

Did Yeshua adjust God's Torah of clean and unclean foods?

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Did The answer shouldn't be hard to find. It should be right there in the four gospels.

In Leviticus, chapter 11, God detailed exactly which animals were edible and which were not. He did so, not as an arbitrary test of obedience, but for the benefit of His creation. God knew long before modern science that pork is bad for your heart. He knew that shellfish are the garbage-disposals of the sea and have their own unique place in the food chain, separate from human consumption.

[Lev. 11 talks about "Clean" and "Unclean". What exactly does the Bible mean by "Clean" and "Unclean"?

(i) "Clean" and "Unclean" do not directly refer to "righteous" and "sinful". In ancient Israel, "uncleanness" (for any reason) prohibited the worshipper from entering God's Temple, so the prophets often use "uncleanness" as a *symbol* for sin.

(ii) Most categories of "Unclean" relate to coming into contact with blood, dead bodies, certain diseases and childbirth. Most of these parallel modern sanitation and quarantine precautions.

(iii) "Clean" and "Unclean" foods do not refer to "washed" and "dirty". The Bible assumes we would only want to eat things of good quality, properly prepared.

(iv) One particular area of "Unclean" relates to what foods we might think are edible (not obviously poisonous), but that God categorizes as "unclean" - unacceptable to the true worshippers of God.

Vegetables, herbs, grain, bread, etc. are "clean". So are coffee, tea, chocolate, beer, wine, spirits, tomato sauce and salza.

"Clean" animals include cows, sheep, goats, deer.

"Unclean" include pigs, horses, camels, rats, cats, dogs, snakes, raccoons, squirrels, most insects.

"Clean" birds include chicken, turkeys, geese, ducks, doves.

"Unclean" birds include eagles, sparrows, crows.

"Clean" sea-food includes salmon, trout, and those fish with fins and scales.

"Unclean" seafood includes catfish, sharks, scampi, octopus, squid, shellfish, whales.]

Yeshua knew this Torah and obeyed it. Of course, He often came into conflict with the Pharisees over the traditions which they had *added to* God's law over the years, but that is altogether different than doing away with the laws themselves.

Nevertheless, it is a widely held view that Yeshua set aside the Torah of God, including those delineating what was good to eat and what was not. Some people believe this view is supported by an incident recorded in the seventh chapter of Mark's gospel.

Yeshua's disciples were being criticized for eating without first washing their hands ([Mark 7:5](#)). Yeshua condemned the Pharisees for their arbitrary administration of Torah. Drawing a sharp distinction between the tradition of the elders on the one hand, and the commandment of God on the other, Yeshua accused them of invalidating the word of God by their tradition.

Notice that Yeshua firmly supports the Torah. Having made that point, He offers an answer to the question of *eating with unwashed hands*: "There is nothing without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man" ([Mark 7:15](#)).

There are several important things to notice about this verse. First, Yeshua is speaking in the present tense and is talking about *the way things are*. He is not offering new legislation or abrogating the old. The statement was true when Leviticus was written and it is true today. The dietary laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are *Torah and are not annulled*.

Finally, there are two very different Greek words that have to do with defilement or uncleanness. The words are *koinos* and *akthartos*. They mean, respectively, "common" and "unclean". *Koinos* in the usage of the day simply meant the opposite of "holy". That which was *koinos* was "unhallowed", or "unholy". *Akthartos*, on the other hand, is the opposite of "clean". It has more to do with moral or physical uncleanness or corruption.

The word "defile" as Yeshua uses it in this passage is from the root of the Greek word *koinos*. It has to do with the spiritual defilement of the heart, not the physical defilement of the flesh. Yeshua explains what He means by pointing out the obvious: "Do you not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without enters into the man, it cannot make him unholy; *because it enters not into his heart*" (verses 18, 19).

Yeshua is not talking about eating dangerous or unlawful things which could ruin your health or take your life. He is talking about eating with unwashed hands. His point is that a little bit of dirt on your hands cannot defile your heart - cannot make you unholy. The unholiness of which He speaks is caused by things like theft, covetousness, and fornication which proceed out of the heart of a man (verses 21, 22).

