

Clean and Unclean Food in the NT**Yirmeyah Tan 11 Nov 2025**

Shalom,

Today I am going to share with you about a very controversial subject. I have entitled it: **Clean and Unclean Food in the New Testament.**

For the text, let me quote from the well-known **Act 10:9-28** –

Act 10:9 *On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:*

Act 10:10 *And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,*

Act 10:11 *And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:*

Act 10:12 *Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.*

Act 10:13 *And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.*

Act 10:14 *But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.*

Act 10:15 *And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.*

Act 10:16 *This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.*

Act 10:17 *Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,*

Act 10:18 *And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.*

Act 10:19 *While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.*

Act 10:20 *Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.*

Act 10:21 *Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?*

Act 10:22 *And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.*

Act 10:23 *Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.*

Act 10:24 *And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.*

Act 10:25 *And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.*

Act 10:26 *But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.*

Act 10:27 *And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.*

Act 10:28 *And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.*

I. Peter's Vision

The first question is:

- a. **Was it a command from the Lord to kill and eat unclean animals?**
This is the position taken by most churches and most Christians in the world but please look at what Peter said when he was given the command.
- b. **Peter said he had never eaten everything defiled or unclean: note that this was some time after Pentecost, well after Yeshua's ascension into Heaven. He was observing Lev 11 which is all about clean and unclean food.**
- c. **Peter interpreted his vision to mean that it was now lawful for a Jew to keep company with Gentiles: v28. He never went out to unclean food after the vision.**
In other words, Peter interpreted his vision not as license to eat any bird, animal and fish that he wanted, clean or unclean but to show him that the door to the Gentiles was now open for salvation.

II. 2 Key Words

There are 2 key Greek words that are in view. We would do well to bear in mind because there is a lot of mistranslation in different versions of the Bible. The first Greek word is -

G2839: koinos

koy-nos'

common, defiled, unclean, unholy

The word should be translated as **common or defiled** but sometimes is **wrongly translated** as unclean as well. The word **unclean** is properly translated from **another Greek word**.

G169: akathartos

ak-ath'-ar-tos

impure (ceremonially, **morally (lewd) or specifically (demonic)**): **foul, unclean**.

In the Septuagint, where the Bible version of the Old Testament was translated into Greek about 200 years before Yeshua was born, the Greek word for unclean is **akathartos** not **koinos**.

Let's look at Yeshua's encounter with the Pharisees in **Mar 7:14-23**. This is another passage that has been misconstrued by most Christians and teachers of the Bible to mean that we now have license to eat all kinds of food clean or unclean.

III. Yeshua in Mark 7

Mar 7:14 *And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand:*

Mar 7:15 ***There is nothing from 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.***

Mar 7:16 *If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.*

Mar 7:17 *And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable.*

*Mar 7:18 And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? **Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him;***

*Mar 7:19 **Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?***

Mar 7:20 And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.

Mar 7:21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,

Mar 7:22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:

Mar 7:23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

- a. **This is the passage used by Christians to justify eating unclean food. They claim Yeshua said nothing a man eats can defile him.**
- b. **Some translations have inserted the clause “Yeshua making all foods clean” in v.19.**
- c. **This is wrong because the context of Yeshua’s discussion with the Pharisees was not about clean/unclean food but the washing of hands: v.3.**
- d. **V.19 simply says that the stomach processes food and discharges.**

The Pharisees observed that the disciples of Yeshua did not wash their hands before partaking of their food. As you know, the Pharisees had very strict rules about hand washing, proper washing of pots and pans and so on before they partook of their food. This has nothing to do with clean versus unclean food. This is having to do with eating food with unclean or dirty hands full of bacteria. The Pharisees were aghast at the behaviour of Yeshua’s disciples. Yeshua told them that they were so worried about defilement from unclean hands but were not worried about the defilement that comes from the heart of a man. Whatever dirt you get into your system it gets flushed out eventually. Of course, some people can get sick if the bacteria cause food poisoning but that is not what is in view here. The Pharisees were firmly of the view that if one were to eat with unwashed hands, this would cause the person to be like spiritually defiled, contaminated and unfit for God's service, but this is not what the Law of Clean and Unclean food in Lev 11 said. That was said in the context of people partaking of unclean food in birds, animals, fishes and including the insects and so on.

