

the Jerusalem Conference

Acts 15 and the Restoration of All Israel

And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien -- Because they do not fear Me," Says the LORD of hosts. ⁶ "For I *am* the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

Malachi 3:5-6

- The apostles had the authority to “do away with” various portions of “the Law”
- God has one law for the Jew and another law for the non-Jew (the Gentile)
- God’s law is spiritual, and the apostles had the authority to “spiritualize away” aspects of the law they considered to be too hard for the “spirit filled” believers in Messiah.
- The apostles were unclear of the role of Torah for the non-Jew (Yeshua had not prepared them for the influx of non-Jewish believers into the believing community)
- Yeshua Himself did not understand the Law since he apparently assumed that “. . . not one jot or tittle would pass away . . .”

Review -

- God raised up Abraham who would be a blessing for all mankind, since –
 - His descendants (Israel) would 'mix' throughout all the nations
 - His Descendant – Messiah Yeshua - would pave the way of salvation by redeeming His people from the penalty of their sins

Review

- Israel was divided into two nations – Israel (the northern tribes) and Judah (the southern tribes)
 - both nations sinned which ultimately lead to their captivity and removal from the Promised Land, yet both nations continued to have a role to play
 - It is God's plan to reunite and restore these two nations into one kingdom so they might fulfill their ultimate role of being a light to the nations

Review -

- God began a 'mini' restoration in the first century
 - The early believers in Yeshua were Jews
 - Acts 2 shows that people from all nations were being brought into the assembly (the church)

Review -

- The Jewish leadership (the Pharisees) believed in two sets of law
 - Written Torah – that which was given by YHVH to Moses and written in a book
 - Oral Traditions – believed by some to have been given to Moses by God, but were handed down orally from generation to generation. These traditions were eventually raised to the level of written Torah and in some cases considered higher than written Torah.

First Century Judaism

- For all practical purposes, the Jewish people were the only people who believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thus Judaism was the only visible ‘godly’ belief structure.
 - It was believed that you had to become ‘Jewish’ in order to have a place in the kingdom (salvation)

“All Israelites have a share in the world to come, as it is said, Your people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.”

- *m.Sanhedrin* 10:1 referring to Isaiah 60:21

First Century Judaism

- The leading sect within Judaism were the Pharisees (separatists)
 - Teachers of Oral Law -
“. . . Moses received the Torah from Sinai and conveyed it to Joshua, Joshua to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets to the Men of the Great Assembly. . ."
(Pirkei Avot 1:1)
- Many of those who believed Yeshua was The Messiah were Pharisees

First Century Judaism

- James – the leader of the believing Jewish community
 - The brother of Yeshua
 - Was held in high esteem by practically all sects of Judaism, including the Pharisee, Essenes, Zealots, and the Priesthood
 - Credited as saying *“The world is sustained by three sayings, the Law, the Temple Service and the practice of benevolence.”* (Mishnah, Aboth. 1.2)
 - The ‘Nasi’ or president of the (Messianic) Sanhedrin, thus in a position to establish halacha

Acts 15:1 *And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the **custom of Moses**, you cannot be saved."*

- Believing Pharisees from Antioch (Acts 14:26; Acts 15:5)
 - More than likely subscribed to most, if not all, of the “halacha”
 - Written halacha (written Torah)
 - Oral halacha (oral traditions)

- What is “the Custom of Moses”?
- What does Moses say about circumcision?
 - Moses having a problem circumcising his own children -
 - *(Ex. 4:26) So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.*
 - What to do if a stranger – a “ger” – wants to eat the Passover –
 - *(Ex. 12:44) But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof (a “ger” or stranger that wants to keep the Passover)*
 - *(Ex. 12:48) And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. a “ger” or stranger that wants to keep the Passover*
 - Circumcise your newborn male children on the eighth day –
 - *(Lev 12:3) And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.*
 - Circumcise your heart –
 - *(Deu 10:16) Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.*
 - *(Deu 30:6) And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.*

- “the **Custom** of Moses” is tradition . . . Oral Law
 - **1485** ἔθος ethos {eth'-os} **Meaning:** 1) custom 2) usage prescribed by law, institute, prescription, rite
 - Practically everywhere the word “ethos” is used, it refers to Jewish tradition (Oral Law)
 - **Acts 21:21** *"but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the **customs** (ethos).*
 - **Acts 6:14** *"for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the **customs** (ethos) which Moses delivered to us."*
 - **Luke 22:39** *Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was **accustomed** (ethos), and His disciples also followed Him.*
 - **John 19:40** *Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the **custom** (ethos) of the Jews is to bury.*

- “the **Custom** of Moses” – an oral tradition that dealt with either
 - 1) the conversion process
 - 2) re-circumcision
 - 3) or both . . .

