make sense that others rejoice when the righteous are doing well: “Why should the community rejoice in the prosperity of the righteous? Because both the way a righteous man gains his wealth and the way he uses it benefits society. The righteous businessman employs others, supports schools and government with his taxes and in the O[ld] T[estament] tradition, shares generously” (*Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on verses 10-11). And often people enjoy seeing justice where the good guy wins.

“NATIONAL AND PERSONAL PRUDENCE. *Type: Parallel (11:14-15)*....Both proverbs here follow the pattern ‘imprudent action brings disaster / prudent action gives security,’ but the first involves national matters where the second concerns personal business” (NAC).

Verse 14 explains that it's vital to get counsel from a number of sources than can be weighed together in making important decisions (see also 15:22; 20:18; 24:6).

Proverbs 11:15 should also be read in light of the next listed proverb in verse 16. "These two proverbs balance each other. The first warns against rashly giving surety or a pledge for a stranger. The second praises generosity [as being 'gracious' or 'kindhearted' (NIV) surely includes]; generosity begets honor" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 15-16). Verse 16, discussed next, should also be read in the context of the next verse, with which it is parallel.

- "KINDNESS AND CRUELTY. *Type: Parallel (11:16-17)*....The pattern of these two proverbs is 'kind woman / cruel man // kind man / ruthless man.' By itself v. 16 could be read cynically ('A kind woman gets respect, but a cruel man gets rich'...to justify unscrupulous behavior. In conjunction with v. 17, however, the self-destructive nature of the 'hard-nosed' approach to life is apparent....
- "THE WAGES OF SIN AND RIGHTEOUSNESS. *Type: Chiasmus (11:18-19)*....This pair has the chiastic pattern [in this case *a-b-b-a*] 'wicked man / he who sows righteousness / righteousness / he who pursues evil'....Note that this pair has links to vv. 16-17. The wealth of the cruel man corresponds to deceptive wages as the honor given a kind woman is genuine. Also the health/self-inflicted pain of v. 17 corresponds to the life and death of v. 19.
- "DIVINE JUDGMENT. *Type: Parallel (11:20-21)*....God's attitude toward individuals (disgust / pleasure) in v. 20 corresponds to the outcome of their lives (inescapable trouble / deliverance) in v. 21"—which also impacts their children (NAC).

7. ***Beauty Without Discretion (11:22)***

"TYPE: INDIVIDUAL PROVERB"(NAC).

8. ***Generosity and Selfishness (11:23-27)***

"TYPE: INCLUSIO....Verses 23,27 closely parallel each other and form an inclusio around vv. 24-26, all of which center on the theme of generosity and selfishness. The inclusio states the general truth that one receives back according to one's own behavior while vv. 24-26 deal with the concrete issue of hoarding [and refusing to sell currently at a fair price]" (NAC).

The picture of the one who scatters abroad increasing more—the generous person being made rich—is similar to Ecclesiastes 11:1: "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days." The good we do will be returned to us in different ways. Just on a human level, a selfish, stingy person will likely make enemies, a factor that will probably hurt him later—even financially perhaps. The generous person will make friends who will be there to contribute to his prosperity and well-being later. But there is more to the universe than that—as there is a real God who blesses generosity and curses greed and selfishness.

Yeshua likewise taught: “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38).

Of course, the passages here are not a promise of material wealth in this lifetime in return for being generous. The greatest riches are spiritual ones—though this does include the promised hope of possessing the entire universe as co-heirs with Messiah.

See also Proverbs 13:7.

Acts 10

9 The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. **10** And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance **11** and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. **12** In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. **13** And there came a voice to him: Rise, Peter; kill and eat. **14** But Peter said, By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. **15** And the voice came to him again a second time, What God has made clean, do not call common. **16** This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. **17** Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon’s house, stood at the gate

Open up most Christian commentaries on the book of Acts and you’ll see that most commentators interpret God’s words in verse 13 as a command for Peter to eat unclean animals, and verse 15 as a declaration that all foods are now clean. Thus, in this passage, God is hereby overturning all of the OT dietary laws, essentially nullifying two whole chapters of the bible (Leviticus chapter 11 and Deuteronomy chapter 14), and calling into question a great many passages in the NT, in which believers are told to avoid ‘uncleanness’ ([Rom 6:19](#), [2 Cor 12:21](#), [Gal 5:19](#)).