Let me repeat: this passage in Mar 7 has nothing to do with clean versus unclean food in the Lev 11 sense of the word. It has to do with eating with unwashed hands.

Lev 11 is very clear that the unclean animals listed are an abomination to Yahweh, to our heavenly Father. Whoever touches or eats these unclean things become an abomination to Father Yahweh. It is not just defiling in a sense of being dirty, but **you become detestable to Him**. The Law of Clean and Unclean in Lev 11 is **a commandment of Yahweh**. Anyone who breaks the commandment becomes detestable and defiled to Him.

Let me repeat, Yeshua and His disciples observed and obeyed Lev 11 all their lives and they never changed Lev 11. Why? It is simple: **because Yahweh never changes**. He declares this in **Malachi 3:11** and we are told in **Hebrews 13:8** that Yeshua is the same yesterday, today and forever. The God that caused the Bible to be written from the first page of Genesis to the last page of Revelation is the same God. **He does not change His mind from one generation to another.**

He does not contradict what He says in the Old Testament by something else in the New Testament. Please note that the Greek word for defile used by Yeshua in Mark and Matthew is the Greek word **koinos** and **not akathartos**. Koinos is translated as common or defiled but akathartos refers to unclean in terms of Lev 11, declared as unclean by Yahweh. Demons, evil spirits are described as akathartos throughout the New Testament. Any demon enters a man is called an unclean spirit – **akathartos** not koinos.

The Bible in the New Testament tells us about bad fish and unclean animals. Look at **Mat 13:47-48** -

IV. Bad fish & animals

Mat 13:47 *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:*

Mat 13:48 *Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, **but cast the bad away.***

- a. There is good fish and bad fish. The fish was thrown back into the sea as they were unfit for human consumption. To the Jews, it was abundantly clear what a bad fish involved. Think of catfish, they are unclean as they don't have scales. Think of sharks, they may have fins, but they don't have scales, so they are unclean. A clean fish must have both fins and scales. If the fishing net brought in some prawns, shrimp and/or lobsters they would be thrown back into the ocean because they are unclean as defined by Lev 11. **There would be no bad fish if all had been made clean.**

Next, let's turn to **Luk 11:11-12** –

Luk 11:11 *If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a **serpent?***

Luk 11:12 *Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a **scorpion?***

Snakes and scorpions are eaten in many cultures, but Yeshua was obviously pointing to their uncleanness and being dangerous.

The Pharisees would have understood Yeshua very well when He made reference to serpent and scorpion. If scorpions and serpents are now ok for us to eat, what is wrong with a father giving his children to eat? If we ask our heavenly Father for bread and He sends a serpent or scorpion to us we can kill and eat if they have been made clean. In China, they eat snakes and scorpions as well. In Ireland, Cambodia, Laos, all these are commonly eaten. Yeshua is saying that our Heavenly Father will never give us such things.

Moreover, unknown to lots of Christians, unclean birds and animals are mentioned in the New Testament in **Rev 16:13** –

V. Unclean Animals in NT

- a. **Frogs: Rev 16:13** *And I saw **three unclean spirits like frogs** come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.*
- b. **Birds & Beasts: Rev 18:2** *And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.*

ISV: Rev 18:2 He cried out in a powerful voice, "Fallen! Babylon the Great has fallen! She has become a home for demons. She is a prison for every unclean spirit, a prison for every unclean bird, and a prison for every unclean and hated beast.

You can see how exquisite the translation is in the ISV version. There has been no change about the list of clean and unclean foods in Lev 11. The New Testament did not change any of these things.

We shall be talking about another controversial passage, namely, **Rom 14:14** –

VI. Rom 14:14

Rom 14:14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

Note:

One of the problems in the NKJV and most other translations is that they translate koinos as 'common' in Titus 1:14 and Jude 3 but translate it as unclean—a meaning that it does not have-- in Romans 14:14.

Koinos is also mistranslated as unclean in Hebrews 9:13, where it also should be translated to be "defiled" as in touching dead bodies, or childbirth.