Note well, the question of clean and unclean meats is nowhere discussed. The subject under discussion is eating with unwashed hands. Yeshua says that food does not enter into the heart, "but into the belly, and goes out into the draught (literally: the latrine), purging all meats" (verse 19). This last phrase simply means that all foods are purged from the body and has nothing to do with a change in the Torah. Unaccountably, some translations add a phrase to this verse which is in no ancient Greek text. It reads, "*This He said, making all meats clean.*" This is pure interpretation on the part of the translators and is totally unwarranted by the original text.

If Yeshua had intended to do away with the Torah of unclean meats, His listeners could not have missed the point. If He had made a statement that all foods are now clean, it would have created one of the biggest controversies of His ministry. Did His listeners understand Yeshua to be abrogating the dietary laws of the Torah? There were Pharisees present when Yeshua made the statement. How would we expect them to respond if Yeshua had plainly said that swine's flesh was good for food? There is not a hint in the account that they understood Yeshua that way. If they had, they would have needed no hired witnesses against Yeshua at His trial. They could have charged Him with speaking against Moses and the Torah. No such charge was made.

The Gospel of Matthew also records the event as nothing more than a discussion of eating with unwashed hands ([Matthew 15:1-20](#)). It offers no indication that Yeshua was talking about unclean meats.

Peter was present, and years later he still refused to eat anything common or unclean (*koinos* or *akthartos*), even in the face of a direct command from God ([Acts 10:9-16](#)). There can be no mistake about Peter's understanding or intent, because the procedure was repeated three times, and three times Peter declined to eat.

But this is a direct commandment from God. Would God command Peter to do something that was wrong? It's a valid question, but we must inquire a step further. Is there such a thing as a *metaphorical* or *rhetorical* command? Is there such a thing as a command which is figurative, given for effect or emphasis ?

Certainly such commands do exist. Notable is Yeshua's statement: "If your right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee." No one believes that he should literally pluck out an eye merely because he stole something. After all, the impetus to steal did not arise from the eye. Yeshua's commandment is phrased in the most imperative of terms, but yet we all understand it to be figurative, given for effect and emphasis.

Consider also God's commandment to Abraham regarding the sacrifice of Isaac. Can we infer from this illustration that human sacrifice must be lawful or God would not have used that as a test of Abraham's obedience?

Plainly the commandment in Peter's vision is a *rhetorical* commandment and Peter drew no inferences from it other than the one stated. Furthermore, the stronger case you make that this is a direct commandment from God, *the more significant becomes Peter's refusal to eat*.

On what basis did Peter refuse? Obviously on the basis of the Torah, because it was the Torah which defined what was common or unclean. Peter knew better than to break God's Torah merely because a voice from heaven told him to do it.

Peter initially doubted the meaning of the vision. If Yeshua, during His ministry, had taught that meats previously termed unclean were now cleansed, Peter could hardly have missed the significance. In that case, his refusal to eat common or unclean meats could only be seen as stubbornness on his part. Whatever response we might have expected from Peter, it seems unlikely that he would have "doubted in himself" what the vision might mean. Peter's initial doubt makes no sense if Yeshua had plainly taught the cleansing of all meats.

Perhaps the most important evidence regarding Acts 10 is that Peter's ultimate interpretation of the vision had nothing to do with meats. He explained to Cornelius, "You know how it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or to come unto one of another nation; but God has showed me that I should not call any *man* common or unclean" ([Acts 10:28](#)). *This is the only interpretation Peter offers for this vision.*

Peter did not understand his vision to authorize any change in the Torah of God, and his personal response to that vision demonstrates conclusively that Peter knew nothing of any supposed change.

The idea that Yeshua annulled the dietary laws of the Torah is a late interpretation. No one at the time seems to have understood Yeshua that way at all. Not even Paul. In writing to the Romans, he opines, "I know and am

persuaded by Adonai Yeshua that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that esteems anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean" ([Romans 14:14](#)). But Paul uses the word *koinos* or "common" here, not the word *akthartos* or "unclean". And he is talking about vegetarianism versus meat eating, not unclean meats as such ([Romans 14:2](#)).

