Acts 15 - The Jerusalem Conference

Introduction

Recently in the PGR ("950315.PGR", Page 7) it was stated that the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15) resolved the issue of what was to be bound on Gentiles entering the Church. It is contended that not only was circumcision removed as an obstacle, but also the Law of Moses. Quote - "The law of Moses is not to be bound on Christian converts". The "law of Moses" is referred to as the "yoke" which the fathers were unable to bear. Thus this passage of scripture is used to justify jettisoning observance of any elements of the old covenant. The issue is said to be twofold...
(1) circumcision, (2) obedience to the Law of Moses...both based primarily on Acts 15.5.

It is then noted that (from v19-20) the judgement of the Holy Spirit, spoken by James, removed these two elements from being obstructive to the conversion of Gentiles. Closer study casts a great measure of doubt upon this interpretation.

SPS

This paper attempts to fulfill Mr Tkach Jnr's admonition to "read Acts 15 again carefully". However, our conclusion is the opposite of his!

This paper sets out to show that the issue in Acts 15 is plainly ONLY circumcision in connection with - 'them which from the Gentiles are turned to God' (v19), and NOT the Law of Moses generally. To maintain that there are two issues under discussion is unwarranted and does violence to the original text. The key verses to look at are v1, v5, v9-11, v19-21 and v24. Acts 21: 21-25 is also highly relevant. These will be explained thoroughly with reference to the Greek. Some of this discussion is inevitably detailed and technical. We have tried to keep matters as simple as possible for easy comprehension. One key element is the use of "periphrastic" expression and this is discussed in detail. There are a number of important background issues which need to be discussed. These include a detailed discussion of requirements for incorporating "strangers" (Heb - GER) into the community of Israel. Also a detailed discussion on Law (Torah), "Halakhah" ("way of walking") and the Oral Law. Several helpful quotes from various authors are included.

We conclude that the Jerusalem Conference removed the impediment of adult circumcision for Gentiles entering the Church. Nothing is said or implied about any change in the status of law, removal of law or change to any law. The law of Moses is NOT in question. The Conference in no way removed an obligation on the Gentiles to uphold the law of Moses.

Inevitably, the more one looks into the issues involved, the wider the study becomes, and the longer any research paper becomes. This paper therefore is limited as far as practicable to Acts 15 and the immediate issues raised.

Main Points

(A) The Main Issue

The issue rose from 'circumcision *according to the custom* taught by Moses' (v1, NIV); there is no mention of other angles to 'this question' (v2). Obedience to the law of Moses in general was not the issue. See the helpful note in Appendix on use of the term `law'.

In connection with this passage (to verse 23) Bullinger states - "The question was whether Gentile converts, entering by the door of faith could be saved...without the seal of faith (Rom 4.11). In other words, whether they could belong to the family of believers (up to this time... a strictly Jewish polity) without formal admission as 'strangers' in accordance with Ex 12.43-44" (*Companion Bible*).

(B) Pharisee's Viewpoint

In Jerusalem all of the Christians were Jews; to a Jew, ***baptism*** (see note in Appendix) was the required initiation of an adult foreigner into Israel; to a Pharisee in particular, baptism must be accompanied by circumcision, but to Jews of a more liberal tradition only infants needed to be circumcised. This is a matter of interpretation of the law. Non-Pharisees saw only circumcision on the eighth day as being obedience - therefore adult circumcision was redundant. Pharisees took 'circumcise all your males' as being literal. (This is a matter that was very much debated around the time of Christ - see the Talmud).

