

# The Torah & The Apostolic Scriptures, part 3

## *The Great Debate in Jerusalem (Acts 15)*

Don Cole

Refer to the last page: "How to Interpret Scripture"

### **Acts 15:1-21 (ESV)**

#### **The Jerusalem Council**

Your notes:

The Jerusalem Council was organized by the Apostles and Elders of Yeshua in 50 AD. This was the first council; the Council of Nicaea was not until 325 AD.

The Jerusalem Council was comprised of those who walked, taught, and were persecuted for their faith. These Apostles and Elders of Yeshua gave us not only the most accurate details and records which we have today, they also explained how they arrived at their conclusions based on the Biblical text. Without a doubt, the Jerusalem Council was the most important and crucial council of the Messianic Body. Whereas the Council of Nicaea, in 325 AD, records some questionable conclusions. Only a comparison of these two councils reveal how the Scriptures were destroyed or kept!

#### **Acts 15:1:**

<sup>1</sup>But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." [Acts 15:1]

It was common for the average Jew to say that "you must be circumcised according to the custom of Moses, or you cannot be saved"; as evidenced in verse 5 by the Pharisees who believed in Yeshua when they said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

It is here that we see the major issue of the Jerusalem Council. It was about circumcision and keeping the law (Torah) of Moses. That is the context of the issue!

However, as we unravel the actual dispute of how a non-Jew could walk as a covenant member with Israel and receive the blessings of the covenant.

The issue was not about abolishing the Torah nor was it about Gentiles being grafted into a "church." (Acts 10 shows that these Gentiles were already grafted into Israel.) Nor was the issue about Gentiles keeping

only part of the Torah. It was about circumcision. We need to examine the context of the Scripture versus Tradition. The CONTEXT is key!

Acts 15:2-6:

<sup>2</sup>And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. <sup>3</sup>So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. <sup>4</sup>When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church [the Body of Yeshua] and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. <sup>5</sup>But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”

<sup>6</sup>The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. [Acts 15:2-6]

This debate had been going on for 8 to 10 years, and it was coming to an end. The issue of circumcision, Torah and Salvation had to be settled: the Gentiles were attending synagogue but were not keeping the Torah. Their sin was so horrific that it placed the Gentiles' salvation into question as expressed by the four Laws taken from Leviticus 17 & 18.

Acts 15:7-9:

<sup>7</sup>And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

<sup>8</sup>And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, <sup>9</sup>and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. [Acts 15:7-9]

But listen to Peter's opening statement in the last half of verse 7, “God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe”. Peter recalled what had taken place in chapter 10 of Acts. That is, that event was out of his control, and they witnessed Yeshua's will and not man's. That it was Yeshua who approved the Gentiles' hearts and bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us Jews and He made no distinction between us and them. And, therefore, Yeshua cleansed their hearts by faith! Peter said that “God made a choice” and therefore it is out of their doing! The proof of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit closed the subject, for it is the work of God! This event revealed that “circumcision” was not a decisive matter in receiving the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 15:10:**

<sup>10</sup>Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? [Acts 15:10]

Now, Peter addressed all who attended the council saying, “therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear”? Peter was not referring to the written Torah (the first 5 books of the Bible) as putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither your fathers nor we have been able to bear” Peter was referring to the “oral traditions” (AKA the Oral Law) of man-made laws to convert a proselyte!

A proselyte was a gentile; he was a sojourner in the land of Israel who wanted to convert to Judaism. Common belief was that this gentile must be circumcised as a first step to becoming a convert to Israel.

This dominant theology of the Second Temple period was that these “man-made” rules of Oral Torah must be followed. This early rabbinic theology of the Oral Torah became interwoven with the Written Torah, so much so that some could not distinguish between the two. It was this rabbinic theology (Oral Torah) that was deemed as man-made, and these were the laws that were too heavy for anyone to bear.

**Matt 23:4-5 quotes Yeshua:**

<sup>4</sup>”They tie up heavy burdens [yoke], hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. <sup>5</sup>They do all their deeds to be seen by others”. [Matt 23:4-5]

The word “yoke” was a common term at that time, Peter said “you are putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10).

**Matt 11:29-30 Yeshua said take My yoke:**

<sup>29</sup>“Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” [Matt 11:29-30]

**Matt 23:15 quotes what Yeshua said about proselytes:**

<sup>15</sup>Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. [Matt 23:15]

The term “yoke” can be either good or bad. As we saw in the previous verses, Yeshua speaks of His yoke as His government, which is easy & light & anyone can keep His Torah. James confirmed that keeping Torah gives freedom, Jas 1:25.

**“Putting God to the test”** (Acts 15:10) is when a person places their ways over God’s.

According to rabbinic theology, those who were becoming proselytes had to be circumcised to become Jewish & to enter into Israel. The rabbis believed that all of Israel would be saved.

