

JERUSALEM COUNCIL

September 12, 2000 (Updated October 03, 2000)

After the advent of the Messiah, the religious system of Judea was shaken as if by a great earthquake. In the first century, Christian believers were separating from beliefs and traditions held by their forefathers for hundreds of years. And yet, within the Christian faith there was division over interpretation of the law which sometimes brought intense debate over issues. The declaration coming out of the Jerusalem council remains today, as an important hallmark in understanding how we are to relate to the written word (law).

Acts 15:1-2, 5: *And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. 2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. 5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. If Paul and Barnabas were disputing about circumcision and the law, no doubt they disagreed with what was being taught by other believers. The conflict was important enough to call a general meeting in Jerusalem of the apostles and elders of the churches.*

Many interpret “law of Moses” as only referring to the ceremonial system. In abridgment, from previous studies, it has been shown that the law of Moses, also referred to as law of God (Josh 24:26; Neh 8:8, 18; 10:28), is everything given at Mt Horeb, including the Ten Commandments. It is everything written in the first five books of the English Bible. The Hebrew word for law means ‘teaching’ or ‘instruction’, and generally refers to all the writings. These were divine instructions for the whole economy of Israel as a nation and as a type (1 Cor 10:6, 11). Example: **Deut 1:5-7:** *5 On this side Jordan, in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare this law, saying, 6 The LORD our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount: 7 Turn you, and take your journey,...* “This law” is a review of the instructions God gave Moses. “This law” continues through the first three chapters of Deuteronomy describing the exodus and Israel’s encounters along the way. It is *the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments which Moses spake unto the children of Israel, after they came forth out of Egypt.* (Deut 4:45). It is all that Moses wrote.

Now to the meeting:

After much discussion, James (Brother of Jesus, cf Acts 12:2; Gal 1:19), made this statement: **Acts 15:19-20:** *19 Wherefore my [opinion] is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: 20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollution of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. [Greek] Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church,... being assembled with one accord,...* (verses 22, 25) to send Paul and Barnabas, along with others, with letters stating what agreement came out of the meeting. They also stated that those demanding the Gentiles be circumcised and keep the law did not have the approval of the apostles and elders of the church. Nothing is recorded in Acts 15 about Jews keeping the law or not. Later references, addressed below, indicate the Jews were expected to keep the law, but the Gentiles were only obligated to do as noted above. However, it also is evident that all did not agree totally with this arrangement. Look at the statement of Peter at the beginning of the meeting:

Acts 15:7-11: *7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth*

should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. 8 And God, who knows the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; 9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. Why would Peter make such a statement? In Acts 10 is recorded a vision given to Peter of all manner of unclean beasts. 19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. 20 Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Jews considered all non-Jews as unclean. Cornelius, a Roman centurion, worshiped the one true God. God set up a powerful witness to break down a wall of prejudice and distortion of the Jew by bringing the Gentiles into full fellowship with Jews as the body of Christ. Peter was totally convinced that God was showing him there was no difference between Jew and Gentile. (Cf Eph 2).

Acts 11:1-3: *And the apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. 2 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, 3 Saying, Thou went in to men uncircumcised, and did eat with them.* In the account of Peter's visit, he did more than just eat with Cornelius, his family and friends. He had fellowship and preached the gospel. Why would the Jews contend with him about this? The letter of the law forbids a Jew to go into one uncircumcised (cf Ex 12:48; Jud 14:3; 1 Sam 17:26). And, anyone not a Jew was considered unclean. Peter had conveyed this to Cornelius: **Acts 10:28-29:** *...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 has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. 29 Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying...* Did this contention with the Jews affect Peter? Yes it did!

In Galatians 2, Paul recounts a visit to Jerusalem and how James, Peter and John saw merit in Paul's and Barnabas' ministering to the Gentiles, while they did likewise to the Jews. Then he confronts Peter about his hypocrisy: 11 *But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. 12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. 13 And the other Jews [acted hypocritically⁴⁹⁴²] likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their [hypocrisy⁵²⁷²]. 14 *But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, live after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compel thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? 15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ...* First, note that Paul makes a distinction among the Jews, as "the circumcision" (those believing one should be circumcised and keep the letter of the law) and "the other Jews" (those believing the law was spiritual, that salvation was by grace through the faith of Christ). As observed in Acts 15:11, Peter was not keeping the letter of the law. The inference is that he was convicted by the Spirit that the law was spiritual, a Jew was inward and circumcision was of the heart. But, because of fear of the Jews zealous for the letter of the law, he began a double role, at the same time telling Gentiles to live like the Jews. Remember, the Jews were always to keep the righteousness that was in the law by obeying the voice of God (Jer 11:2-4; Deut 30:10). The Hebrew economy was a living parable of what the church was to be spiritually. However, the Jews had evolved into keeping the letter of the law according to their own understanding. This mind set had been around 2000 years, and would not be easily changed.*