(C) Acts 15:5

The argument in v5 is surely not that the Gentiles 'must be circumcised AND required to obey the law of Moses': the Greek actually has three verbs, all infinitive: 'to be circumcised', 'to charge' and 'to preserve'. The last two are shorn of modifiers and joined together with 'and'. This is ***periphrastic*** [1]: the first is accomplished with a view to the second. In effect a rewording can be that the Gentiles are 'to be circumcised, charged [thereby] *with a view to* preserving the law of Moses'. Note that

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[1] *periphrasis* (n) - (1) the use of indirect or roundabout methods of expression, (2) an indirect expression or circumlocution (Latin from Gk PERI (around) + PHRAZEIN (to say); ...for example, the phrases "the word of his father" and "his father did say" are periphrastic, while "his father's word" and "his father said" are inflected. - **R D Universal Dictionary**

Note: 'periphrastic' is a means of expression used in several languages, both ancient and modern: it applies in Hebrew very much, koine Greek under circumstances similar to this (a series of unadorned verbs in the same mood and tense), modern French and English. For example 'repent and be baptised': these are present imperative (both Greek and English), and convey the idea that they are *tied together*, and the second depends on the first. Often the best words to express the meaning are 'thereby', 'for the purpose of' or 'with a view to'. In Greek the indicators that a periphrastic meaning is intended are...

(i) two verbs in the same form are together, separated by KAI ('and').

(ii) there are no modifiers intervening - only the KAI; note that if there *are* modifiers, but they are in an unusual position leaving KAI alone between the verbs, this is considered strong evidence.

(iii) another indication that adds even more strength is when the second verb is in an unexpected form: the idea being that there has been a twist in the text to bring about the conditions for a periphrastic interpretation.

the 'and' is actually placed between the second and third verbs (in the original Greek text), very much suggesting a periphrastic interpretation.

(D) Acts 15.10

This speaks of a 'yoke' placed on the disciples 'that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear' (NIV). This is a mistranslation: 'have been able' is Imperfect tense (in English) but the Greek is Aorist ! (Briefly, Imperfect conveys an action started in the past, but continued or repeated beyond a specific time; Aorist signifies a single action performed in the past).

A better translation of ISCHUSAMEN BASTASAI would be '... could have borne' - in the sense, *not* that they had tried this yoke and found it difficult to bear, but that *this yoke was never required of them - because they were circumcised on the eighth day.* What yoke is this? - the answer which most naturally fits the context and the construction of the Greek is *'being circumcised as an adult'*, rather than 'trying to adhere to the law'.

(E) Acts 15: 20-21 Incorporating Foreigners into Israel

The four charges for the Gentile convert to observe (v20-21) are precisely those that were to be imposed on Gentiles being incorporated into Israel (as in Leviticus 17 and 18) by the more liberal Jewish interpretation of the law. The implication is that these are the ONLY requirements for the Gentiles to be grafted into Israel (the Church) - not circumcision. Further teaching in the customs of the new culture was clear-cut, consistent with the rabbinical teachings (v 21) - the ministry of the Church - each Sabbath!

The requirements for incorporation into Israel of the GER (the word for an unenfranchised foreigner) consisted of:
(i) Exodus 12.48: 'When a GER shall sojourn... let his males be circumcised'.
(ii) Leviticus 17.8-9: 'whatsoever man... of the GERIM... that offereth a burnt offering... not at the gate... unto the LORD... shall be cut off'.
(iii) Leviticus 17.10: 'whatsoever man... of the GERIM... that eateth any manner of blood... I will cut him off'.
(iv) Leviticus 17.13-15: ... the GERIM shall pour out the blood' (of a hunted beast).
(v) Leviticus 18.6-26: 'thou shalt not...' [commit sexually unclean acts] '... ye shall not commit any of these abominations... nor any GER'.

NB. There are several other verses which pertain to "strangers" which are discussed later in the Appendix.

These requirements were the subject of intense debate: not so much *what* the law was, but *how* it can be applied. These verses were interpreted (and these interpretations debated) by rabbis over the generations: this continuing debate was part of the Oral Law - used by all Jews but most strenuously employed by Pharisees. (The idea of the Oral Law was to be a 'hedge' - interpretations of law, and new rules

whose obedience would ensure obedience to the written Law automatically - see later note).

(i) **LET HIS MALES BE CIRCUMCISED**:

This was the debate in Acts 15. By the time of Christ, Oral Law said there were three requirements in the *halakhot* of 'sojourning' (see below for meaning of *halakhah* and its plural *halakhot*): they were:
1) **BRIS** (literally 'encovenanting'),
2) **TEVILAH** (baptism - see note in Appendix - though Jews avoid this Greek word because of the Christian usage) and
3) **MISHNAH TORAH** ('teaching of law').

