THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL

ACTS 15:20-21

AVRAM YEHOSHUA
All quotes from *Unger's Bible Dictionary* are used by permission.
This book is dedicated to Messiah Yeshua, whose Spirit and Word have shown me the Way of Life. May its words glorify You, my Lord.

This book is also dedicated to my wife Ruti, whose love for Messiah Yeshua has been a Beacon Light for me in this world of darkness. Thank you, my love!
A veil has been placed over the eyes of my Jewish people concerning Messiah Yeshua (2nd Cor. 3:14-16).

A similar veil has been over the eyes of the Bride of Christ concerning Mosaic Law (Daniel 7:25).

In these last days Papa God is lifting both veils, to the Glory of His Beloved Son, Messiah Yeshua!
# THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL

**ACTS 15:20-21**

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<td>AHCL</td>
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<td>ARA</td>
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<td>JNTC</td>
<td>Jewish New Testament Commentary</td>
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<td>KJV</td>
<td>King James Version (Bible)</td>
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<td>NAGL</td>
<td>The New Analytical Greek Lexicon</td>
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<td>NASB</td>
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<td>NBDBG</td>
<td>The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon</td>
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<td>NKJV</td>
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Acknowledgements to the First Edition

I am indebted to Hannah Cooperman and my wife, Ruti Yehoshua, for their tireless efforts in proofreading the manuscript as well as for their keen insights. Many typos were corrected because of their diligence. I am also indebted to Yeshua for revealing His understanding of Acts 15:20-21 and its relationship to Mosaic Law to me.

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I want to thank Yakov Snyder for bringing a number of my typographical errors in the first edition to my attention (after I updated it). I’m also grateful to Katie Hoogerheide for proofreading the revised manuscript, making numerous corrections and offering many insightful suggestions.

Notes to the book’s Third and Fourth Editions, and the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Online Editions

The third and fourth editions allowed me to further revise and refine the concepts in the book, as well as to correct a number of my typographical errors. The fourth edition also afforded me the opportunity of expanding two chapters: Acts 15:10—The Yoke, and Acts 15:21—The Preachers of Moses.

The fifth, sixth and seventh editions have been revised and reformatted to standard letter size paper so that it can be printed out on a personal printer. It’s free to read and/or download as a PDF on The Seed of Abraham’s website.

May the Lord Yeshua bless you as you read, The Lifting of the Veil,

Avram Yehoshua

Flagstaff, Arizona USA

As of 16 November 2018 this seventh edition is revised to p. 75.
INTRODUCTION

The Lifting of the Veil breaks fresh, new ground for Acts 15:20-21, presenting the biblical alternative to the Church’s poor and convoluted interpretation of the passage. The Church, interpreting the four rules of James (Acts 15:20) as table fellowship, completely misses God’s point. The four rules form a conceptual unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry and were meant to deal with Gentile worship of their gods and goddesses. James, the half-brother of Jesus and the leader of the Council of Acts 15, was concerned that Gentile believers would just ‘add’ Jesus to their pantheon of gods, and consequently, they would continue to believe in, and worship, Diana and Zeus, etc., along with Jesus. His concern was well founded (see 1st Thess. 1:6-10; Rev. 2:14-16, 20). Understood from its Hebraic Perspective the four rules form the theological pillar that establishes Mosaic Law for every Christian.

The four rules of James acted as a spiritual filter, revealing whether Gentile faith in Jesus was genuine or not, because Jesus doesn’t countenance any competitors. These four rules were the first of many Mosaic rules or laws, and not ‘the only rules’ that the Gentiles were expected to observe. They have absolutely nothing to do with ‘table fellowship,’ which is how the Church interprets them. The four rules were given because of their primary importance, specifically in relation to Gentile salvation, which is why the Council of Acts 15 met (Acts 15:1-2f.). Acts 15:20 forms the New Testament’s theological foundation, after the resurrection, that establishes Mosaic Law for every Christian because James speaks of the Gentiles going to the synagogue, on the Sabbath day to learn of Moses (i.e. Mosaic Law):

“For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (Acts 15:21).

Acts 15 took place 18 years after the resurrection. The Church teaches that at the crucifixion of Jesus, Sabbath changed to Sunday and Mosaic Law ‘was done away with,’ but obviously, the Book of Acts, with James speaking of the Sabbath, disputes that.1 The Church does not have biblical authority from God to keep Sunday, Easter (or the more fashionable, ‘Resurrection Sunday’), nor Xmas, nor the right to eat unclean foods, such as bacon. If it did, Scripture would say that Sunday replaced the 7th day Sabbath, etc. The proof texts the Church uses to justify the eating of unclean meats disintegrates when the Word of God is properly understood. The Pharisees, too, had their teachings that nullified God’s Word (Mt. 15:1-9), and they, too, had Scripture proof texts to support their heresies.

The Book of Acts forms a divine bridge between the Gospels and the letters of Peter and Paul, etc. Without Acts we’d be at a tremendous loss, not knowing what happened in Jerusalem after the resurrection with the subsequent giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. We wouldn’t know of the many thousands of Jewish people who came to believe in Yeshua2 (the Hebrew name for Jesus) and we wouldn’t realize what Peter, Stephen or Philip did, nor what happened to Paul on the Road to Damascus. We also wouldn’t know anything about how the question of Gentile salvation and the Law of Moses was settled in Acts 15, whose proper interpretation is of vital importance for us today.

Salvation is based on biblical faith in Jesus plus nothing else. There’s no law nor good deed that anyone can do ‘to save him.’ Only the sacrificial blood of Yeshua can transform one’s nature into the nature of Yeshua. It’s called being Born Again (John 3:3, 5). The keeping of Mosaic Law could never give anyone

1 For other places where the Sabbath is seen, see Acts 13:14, 27, 42, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4; cf. Col. 2:16; Heb. 4:9. For the biblical evidence that neither the Sabbath nor the Feasts of Israel nor Mosaic Law were cancelled for Christians see the one page article, The Feasts of Israel and the Church and its longer version, The Feasts of Israel as Time Markers After the Resurrection.

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eternal life nor was it designed to. Justification by faith is the gracious work of the Father through His Son for forgiveness, transformation and eternal glorification.

The Church (collectively consisting of all organized Christian churches) teaches that Mosaic Law was nullified by the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. The Feasts of Israel, the dietary laws and the 7th day Sabbath, to name three major pillars of the Law, are ‘only for the Jews who rejected Jesus’ and who are still ‘under the Law.’ Christians are ‘under Grace’ and free from the Law, or as F. F. Bruce wrote, Christianity is a ‘law-free gospel.’ Acts 15 is used by the Church to prove its theology. The chapter deals with the issue of whether Gentile believers needed to be physically (covenantally) circumcised and keep the Law, along with their faith in Jesus, in order to be saved (Acts 15:1, 5).