The traditional interpretation of Peter’s Vision however, leaves a great many questions unanswered. For example:

Why does Peter refer to what is on the sheet with the words ‘common’ [*koinos*] and ‘unclean’ [*akathartos*] in verses 14 & 15, and what’s the difference between these words? Why does God only correct Peter’s use of the word ‘common,’ and not his use of the word ‘unclean’ in verse 15? When God tells Peter to kill and eat, why doesn’t Peter just obey God, take a clean animal from the sheet (like a cow or a chicken), kill it, and eat it? After all, the sheet contained “all kinds” of animals. And why, after walking with Yeshua all that time, was Peter still under the impression that he could not eat anything unclean? And why does Peter still not understand his own, even

after having the sheet lowered three times? And lastly, why doesn't Peter ever interpret his own dream as having anything to do with food?

The traditional interpretation of Peter's Vision also raises many important hermeneutical questions. For example, one of God's most important attributes is the fact that he does not change and always stays the same (Psalm 102:27, Malachi 3:6), and God does not change his mind, as a man would change his mind (Numbers 23:19, Psalm 110:4). So it seems to be a very important hermeneutical principle that in interpreting scripture and dealing with seemingly ambiguous passages, one errs on the side of maintaining God's unchanging nature, rather than being quick to point out a fundamental change in God's nature or his dealings with humans. A good example of this principle is found in Hebrews 7, where the author argues in a sustained way, that there is a logical necessity for a change in the priesthood (vv.11-14), and that there is a strong scriptural basis in the OT for such a change (Psalm 110:4), which the author quotes three times in the book of Hebrews (5:6, 6:20, & 7:17), going out of his way to defend the fact that "God does not change." Now compare that careful analysis in Hebrews to Peter's dream in Acts 10, where apparently, two whole chapters of the OT are nullified, yet nobody seems to mind. Luke doesn't even mention this as being a challenge to the OT law, and Peter even retells his dream – to the circumcision party of all people. These were the ultra-conservative pharisaic believers in Yeshua. And rather than question any change in the Torah, they heard about Peter's vision and:

"they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18).

So what is the difference between common [*koinos*] and unclean [*akathartos*]?

14 But Peter said, By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common [*koinos*] or unclean [*akathartos*]. **15** And the voice came to him again a second time, What God has made clean, do not call common [*koinos*].

The Greek words ?????????? [*akathartos* / unclean] and ?????????? [*akatharsia* / uncleanness] occur around 200 times in the Septuagint (the first century Greek bible, aka. LXX), and around 40 times in the New Testament. In the LXX they refer to all manner of uncleanness, including the unclean meats in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Almost any time the word 'unclean' is used anywhere in the Septuagint, the Greek words *akathartos* or *akatharsia* are being used.

The Greek words ??????? [*koinos*, "common"] and ??????? [*koino?*, "to make common"] are used only 4 times in the canonized books of the LXX, each time referring to things "shared in common" (in the LXX, see for example, Proverbs 1:14, 21:9). So in the LXX, the Greek words *koinos* and *koino?* are never used to refer to "uncleanness" or to something as "unclean." Thus, it can be inferred that Luke would not have used these words interchangeably. They would have represented distinct concepts in his mind and in the minds of his Greek speaking audience.

This is strong evidence for the fact that referring to things as "common" (*koinos*) was a later pharisaic development (i.e. a manmade tradition), not found in the Law of God (Torah). A tradition

which served to differentiate 1st century Jews from the surrounding gentile culture. If you've studied the history leading up to the first century, this might make more sense because it's not until the book of Maccabees that we see *koinos/koino?* start to gain the connotation of 'defilement' or 'unacceptableness' that we see in Acts 10 — but this would be a separate study in itself.

So if "common" isn't used in the LXX to refer to defilement or uncleanness, what did Jews in the first century understand this word to mean? Well in the NT, "common" [*koinos / koino?*] is used around 25 times, but carries two different meanings. The first meaning is the same one used in the LXX, referring to things "shared in common" (see for example [Acts 2:44](#), [4:32](#), and [Titus 1:4](#)). The second meaning of *koinos*, however, is more difficult to pinpoint. If you look up all the instances of the words *koinos* and *koino?* in the NT, and compare them to the passages that use *akathartos/akatharsia*, you should get a pretty good sense of how the NT writers understood these terms. Here's a rough definition of *koinos/koino?* based on the verses they appear in:

Koinos refers to situations not covered in the Law of God (Torah), in which something clean (a pot, a utensil, a clean animal, or even a person) comes into contact with something unclean (an unclean animal, dirt, etc), rendering the clean thing defiled or unacceptable. The Pharisees viewed these previously clean things as now being "common" [*koinos*].

So in a sentence, the difference between *koinos* and *akathartos* (common and unclean), is that *koinos* (common) connotes the pharisaic belief (based in tradition) that a clean thing can be made 'common' through contact – whereas *akathartos* (unclean) connotes that which God has declared to be unclean.