Points (ii) to (v) above, were usually considered to be CHOQ (ordinances) related to teaching the law. (In addition, the Pharisees included a CHOQ that a sacrifice should be given, and explicitly they stated that this was *Mishnah Torah*).

In the time of Christ some rabbis believed that 'males being circumcised' meant, quite literally, that each male should be circumcised, whatever his age. Other rabbis argued that as circumcision was commanded to be done 'on the eighth day', the literal act would not fulfill the law anyway. This is identical with James' argument in Acts 15. While many rabbis argued whether a person who had been circumcised on the wrong day AND for the wrong reason (it was quite common in other societies) could be 're-circumcised', others simply took the promise to circumcise future-born males as the fulfilment of this command, and that following this BRIS the person was 'circumcised in heart'.

Much of the contention arises from the events surrounding the circumcision of Moses' son (Exodus 4.24-26). The Talmud expands on this by explaining that Gershom had not been circumcised on the insistence of Reuel (that is, Jethro his grandfather; Jasher 78.9 - but Exodus 2.22 does not mention this). Zipporah circumcised her son when 'an angel of the Lord' sought to kill Moses and an alligator began swallowing (head first) Gershom.

From a Jew's viewpoint the NIV mistranslates Ex 4:26: 'bridegroom of blood' refers to Moses - not to circumcision. (The translator of this portion noted his suspicion that 'bridegroom of blood' was a nickname for circumcision - but the Talmud clearly belies this). 'Bridegroom' is a rare translation of the Hebrew word here (CHATAN); the usual meaning is 'son-in-law'.

In the Talmud Zipporah is not speaking to the circumcision (!) but to Moses; she is not being pejorative, but commenting with dark humour that it seems to her that Moses is 'a bloody son-in-law' to her father Reuel, who had forbidden the act that saved the lives of Moses and Gershom. Pharisees in the First Century took this as <u>proof that the physical act of circumcision was paramount</u> - even life-saving - for the Ger. (Gershom - himself named 'stranger' or 'foreigner' - was seen as the prototype of the Ger). (By the way: the text of verse 26 certainly does not have the name of God in

it - but the NIV translator *puts* it there - even capitalising 'LORD' to signify the presence of the name YHVH. Is this a responsible act?)

(ii) **POLLUTION OF IDOLS (meat offered to idols)**:

As recorded, this command seems to be about the *method* of bringing a burnt offering rather than the object of worship - but this was reinterpreted as further grounds against idolatry.

(iii) **EATING BLOOD**:

(No special reinterpretation or application)

(iv) **MEAT NOT BUTCHERED:**

Note that the hunt was for eating (Lev 17.13); this is an example of the correct butchering of a food animal; it is not merely a repetition of (iii), but includes further examples against eating unbutchered meat (v15). The important thing to note here is that Jews - even today - summarise all unbutchered meat as TEREIF ('torn' - as in v 13), using this as an antonym of KOSHER. Note that in Greek - PNIKTOS ('strangled' - as in Acts 15.20) is precisely the same idiom - 'not bled' - as will be confirmed by any source, including Strong's Concise Dictionary (4156).

(v) **ESCHEWING FORNICATION**:

In Deuteronomy 24.1 the law gives the example of divorce when a man finds ERVAH in his wife. This same word appears 23 time in Leviticus 18 - an adequate definition! Jesus refers to this in Matthew 5.32 as PORNEIA - again used in Acts 15.20 (and 29) where KJV renders it 'fornication'. It seems clear that Acts 15 cross-references Leviticus 18 - NOT 'unmarried sex' (particularly). Thus the meaning of PORNEIA is made clear. See also 1 Thess 4.3-4 where PORNEIA is contrasted with 'knowing how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour'.

It seems quite clear that items (ii) to (v) correspond EXACTLY with the requirements placed by the Jerusalem council upon Gentile converts. What has happened specifically is that these Gentiles were *enfranchised* as covenant-members in Israel (the Church) - surely because this is seen as part of the salvation process! What has been decided is NOT a break from the law, but specifically *that the Pharisaical interpretation of Exodus 12.48 was not required of them.*

There are four places in Acts 15 that deal with the Law of Moses:- or more accurately, an *interpretation* of the Law of Moses:

(a) verse 1 : 'except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses'.