The Church supports its teaching of a ‘law-free Gospel’ based on its misinterpretation of the four rules of James (Acts 15:20). Theologians teach that the rules apply to table fellowship and that these are the only rules or laws for Christians, other than the moral laws. Their anti-Law theology blinds them to the biblical interpretation. This in turn sets up their inability to correctly understand the meaning of the next verse (v. 21), where James speaks of the Law of Moses being taught in the synagogues every Sabbath day.

F. F. Bruce describes Acts 15 as ‘epoch-making,’ and I. Howard Marshall agrees with him and believes it is theologically important because,

‘Luke’s account of the discussion regarding the relation of the Gentiles to the law of Moses forms the center of Acts both structurally and theologically.’

Marshall and Bruce are right about the tremendous importance of Acts 15, but they fail to understand its proper meaning and implications. The words of James are nothing less than the fulcrum point and foundation where Mosaic Law is declared valid for every Christian, but it’s at this crucial juncture that the Church creates a theological veil so thick that it has kept Christians from seeing their ancient Hebraic heritage—how the Father wants them to actually walk out their faith in His Son. This failure, in turn, has led the Church into pagan celebrations ‘in the Name of Jesus,’ which neither Jesus or Paul ever intended.

Almost two thousand years ago, in 48 AD, all the believing Jewish Apostles and Elders of Jerusalem assembled to discuss the matter of Gentile belief in the Jewish Messiah (Acts 15:1-6). They needed to know exactly what constituted salvation for the Gentile. Paul, Barnabas and others from the congregation in Antioch were also there that day. The Jewish leadership in faraway Antioch had requested a ruling. Acts 15:1-2 states,

“Some men came down from Judah and began teaching the brethren, ‘Unless you are

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4 Church theology on the Law has been challenged in the last 40 years by E. P. Sanders (Paul and Palestinian Judaism; 1977), James Dunn (The Theology of Paul the Apostle; 1998) and N. T. Wright (Paul: In Fresh Perspective; 2005). Equating Mosaic Law with legalism is finally being seen as a perversion and caricature of God’s holy Law (Rom. 3:31; 7:7, 12, 14).
7 Antioch (on the Orontes River) was 300 miles (482 kilometers) north of Jerusalem. It had a population of 500,000, 70,000 of which were Jews. Josephus ranked it as ‘the third greatest city of the Roman Empire, behind Rome and Alexandria’ (Josephus, Jewish Wars, 3.29).
Introduction

circumcised according to the custom of Moses (i.e. Mosaic Law) you cannot be saved.’ And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the Apostles and Elders concerning this issue.”

Those men from Judah wanted the Gentiles to be physically covenantally circumcised, which was seen at that time as a way of becoming part of Israel (to become a Jew), but more to the point, it meant keeping Mosaic Law for eternal life (symbolized in physical covenantal circumcision; Gen. 17:10-14), which was how the Jew got to Heaven before Jesus. The Gentile, then, would then be part of the people that God was redeeming (Israel). God never set up Mosaic Law for eternal life, but rather with the sacrifice of His Son, both Jew and Gentile would enter the Kingdom by faith in Yeshua (Acts 2:37-40; 15:11; Rom. 4:1f.). In the aftermath of the decision by James, in which he struck down the false notion that eternal life hinged upon Law keeping, four rules were issued (v. 20). Biblical interpretation of them is vital in understanding what James ruled and what the Council ratified, and therefore, what God through them intended for the Gentile believers after they had entered into the Kingdom of Jesus.

What the Holy Spirit issued through James for the Gentile was conceptually no different from what God had done for Israel through Moses when He brought Israel out of Egyptian slavery. The Hebrews were not saved by circumcision nor the Law, but by the blood of the lamb and their faith in Moses (Ex. 12), the greatest Old Testament type of Yeshua. It follows, then, that the Gentile wouldn’t be saved by circumcision or the Law, either. After Hebrew deliverance (salvation) from Egypt, Yahveh brought Israel to Mt. Sinai to learn His ways: who was this God that had just brought Egypt, the mightiest nation in the world at that time, to its knees? What did He consider sin? What was pleasing and right in His eyes?

God didn’t set Israel free to do her own thing, willing to accept whatever any Hebrew thought was ‘right in his own heart.’ He gave Israel His holy Law (Dt. 4:5-8; Rom. 7:12, 14) so that she would know right from wrong. It’s not different ‘in Christ.’ After all, why would God’s holy rules be invalid for the Gentile believer in the Jewish Messiah? Some might say, ‘The only thing we need to do is to love God and our

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8 Most Scripture quotes are taken from the New American Standard Bible or the New King James Version. Changes have been made to texts where The Hebrewic Perspective (translation) is more suitable. Unless otherwise stated, italics are my way of emphasizing a word or a phrase, while proper nouns are capitalized (e.g. Aaron the High Priest, the Law, the Temple, etc.) and the Name of the God of Israel (Yahveh) is written as such, instead of the ubiquitous term, ‘the Lord.’

9 Becoming a proselyte meant that the Gentile was ‘now a Jew,’ but it’s an unbiblical and false concept of Rabbinic Judaism. Nowhere does God ever say that a Gentile becomes a Jew. The Gentile who ‘came alongside’ Israel was certainly part of Israel, so much so that God speaks of there being ‘one law for the stranger and the native born’ (the Israeli). This ‘stranger’ is specifically called a ger גֵר in Scripture and is very different from other ‘strangers’ (Gentiles). I bring out the differences in the Appendix, The Stranger and the Native-Born.

10 The male Gentile believer must not be physically covenantally circumcised in order ‘to keep Passover,’ or Mosaic Law. See Gentile Circumcision?

11 Alfred Edersheim, The Temple: Its Ministry and Services (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), pp. 183-184. Edersheim writes that the sacrifice of the Passover lamb in Egypt was a picture of the sacrifice of Yeshua. No other sacrifice ‘could so suitably commemorate His death, nor yet the great deliverance connected with it, and the great union and fellowship from it.’ It ‘had been instituted and observed before Levitical sacrifices existed; before the Law was given; nay, before the Covenant was ratified by blood (Ex. 24). In a sense, it may be said to have been the cause of all the later sacrifices of the law and of the Covenant itself.’ The Jew was not saved from Egyptian slavery by either circumcision or the Law, but by the blood of the lamb, which was the grace of Yahveh to Israel, the prototype of the Lamb.

12 The personal name of the God of Israel is נ̄הו̄ Yahveh. It’s found 6,823 times in the Old Testament.
neither.’ That’s very true, and this is the heart of the Law (Dt. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18), but how do we define love? This Lord Yeshua declared that all the commandments and rules of Mosaic Law are God’s very definition of how we’re to love God and our neighbor (Mt. 22:35-40).