Even though [Mark 7](#) isn't a part of this study, it deals with this exact problem (for a full explanation of Mark 7, read the article [here](#)). Remember this is where the disciples were eating with 'common' [*koinos*] hands, and the Pharisees reprimand them for not abiding by their traditions. [Mark 7](#) isn't about food – rather, it's about Pharisaic traditions that were being put on par with the Law of God (the Torah). Thus, Yeshua reprimands the Pharisees right back, telling them what *really* makes a person common. But I digress.

A better understanding of Acts 10

When the sheet comes down in front of Peter, on it are, "all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air" ([Acts 10:12](#)). In other words, clean and unclean animals, all writhing and tossing and turning over one another. This is the purpose of the image of a sheet coming down, held up by its four corners. It emphasizes that these animals aren't just close to each other – they are squirming all over one another.

So even though there are clean animals on the sheet, Peter refuses to eat any of them because some were unclean, and the rest were clean, but they had been made common [*koinos*] according to the Pharisees, because they were in direct contact with unclean animals on the sheet. Keep in mind, there is no mention in Leviticus or Deuteronomy that an unclean animal can touch a clean animal and make that clean animal unclean, which makes this a Pharisaic prohibition very similar

to the washing of hands in Mark 7, where it was taught by the Pharisees that all Jews must wash their hands before eating (and wash various vessels and utensils before ordinary use). In fact, you will notice that the term “common” [*koinos*] is also used in Mark 7:1, referring to the disciples’ dirty hands, because it was believed that dirt defiled their hands, and that this defilement would transfer to the individual if a person ate or drank with dirty (common) hands. This, in their eyes, would make the person common [*koinos*] or defiled – but please note that this is nowhere found in God’s Law (Torah).

Note that the image of a sheet being brought down by its four corners is crucial to understanding this passage because it emphasizes the fact that the animals were forced towards the center of the sheet, touching one another, crawling all over each other, etc. To a Jew who kept both the Torah *and* the traditions of the Pharisees, this would have made for a very disturbing presentation – thus Peter’s strong denial when God commands him to ‘take and eat.’

So this explains why Peter would not grab a clean animal from the sheet and eat it, and why God corrects this inclination in verse 15: “And the voice came to him again a second time, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common [*koinos*].’” Notice that God doesn’t correct Peter’s use of the word ‘unclean’ [*akathartos*] in verse 15. He doesn’t tell Peter “what God has made clean do not call *unclean*.” This is because God would be contradicting himself when he gave the food laws back in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. So in effect, Peter did not obey God because he was following the traditions of men – thus the rebuke.

It also explains why Peter, after walking with Yeshua all that time, never understood him to have overturned God’s instructions on eating a holy (set apart) diet. Surely Peter would have realized at some point, “oh yea, God did away with all that food stuff.” And yet Peter’s interpretation of his own dream has nothing to do with food.

It also explains the connection Peter draws between his dream and his meeting with Cornelius. According to the Jewish traditions of the day, many products and practices of Gentiles were regarded as being “common” or conveying “commonness” to Jews. This is why Peter was not going to enter the house of Cornelius up until this point. Just like Pharisaic traditions prevented Peter from eating common [*koinos*] food, they also prevented him from meeting with common [*koinos*] people (i.e. Gentiles), shaking their common hands, entering their common home, sitting in their common chairs, eating at their common table, etc. But God used this dream to show Peter that he should not call any person common or unclean (verse 29) — effectively breaking down a large dividing wall that these manmade traditions had erected.

To quote Yeshua, the Pharisees once again make void the word of God by the tradition that they have handed down (Mark 7:13), because God has always intended Israel to be a light to the nations (gentiles), so that salvation may reach the end of the earth, yet Israel’s own traditions kept her from doing just this. So God, then, used Peter’s Vision to break down a barrier (a dividing wall) that the Jewish traditions of the day had erected – a barrier that severely hindered the spread of the gospel to the nations.

This interpretation brings to light the fact that it was not God himself who was hindering Peter's meeting with Cornelius and the spread of the gospel to the gentiles. God's call for Israel to be holy (set apart) was never intended to negate her call to be a light to the nations (gentiles!):

Isaiah 42:6 "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations,

Isaiah 49:6 "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

The food laws as they are given in the Torah were never intended to impede this. The Torah is intended to point out how God's people might live holy (set apart) lives, by the power of the holy spirit. God's intent was that by her light, Israel might draw the surrounding nations to herself. However, according to Acts 10 it was the manmade traditions of the day (many of which carried the force of law, cf. Acts 10:28) that kept Jews from associating with gentiles, and kept the gospel from traveling out into the nations.

As members of the Household of God then, let us be wise in the traditions we choose to keep and not keep. Traditions can be good if they enrich our lives and serve the will of God as it is revealed in scripture. But they can be a burden and a hindrance when they conflict with God's greater purposes.

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