

Torah Observance & Acts 15

Taken from pages 56 & 57 of the MJAA / IAMCS paper titled “One Law, Two Sticks”

Gentile Torah Observance, Our View:

Paul circumcised Timothy, whose mother was Jewish, (Acts 16:3); but did not circumcise Titus, who was Greek. (Gal. 2:3). Paul saw that circumcision was right and good for the Jewish believer in Yeshua, but made no sense for the Gentile. The fact is, Paul did not see the Torah as having the same application to Gentiles as to Jews under the New Covenant. Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles. If One Law One People had any doctrinal validity, Paul would have been the one to preach it. He preached no such thing.

We do not believe the Gentile church is called necessarily to observe Shabbat, the Levitical feasts, the laws of kashrut, and other Mosaic laws that are specific to Israel. We don't forbid anyone from doing those things, but we do not fault the church for not keeping them. Nor do we believe in urging Gentile believers worldwide to observe commandments other than the ones the Apostles commanded in Acts 15.

Indeed the Apostles in Acts 15 dealt with the issue of Gentile Torah observance squarely on point. As Peter said to the “One Law” proponents of his day in Acts 15:10: “Why do you test God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the (Gentile) disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”

When it comes to the issue of Gentile Torah observance, our approach is simply to follow the advice of the Apostles. They determined not to put a yoke of law upon the Gentiles. Neither would we. And like the Apostles, we would oppose those who do.

Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council:

The controversy over Gentile Torah observance in our time is exactly the same one addressed by the Apostles. As Paul preached the gospel among the Gentiles, certain men were insisting that the Gentiles must be instructed to keep the law. For this very reason, “*It was determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others should go up to Jerusalem unto the Apostles and Elders about this question.*” (Acts 15:2)

When they came to Jerusalem, and declared all the wonderful things that God was doing among the Gentiles, there were certain Jews who were believers in Yeshua, who were Pharisees, that rose up saying: “*It is necessary to circumcise them and command them to keep the law of Moses,*” (Acts 15:5). Peter was the first to dispute the point, having already seen how God poured out His Spirit upon non-Torah observant Gentiles. (Acts 10:44-45).

For the Apostles, though the laws of Moses were an important part of their Jewish way of life, they knew that the power of the gospel was not based in legal observance, it was based upon faith in the Messiah, and was as equally available to the uncircumcised Gentile as to the circumcised Jew. This at first seemed to contradict the law given at Sinai.

Yet, the Apostles were quite clear on answering the question brought before them. The Gentiles need not be instructed to be circumcised, nor do they need to be instructed to keep the law of Moses. They determined that “*we trouble them not which from among the Gentiles are turned unto God*” (Acts 15:19). As today's Messianic Jewish leaders, we fully agree. It is not our calling to bring the Gentile world into Torah observance.