Others say, ‘We don’t need the Law. We have the Holy Spirit to guide us in God’s will,’ yet the Corinthians, who had the Spirit, were continually being rebuked by Paul because they needed to be taught the Way of God. We wouldn’t have the letters of Paul to them if we ‘only need the Spirit.’ It’s the Spirit and the Word of God we need, and it’s the express purpose of the Holy Spirit to write Mosaic Law upon the heart of every Christian (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:26-27; Heb. 8:10). If the Law is truly written on the heart, wouldn’t believers want to keep Passover and God’s 7th day Sabbath holy, etc., just as Jesus did? Isn’t He our Example in all matters of faith and practice?

In the days of the Apostles, the Gentile Christians learned Mosaic Law and were part of Israel (Jn. 10:16; Rom. 11:24; 1st Cor. 7:17-19; Eph. 2:13). He learned the Law by going to the unbelieving or believing synagogue (Jn. 2:2) on the Sabbath day (Acts 15:21). Mosaic Law taught him his new Family Rules and History, so that he might walk in those rules in the power and love of the Spirit, just as all the Apostles and Jewish believers did after the resurrection (Acts 21:20; 55 AD).

The Lord Yeshua uses the expression Born Again (or Born from Above, Jn. 3:3, 7) to indicate one’s birth or entry into His Kingdom. An infant is born into a family without keeping any of the family rules, ‘by the grace of the parents.’ Does this mean that the child will not be required to keep the family rules when it comes of age? Does it matter if the child obeys his father? Or should the will of the child overrule the father’s will? Knowing the will of the Father in Heaven and doing it is central to being a son or daughter of God. Yeshua said in Matthew 7:21,

‘Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven will enter.’ (See also Mt. 12:50)

What is the will of God in relation to Mosaic Law? Many in the Church say, ‘The Law has been done away with,’ yet Marshall, before he theologizes the Law away, says that Mosaic Law is the will of God:

What ‘evidence was there that the law, which represented the will of God for his covenant people, had been repealed?’

God gave those rules to Israel after He had saved them from Egyptian slavery. The same concept holds true for the believer today. Once saved, once ‘in’ the Kingdom of Yeshua, Mosaic Law becomes the divine guideline for how each Christian is to walk out their faith in Christ. It’s the will of God, showing them what is sin and what is right in God’s eyes.

Messiah Yeshua said that love was the basis for all the laws of Moses (Mt. 22:40), so Christians keep the essence of the will of God. Unfortunately, the organized churches teach against everything in the Law except what they perceive to be the moral laws. Therefore, Christians are ignorant of the specifics of God’s Law and are horrified to even consider them. The mere mention of Mosaic Law as part of God’s will brings puzzled looks, fear and/or contempt to the faces of many, who in their pride and ignorance think it doesn’t apply to them. Those same facial expressions were also seen on the Pharisees, who boasted of their own righteousness and interpretations of God’s Word (Lk. 18:9-14; Mt. 15:1-20), while rejecting the understanding the Word of God who stood right before them. As King Solomon wrote, ‘There’s nothing new under the sun’ (Eccl. 1:9c). On the other hand, some extremists in the Law Camp say that Christians

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who don’t keep the 7th day Sabbath are going to Hell. This, too, is wrong. Anyone who loves Jesus and his neighbor is keeping the heart of the Law (Dt. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18; Lk. 10:25-28). Those extremists fail to realize that even if someone is keeping Sunday and eating ham, if he has a living relationship with Jesus he will be forgiven of those sins (1st Pet. 4:8). Yeshua’s sacrifice is that great (Acts 13:38-39), but a believer walking in those sins is not what Jesus wants. Committing those sins has its negative effect upon the Christian, as well as on others. Walking like Jesus did is a divine goal for all of us.

Of course, there are Christians who hear that eating pig won’t send them to Hell, so they’re not concerned about the Law, but sinning against God is no light matter. Building a theological house on sand is much more disastrous than building a real house on it (Mt. 7:24-27). Reading into Acts 15, and other passages of the New Testament, that Mosaic Law has been done away with is a false interpretation of the texts, and false theology leads to perverse and sinful lifestyles. This distorts the picture of the true Jesus that godly believers want to emulate and present to others.

This false picture also offends the Jewish people, who understand, and rightly so, that their Messiah wouldn’t do away with Mosaic Law (and isn’t this exactly what Jesus said; Mt. 5:17)? Jews know that the only true God is the God of Israel and that He gave the laws and statutes, etc., to Moses. God Himself warns them in the Law that if anyone entices them to follow ‘another god,’ they’re to be stoned to death (Dt. 13:1-5; 17:2-13). At this point, a ‘Jesus (or Paul) who has done away with the Law’ becomes a salvation issue for the entire Jewish community. Placing this stumbling block in the way of the Jewish people is nothing less than satanic.

Most Israelis are taught in grade school that Jesus started another religion—Christianity. It hates the Jewish people and the Law of Moses. Is that really what Jesus wanted? It certainly can’t be found in His words, nor the Book of Acts, nor even Paul, but for the last 1,900 years Church theology and history toward the Jewish people confirm this sinister attitude toward both Mosaic Law and God’s Chosen People Israel (Rom. 11:11-36).

In the New Covenant, whenever salvation is pitted against the Law (or physical circumcision, which implied that the Gentile was to become a Jew and keep the Law for salvation along with his faith in Christ), the Law is rightly rejected as a means of obtaining and maintaining the new birth and the new life. Paul’s emphasis of non-circumcision for the Gentile (e.g. 1st Cor. 7:17-19; Gal. 2:3) was always against the keeping of the Law for salvation, which circumcision implied (Gal. 2:16, 19, 21; 5:4). One cannot add anything to the finished Work of Messiah Yeshua’s sacrifice, but once he is Born Again, the Law rightfully comes to the forefront in the New Testament for how he should live out his new life of faith. Christian scholar David Williams, not a Law keeper himself, nevertheless writes that, “for Paul, the law remained the authoritative guide to Christian living.”

All the Jewish believers kept the Law (Acts 21:20), including Paul (Acts 21:23-24, 26; 23:1-5; 25:8), who also commanded his followers to keep it (Rom. 3:31; 7:7, 12, 14; 1st Cor. 7:19). If Paul, then, wrote to

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14 E. P. Sanders, *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*. Sanders first raised Christian awareness that circumcision meant the Gentile became part of the (supposedly eternally saved) Chosen People, and now a ‘Jew’ who stayed ‘in Covenant’ by keeping the Law. (See Scot McKnight, *Jesus Creed*.

David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 273: ‘Circumcision for the Gentile meant the circumcision party (Acts 15:1) was requiring the Gentile to become a proselyte (i.e. ‘in every sense’ a Jew).’

Gentile believers ‘to follow him as he followed Christ,’16 shouldn’t Gentiles today be keeping the laws of Moses (that pertain to them)17 from just this perspective? How can it be that the ancient Apostolic faith community loved Mosaic Law and adhered to it, while the modern faith community strongly teaches against it? Are there two different faith communities in the one Flock of Jesus Christ (Jn. 10:16)?

