

Resurrection Life of Jesus Church

BACK TO THE BOOK OF ACTS (BBA)

RLJ-1144

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PART 33: DEFINING THE DOCTRINE FOR GENTILES

It is important to understand, and I can't stress this enough, that the apostolic church had no written doctrine up to the time of chapter 15 in the book of Acts. The four Gospel's had not been written and the general teaching of the apostles was that Jesus would come back in their life time to set up His kingdom on earth.

Since Luke did not give us specific dates of the events written down in the Book of Acts, there is no way of knowing where each event fits on the timeline. All we know is that the church of Antioch had been established before the Jerusalem Council took place. My personal belief is that the Jerusalem Council took place some 15 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

THERE WAS NO UNIFORM DOCTRINE AT THIS TIME

Preaching and teaching during this early stage of the church was done through personal knowledge from time spent with Jesus or from oral history spoken by people who had been part of the 120 followers of Jesus when He walked in the flesh on the earth.

Only those born again and filled with the Holy Spirit spoke truth. **John 16:7-15**

Since the apostles all believed and taught that the return of Jesus was imminent, they had made no provision for how a born again Gentile should live. The born again Jews followed the teachings of the Old Testament since it was not clear to them that the first covenant had been replaced with a new one. **Acts 2: 38-47**

MEN FROM JUDEA

It is interesting that certain men came to the church in Antioch, not from Jerusalem, but from somewhere in the province of Judea, teaching that it wasn't enough for Gentiles to only believe on Jesus, repent and be baptized, but that *they also needed to be circumcised*. **Acts 15:1**

A huge debate broke out with Paul and Barnabas opposing them. The dispute could not be settled in Antioch and it was decided that Paul and Barnabas had to travel to Jerusalem and have the apostles settle the issue. **verses 2-4**

ARRIVING IN JERUSALEM

At first Paul and Barnabas were received with joy but it did not take long before they were attacked. Luke identifies the attackers as Christian Pharisees. **verse 5**

There was a long debate, and we are not told if this was settled in one day or if it dragged out over a period of several days, but Peter is the first apostle to weigh in on the matter. **verses 7-9**



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In reading verse 10, it is clear that Peter had a complete understanding on the issue of salvation and there was no doubt in his mind that salvation is of grace and not works. **verses 10-11**

The debate was over once Peter had made it clear where he stood and Paul and Barnabas were allowed to share the astonishing news how Gentiles had been saved and had a part in the kingdom of God. **verse 12**

THE RULING OF THE APOSTLES

It was James, the half brother of Jesus, who then declared his position. This was not the apostle James, the brother of the apostle John, who had been killed a short time after the Day of Pentecost. **Acts 12:1-2**

James was not considered an apostle at this time but held a leadership position in the church of Jerusalem. In his epistle to the twelve tribes, he calls himself “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” **James 1:1**

Some years later he was recognized as an apostle. **Galatians 1:19**

In his ruling, James loosely quotes from **Amos 9:11-12** and uses it as a platform to justify why Gentiles can be saved but do not need to be converted to Judaism. **Acts 15:13-18**

A COMMANDMENT IN THE FLESH

James laid out four demands in **verses 19-21** on converted Gentiles:

1. They should cease from idol worship.
2. They were not to commit fornication.
3. They were not to eat meat from animals which had been strangled.
4. They were not to eat blood in any form.

What James said and the rest of the apostles agreed upon were that Gentiles could be saved but they were still inferior to Jews. This racist attitude of still treating them like animals meant that they weren't held accountable to God's spiritual and moral laws.

When Jesus walked on earth, He laid out the spiritual and moral laws but never said that this was exclusively for Jews. The apostle Matthew realized this in later years in his written gospel account. **Matthew 28:18-20**

Christians cannot build any kind of theological doctrine using verses 19-21, instead, we must understand that this ruling was in the flesh and totally wrong; in later years, it would be corrected by all the writers of the New Testament books.

Jews and Gentiles alike are held to all the spiritual and moral laws that God has revealed in the Bible. The four points mentioned by James are true but they are only a fraction of the Word of God.

Progressive Revelation is a term to describe what has taken place from the time of Adam and Eve until the first century A.D.

During the time period of the Book of Acts, none of the New Testament books were written yet. It was not until the apostles became older and recognized that Jesus was not going to come back in their lifetime that they began to write down the doctrine of the Second Covenant. **Ephesians 3:1-11; 2 Peter 1:14-21**

The First Covenant was built upon the sacrificial system.

The Second Covenant was built upon the sacrifice of the Son of God.

Under the First Covenant, Gentiles could be saved and added to Israel, which were the twelve tribes of Jacob.

Under the Second Covenant, Jews and Gentiles alike are added to the Church, which is the *body of Christ* at the moment they are born again. **Ephesians 1:15-23**

A FAULTY DOCTRINE – PARTIALLY TRUE

According to Luke, there was a consensus among leaders and members in the church in Jerusalem and a letter was drafted and sent out to Antioch with two additional witnesses to certify that the written document was genuine. **Acts 15:22-32**

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS?

When we read the Bible, we must carefully look at each verse and not take it out of context; consider the verses before and after so that you aren't picking up something that God didn't say. We must also compare Scripture with Scripture, so that we are not making a false claim.

There is some information in the Bible that is hard to explain. One such example is found in **1 Corinthians 15:29**. The apostle Paul is not telling us that we are to baptize people for the dead, he is simply using an argument, that someone is baptizing people for the dead, therefore we should believe in a coming resurrection of all believers. Verses 22-58 deal with the resurrection of the dead and the ruling by Christ; it is not a doctrine to baptize living people for the dead as the Mormon Church does!

Another example is also found in **1 Corinthians 11:1-15**, where Paul writes that a woman must cover her head when she prays or prophecies. This teaching is not found anywhere else in the Bible. We know that there were temple prostitutes working at the temple of Apollo in the city of Corinth. These women had shaved their heads to set themselves apart as temple prostitutes. Thus, Paul wanted the Christian women who had been converted be set apart from the temple prostitutes. Over the years, Christians have taught that all women must have their heads covered with some type of cloth material. Again, a faulty doctrine has been built upon a portion of Scripture that was written for a specific time and place.

DO YOU HAVE AN EAR TO HEAR WITH?