(b) verse 5: 'that it was needful to circumcise them, and to command [them] to keep the law of Moses'.

(c) verses 20-21 'that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and [from] fornication and [from] things strangled, and [from] blood; for Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him...'.

(d) verse 24: '[ye must] be circumcised, and keep the law' (not in the NIV).

In case (a) circumcision is clearly the point of contention: the law is claimed to prescribe the application.

Case (b) is the judicial restatement of case (a): some appear to believe that the one issue is made into two (adherence of circumcision to Gentiles; adherence of law to Gentiles), but the language links the three verbs "circumcise", "command" (charge) and "keep" - thus indicating just one issue.

Case (d) again formally restates case (a) - and this time the grammar clearly indicates that 'and keep the law' is a <u>one-time act</u>, associated directly with being circumcised. (Perhaps this is why NIV leaves it out: its presence weakens antinomianism!)

This leaves case (c), which formally re-states the requirements for the GER out of the (written) law, expressly *omitting* circumcision; in this instance, direct mention is made that *other* aspects of the law (which would now apply to the grafted-in GER) are preached every Sabbath (when *anybody* can avail themselves of knowledge of God's will).

(F) Acts 15.24

This includes the phrase 'be circumcised and keep the law' (Greek PERITEMNESTHAI KAI TIREIN TON NOMON); note again that two verbs are connected by KAI without prohibition or intervention (that is, other words or particles intervening); this *normally* means that the second is a result of the first - a *periphrastic* rendition. In English the KAI (literally 'and') is best rendered 'for the sake of', 'in order to', or 'with a view to' or 'thereby'. Applying this here we see that the command is to 'be circumcised *with a view to* keeping the law'.

Even more to the point here, both 'be circumcised' and 'keep' are in the Aorist Imperative (the first in Middle voice, the second in Active, for what it's worth), which specifies a ONE-TIME action. Note this carefully: the keeping of the law spoken of here is *not* a continuous or habitual action - it is directly attached to the act of being circumcised: but *who is being circumcised*? - the person addressed is the Gentile believer. With this understanding, we see this verse...

(1) relates to circumcision of adults.

(2) does not relate to the GENERAL keeping of the law (or the PRESENT Imperative for 'keep' would be used).

(3) corresponds exactly (and surely refers to) the contention of some of the disciples in Acts 15.1.

(G) Acts 21.21

This raises the issue that Jewish Christians in Jerusalem had come to believe that Paul urged Jews among Gentiles to give up circumcision and Jewish customs. The problem is analyzed by the disciples and a rationale is established (Acts 21.17-26) and Paul cooperates. Note the following facts about this:

(1) the disciples use the language of *rumour* (clear in the Greek) in verse 21 about the claim that Paul had abandoned law. The Asian Jews were in uproar (v27-28).

(2) their suggestion (that Paul adhere to a vow with a following offering) to

demonstrate that he still personally kept the law - was accepted and accomplished by Paul; if Paul did not sincerely keep the law, this makes him a hypocrite in the extreme. If he himself obeyed the law but directed Jews otherwise he would also be a hypocrite. Thus (presuming Paul's honesty) the rumour must have been false!

(3) in verse 24 and 26 we learn that (according to the disciples) there was *no truth* in the rumours (literally 'that of which they have been told concerning you is void').

(4) the NIV omits part of verse 25, only declaring the positive side of the letter from the council in Acts 15; the Greek Textus Receptus includes the (extra) words..

..MIDEN TOIOTON TIREIN
..not-any such-thing to-practice (watch, observe, keep)

This makes sense of the words EI MI (English 'but') in that verse; some versions omit the above words and guess that EI MI here means 'only' (NIV leaves it untranslated, with no note about the matter!). It is as if the verse said 'As for the believing Gentiles we joined in writing, judging them [only] to abstain..".