The Church is adamant, though, that the Law doesn’t pertain to Christians. Even the so-called Messianic Jewish community doesn’t keep Mosaic Law, although they give lip service to it. They don’t think that they, nor the Gentiles, need to keep Mosaic Law, even though they assemble on the 7th day Sabbath and have their Passover demonstrations, etc., because their theology on Law and Grace is similar to that of the Church.18 The keeping of the Sabbath, etc., is only a facade, ‘window dressing’ meant to impress the un-believing Jewish community that Messianic Jews are ‘still Jewish.’ They’re more concerned with ‘looking Jewish’ before the Jews who aren’t saved than with walking biblically before their Jewish Savior.

Messianic Jews meet on the 7th day Sabbath, but they desecrate it by buying, selling and working on it. This is not what God meant when He said to keep His Sabbath day holy.19 They also teach, by word and example, that the eating of unclean meats is acceptable to God. They are no different from their predecessors, the Jewish Christians of the 19th century, except for the wearing of their tallits and kipas, and the eating of bagels and cream cheese at their Sabbath assemblies. They don’t understand that Torah (Mosaic Law) is holy and valid for every believer—Jew and Gentile. Instead, they teach, but misunderstand, that they are ‘under Grace, not Law.’ The 7th day Sabbath and the Feasts, etc., are just Jewish traditions for them to use in evangelizing unsaved Jews. Their false theology also allows them to maintain their relationship with the ‘Law-free’ Church, but this is extremely confusing to many Gentiles who come to them desiring to learn about the Law. Why would a Gentile, raised and nurtured in the anti-Law Church, want to keep the Law of Moses? Why, indeed!

While the Church and the Messianic community avoid the Law like a plague, the Spirit of Jesus is leading many Gentile and Jewish believers into observing Mosaic Law, from the heart. In these last days the Holy Spirit is using the Law as a filter to see who will walk where Jesus is leading him, even if it goes against 1,900 years of staunch Church opposition. In this it’s not unlike the controversy that surrounded Yeshua as He confronted the Pharisees and their teachings (e.g. Mt. 15:1-20), or the religious opposition that has met with every fresh move of the Spirit of God since the days of Moses. Resisting the Work of the Holy Spirit is an all too common phenomenon among God’s people (Psalm 95:6-11; 2nd Cor. 1:23; 12:21; 13:2, 10), but those who realize that the oasis they’re at is not the final one are open to the leading of the Holy Spirit to the next oasis, even if the path appears forbidden and dangerous.

Millions of Christian love Jesus with all their heart, but are enslaved, without even realizing it, to Church theology and tradition that nullify the Word of God. Great is the power of Satan to deceive, even and especially, the Bride of Christ (Dan. 7:25; Rev. 12:17). God’s will today is for every believer walk out their

16 1st Cor. 4:14-17; 11:1; Phil. 3:15-17; 4:9; 1st Thess. 1:6-7; 2nd Thess. 3:7, 9.
17 Not all the commandments of Moses apply to everyone and many aren’t able to be done today. Some apply only to the High Priest and the Levitical priests, and these, of course, aren’t done today because there is no Temple. Other commandments only apply to women or to farmers, etc. We must know the commandments and rules in order to observe those that do apply to us. The major rules that apply to everyone today are the 7th day Sabbath, the Feasts of Israel, tithing and the Mosaic dietary laws.
18 See Law and Grace. Also, see Goodbye Messianic Judaism! for why Messianic Judaism has failed to live up to God’s desire for it.
19 Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 16:23; 20:8; 31:12-17; 35:1-3; Dt. 5:11-15; Is. 56:2, 6; 58:13.
faith in His Son through Mosaic Law, as interpreted by Yeshua, not the Rabbis (who pervert and twist God’s Word). Once this is seen, the veil will be removed from the eyes of the Lord’s Bride so that she will be able to see her Bridegroom clearer than ever before, and walk out of the darkness of sin, to the Glory of the Light of the world!
THE FOUR RULES OF ACTS 15:20

The Church correctly understands Acts 15 to be a place where God declared that the Gentile didn’t have to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses, but the Church doesn’t realize that this prohibition against keeping Mosaic Law only pertained to salvation. Theologians also point to the four rules of v. 20 and erroneously say that these are the only rules for the Gentile (other than loving God and neighbor).

Church interpretation explains the four rules as ‘an expression of Christian charity’ toward ‘the weaker brother’ (the Jewish believer). Theologians teach that the Jewish believer hadn’t yet realized that he had been set free from the Law, but could all the Jewish Apostles have been blind to this for the entire period that the Book of Acts covers (30-64 AD)? More than interesting to note is that Jesus didn’t speak of the Law’s demise in His 40 days with the Apostles after the resurrection, when He specifically taught them about the Kingdom (Acts 1:1-3). Such an important concept would hardly be overlooked by Him, if in fact, His sacrifice had nullified Mosaic Law for Christians.

Scholars recognize that all the Jewish believers, including Peter and Paul, continued to ‘live by the Jewish law.’ Were all the Jewish believers wrong? According to the Church they were, and so, as not to offend Jewish sensibilities, the Gentiles were asked to walk in these four rules. This way, theologians say, there would be ‘a basis for fellowship’ with the Jews, since the Jews were ‘in every city’ (15:21).

F. F. Bruce, thinking that three of the four rules fall under the category of dietary regulations (all but rule two; ‘sexual immorality’), explains that the rules centered around table fellowship between Jew and Gentile. In other words, they were given by James so that the Gentile believer would be able to eat and fellowship with the Jewish believer (who still kept the dietary laws; Lev. 11, etc.). The four rules of Acts

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20 Marshall, Acts, p. 242: The Gentile was saved ‘without accepting the obligations of the Jewish law.’ Page 243: ‘no more than these minimum requirements’ (the four rules) ‘should be imposed upon the Gentiles.’

21 This contradicts the New Testament. If, as the Church teaches, only the ‘moral laws’ (e.g. stealing and murder) have passed into the New Testament, what makes something like homosexuality wrong (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:27)? In other words, if a Greek man said that homosexuality for him was ‘loving his neighbor as himself,’ how could Paul say he was wrong? The Apostle could only turn to Mosaic Law. This is a clear indication that the four rules cannot be the only rules for the Gentile Christian.


25 Williams, Acts, p. 256; the ‘law remained determinative for their lives. They had no clear teaching from the Lord to the contrary.’

26 Pfeiffer, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1152: ‘The decree was issued... as a basis for fellowship’ so as not to ‘offend the weaker brother.’

27 Bruce, The Book of the Acts, p. 285. Bruce states that, after the decision that Gentiles needn’t be circumcised, the Apostles and Elders ‘turned to consider terms on which table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians might become acceptable.’

Marshall, Acts, p. 243, states that this is ‘the question of how Jewish Christians, who continued to live by the Jewish law could have fellowship at table with Gentiles who did not observe the law.’
The Four Rules of Acts 15:20

15:20 direct the Gentile to abstain from,

1. ‘the pollution of idols and of
2. sexual immorality and of
3. things strangled and of
4. blood.’