However, according to Scripture, faith & repentance in the Messiah were critical aspects in order to obtain the Gospel of Israel.

1Cor 7:19-20, Paul said:

<sup>19</sup>“For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision but keeping the commandments of God. <sup>20</sup>Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called”. [1 Cor 7:19-20]

How could this be when the Torah stated that you are to be circumcised? In the text below, Paul answers this question.

Rom 4:9-12:

<sup>9</sup>Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. <sup>10</sup>How then was it counted to him? Was it *before* or *after* he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. <sup>11</sup>He received the sign of circumcision as a *seal of the righteousness* that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, <sup>12</sup>and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. [Rom 4:9-12]

Let us go back to Acts 15.

Acts 15:10-11:

<sup>10</sup>Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? [Acts 15:10]

<sup>11</sup>But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” [Acts 15:11]

Peter stated the same Gospel when he spoke to the Jews during Hag HaShavuot (Pentecost).

Acts 2:38-39:

<sup>38</sup>And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup>For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” [Acts 2:38-39]

## Barnabas & Paul's testimony:

Acts 15:12-15:

<sup>12</sup>And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. <sup>13</sup>After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. <sup>14</sup>Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. <sup>15</sup>And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, [Acts 15:12-15]

## James quoted Amos.

Acts 15:16-18 quoting Amos 9:11-12:

<sup>16</sup>“AFTER THIS I WILL RETURN,  
AND I WILL REBUILD THE TENT OF DAVID  
THAT HAS FALLEN;  
I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS,  
AND I WILL RESTORE IT,  
<sup>17</sup>THAT THE REMNANT OF MANKIND MAY  
SEEK THE LORD,  
AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE  
CALLED BY MY NAME,  
SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE  
THINGS <sup>18</sup>KNOWN FROM OF OLD.” [Acts 15:16-  
18 & Amos 9:11-12]

## The Gentiles break God's Law (not the Noahic law). The book of James tells of James' belief in Torah.

James 1:25; 2:8; 2:12:

<sup>25</sup>But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. [Jas 1:25]

<sup>8</sup>If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. [Jas 2:8]

<sup>12</sup>So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. [Jas 2:12]

Acts 15:19-21:

<sup>19</sup>Therefore my [James'] judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, <sup>20</sup>but should write to them to <sup>1</sup>abstain from the things polluted by idols, and <sup>2</sup>from sexual immorality, and <sup>3</sup>from what has been strangled, and <sup>4</sup>from blood. <sup>21</sup>For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues." [Acts 15:19-21]

## The Council's Letter to Gentile Believers

<sup>22</sup>Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, <sup>23</sup>with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. <sup>24</sup>Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, <sup>25</sup>it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, <sup>26</sup>men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>27</sup>We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. <sup>28</sup>For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: <sup>29</sup>that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” [Acts 15:22-29]

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# “How to Interpret Scripture”

*Three things to always apply when studying Scripture:*

1. *Contextually* – study Scripture within the context of the entire Bible.
  2. *Literally* – read Scripture literally – what do the words actually mean.
  3. *Historically* – understand Scripture within its historical/chronological context.
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*The character of Yeshua according to His Word:*

1. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, & forever,” [Heb 13:8; Malachi 3:6]
  2. “God is not a man that He should lie,” [Num 23:19; Heb 6:18]
  3. Do not add or subtract from the Scriptures, [Deut 4:2; Rev 22:18-19]
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## *Key Scriptures to Interpret the Bible*

Matt 28:18-20 – this is after His resurrection.

<sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Acts 1:6-8 – after Yeshua’s resurrection, He spoke to His disciples about the restoration of Israel.

<sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup>He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

John 3:36 – the book of John stated that obedience is key to eternal life:

<sup>36</sup>Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

1 John 2:3-6 - the Apostle John asked, “Do you really know God?”:

<sup>3</sup>And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. <sup>4</sup>Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, <sup>5</sup>but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup>whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. [Note: Yeshua perfectly kept the Torah; likewise, we also need to &, thereby, stop sinning.]

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## Timeline

Pre-30AD - <i>Rabbinic tradition</i>	30AD – <i>Resurrection / Pentecost</i>	40AD – <i>Peter’s vision &amp; Cornelius (Acts 10)</i>	50AD – <i>Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)</i>	325AD – <i>Council of Nicaea</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Oral Law</li> <li>○ Customs of Moses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Outpouring of the Holy Spirit to <u>Jews only</u> who came up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 10 years after Pentecost</li> <li>○ Outpouring of Holy Spirit on <u>Gentiles only</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 10 years after Acts 10</li> <li>○ Jerusalem Council – discussion about Gentiles’ salvation &amp; circumcision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Under the auspices of Constantine</li> <li>○ Only Gentile bishops were allowed – Jews could not attend</li> </ul>