

## Gentiles Who Are Called by My Name – Part 1

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The video version of this teaching is at: <https://youtu.be/jrRhI-ah2rM>

The Scripture Reading is Acts 15:1-20

After Paul and Barnabas completed their mission to Galatia and Lycaonia where many Jews and Gentiles had believed their message and received salvation, they returned to Syrian Antioch and reported the results of their journey. Faith was quickly spreading throughout the region as both Jew and Gentile embraced the gospel. However, not everyone among the followers of the Way was satisfied that Gentiles could really be saved unless they converted to Judaism. These people tried to tell the Gentile believers that they hadn't really received salvation.

Acts 15:1 NKJV 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."

This went against the gospel that Paul and Barnabas taught which had been endorsed by James, Peter, and John during Paul and Barnabas' earlier trip to Jerusalem. It seems that the problem of Gentile inclusion was not yet settled.

Paul and Barnabas vehemently disagreed with these Judaizers who came from Judea and entered into many heated discussions with them about the Gentiles. We can imagine Paul, Barnabas and these men arguing back and forth, citing passages from the Torah and the prophets to support their different opinions. The men supporting the position that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised probably cited the passage in Exodus where only those who are circumcised can participate in the Passover.

Exodus 12:48-49 NKJV 48 "And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to 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 a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. 49 "One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you."

Paul may have countered with the Torah's instructions on how to treat the stranger within their gates.

Leviticus 19:33-34 NKJV 33 'And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. 34 'The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Perhaps the men from Judea cited the words of Yeshua when he was confronted by the Canaanite woman that He was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Matthew 15:22-24 NKJV 22 And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." 23 But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." 24 But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Paul could have countered with the fact that Yeshua did indeed heal the Canaanite woman's daughter and, in fact, commended her faith.

Matthew 15:28 NKJV 28 Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

If this example was cited, I'm sure they also debated Yeshua's intent in first ignoring this woman. Was it a test to see how His disciples would treat the stranger in their land or was it a rejection of her as a non-Israelite?

Even after many discussions, agreement could not be reached, so they determined to take the issue to the Jerusalem council to decide once and for all.

Acts 15:2 NKJV 2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

Paul and Barnabas are following the prescribed protocol for settling a dispute. When an issue was too difficult to decide, they were to bring it to the place where God's name resided.

Deuteronomy 17:8-9 NKJV 8 "If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses. 9 "And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment.

Since the priests of Paul's time didn't even accept the testimony that Yeshua was the Jewish Messiah, the issue of Gentile inclusion would not even be considered by the priesthood. This was not a question about temple practices or inclusion in established Judaism; this was a question about salvation through Yeshua. Before Yeshua's death, He had appointed leaders who could judge in His absence.

Matthew 19:28 NKJV 28 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

He gave the disciples the authority to make decisions in His place.

Matthew 16:18-19 NKJV 18 "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19 "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

The terms "to loose" and "to bind" were well-known Jewish idioms indicating authoritative decisions to allow or "loose" from some action or to require or "bind" to an action. The twelve disciples had the authority to decide whether to require that a Gentile needed to be circumcised in order to be saved or to allow a Gentile to remain uncircumcised.

Matthew records that when Yeshua gave instructions for the "great commission," He was speaking to the eleven remaining apostles.

Matthew 28:16-18 NKJV 16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

These eleven, together with Matthias who was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot, made up the ruling council. James, the brother of Yeshua, was apparently acting in his role as next of kin assuming the role of a steward over Yeshua's kingdom. The gospels don't record this appointment although Paul refers to it when he writes that Yeshua appeared specifically to Yeshua's brother James. By taking this issue to James and the apostles, Paul and Barnabas are following the Torah guidelines. They had already demonstrated their submission to this authority when they reported to James, Peter and John that they were not requiring the Gentiles of Syrian Antioch to be circumcised. Now, this issue was being revisited and would be heard by the entire council as well as the elders of the Jerusalem body of believers.

As Paul and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem, they described the work that God had been doing among the Gentiles. Their first report to those in Jerusalem was also about this work of God.

Acts 15:3-4 NKJV 3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. 4 And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them.

It wasn't long until Paul's detractors brought the charge that Gentiles could not receive salvation unless they converted to Judaism.

Acts 15:5 NKJV 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."

Once again, this opened up a whole debate on the issue! Perhaps the same proof texts were used as were presented in Antioch. I'm sure many more were cited as this issue was debated back and forth including Isaiah's words that the Messiah, the Servant of the LORD, would be sent as a light to the Gentiles.

Isaiah 49:6 NKJV 6 Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'

Finally, Peter stood up and brought out the precedent established with Cornelius' household.

Acts 15:6-9 NKJV 6 Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. 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. 8 "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.

This was not just something that Paul had come up with! In fact, the Gentiles first received the gospel through Peter, one of the three heads of the Jerusalem council. He reminds those involved in the debate that God purified the Gentiles by faith and not by observance of rituals of the flesh. Peter implies that the same is true for Jewish believers; God made no distinction between Cornelius' household and them, therefore, the true purification is of the heart and by faith not by works of the observing the Torah.