Scholarship is unanimous that rule #1, ‘pollution of idols,’ deals with eating meat sacrificed to an idol. Also, any leftover meat from the sacrifice would generally be sold at the marketplace.28

‘Things strangled’ (#3) is interpreted to mean the Gentile shouldn’t eat meat from a strangled animal—it should be properly slaughtered with the blood drained. Rule #4, ‘blood,’ was said to refer to blood which might be found in meat that wasn’t properly drained or adequately cooked (the Law prohibits the eating of blood; Lev. 3:17). The Church, interpreting these rules, says that out of consideration for Jewish sensibilities the Gentile believers wouldn’t break them.29

Rule #2, ‘sexual immorality,’ which the ASV, KJV, NASB and the NRSV call ‘fornication,’ is generally seen as any kind of illicit sex, such as adultery, homosexuality, pre-marital sex or incest, etc. Marshall translates it as unchastity, variously understood as illicit sexual intercourse or as breaches of the Jewish marriage law (which forbade marriage between close relatives, Lev. 18:6-18).30

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary is not certain as to what James meant by ‘fornication.’ It follows Marshall as to illicit intercourse, but adds that it could point to cult prostitution:

‘fornication may refer either to immorality in general or to religious prostitution in pagan temples. Such immorality was so common among Gentiles that it merited special attention.’31

Without realizing it, Wycliffe has hit upon the key to unlocking the proper interpretation of Acts 15:20—religious prostitution. The first rule, meat sacrificed to idols, obviously falls under sacrificial idolatry. The second rule, ‘fornication,’ should also have been seen as part of sacrificial idolatry, simply from its word usage in the Bible, and also, from it being ‘so common among Gentiles.’ The second rule speaks of cult prostitution. These two rules are the major parts of a pagan ceremony—sacrificial-sexual idolatry.

Rule #4, blood easily fits into this concept and things strangled follows suit. Sadly, it wouldn’t be until this book was published that all four rules were seen to pertain to sacrificial-sexual idolatry, and this only. As to where James got these four rules from and what they meant to the Gentile, R. J. Knowling writes that some thought the rules came from the seven laws of Noah. On the other hand, he questions it ‘coming

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WBC, p. 1152: ‘Often meat purchased in the market places had been sacrificed in pagan temples to heathen deities. The eating of such meat was offensive to sensitive Jewish consciences, for it smacked of taking part in the worship of the pagan deity.’

29 Marshall, Acts, p. 253; ‘The third element was meat which had been killed by strangling, a method of slaughter which meant that the blood remained in the meat, and the fourth item was blood itself.’ Page 243: ‘Nevertheless, some kind of compromise was necessary in order not to offend the consciences of the strict Jewish Christians, and he proposed that the Gentiles be asked to refrain from food dedicated to idols, from unchastity, and from meat containing blood.’

30 Ibid.

31 Pfeiffer, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1152.
from Noah’ because even though,

‘there are points of contact,’ yet ‘it would seem that there are certainly four of the Pre-
cepts’ (of Noah) ‘to which there is nothing corresponding to the Decree.’

In other words, why didn’t James give the Gentiles all seven rules of Noah? Knowling goes on to write that some say the rules of James were part of what was given to the ‘stranger’ (the ger) dwelling in Israel. He rightly dismisses this idea saying that this ‘would be far from satisfactory’ because the Jewish Chris-
tians who kept all the Law (Acts 21:20) would be seen as superior, while only when the Gentile would keep the whole Law would he have the ‘full privilege of the Christian Church and name.’

Knowling says that others consider the rules as coming from Leviticus 17–18, but this too is awkward as it makes the ‘written law…the source of the Jewish prohibitions.’ Attempts have been made to present the rules as ‘binding upon proselytes in the wider sense, i.e. upon the uncircumcised’ that existed in the days of the Apostles, but ‘of direct evidence…there is none.’ He further writes that,

‘the difficulty is so great in supposing Paul and Barnabas could have submitted to the dis-
tinction drawn between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians that it led to
doubts as to the historical character of the decree.’

Would Paul have submitted to the distinction? Certainly not the Paul of the Church, and so it’s a valid point for those who hold a ‘no-Law’ Gospel. Doubting the event, some say the decree was ‘formulated after Paul’s departure…But this view cannot be maintained’ Knowling states, in light of Acts 16:4-5, ‘where Paul is distinctly said to have given the decrees to the Churches to keep.’ He adds that W. M. Ramsay, following John Lightfoot,

thought ‘it impossible to suppose that St. Paul would have endorsed a decree, which thus
made mere points of ritual compulsory.’

In the mostly Gentile churches of Paul, as Knowling puts it, the Apostle may not have enforced the Dec-
ree, with its ‘blood and strangled,’ because it would have,

‘been a cause of perplexity, a burden too heavy to bear, the source of a Christianity maim-
ed by Jewish particularism.’

All these views, from table fellowship to Noahide Law to thinking that Paul would never have accepted it, rest upon the assumption that Mosaic Law ‘was done away with.’ Yet, David Williams writes that,

‘those who argue that Paul could not have endorsed the decrees as they appear in the ac-
cepted text’ don’t ‘show any appreciation of the situation in the church of the first century
or of Paul’s own attitude toward the law. There is considerable evidence that the decrees,
as we have them, were not only issued, but observed in the Gentile churches for many


\[33\] Ibid.

\[34\] Ibid.

\[35\] Ibid., p. 336.

\[36\] Ibid.

\[37\] Ibid.

\[38\] Ibid., p. 337.
The Four Rules of Acts 15:20

years after their promulgation.  

The ‘problem’ with Paul accepting the Decree is cleared up once the four rules are seen as the filter the Gentile convert needed to address immediately after he was Born Again. The rest of the ‘rules of Moses’ would follow as he ‘grew in Christ’ and went to the assembly on the Sabbath day to learn of ‘Moses’ (Acts 15:21). Why these four rules first? Because of Gentile propensity to add gods (i.e. Jesus) to the gods and goddesses they already had and to continue to honor them through sacrificial-sexual idolatry, while still ‘believing in Jesus,’ which would nullify their salvation.

The four rules weren’t made so that the Gentile believer could fellowship and eat with the Jewish believer, as important as that is, but so that the Gentile could retain his salvation. The Gentile needed to know the boundaries and prohibitions of the Covenant he had entered into. He had to realize what was permissible for him and what would cost him his eternal life.

The four rules of James are an inherent ‘whole.’ They are a ‘package deal’ or a unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry. This pagan practice had to stop immediately if Gentile faith in Jesus was to be recognized as genuine.

The second rule is usually translated as ‘sexual immorality’ or ‘fornication,’ but there’s overwhelming biblical and historical evidence that cult prostitution is specifically what James meant. Translating the rule as ‘sexual immorality’ is totally inadequate because it not only hides the true meaning of the second rule, it also distorts the proper interpretation of the entire Decree.

