

Date : 26th July 2026
Topic : Jerusalem Council
Passage : Acts 15

3 Layers addressed. Pick one to focus on

- Layer 1: The Law of Moses

Survey question "How do you feel?"

Which side resonates with you? Left? Right? Explain.

Tween: I don't want to get baptized...but does that mean I won't go to heaven? Youth: About my faith? It depends—on my behavior—am I obeying God or not. Grandma: I hope [grandchild] will be "Christ-centered"—go to church, share with and care for others, speak politely, and listen to me when I tell her that she is wrong.	- You do <u>you</u> : - I'm just being <i>me</i>; being free! - We are not "<i>under the law</i>". - The Old Testament is obsolete. Culture has changed; like the laws about sexual relations in Leviticus no longer apply today.
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- Layer 2: How do you "read" the bible? How did you "read" Acts 15? (debate genre)
- Layer 3: How did the Holy Spirit help church leaders with doctrinal disagreement?

Acts 15 "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved"

What question did the Jerusalem Council convene to resolve?

To be saved from God's judgement, what must Gentiles...?

(NOT "How do we get Jews and Gentile believers to eat together?")

Case by Pharisees who had come to Messiah Jesus to be reconciled with God:

Acts 15:5 "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses"

Basis: How it has always been, throughout Israel's history

To be saved from God's judgement, you must:

- Must join, enter in, be part of God's people. Then can receive God's help.
First become part of this nation/ethnicity, the Jewish people. *Examples:*
 - ✓ *Rahab*: Canaanite prostitute in Jericho. She joined Israel and her whole family was saved from destruction (Joshua 2)
 - ✓ *Ruth*: Moabite widow (Ruth 1)

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried..."

- How? Through the law. **Distinctives:** Culture and traditions, shared language and history, circumcision (Genesis 17:9,10), food laws (Leviticus, Deuteronomy)

Case by Peter, Paul and Barnabas, also Jewish followers of Messiah Jesus

Basis:

- **Q1:** What did Jesus, our Lord and God, say/do?
- **Q2:** How is the Holy spirit moving/confirming this?

Peter

Use Acts 15:7-11. Fill in the blanks.

- V7 God made a _____
- V8 God, who knows the heart, sh_____ ...
- V9 God ... p_____ their hearts by f_____...

Really? How so? When? Answer Q1 and Q2:

Acts 10

11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large

sheet being let down ... 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. 13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

16 This happened three times...

the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. 20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them..."

34 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

36 You know the message God sent ...

...that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that

the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. 46 For they heard them speaking in tongues[b] and praising God. Then Peter said, 47 “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” 48 So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

After this, when Peter went back to Jerusalem:

- (Acts 11:2,3) the circumcised believers criticized him 3 and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”
- What picture/paradigm were these believers having in their minds?

Jewish people
- inside
- clean, accepted by God

>>>> Peter is going in the wrong direction! >>>>

Gentiles
- Outside
- Unclean, not acceptable to God

This was also Peter’s picture/paradigm.

But then what picture/paradigm did Jesus and the Holy spirit show?

Acts 11

15 “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. 16 Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but **you** will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’

17 So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?”

Quoted from Acts 1

. 4 On one occasion, while he[Jesus] was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.

5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days **you** will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Who is included in the group, “you”?

What was Peter’s surprising new picture/paradigm?

Jewish people
- Inside, clean
“a yoke that *neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear*”
(Example: 2 kings 17)

Not through doing the laws to enter into the Jewish nation, but through faith in Jesus Christ to be included as God’s chosen people

Gentiles
Outside
Unclean

A new people, *from where?*

On what basis?

Acts 15.8 God, who knows the heart,
showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them,
just as he did to us. 9....
for he **purified** their hearts by faith.

James:

Acts 15

13 When they finished, James spoke up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me. 14 Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas

“12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.”

Really? Got meh? Which signs and wonders? Answer Q1 and Q2:

Acts 13

Cyprus...they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. ... Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, 7 who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. 9 Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 10 “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right!... 11 Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, ...he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. 12 When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

Acts 13:14 to 52

Pisidian Antioch. ...

46 Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. 47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

“ ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”

...51 So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium.

52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 14

Iconium

3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders.

So now, how?

Throw out the law? What was Jesus (Matthew 5), Paul (Romans 7:6, 7; Romans 13), James (James 2) and Peter’s (in 1 and 2 Peter) attitude toward the Law of Moses?

James was the leader of the Jerusalem church

How does he judge on this matter?

Acts 15: 15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this,
 as it is written: 16 “After this I will return
 and rebuild David’s fallen tent.
 Its ruins I will rebuild,
 and I will restore it,
 17 **that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,
 even all the Gentiles who bear my name,**
 says the Lord, who does these things’ —
 18 things known from long ago.
 19 “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who
 are turning to God.

“in agreement”? What did the prophets say? Who did they speak to? Examples:

Isaiah (prophesied around 680B.C. (Note: Cyrus the Great rose to power about 150 years later, at 539B.C.)	Amos (around 733 B.C.)
Isaiah 45 “This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of ... “Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save. 21 Declare what is to be, present it— let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. 22 <u>“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.</u>	To surrounding nations - Damascus (Amos 1) - Gaza - Tyre - Edom - Ammon - Moab To Judah, Jerusalem To Israel (Northern Kingdom)

Now I am “in Christ”. What now? What next?