It was clear that **Baptism, Circumcision, and Sacrifice** were part of the ***traditional*** conversion process - *“The details of the act of reception [into the community of Israel] seem not to have been settled definitely before the second Christian century. From the law that proselyte and native Israelite should be treated alike (Numbers 15:14 et seq.) the inference was drawn that circumcision, the bath of purification, and sacrifice were prerequisites for conversion . . .”*

Jewish Encyclopedia Online

There were *disagreements about which came first, baptism or circumcision* –

“Our rabbis taught: ‘If a proselyte was circumcised but had not performed the prescribed ritual ablution [immersion], R. Eliezer said, ‘Behold he is a proper proselyte; for so we find that our forefathers were circumcised and had not performed ritual ablution’.

If he performed the prescribed ablution [immersion] but had not been circumcised, R. Joshua said, ‘Behold he is a proper proselyte; for so we find that the mothers had performed ritual ablution but had not been circumcised’.

The sages, however, said, ‘Whether he had performed ritual ablution but had not been circumcised or whether he had been circumcised but had not performed the prescribed ritual ablution, he is not a proper proselyte, unless he has been circumcised and has also performed the prescribed ritual ablution [immersion]’”

(Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Yebamot, 46a)

“The issue between the Zealot and Liberal parties regarding the circumcision of proselytes remained an open one in tannaitic times; R. Joshua asserting that the bath, or baptismal rite, rendered a person a full proselyte without circumcision, as Israel, when receiving the Law, required no initiation other than the purificative bath; while R. Eliezer makes circumcision a condition for the admission of a proselyte, and declares the baptismal rite to be of no consequence (Yeb. 46a) . . .

A similar controversy between the Shammaites and the Hillelites is given (Shab. 137a) regarding a proselyte born circumcised: the former demanding the spilling of a drop of blood of the covenant; the latter declaring it to be unnecessary. The rigorous Shammaite view, voiced in the Book of Jubilees (l.c.), prevailed in the time of King John Hyrcanus, who forced the Abrahamic rite upon the Idumeans, and in that of King Aristobulus, who made the Itureans undergo circumcision (Josephus, "Ant." xiii. 9, § 1; 11, § 3). According to Esth. viii. 17, LXX., the Persians who, from fear of the Jews after Haman's defeat, "became Jews," were circumcised."

Jewish Encyclopedia Online

Acts 15:5 *But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."*

- *Two requirements according to these “certain” men (a subset of the believing Pharisees)*
 - *Circumcision (after the “manner of Moses”)*
 - *Keep the Law (Torah) of Moses*
- *These two requirements are not necessarily one in the same. One pertains to Written Torah, the other to Oral Tradition.*
 - *Keep in mind that by the first century, the Oral Torah was held to the same level as Written Torah. Thus the Pharisees, when they say “law”, could mean Written Torah, Oral Traditions, or both.*

Acts 15:6 *Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.*

- They were going to discuss “Halacha”
 - Was the Halacha which forbid Jews from fellowshipping with non-Jews (*non-Jews who had not gone through the traditional conversion to Judaism*) applicable to those who were coming into this new Jewish sect – the Nazarenes?

Acts 15:7 *And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.*

- *Cornelius was a "God-fearer" who had not (yet) converted to Judaism*
- *Cornelius was probably not circumcised*
- *Peter went against traditional halacha in order to sit at the same table with Cornelius*

Acts 15:8-9 *"So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, ⁹ "and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.*

God gave Cornelius and all his household the holy spirit - even before they were immersed or circumcised.

- **Numbers 15:16** *'One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you.'*

Acts 15:10 *"Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"*

What is this “yoke”?

- Circumcision was never a yoke to the Israelites
 - It happened to them on the 8th day after birth!
 - Numerous examples of adult males undergoing circumcision
 - Abraham and his household
 - All of the Shechemites for the sake of one man marrying a Hebrew woman
 - All the Israelite males born in Egypt
 - Israelites born in the wilderness before crossing over
 - During the times of the Maccabees, the parents were willing to die in order to circumcise their children.

What is this “yoke”?

- *The yoke was Oral Tradition*

- **Matthew 23:2-4** *"The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³ "Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. ⁴ "For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.*

What is this “yoke”?

- *The Torah was never a yoke*

- **ESV Deuteronomy 30:11-14** *"For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. ¹² It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' ¹³ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' ¹⁴ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.*

Acts 15:11-15 *"But we believe that **through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ** we shall be saved in the same manner as they."* ¹² Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

¹³ And after they had become silent, **James answered**, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: ¹⁴ "Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles **to take out of them** a people for His name. ¹⁵ "And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:"

- *Redemption and salvation through grace was not new to the apostles, nor to the Jews in that day*
 - *(Isa 11:10) And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.*
 - *(Isa 42:6) I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;*
 - *(Isa 49:6) And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.*
- *God was to draw His people **OUT OF the Gentiles**. He was not necessarily going to draw Gentiles*
- *James states that what is happening is a result of prophecy*

Acts 15:16-17 *'After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; ¹⁷ So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things.'*

“In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen . . .”

- Shortly after David was made King over all Israel, he brought the Ark of the Covenant into the city of David and placed it in a tent.
- The Ark being brought to Jerusalem pictured God being with a united Israel
- Ark was later transferred to Solomon’s Temple. Solomon reigned over a united Israel
- Under Solomon’s reign, Israel reached the pinnacle of greatness
- After Solomon’s death, the kingdom was divide. Before the Temple was destroyed, the Ark was removed. It was not a part of the 2nd Temple
 - Thus, David’s dynasty is a deposed dynasty and the fallen Tabernacle (or Tent) of David is an idiom for the nation being divided.