What is the antecedent to 'no such thing'? If one searches the context, the logical answer is - 'not to circumcise their children nor to walk in the customs' (verse 21). That is, the disciples are stating clearly (in Textus Receptus) that their judgment did NOT endorse the abandonment of circumcision of children or observance of custom *even for the Gentiles*! (See note in NIV Study Bible on Romans 3.31 - The rumour was that Paul taught antinomianism to the Jews; the Jerusalem Council had not only denied *that* (v25) - they denied he had even taught such to Gentile Christians!) Rather, or instead (EI MI), their judgement had endorsed the view that Gentile Christians were *effectively foreigners* grafted into Israel and should obey certain rules. The Church of God is not the violent replacement for Israel - it is the continuation of Israel, though under the direction of a new administration (see Matt 9: 14-17: Matt 21:42-46).

(H) Halakhah and the Oral Law

Note that 'manner' (Acts 15:1) is a Hebraism: it is HALAKHAH ('way of walking'). The Greek word used here (ETHOS) is good, but not perfect because *halakhah* (plural *halakhot*) is a Jewish obsession virtually unknown to Gentiles. No Greek word conveys the whole meaning by itself. A *halakhah* is an application (as dictated by rabbinic interpretation) of a *mitzvah* (command from the law). To keep the law the Jew relies upon living in the *halakhot* written about the particular metier. The Jewish Christians in Acts 15 prescribed the *halakhot* for Gentiles - and aside from the strict teaching about circumcision these were the same as the *halakhot* for admission to the congregation of Israel!

'Halakhah' is also commonly translated with the Greek word HODOS ('way'), which can denote behaviour ('way of walking', halakhah) or a path (as in 'prepare ye the WAY of the Lord', corresponding to Hebrew DAREK - related to our words drag,

track, trek). Places in the New Testament where HODOS most clearly means Halakhah are Acts 9.2, 16.17, 18.25-26, 19.9, 19.23, 22.4, 24.14, 24,22, 1 Cor 12.31 (especially!), I Thes 3.11, Heb 9.8, 10.20, Jas 5.20, 2 Pet 2.2, 2.15, 2.21 and Jude 21.

The various *halakhot*, along with many other interpretations (not involving rules of behaviour) eventually - shortly after the fall of the temple - were collected to form the Talmud. In Christ's time they were collectively called **Oral Law**. Dr David H Stern clarifies:

> "when one speaks of 'the *halakhah*', one is bringing to mind the whole framework of Jewish life as seen from a particular viewpoint... connotes ordinary Jews consulting with their rabbis in order to learn more about how God wants them to live" (*Restoring the Jewishness of the Gospel*, p 53).

So what we see in Acts 15 is a ruling on a *specific* issue (admission to the Messianic fellowship of Israel). The four *halakhot* quoted CANNOT be a substitute for the Law (as if - 'the law of Moses is removed: all the Gentiles have to observe is...') for they do not include anything about murder or lying, for instance! Neither can one hold out the semblance that they somehow supplement the Decalogue - or even the Noahic covenant - for in fact they actually overlap both these sets of law.

Note that the Oral Law (and the *halakhot* in particular) should not be viewed as necessarily evil. Christ spoke of **'traditions of men'** as masking the true intent of the law; in this he was disdaining the error of the Pharisees, that they placed their rules *above* the law, though they were intended to be 'rules of thumb' to guide behaviour. Being interpretations of the true law, they must always take a lower place. Christ also added new *halakhot* - such as 'going the extra mile'. We must note that in many obvious respects Christ followed many traditions that were in the Oral Law but not in the written Law. It should further be noted that the Oral Law was under constant revision : spiritual leaders were always adding to or changing Oral Law - but the written Law could *never* be subjected to addition, change or deletion.

Authority resided in the Jerusalem council of Christians to add or change *halakhot:* this is precisely what they did - guided by the Holy Spirit and in accordance with the written Law. Acts 15 represents a specific ruling on the issue of entry into the covenant, enacted by the legitimate authorities of the church: this is not based on Oral Law - although in effect it becomes Oral Law itself. It is entirely based on the written Law in the Old Testament.