Note: Clean/unclean foods are declared so by YHWH, not by any man [Lev 11]

VII. 1Tim 4:1-5

Look at **1Ti 4:1-5** –

1Ti 4:1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

1Ti 4:2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

1Ti 4:3 Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

1Ti 4:4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:

1Ti 4:5 For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Most pastors tell their congregations that you can sanctify any food like pork by praying over it and giving thanks. Rather, what Paul is saying to Timothy is that whatever is sanctified by the **word of God** we can give thanks and eat. Please note that:

- a. Lev 11 speaks of unclean food as “abomination” to YHWH. Praying will never sanctify such food.
- b. We can only eat what is “sanctified [set apart] by the Word of God”
- c. Moreover, 1Tim 4:3 tells us that the subject is false teaching against marriage and advocating vegetarianism, that is, forbidding people to eat [clean] meat

Next, lots of Christians do not realize that eating unclean food is a sin because you are breaking Yahweh's commandment. They say where do you find that in the New Testament?

One example is from **Gal 5:19-20** –

VIII. Uncleaness is a Sin

Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleaness, lasciviousness,
Gal 5:20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

Have you ever wondered what this sin or this work of the flesh is that is called 'uncleaness'? Have you heard of this work of the flesh (uncleaness) being preached in your churches? The answer must be no. A work of the flesh is the same as sin: it is a transgression against Yahweh's laws, the breaking of Yahweh's laws. Uncleaness as a work of the flesh refers to breaking Yahweh's commandments on clean and unclean foods plus forbidden unclean sexual activities as during a woman's menstruation.

Look at **Isa 65:1-5** and **Isa 66:15-17**. Here are the passages that refer to the time when Yeshua returns visibly to this earth to conquer all the wicked and set up His kingdom in Jerusalem –

IX. Day of YHWH [When Yeshua Returns]

Isa 65:1 I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name.
Isa 65:2 I have spread out my hands all day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts:
Isa 65:3 A people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick;
Isa 65:4 Which remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments, which eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels;
Isa 65:5 Which say, stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.

You see graves are unclean, you are not supposed to touch gravestones and live among the graveyards. Eating swine's flesh, having abominable food in your pots, pans and bowls at home are forbidden. If you are not convinced, look at **Isa 66:15-17** –

Isa 66:15 For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.
Isa 66:16 For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many.
Isa 66:17 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.

We are already in the days when Yahweh is judging the world by fire and by sword. Look at the wildfires in Australia in recent years. Look at the wildfires every summer in California and the western States of America. These wildfires in America are still ongoing, raging away and getting more and more intense. It is judgment time. **Isaiah 65 & 66** look forward to return of Yeshua when He comes to judge the world by fire and by the sword. He will also go after those who eat swine's flesh and other abominable things like mice.

For the millennial temple when the clean and unclean will be taught, let's turn to **Eze 44:23** –

X. The Millenium

Eze 44:23 *And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.*

People will be taught the difference between the holy versus profane and to discern between the unclean and the clean.

Let's go to the New Testament **1Pe 1:13-16** –

XI. Clean Food, Abomination & Holiness

1Pe 1:13 *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;*

1Pe 1:14 *As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:*

1Pe 1:15 *But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;*

1Pe 1:16 *Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.*

I am going to show you the linkage between clean food/abominations and holiness. In verse 16 Peter was quoting from **Lev 11:44** -

Lev 11:44 *For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.*

Next let's go to **Rev 21:27** –

Rev 21:27 *And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

- a. Holy
- b. Defile
- c. Abomination

Compare:

Lev 11:45 *For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: **ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.***

Lev 11:46 ***This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth:***

Lev 11:47 ***To make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten.***

- a. Clean & Unclean Food is YHWH's Law
- b. No man can declare any food to be clean or unclean. He can only declare a food to be defiled [common]
- c. Not based on hygiene or nutrition but His decision
- d. Eating unclean food is therefore a sin, a transgression of the Law [Torah]

- e. **The one commandment given to Adam & Eve was about food-not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good & evil!**
- f. **The forbidden fruit was lovely to look at and good for food:**

Gen 2:9 *And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.*

People eat pork, lobster, prawns, oysters, etc because they look good and are tasty. However, YAHWEH has declared such food as unclean, and He forbids us to eat them. I choose to obey Him. What about you?