The first rule forbids the Gentile from eating the meat of a pagan sacrifice at the sacrifice. The second rule prohibits cult prostitution after the eating of the sacrifice. The third rule, strangled, speaks of a pagan sacrifice in which the neck of the victim was strangled and the fourth rule forbids the drinking of its fresh, raw blood, which is the satanic counterpart of drinking Messiah’s blood from the Third Cup of Passover.  

The four rules specifically deal with sacrificial-sexual idolatry, something every Gentile in the ancient world fully understood and many practiced.

The four rules had nothing to do with table fellowship. They were designed to filter out gross idolatry. That would be very offensive to the God of Israel and cost the Gentile his life—his eternal life. One might think, in terms of Christianity today, that anyone coming to Jesus wouldn’t imagine that they could worship Jesus and Zeus, too, but Gentiles in the days of the Apostles believed they could have as many gods as they wanted. As we’ll see, their culture and souls were permeated with that view. ‘Adding Jesus’ to their pantheon wouldn’t be seen as blasphemous by them. Of course, this would be an abomination in God’s eyes. This is why James gave the four rules first. He wanted the Gentiles to know that there were red lines that could not be crossed—even ‘under Grace.’

Once it’s understood that the four rules deal with cultic idolatry and aren’t rules given for ‘table fellowship’ to appease the ‘weaker’ Jewish believer, the theological door swings wide open to realizing that God never intended for the Gentile Christian to be without Mosaic Law (Acts 15:21). The four rules were the divine filter that the Gentile had to pass through in order for his salvation to be seen as authentic, not some rules that he voluntarily observed in condescension to ‘the weaker’ Jewish Christians.  

It’s becomes

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39 Williams, Acts, p. 268. He cites as further evidence for the observance of the Decree, ‘Rev. 2:14, 22; Justin Martyr, Dialogue 34:8; Minucius Felix, Octavius 30:6; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 5.1.26; Tertullian, Apology 9:13; Pseudo-Clementine Homilies 7.4.2; 8:1, and 19.’

40 See Passover for the meaning of the Third Cup and why Yeshua chose this one to represent His blood.

41 It is the height of pride and ignorance to present the new Gentile believers as stronger in faith than the Jewish Apostles. All the Apostles had been walking for many years with the Holy Spirit, and as is attested, would keep
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apparent that the four rules weren’t the ‘only ones’ for the Gentile, but the first of many that God had given to His people Israel, which now included Gentiles who believed in Yeshua.

The Church has taken the Wind of the Holy Spirit out of the sails of Acts 15:20 in presenting its teaching of table fellowship. Even if ‘sexual immorality’ (KJV ‘fornication’) is addressed as cult prostitution, unless the four rules are seen as a unit on cultic idolatry, one is able to assume that the four rules are just random selections on the part of James toward ‘Jewish sensibilities’ that have little relevance for us today.\(^42\)

The Church doesn’t understand this ‘unit of cultic idolatry’ because of its vilification of Mosaic Law. The Church sees anyone who keeps the Law as being in bondage, but teaching that Mosaic Law is bondage makes the God who gave it to Israel a malicious ogre. Did Yahveh set the Hebrews free from Egyptian slavery only to shackle them ‘to the accursed Law?’ No wonder many Christians think that ‘the God of the Old Testament’ is very cruel and so different from ‘the loving Jesus.’

Mosaic Law, far from being a curse, is the basis for understanding not only Who the God of Israel is and what He has done and will do for Israel, but also what He thinks is sin and what He requires of Christians.\(^43\) The one who is cursed is the one not observing it.\(^44\) What that means today, for Christians who don’t observe the Sabbath and who eat pig, etc., is that at these specific points they are breaking God’s Law; His will for them, and sinning. Whether they understand it or not, they are suffering the consequences of their sins.

One doesn’t have to understand (or even acknowledge) the laws of proper nutrition in order to be adversely affected by poor eating habits. Lack of knowledge or ignorance of a law is never a proper defense, whether in an earthly court or before the heavenly Tribunal.\(^45\)

\(^{42}\) Stern, JNTC, p. 278. In commenting on a possible interpretation of the four rules, Stern says that if ‘these food laws were given only as practical guides to avoid disruption of fellowship between believing Jews and Gentiles in the social context of the first century’ then ‘the issue is irrelevant, and there is no need for Gentile Christians to obey a command never intended as eternal.’ He adds, ‘Messianic Jews today are a small minority in the Body of Messiah and few, if any of them, take umbrage’ at Gentile eating habits. Stern’s logic is flawed and not only because the rules have nothing to do with food laws. Contrary to what he writes, there are many believing Jews today who are offended by Gentile eating habits (i.e. eating unclean meats). The only condition that has changed since James gave the ruling is that now there are more Gentile believers than Jewish believers, but as Paul said, ‘if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble’ (1st Cor. 8:13). Stern’s position also doesn’t speak of the example that Gentile Christians are supposed to be toward Jews who don’t yet believe in Jesus (Rom. 11:13-14). What kind of an example is it to a Jew for a Gentile Christian to tell him that he can eat pork, shrimp and catfish, when the Jew knows that God forbids such things (Lev. 11:7; Dt. 12:8)?

\(^{43}\) Leland Ryken, James Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III, General Editors, Dictionary of Biblical Imagery (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 489. Under ‘Law’ it states, ‘The law expresses God’s expectations for the moral and spiritual conduct of Israel, the guidelines God has given to Israel to enable them to live life as he created it to be lived….there is general agreement that it bears the connotations of guidance, teaching and instruction.’ See Ex. 31:12-17; Lev. 23; Dt. 4:5-8; Rom. 3:20; 7:7, 12, 14; 1st Jn. 5:2-3.

\(^{44}\) Dt. 27:26: “‘Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this Law by doing them!’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’”

\(^{45}\) Hosea 4:6: ‘My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you from being My priest. Since you’ve forgotten the Law of your God, I will also forget your sons.’ (See Lev. 4:2; 5:17-19, which speaks of the sacrifice for the sin of ignorance, and Lk. 12:47-48. If someone breaks the
Today Christians have Bibles and the Holy Spirit to teach them the Way. The problem is that most have been blinded by the tradition of the Church, which nullifies Mosaic Law. In this the Church is Pharisaic. The Church says their doctrine is from God, but in reality it’s from Satan because it nullifies and makes void God’s teaching in this vital area (Mt. 15:3, 7, 9; Rom. 3:20, 31).

All God’s commandments are for our blessing, protection and wisdom and they reveal to us how much He loves us (Dt. 4:5-8; Mt. 22:35-40). When we fail to walk in any of them that pertain to us, whether intentionally or out of ignorance, we are the ones to suffer. That’s why it’s so important to properly understand what God is saying about Mosaic Law in Acts 15:20-21.