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul (with proper authority) seems to have modified the *halakhah* that forbids food offered to idols. Inspection will show that in spite of the change *there is no modification to the actual Law*: the *halakhah* is lifted simply because 'we know that an idol is nothing' (1 Cor 8.4).

It is an interesting thought that booklets published by the Church today, fill the

same role as Oral Law did in the first century: they discuss and interpret the scripture; they explain the principles of the bible; they provide good and bad examples to follow or avoid; they strongly suggest guidelines for how a Christian can obey God; they are considered authoritative, yet no divine infallibility is claimed for them; they are occasionally revised when understanding or circumstances change; they represent the distilled thought of the leadership of the congregation. But they do not, and cannot in any way replace, change or delete the law of God. (To do so would be to fall into precisely the same error as the Pharisees, which Christ himself so comprehensively condemned!).

It must be noted - and it is easy to confirm by opening to any page of a copy of the Talmud - that the pronouncements that comprise various *halakhot* often bear little resemblance to the written Torah (Genesis to Deuteronomy). For example 'Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk' (Ex 23.19) has become a prohibition against eating dairy produce and meat in the same meal - or even preparing them with the same utensils!

The term most often used in the New Testament for **Oral Law is 'tradition of the elders'**; Jesus had no qualms about rejecting or reinterpreting its parts; see Matt 15.1-11 and Mark 7.1-23; note that even in the dubious NIV rendering of Mark 7.19, Jesus ventures to reject Oral Law, not Written Law (cf verses 2 and 19, NIV). Hyam Maccoby (lecturer at Leo Baeck College, London) explains:

> "... always beware when someone says, 'The Talmud says this' or 'the Talmud says that'. What he *should* say is that some *specific* Rabbi in the Talmud says this or that. Even if this Rabbi has the decisive opinion, this is not necessarily final because such decisions could be wrong, even though in accordance with 'the rule of law' they are regarded as being in force until they are proved wrong and officially repealed". (*The Day God Laughed*).

(I) Helpful Quotes

On the main passage (Acts 15) it would be good to note the following explanations:

> "One of the central texts used by antinomians (see below) is Acts 15.5... There is no evidence whatsoever that the Ten Commandments ceased to be law after the Council of Jerusalem..The laws of God against sin were never repealed by this council. The issue was justification; Judaism had misused the law. *First*, it had replaced it with the traditions of man, which it made into law, and, *second* the law, which is the way of sanctification, was made into the way of justification...Moreover, the Pharisees called their rabbinic interpretations 'the law of Moses' although Christ called them 'the traditions of men'... it was the protest and phrasing of the Pharisees which we read in Acts 15.5. By law was

> thus meant the law as viewed by rabbinic tradition...Clearly, verse 21 emphasizes the still binding character of the [written] law...The use of the word "synagogues" can refer to the Jewish synagogues...or to Christian gatherings....The instruction to the gentile Christians is summed up in verse 20. Does this mean that the Gentiles were free to have other gods, to blaspheme, dishonour parents, murder, steal, bear false witness or covet? Obviously not...the issue was not whether the law was to be retained, but *how* to be retained: as the means of justification, or of sanctification?"
> Rousas John Rushdoony *The Institutes of Biblical Law*

(Note: 'antinomian' refers to the doctrine of throwing out the law: ANTI (=against) + NOMOS (=Law). It is widely appreciated that the foremost antinomian theologian of today is probably Dr F.F. Bruce of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena). Please distinguish *antinomianism* from *antinomy*, which is an altogether different subject.

(J) Conclusion

The judgment and outcome of the Jerusalem Conference removed the obstruction of *adult circumcision of adult converts* - nothing more is mentioned! Furthermore even this is still optional - Timothy is circumcised 'because of the Jews' in the very next chapter (vs 1-3) . Timothy was a half-Jew: his father was Greek, but his mother Jewish. He would be regarded (by the Jews) as an uncircumcised Jew.

By way of summary:

(a) Pharisees from among the Christian community had approached Gentile converts, insisting that to fulfil law they would have to be circumcised *as well as* be baptised and practice 'the way' (*halakhot*).