*“ . . . and **close** up the **breaches** thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old . . . ”*

“close” is 1443. גַּדַּר, gaw-dar'; to wall in or around; close up, fence up, hedge, enclose, repairer

“breaches” is 6556. פְּרֵצִים, peh'-rets; a break ; a breach

- In other words, hedge up the brokenness of the Kingdom as a result of the split.
 - This is explained in Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol. 7, pg. 329-330.
 - Yahweh is saying that in the last days, he is going to unite and restore the kingdom of Israel as it was in the time of David, complete with the Ark of the Covenant. This is consistent with all the prophets and is pictured in Ezekiel 37.

“ . . . that they may possess the remnant of Edom . . . ”

- “Edom” = “man”. LXX reads “That the remnant of man may seek the Lord”
 - In Hebrew thought, Israel is synonymous with man.
- Israel is considered the remnant (Isaiah 10:20; 11:10,11,16; Jer. 23:2 & 3).
 - Gentiles are never considered a remnant.

“ . . . and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this.”

- *“heathen” = “goy”; nations. Israel was sifted throughout the nations.*
- *LXX reads “. . . that bear my name.”*
 - *Israel is called by Yahweh’s name (Deut. 28:10; 2 Chron. 7:14; Is. 43:3; Jer. 14:9)*
- *Gentiles are never called by God’s name*

Amos 9:11 paraphrased:

“In that day I will restore the dynasty of David, the united Kingdom of Israel, that had fallen down, and rebuild it as it was in David’s time so that the remnant of my people Israel, who are called by My name, may earnestly seek me. I, YHVH, will make it come to pass.”

Acts 15:19 *"Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God . . ."*

- *"sentence" is better translated "judgment"*
 - *This would be considered the "halacha" of the non-Jewish Nazarines (Christians) for that day*
- *"from among the gentiles"*
- *"turned to God" could also mean "return"*
 - ***1994** epistrefho {ep-ee-stref'-o} - to turn to the worship of the true God; to cause to return, to bring back*

- *Consider this:*

- *If these people were “among” the Gentiles, could it be that they were the ones who had been “scattered” among the Gentiles as so many prophecies clearly show?*
- *If they, as a people, were returning to God, does that not indicate that they had once had a relationship with God?*
- *Could these people be part of the Lost Tribes of Israel, who Yeshua was sent to?*
- *If they were Israelites, is it not quite possible, and even probable, that **these returning Israelites WERE ALREADY CIRCUMCIZED!***

Acts 15:20 “. . . but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from* things strangled, and *from* blood.

There are a number of possibilities as to what these four prohibitions pertain to:

- Pagan temple rites
- Foods not properly slaughtered
- The “Heart of the Torah” (Lev. 17 – 18)
 - Simply by stating these four things, the leadership (especially the Pharisees) would have known exactly what James was talking about. These two chapters of Leviticus describe these 4 things that are an abomination to God.

Whatever James meant by these four prohibitions, they were practices that would separate the non-Jews from the Jewish community and thus hamper the growth of those wanting to learn more about the God of Israel.

Acts 15:21 *"For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."*

The four prohibitions were only the starting point for the believing non-Jews as they started their new walk in God's way.

- They opened the door to fellowship within the synagogue system
- The newcomers would be expected to attend the synagogue each Sabbath in order to continue their education in "Moses" – a common idiom for the Torah, the Law of Moses.

Review

- There were differing views among the Jewish leadership of the believing community concerning circumcision:
 - Is it necessary part of the conversion process?
 - At what point should a man be circumcised, before baptism or after?
 - Should a man who is already circumcised have to be “circumcised” again?
- Circumcision “after the custom of Moses” was tradition concerning the conversion process
- Though alluded to, a formal conversion process is not found in the Torah except for possibly Exodus 12

Review

- Peter showed that God instructed him to have “table fellowship” with Cornelius and his household, people who had not gone through the traditional conversion process.
- James indicates that the believing community was witnessing the beginning of the return of the exiles (the lost ten tribes) as described in Amos 9.
 - It can be assumed that many, if not most, of the returning exiles had already been circumcised at birth
 - According to the traditional conversion process, these returning exiles would have to be re-circumcised in order to join into the community.

Review

- James established this Halacha for the believing community:
 - The non-Jews would initially have to abstain from certain activities
 - The Jews would have to accept them into the community if they did abstain from those activities
 - The non-Jews would continue their Torah education in the synagogue
 - they would grow in their Torah walk

Conclusion

- The purpose of the Jerusalem Conference was not to:
 - Do away with the Torah
 - Do away with circumcision
 - Modify God's law in any way in order to accommodate the non-Jewish believers
- Instead, the purpose of the conference was to determine if a non-Jewish believer had to follow the traditional conversion process and become Jewish in order to be accepted into the believing community. It was determined that they did not!

God does not change!

שְׁלוֹם לָכֶם

Shalom Alecheim

Peace be Unto You