Peter goes on to admonish them not to test God by putting restrictions on what God could do and how He could do it.

Acts 15:10 NKJV 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 that Peter warns them not to put on the necks of the Gentiles? Is it merely the traditions of the Pharisees who put fences around the Torah? Is it the Torah itself which, if the Gentiles converted to Judaism, they would be compelled to follow? Moses told the children of Israel that the Torah was not a burden.

Deuteronomy 30:11, 14 NAS95 11 "For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach.... 14 "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.

However, Peter says that the yoke the Pharisees wanted to place on the Gentiles was such that not even the fathers were able to bear it. As we examine the history of the children of Israel, we see that they broke God's Torah over and over; they could not sustain obedience to its requirements. Isaiah writes that the practice of ritual purity prescribed by the Torah was not enough to make them pure before God.

Isaiah 64:6 NAS95 6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

Ezekiel wrote that they would only be pure when God sprinkled clean water on them.

Ezekiel 36:25 NAS95 25 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

Paul will later write in Romans 3:23 that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory! Even David who loved God's Torah failed to keep the Torah. David was guilty of transgressing the Torah, and, under the Torah, David's life was forfeit. The Torah that David loved became his accuser. To those, like David, who are under sentence of death because of their transgression of the Torah, it becomes a yoke of slavery. On his own, David could not bear the condemnation of Torah, but under God's grace and mercy, David continued to live and will live again. David cried out to God for mercy.

Psalms 51:1-3 NKJV 1 <<To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.>> Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me.

The mercy David received did not and does not nullify the Torah. David testifies to his love of the Torah.

Psalms 119:97 NKJV 97 Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.

Peter continues his point their fathers' inability to maintain obedience to the Torah by explaining that the salvation of the Jews is by the same mercy God granted to the Gentiles.

Acts 15:11 NKJV 11 "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

Peter stated unequivocally salvation does not come by observance of the Torah or by circumcision. Salvation comes through grace and faith in Yeshua as the Messiah sent by God. The opposition was silenced; there was nothing else they could say. To emphasize this point, Paul and Barnabas again recounted everything that God had done among the Gentiles. Finally James made a ruling that God was taking for Himself a people out of the Gentiles who would remain Gentiles.

Acts 15:13-20 NKJV 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: 16 '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.' 18 "Known to God from eternity are all His works. 19 "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, 20 "but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.

James uses a quote from the Septuagint's version of the prophet Amos as his proof text for his decision. Amos says that the Gentiles will seek God under the restored tabernacle of David. The word "tabernacle" is the Hebrew word "Sukkah," number 5521 in Strong's Concordance meaning a hut, tent, or pavilion. It comes from the root word "saw-kak," number 5526 meaning to fence in, cover over, protect or defend. Isaiah writes that God will cover all of Israel with a sukka when He restores Israel.

Isaiah 4:6 NKJV 6 And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.

The sukka of David, then, would be his reign over Israel when he defended and protected them. The restoration of David's sukka is when the promised seed of David's line would once again rule over Israel.

Jeremiah 23:5 NKJV 5 "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.

The sukka of David represents the ruling house of David that God promised would reign over Israel forever. Now that Yeshua, the promised son of David had come, the Gentiles were seeking out God just like Amos prophesied. These are the Gentiles that God said would be called by His name! James concluded that the Gentiles did not need to be circumcised to receive salvation! Further, the Jews should not "trouble" the Gentiles who were coming to faith. The word translated as "trouble" is the Greek word "paranochleo," number 3926 meaning to harass further. James stated that the Gentiles were not to be harassed further. However, if Gentiles did not become Jews, how would they be full members of the community? How could Jews maintain their own covenant obligations to the Torah and have fellowship with Gentiles? What was the standard of behavior of the Gentiles? Although many of them were God-fearers who already kept the whole Torah of God with the exception of being circumcised, other Gentiles had little knowledge of the Torah and their lifestyles reflected the pagan Roman culture.

James described four actions that would be required of all Gentiles who had received salvation. In our next teaching, we will look at those four requirements and their significance in the Jewish culture of the day.

Study Questions:

1. What are some of the possible scripture references that Paul or the Judaizers may have used to argue the case for and against Gentiles being circumcised in order to be saved?

2. What was the context of Yeshua healing the daughter of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:22-28? What other interactions did Yeshua have with Gentiles? Did He include or exclude them?
3. What does Yeshua say about settling disputes between brothers (either brothers in the flesh or brothers in spirit)?
4. Under the rabbinical system, the rabbis have the authority to rule on cases of “halacha,” that is how to interpret and live out the Torah even if it “changes” the Torah. How does this compare with the authority that Yeshua gave the twelve apostles? Does anyone in the body of believers hold that same authority now?
5. James quoted the Septuagint version of Amos 9:11-13 followed by a paraphrase of part of Isaiah 45:20-22. How does the Septuagint version as quoted by James differ from the Masoretic text as translated in our English Bibles? Do these versions contradict each other?
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?