How does Paul understand *akthartos*? Writing to the Corinthians about their involvement with the world, he exhorts them, "Wherefore come out from among them, and *be ye separate*, saith the Lord, and *touch not the unclean thing*; and I will receive you" ([I Corinthians 6:17](#) from [Isaiah 52:11](#)). The word for "unclean" here is *akthartos* and is the same word applied to unclean animals, their flesh, and their carcasses. It is strange that Paul would exhort a gentile church to avoid the unclean if he believed that Yeshua had abolished the Torah of the unclean.

Paul was quoting Isaiah, and lest we should be in doubt about what Isaiah meant, he later spoke of, "a people that provoke me to anger continually to my face; that sacrifice in gardens ... which eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels" ([Isaiah 65:3,4](#)). The time setting is plainly the end time: "For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with His chariots ... For by fire and by His sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many. They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one tree in the midst, eating swine's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be consumed together, saith the Lord" ([Isaiah 66:15-17](#)). God seems to take eating unclean meats rather seriously - even at the end time. These people were not accidentally or unknowingly eating pork. They were deliberately eating it, apparently as a rite of "purification".

What then does God think of "Easter" Ham ! (Our comment not the author of this article)

There is one other reference to this subject in Paul's letters. It is his warning to Timothy about end time apostasy ([I Timothy 4:1-5](#)). "Many shall depart from the faith", Paul says, "giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons." One of these "doctrines of demons" is "commanding to abstain from meats, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth."

What, precisely, does this mean? Well, initially it is important to note that this is not merely a discussion of eating meat. To the King James translators, "meat" was not animal flesh, but food in general. The Greek word is *broma* which means "food".

Upon taking a closer look, this *cannot* refer to a command not to eat the "unclean meats" of Leviticus 11. If it did, it would be tantamount to calling Leviticus 11 a doctrine of demons!

Additionally, the doctrine specifically refers to a command to abstain from those foods *which* God *created to be received*. It may be presumed that He created things which were *not* to be received as food.

Paul continues: "For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused, *if* it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified [set apart] by the Word of God and prayer" (I Timothy 4:4, 5). Where in the Bible are foods "set apart" for human consumption? In Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Paul did not say that everything created by God was good for food *without qualification*. Some things created by God are not fit for human consumption. Paul was condemning those who go beyond the Word of God to prohibit *clean* foods.

The apostle John was also present when Yeshua made His statement about eating with unwashed hands. Very late in John's life, he received an apocalyptic vision. In this vision he saw an angel descend from heaven and heard him cry, "Babylon the great is fallen, and has become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, *and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird*" (Revelation 18:2). Here, late in the first century, there is apparently still such a thing as an unclean bird.

There is one other incident in Yeshua's ministry that may shed some light on His intent relative to unclean meats. When He encountered a man possessed with a "legion" of demons, the demons pleaded with Yeshua to allow them to enter a herd of swine feeding nearby (Mark 5:1-13). If Yeshua had declared pork fit to eat, why did He allow such wholesale destruction of valuable private property?

There may also be some symbolism involved in the question. No animal more symbolizes filth than the swine. Demons are called unclean spirits, and are allowed to enter, possess, and destroy swine. Babylon is become the hold of every foul demonic spirit and every unclean and hateful bird. The unknowing ingestion of unclean meat bears no symbolic meaning. The choice to eat swine's flesh may be *quite* symbolic.

Contrary to popular belief, Yeshua did *not* come to destroy any part of God's Torah, including the health and dietary laws. He came to redeem those who had broken the Torah, and to magnify the Torah (Isaiah 42:21). Yeshua said that not the smallest letter nor stroke of the pen would pass from the Torah until

heaven and earth passed. People should not look for which portions of Torah have been done away. There isn't any.

However, the Messianic Believer is justified in asking how Messiah Yeshua would *administer* the Torah. And since Messiah Yeshua lives in each of us, each of us is fully responsible before God to obey the Torah not as some Pharisees might demand, but as *Messiah Yeshua would have us to do*.