

Peter's Nightmare (from Acts Chapter Ten.)

Let me take you on a trip back in time to the world of the apostles and share with you one of the scariest moments in the life of the Apostle Peter. He had just spent some three years being trained by the most controversial Bible teacher of his generation.

It had taken him that long to accept the claims of the carpenter from Nazareth and to acknowledge that Yeshua (Jesus) was in fact the promised Messiah, David's Greater Son and the true King of Israel.

He went through a rough time when Yeshua was arrested, tried and crucified, mostly because it happened exactly the way our L-rd said it would. He had several startling encounters with the resurrected Messiah and participated in the greatest outpouring of the Holy Spirit ever recorded in the Scriptures.

Despite great resistance and severe persecution, the community of believing Jews continued to grow. More and more of our people came to faith and believed all that the prophets had written concerning the Messiah.

They understood that He came the first time to suffer and to die on the cross for the sins of the world. When He ascended into Heaven, He said He would return one day to set up G-d's Kingdom on earth. There were several opinions as to how this was to occur, but Peter was more troubled by a pressing practical concern – what to do with all the Gentiles who were coming into the faith.

At this time, up to ten percent of the Roman world had converted to Judaism and an even greater number of people were coming to believe in the G-d of Israel, without becoming Jews. In fact, ***outside of the Holy Land, these righteous Gentiles outnumbered Jews in most synagogues by a ratio of three to one.*** They attended worship services and studied the Torah and wanted nothing more to do with the pagan idolatry they once practiced.

At first, Peter and the leadership of the Jerusalem Messianic Jewish community were convinced that when Gentiles came to faith, they had to become part of Israel and live as practicing Jews. ***There appeared to be no other option for them.*** One day, while Peter was staying by the sea shore, he went out on the roof to rest while his hosts prepared a meal for him.

Now from what the Scriptures tell us about Peter, he was pretty stubborn and not always very quick on the uptake. He took his time before he accepted new ideas, but once he accepted a position he let everybody in on his discovery.

As he was trying to sleep, he had a bizarre nightmare, where all kinds of slimy, unclean animals wanted him to put them on the menu. What made it worse; he heard what he recognized as the voice of G-d which was apparently calling for this radical change in diet. In three separate episodes, Peter refused to obey the voice of G-d because it seemed to be asking him to violate the biblical laws of Kosher.

As a Jew, it was unthinkable for him to touch anything unclean, let alone actually eat something forbidden.

To his horror, Peter could not understand why G-d was apparently changing the Laws of Kosher, because the voice repeatedly said that Peter was to no longer call unclean that which the L-rd had cleansed. Peter was awakened by a knock at the door, and he was told that a group of Gentiles had been told by G-d to come to the house where Peter was staying. At that moment, Peter finally understood what G-d was saying to him.

He immediately went downstairs and killed his Gentiles visitors and then cut them up and ate them. After all, isn't what that G-d meant by using the illustration of a tablecloth full of ritually unclean animals?

NO, OF COURSE NOT

Well, fortunately for Peter's guests, the apostle understood that ***it was the believing Jews' attitude towards the Gentiles which needed to change.*** The sacrifice of our blessed Saviour on the cross of Calvary, cleansed all the nations and generations of mankind, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Peter's nightmare had nothing to do with food and yet too many modern Christians have this misunderstanding about this vision, but in reverse. ***Instead of understanding that the apparent change of Kosher Laws was merely an illustration, many Gentile Christians feel that somehow G-d has***

cancelled the rituals and practices of Judaism. Some Christians even teach that Jews are no longer allowed to circumcise their children and that they are under the curse of the Law if they still observe the Sabbath. ***What began as a nightmare for Peter has become a nightmare for the Jewish people.***

G-d wanted the Messianic Jewish believers of the first century to accept converts from among the Gentiles, because it is this group of people which has been cleansed. The dream had actually nothing to do with making any changes in the dietary laws. ***It had everything to do with accepting Gentile believers without requiring that they become Jews first.***

Today, many Gentile believers are teaching Jewish believers that the laws of Kosher no longer apply to them, because animals that were formally ritually unclean, have now been cleansed by G-d. ***This is as ridiculous as saying that Peter's dream permits Jewish people to kill and eat their Gentile neighbours.***

The Gospel did not abolish the practices of Judaism. What the Gospel does is to allow Gentiles to become believers without having to adopt the practices of Judaism. The entire Epistle to the Hebrews points to the superiority of the reality of what Messiah accomplished on the cross. He fulfilled in reality what the sacrificial rituals of Judaism portrayed through symbols.

These symbols only become a problem when we confuse them for the reality which they still represent.

In the Gospel, Jewish believers remain the guardians of these symbols and nowhere does the New Testament cancel any of the practices of Judaism. This is what Paul was talking about in Galatians, in I Corinthians and in Romans.

Just as Gentiles are set free to become believers without having to convert to Judaism, so Jews are set free to become believers without having to abandon Judaism.

There is really no other way to understand Peter's nightmare.

For a fuller discussion of topics related to the practices of Judaism from a Messianic Jewish point of view, we invite you to visit our website:

www.bnaichayim.com.

Or you can contact us:

info@bnaichayim.com

B'nai Chayim Children of Life

8505 – 142 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5R 0M2
(780) 452-1649

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We are a Messianic Jewish congregation of Jews and Gentiles that acknowledges that Yeshua is the promised Messiah, and celebrates this fulfillment of Torah in a Jewish lifestyle.