Acts 15
 20 Instead we should write to them, telling them

to **abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality**, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. 21 For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

Hah? If only by faith, trusting in what Jesus did [Remember: Noah’s ark and flood— I entered into the ark; Passover Lamb— I took refuge under the blood of Jesus Christ]

then why do I now have “rules”?

why bother with any laws at all? And why *these* laws?

Where did this “law” come from?

Leviticus 17

Leviticus 17

them: ‘This is what the Lord has commanded:

3 Any Israelite who sacrifices an ox, a lamb or a goat in the camp or outside of it 4 instead of bringing it to the entrance to the tent of meeting to present it as an offering to the Lord in front of the tabernacle of the Lord—that person shall be considered guilty of bloodshed; they have shed blood and must be cut off from their people.

5 This is so the Israelites will bring to the Lord the sacrifices they are now making in the open fields. They must bring them to the priest, that is, to the Lord, at the entrance to the tent of meeting and sacrifice them as fellowship offerings. 6 The priest is to splash the blood against the altar of the Lord at the entrance to the tent of meeting and burn the fat as an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

7 They must no longer offer any of their sacrifices to the goat idols to whom they prostitute themselves.’

What’s a “fellowship offering”?

How is it different than the sin offering?

What’s the connection to “abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality”.

Leviticus 3

“If your offering is a *fellowship offering*, and you offer an animal from the herd, ... you are to present before the Lord an animal without defect. 2 You are to lay your hand on the head of your offering and slaughter it at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Then Aaron’s sons the priests shall splash the blood against the sides of the altar.

3 From the fellowship offering you are to bring a food offering to the Lord: the internal organs and all the fat that is connected to them, 4 both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins,.... 5 Then Aaron’s sons are to burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering that is lying on the burning wood; it is a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

Leviticus 7

11 “These are the regulations for the fellowship offering anyone may present to the Lord:

12 “If they offer it as an expression of thankfulness, then along with this thank offering they are to offer thick loaves made without yeast and with olive oil mixed in, thin loaves

made without yeast and brushed with oil,.... 13 Along with their fellowship offering of thanksgiving they are to present an offering with thick loaves of bread made with yeast. 14 They are to bring one of each kind as an offering, a contribution to the Lord; it belongs to the priest who splashes the blood of the fellowship offering against the altar. 15 The meat of their fellowship offering of thanksgiving must be eaten on the day it is offered; they must leave none of it till morning. 16 “If, however, their offering is the result of a vow or is a freewill offering, the sacrifice shall be eaten on the day they offer it, but anything left over may be eaten on the next day.

Not that Gentiles have to obey some laws to gain God’s (or the Jews’) acceptance.

Meaning:

- The fellowship offering is voluntary (freewill), not obligatory
- Made in gratitude, as thanksgiving
- Jesus’ sacrifice as the sin offering has joined me to God.
- Now that I am reconciled to God through Christ, One with Him, how can I respond, **in faithful love** to the God who has brought me close to Him?

Paul’s later explanation:

1 Corinthians 10	Referencing
7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.” 8 We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.	Exodus 32:4-6 V 4 Aaron made a golden calf Then they said, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” V6 the next day the people... sacrificed burnt offerings and <u>presented fellowship offerings</u> . Afterward they <u>sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry</u> .
14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. 16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a <u>participation in the blood of Christ</u> ? And is not the bread that we <u>break a participation in the body of Christ</u> ? 17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf. 18 Consider the people of Israel: <u>Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar</u> ? ..., but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.	Numbers 25 While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, 2 <u>who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods</u> . The people <u>ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods</u> . 3 So Israel yoked <u>themselves to the Baal of Peor</u> . And the Lord’s anger burned against them. 6 Then an Israelite man brought into the camp a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting. 7 When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron,

21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. 22 <u>Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy?</u> [Exodus 20: 4 "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the ...]	the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand 8 and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear into both of them,...Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped;... 10 The Lord said to Moses, 11 "Phinehas son of Eleazar, ..., has turned my anger away from the Israelites. Since he was as <u>zealous for my honor</u> among them as I am, I did not put an end to them in my zeal. 12 Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him.
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Application questions. Pray through for yourself what you discuss.

About the law and my faith journey:

Questions you can ask as you read the Old Testament laws

- How do these laws reveal truth, wisdom or reality? about God's nature? My nature?
- How am I growing to see goodness in God's laws, AND my great need for Jesus?
- God's plan is to give each one who is in Him, a new heart, and his laws will be written on our hearts (E.G., Jeremiah 31:31) How's it been for you?

Might anything in *Tryphyna's story* resonate?(source: *Truelove.is* stories)

Have you ever experienced the Holy Spirit's power to live the law fully? For example, Not just don't harm someone to actually extending love to an enemy (Matthew 5)

Reading Acts 15 (genre: court/lawyer/debate)

- Study by entering through their thinking (James/Peter/Paul, the Pharisees)
- Track back to the meaning resource, *where is this point coming from?*
- Use these resources as the basis of your interpretation

How should we handle doctrinal disagreements among Church leaders?

- They did not take it personally, get offended that the other side disagrees.
- Systematic presentation, not only tradition, but combing through scripture, understanding God's plan through the whole Bible, tracking what Jesus and the Holy Spirit are saying and doing then and now
- Willing to listen through, Pharisee Christians also listened to Peter/Paul
- In unity, celebrating the new revelation from the Holy Spirit; not in factions, upset at "losing" the debate, but joyful that God's will is made known. This isn't about ME, but about understanding God's will.