Being ‘free in Christ’ is not a license to sin (Rom. 6:1f.). True freedom is walking in His will. By understanding that all four rules center around sacrificial-sexual idolatry, Yakov (James in English, but more properly Jacob) was giving the Gentiles what God had given Israel when Israel was about to enter into the Promised Land. Yahve sternly warned Israel about worshiping Him—and Him only! In Dt. 4–9 and 12–13, God admonished Israel concerning idolatry and its consequences. In the Ten Commandments He says,

‘You must have no other gods except Me. You must not make for yourself an idol or any likeness of what is in the Heavens above or on the Earth beneath or in the waters under the Earth. You must not worship them or serve them, for I, Yahve your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the sons to the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me.’ (Dt. 5:7-9)

There were to be no other gods for the Sons of Israel. They weren’t to serve (sacrifice to or worship) them. The Gentiles, entering into the Promised One (Messiah Yeshua) were being warned in the same way by the Holy Spirit through Yakov, the head of the Assembly. Just as God didn’t expect Israel to learn all the laws of Moses in one day, so too, with the Gentiles, but the Gentiles were to be immediately aware of the most important thing—not to continue to practice cultic idolatry.

After that they would learn the rest of the Law as they went to the synagogues where Moses was taught every Sabbath in all the cities of the world (Acts 15:21). Just as a child, adopted into a family gradually learns all the family rules and values, so too, the Gentile would come to know all the laws of Moses that applied to him, as understood through by Yeshua—not the Rabbis, nor the Sadducees, nor the Pharisees.

This understanding of Acts 15:20, that Yakov gave the Gentiles ‘a package deal’ on sacrificial-sexual idolatry, hinges on the definition of the second rule. With this rule the concept either stands or falls. The Greek word for the second rule is πορνεία (pornay’ah). It’s usually translated in Acts 15:20 as ‘sexual immorality’ or ‘fornication,’ but if it can be proven that its primary biblical meaning is ‘cult prostitution,’ and not the vague term ‘sexual immorality’ or related concepts such as illicit sex, adultery, or even common prostitution, the Church’s teaching of ‘table fellowship’ disintegrates, and with it, the Church’s theological position on the Law of Moses. Acts 15:20 is that important and that foundational. The Law’s proper place in the life of every Christian will then be re-established (Rom. 3:31; Rev. 12:17; 14:12) and

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46 Idolatry is not isolated to pagan altars. Astrology, Horoscopes and Tarot cards, etc., are also idolatrous and exclude believers from the Kingdom (Gal. 5:19-21), but James is specifically addressing pagan sacrificial rites.

47 Unless otherwise stated, Greek words used will be identical for both the Textus Receptus and the Nestle–Aland Greek New Testament–United Bible Societies third corrected edition. The former is the basis for the KJV and to a great extent, the NKJV, while the latter is basically the Greek text used to translate the New Testament for the NRSV, NASB and other Bibles. This means that the KJV and the NRSV, etc., have the same Greek word for Acts 15:20 (pornay’ah). When there’s a difference it will be noted.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

Yeshua will be glorified.

Acts 15:20 is the filter through which the Gentile had to leave all his other gods and goddesses behind him. It’s not the magic wand that makes the Law disappear, but quite the contrary, it precedes the verse that establishes the Law in the life of every believer (Acts 15:21).

Acts 15:20 was the divine admonition of Yakov to the Gentiles to break with pagan sacrificial rites. These four rules were the litmus test given to the Gentiles to determine their faith in Jesus. Yakov then added verse 21, knowing that for the last nine years or so (from Acts 10), Gentile believers had been learning the Law at the synagogues, which is a term for the traditional synagogue and also a place like a ‘church’ at Antioch or Ephesus. These Gentile Christians were learning how to walk out their faith in Messiah Yeshua through all the laws, commandments, statutes and rules of Mosaic Law that pertained to them.

The understanding that the four rules specifically speak of sacrificial-sexual idolatry shatters the Church’s heretical teaching on the Law of Moses. Theologians and pastors will no longer be able to use Acts 15 to place an unholy theological veil over the eyes of Christians. Properly understood, Acts 15:20-21 reveals God’s desire for His people to walk in all the laws of Moses that apply to them, by the wisdom and the power of the Spirit of Yeshua, just as He did.
THE FIRST RULE—SACRIFICIAL MEAT

In Acts 15:20, Yakov (James) presents four rules to the Gentile believers. He says to keep away from,

1. ‘the pollutions of idols
2. and the sexual immorality
3. and the thing strangled
4. and the blood.49

The Greek phrase for the first rule (pollution of idols) is αλισγηματων των ειδολων (alisygmatai ton Eidolwn (alisygmatai ton Eidolwn). Wesley Perschbacher says the word for pollution (alisygmatai) means ‘pollution, defilement, Acts 15:20.50 Bauer says it means ‘make ceremonially impure’ and that the plural, pollutions (which is written in v. 20) ‘denotes separate acts.’51 Literally, it’s ‘the pollutions of idols.’ Timothy Friberg agrees.52 It’s something that defiles and can be done repeatedly.

Perschbacher states that the word for idols ειδολων (Eidolon) means,

‘a form, shape, figure; image or statue; hence, an idol, image of a god, Acts 7:41, et al.; meton.53 a heathen god, 1st Cor. 8:4, 7.’54

Friberg says it’s ‘an object resembling a person or animal and worshiped as a god idol, image.’55 Bauer concurs, adding that it is a ‘false god.’56

The four rules are mentioned twice more in Acts after Yakov initially declares them in 15:20 (15:29; 21:25) and this further clarifies what he meant for the first rule. Luke uses a very specific Greek word for idols in the latter two cites: ειδολοθυτων (Eidolothuton).57 Perschbacher says that it’s an animal ‘sacrificed to an idol...the remains of victims sacrificed to idols, reserved for eating; Acts 15:29; 21:25.’58

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49 The literal Greek rendering of this phrase is, ‘and the strangled.’ ‘Thing’ is not in the text, but it can be translated as ‘the thing(s) strangled.’


53 J. M. Sinclair, General Consultant; Diana Treffry, Editorial Director, Collins English Dictionary, Fourth Edition (Glasgow, Scotland: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), p. 980. The abbreviation ‘meton.’ means ‘by metonymy,’ which is ‘the substitution of a word referring to an attribute for the thing that is meant.’ An example of this is, ‘the use of the crown to refer to a monarch.’


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Friberg writes almost the same thing, saying it was ‘the remains of victims sacrificed to an idol and reserved for eating...Acts 21:25.’ David Williams also states it was an animal ‘sacrificed to idols.’

Bruce comments that the Gentiles were ‘directed to avoid food which had idolatrous associations.’ This is vague as no time frame is indicated as to when the person was eating the sacrificial meat (e.g. at the sacrifice or sometime later). This allows Bruce to think that the rules were part of the Noahide laws and given for table fellowship, even though he believes that the Gentiles didn’t have to follow the four rules.