(b) The council in Jerusalem met. James declared that circumcision of converts was an intolerable burden that should not be imposed. In doing this he was agreeing with a more liberal interpretation of *bris* than that held by Pharisees. (By the way, today Jews normally use *bris* as a synonym for *moelah* (circumcision).

(c) The council issued a judgment that re-stated the *halakhot* for Gentile admission to the fellowship of Israel (the Church). This, as we mentioned above, is an 'Oral Law' interpretation, entirely in keeping with the written Law - effectively quoting it.

(d) This decision removes the impediment of adult circumcision. It does not state anything about change of the status of law, removal or change to any law.

(e) Acts 15.21 implies that the Gentile convert <u>*continued*</u> in the teaching of Moses to which he would be exposed each sabbath; this would of course include the festivals.

(f) Paul in Acts 21 repudiates the rumour that he was teaching against circumcision for children or against other customs - for either Jews OR Gentiles.

(g) None of the teachings of Christ or Paul - or any other writer of the New Testament - removes or invalidates written Law (whereas it has *always* been permissible for authorities to change Oral Law - effectively interpretation and practical or administrative measures). This is what Christ referred to in Matt 5: 17-20.

Certain of the written laws have been *superseded* by more eminent laws (such as Christ as high priest, and as paschal sacrifice) - but even this principle has always been acknowledged by Jews as proper treatment of law: David eating the shewbread is an example; rescuing an ox out of a pit on a sabbath is another. It is relevant to note that no higher law (in the New Testament or elsewhere) supersedes the Sabbath, Holy Days, tithing or unclean meats.

Appendix

1. Rabbis' point of view

After most of this study was completed, Wilf Hey discussed it (for accuracy and to balance interpretation) with several Jews, including two rabbis. One of the rabbis pointed out the following interesting fact: that overwhelming evidence now exists - confirmed strongly by the Dead Sea scrolls - that Hebrew, not Aramaic, was the primary language of Jews in Roman times; Professor David Flusser (Hebrew University, Jerusalem) argues that all the synoptic gospels incorporate translations from Hebrew, and that much of Acts (including the proceedings of the council in Acts 15) is replete with Hebraisms. He has lectured, very much along the lines of interpretation expressed here.

2. Additional information on Gerim

The *halakhot* for gerim seeking entrance to Israel are exactly as stated above: there are a few other verses that seem to put responsibility on the ger, but are not discussed *in this context.* We can only make intelligent guesses about why these are not part of the *halakhot,* nor in the statement of the *halakhot* in Acts 15. Representative of these verses are the following: (others are simple variations of these)...

Exodus 12.19: '... whosoever eateth that which is leavened [during the days of Unleavened Bread] ... shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger, or born in the land'.
Exodus 20.10: '[in the sabbath] thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son,... nor thy cattle, or thy stranger that is within thy gates'.
Exodus 23.12: '... on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox... may rest, and ...

the stranger may be refreshed'.
Leviticus 16.29: '[on the Day of Atonement] ye shall.. .do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you'.
Leviticus 24.16: '... he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD ... shall surely be put to death ... the stranger, as he that is born in the land'.

(a) Note that Exodus 12.19 and Lev 16.29 are not specific commands for behaviour (halakhah), but for observance (shimmurah). It is conjecture that these are not included because they are neither one-time acts that change status (like circumcision and baptism) nor continuous acts of obedience.
(b) Exodus 20.10 and 23.12 are of course directly related. The suggestion would be that the latter explains the former; it puts the onus on the Israelite to make sure that work is not done for the refreshing of the beasts, servants and gerim. This makes it clear that the *benefit* is for the gerim, but the *responsibility* is for the Israelite. Truly the Sabbath is made for (all) man(kind).

(c) Leviticus 24.16 is actually part of a distinct passage which must be viewed in context: 24.10-23 traces a case about legal responsibility, and clarifies that the prosecution of civil law must be universal. Seen in this context there is no command for the ger: more appropriately it is a warning of universal application.