It is evident from scripture that Paul was attending feasts and sacrifices, at least some of the time. He also attended church on the 7th day. It is also apparent that he was not teaching the Gentiles that these were required to be saved. But did he teach the Jews they should keep the law? In Acts 21 is recorded Paul's last

visit to Jerusalem. Paul gave testimony of the work among the Gentiles to James and the elders, for which they praised God. Afterwards James and the elders told Paul, *20 ...Thou see, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: 21 And they are informed of thee, that thou teach all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.* The Jews at Jerusalem were holding to a doctrine that required law keeping, while Paul and others taught salvation by faith alone. This word was probably brought back by those who came to Jerusalem for the feasts. If Paul was teaching the law was spiritual, and this fact is very evident (Rom 7:14), why would he agree to take a vow, which would conclude, after seven days, with a sacrifice?

Herein lies an answer: **Rom 10:1-4:** *Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. 2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.* Paul understood the blindness of his people, and had a heartfelt desire that he could bring them to understand the purposes of God in Israel. For this reason he could make the following statement: **1 Cor 9:19-22:** *19 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. 20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; 21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not [without the law of] God, but [in the law of] Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. 22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.* Paul demonstrated true fellowship by meeting people where they were in experience and knowledge. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness" does not mean the law was abolished. It was the end of law keeping as the Jews understood it. Many Christians today are under the law the same as the Jews. (Requiring a specific day of worship, or a certain way of dressing or eating for righteousness). However, we are to keep the law as Christ understands it. (Cf Matt 5:17-18; Heb 7:12). Had Paul been up front with his teaching, would he have had the same opportunity to share truth with his fellow Hebrews? We should know the answer by our own experience.

Today, to refute the teaching of the law as being only spiritual, the two most used examples are those of Paul and Jesus. It has already been shown that Paul, and Peter, through the revelation of the cross, understood our relationship to the law was spiritual. What about Jesus?, some say. He kept the 7th day holy, therefore it is required today. Examine these scriptures: **Lk 2:21:** *And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.* **Matt 8:2-4:** *2 And, behold, there came a leper and worshiped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. 3 And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 4 And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.* **Matt 23:1-3:** *Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, 2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: 3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do...*

If one justifies self, saying keep the symbol (as the 7th day) holy because Jesus kept it holy, then why not keep the law of circumcision and the law of sacrifices, as Jesus told the leper, disciples and people? (See Lev 14 about a cleansed leper) What was Jesus really saying? Do it *for a testimony unto them.* Why? Because the Jews sat in Moses seat! However, they had their own writings of interpretation of how the law was to be kept, even to the minutest detail. Jesus met the people where they were in their understanding. However, over and over He taught that the law was spiritual. True righteousness comes only from the Father

through the Son via the words spoken to and obeyed by an individual. (Cf Rom :21-22; Jn 15:3; Eph 5:26; Matt 7:24).

Gal 4:4-5: *4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, 5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.* A person is “under the law” that uses the law to govern self and others. The law never governed Jesus. He was made to be under the law at His birth and His death. He was born to Jewish parents who kept the law, and He was subject to them. And the Jews (faith) killed Him according to their law. During His ministry, Jesus taught and kept the law the way it should have been - by listening to His Father. He taught the disciples and the people that the law was spiritual. The Jews were trying to kill Jesus because what He taught was contrary to what they believed and taught about the law. Look at the question He ask Nicodemus: **Jn 10:3:** *...Art thou a [teacher¹³²⁰] of Israel, and know not these things?* And what He said to the woman at the well: **Jn 4:23:** *...the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth:...* Nothing was abolished from the law! It is all a shadow of the spiritual, including the Ten Commandments!

The hour cometh, and now is!! **Jn 1:17:** *For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.* **Jn 6:32:** *...Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.* **Jn 6:27:** *Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.* Labor not for man’s, but for God’s understanding of the law, which He put in His only begotten Son. Buy of Jesus Christ gold (faith) that has already been tried in the fire (Rev 3:18)! Grace and truth come only by hearing and doing the concepts of Christ (Matt 7:24). AMEN!!