3. Tevilah - baptism - see points B and E(i)

Baptism as a requirement for the entry of a foreigner into Israel is not mentioned in this verse (Ex 12.48) nor anywhere else in the written Torah. But it derives directly from the defeat of the Midianites by the congregation of Israel in Numbers 31. War was successfully waged (verses 7-12); virgins were saved from among the captives (verses 17-18) and incorporated into Israel by going through 'the waters of separation' (KJV - verses 22-23). These 'waters of separation' were established in connection with the red heifer (Numbers 19).

Baptisms were common by the time of Christ: many sect leaders - rabbis with distinctive teaching - adopted baptism as an initiation into their company, using this same idea that the baptised person was being *separated.* Note that this separation is NIDDAH - the separation of a menstruous woman (Lev 12.1-5 and 15.9-33) rather than NZR - the separation of a consecrated thing. Baptism is required because of filth rather than for the sake of holiness. It is separation with the emphasis on *from* rather than *to*.

4. The Meaning of "Torah"

The Hebrew word TORAH is translated into Greek as NOMOS (=law). It is important to know that TORAH does not mean "law", but "doctrine". The New Bible Dictionary (NBD) has an excellent article on Law (which should be considered essential reading):

> "The translation of the word TORA into Gk. *nomos* has often been criticized, and not without foundation, as TORA, as we have seen, has a wider and deeper meaning, and above all implicates, more than *nomos*, a living and merciful God as the giver of this `instruction'." (NBD page 721)

When we see reference in the New Testament to 'the law' we must endeavour to make distinction between a particular law or the whole law - especially in a context using a Hebraism, where a Jew might naturally refer to those aspects of the law that relate to a particular question. For example in Luke 2.39 'the law' refers specifically to Leviticus 12, and similarly in Acts 15.5 'the law' refers to Leviticus 17-18. Also it should be noted that:

> "In general discourse 'Torah' can mean not only the first five books of the Old Testament but also:
> (1) The actual Scroll, containing the five books of Moses, hand-written on parchment (kept in the 'ark' in a synagogue or temple, behind the high altar), from which specified readings are publicly given on the Sabbath, on Mondays and Thursdays, and during festivals.
> (2) The divine teachings of the Lord.
> (3) The Old Testament as a whole.
> (4) All Jewish Law, including the oral tradition of Judaic religion and moral precepts.
> (5) Living in accordance with the teachings of Judaism; 'to live Torah', 'to live by Torah', 'to practice Torah', mean to practice Judaism's prescriptions about faith, compassion, study and duty to one's fellow man."
> Leo Rosten *Guide Notes on Torah and Talmud*

Much of this variance in use of the term 'Torah' arises from the time of Ezra; in the re-establishment of partial Israel (in the form of Judaism) he developed a system that interpreted and applied the law indirectly through teaching statutes and judgments (Ezra 7.10 and Nehemiah 8.7-8).

It is absolutely essential to be aware of the considerable flexibility in the use of the term `law' (*nomos*) in the New Testament. For example the term `law of Moses' can be understood as embracing more than was strictly Mosaic.

> "There is thus great diversity in the denotation of the word `law', and sometimes there is deep-seated difference in connotation. The result is that a meaning totally diverse from that intended by the New Testament speaker or writer would be imposed upon his words if we did not appreciate the differentiation which appears in the usage. There are instances, especially in Paul, where transition from one meaning to another appears in adjacent clauses....And on numerous occasions it is difficult to ascertain what the precise denotation is. In the main,

however, when the distinctions given above (which see - Ed.) are recognized, the interpretation will be relieved of frequent distortions and needless difficulties will be resolved." (NBD, Page 722)

5. Thought

Is circumcision on the eighth day still in place - still a command for new-born Jewish males? Does it apply to new-born males who are children of Gentile Christians? Is the image of Gentiles becoming 'grafted into' Israel a judicial fact (instead of a colourful metaphor)? (Romans 11). None of these three issues is *directly* dealt with in Acts 15, but it would seem that for the answers to be consistent with all the above, they would be in the affirmative.

NB. Comments and critique on this imperfect paper are greatly welcomed by the authors in the interests of a continuing search for a fuller truth of the scriptures.

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