David Stern is also vague on when the meat was eaten. He says the rule meant to stay away from ‘food sacrificed to false gods.’ Howard Marshall states the ‘pollutions of idols’ referred, ‘to meat offered in sacrifice to idols and then eaten in a temple feast or sold in a shop.’

Bauer states that it’s an animal sacrificed to an idol and eaten at the pagan temple in honor of the god, with the remains (if any) sold at the marketplace. He says it’s ‘meat offered to an idol, an expression which...was possible only among Jews...and Christians.’ (For what Gentile would call his god an idol?)

Going on, he says,

'It refers to sacrificial meat, part of which was burned on the altar, part was eaten at a solemn meal in the' pagan 'temple and part was sold in the market...for home use,' if there was anything left over.

Ben Witherington III, though, says it specifically means ‘something given, dedicated, even sacrificed to idols...in a temple.’ He rightly states that the theme of the four rules is only understood when the first rule of Acts 15:20, the ‘pollutions of idols’ is realized to be a sacrifice ‘eaten in the presence of the idol.’ Witherington says that it’s extremely crucial for a proper interpretation of what James ruled to see that it’s ‘more than just a meat’ or a food issue, but that it points directly to sacrificial meat eaten in a pagan temple at the time of the sacrifice.

Why is Witherington correct? Why can’t it also be the meat sold in the market? After all, it had been used as a pagan sacrifice. The four rules center around sacrificial-sexual idolatry, not the possible eating of sacrificial ‘leftover’ meat brought to the market and then sold. The Apostle Paul addresses this issue of meat sold in the market and allows pagan sacrificial meat to be consumed by believers when taken from the market or eaten at another’s dinner table (as long as it wasn’t made known to the guest that it was meat sacrificed to an idol). He will not allow, though, believers to eat sacrificial meat at the site of the sacrifice (1st Cor. 10:21, 25, 27-28) as that would make them part of the worship of an idol (i.e. idolators). There

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60 Williams, Acts, p. 267.
62 Ibid., p. 285. Unfortunately, Bruce states, ‘the last thing that would have occurred to him’ (Paul) ‘would be to quote a decision of the Jerusalem church as binding on Gentile Christians.’
66 Ibid.
68 Ibid., pp. 462-463.
The First Rule—Sacrificial Meat

wasn’t any disagreement between Yakov and Paul. The Apostle to the Gentiles upholds Yakov’s rules (Acts 16:4-5) and helps to define and confirm them.

The meaning of Yakov’s first rule prohibited the eating of the sacrificial meat at the time of the sacrifice, not the eating of any excess meat that would later be sold to the marketplace for public consumption. The eating of the meat at the temple of the god or goddess would certainly pollute and defile the Gentile Christian however many times he would do it, and hence the plural for ‘pollutions.’

This brings ‘the pollutions of idols’ into much clearer focus. It wasn’t excessive sacrificial meat that was tainted by having been part of an idolatrous sacrifice and sold in the market. It was animal meat sacrificed to the god at the pagan temple and eaten there at the time of the sacrifice by the Gentile in honor of the god or goddess. The first rule falls squarely under sacrificial idolatry and sets up the theme for the four rules. The Christian understanding that the first rule was given because eating meat sacrificed to pagan gods would offend ‘Jewish sensitivities,’ begs the question of whether or not Jesus would have been offended. What would He think if His Gentile followers sacrificed a bull to Zeus and ate the sacrificial meat in honor of, and in covenant with, Zeus?

No believer today would possibly think that it would be alright with Jesus if he participated in a pagan sacrifice to Artemis, Diana or Baal and ate the meat thereof, but in the book of Revelation this is exactly what Gentile believers were doing in two of the seven assemblies in the name of Jesus! In Revelation 2:14, 20 the Lord actually brings up the first two rules of James, rebuking them for eating animals sacrificed to idols at the time of the sacrifice and for participating in cult prostitution, thinking those two things were acceptable as Christians! Yakov’s first two rules were necessary for the Gentile Christians who were steeped in paganism before coming to Jesus, and who wouldn’t think they had to give it up as a Christian.

No believer today would possibly think that it would be alright with Jesus if he participated in a pagan sacrifice to Artemis, Diana or Baal and ate the meat thereof, but in the book of Revelation this is exactly what some Gentile believers were doing in two of the seven assemblies! In Revelation 2:14, 20 the Lord actually brings up the first two rules of James, rebuking them for eating animals sacrificed to idols at the time of the sacrifice and for participating in cult prostitution, thinking those two things were acceptable as Christians! Paul also had to warn many his Gentile Christians about these idolatrous practices and their eternal consequences.

Yakov was not writing about meat that had been sacrificed to idols being sold in the marketplace. His first rule, to keep away from ‘the pollutions of idols,’ is specifically directed against believing Gentiles participating in the eating of animals sacrificed to an idol at the time of the sacrifice, not once, but as a lifestyle, many times. This understanding sets up the conceptual theme of sacrificial idolatry for the four rules, not the self-serving and superficial concept of ‘table fellowship.’

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69 ‘Pollutions’ in the plural means that one was defiled by going to the pagan temples and eating of the sacrificial meat on every occasion that the Gentile would do it. The Gentile world was saturated with gods and goddesses, many of whom demanded animal (and some, human) sacrifice. Yakov was making reference to a Gentile believer going to the temple or shrine on more than one occasion, not to the different stages of the sacrificial meat (at the sacrificial site, at the marketplace and in the home).

As Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 18, brought out, the plural ‘denotes separate acts,’ and as such, would entail the different times a Gentile would go ‘to worship,’ each time polluting himself (cf. Mt. 15:19).
THE SECOND RULE—CULT PROSTITUTION

The second rule of Yakov (Acts 15:20) refers to cult prostitution. It was the ‘high point’ of the sacrificial event and what attracted many pagans—sexual idolatry. Satan knows how to lure man away from God—just equate worship with sex. The symbolic meaning of pagan animal sacrifice was union with the god or goddess, which found its fulfillment through sex with the temple priestesses (cult harlots) or priests.

The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament uses the term ‘sexual immorality’ to translate the Greek word πορνεία (pornay’ah), the second rule of Yakov. The New Revised Standard Version translates the word as ‘fornication.’ This is nothing unusual as different Bibles use various words to convey the meaning of a Greek or a Hebrew word, but what is sexual immorality? What is fornication? Are they interchangeable and do either of them represent what Yakov meant?

In the New Testament and the Old Testament (via the Septuagint) the Greek word pornay’ah has the basic meaning of ‘prostitution,’ either cultic or common. The concept of selling one’s self (prostitution) is then figuratively expanded in a number of ways (e.g. to criticize Israel for making treaties with other nations, but not relying on Yahweh, or of one who practices magic, selling himself to it instead of Yahweh, etc.). It is also used as a derogatory epithet for an adulteress and for the nation of Israel as Yahweh’s unfaithful wife when she deserts Him for another god or goddess.

Yakov was a Jew and he spoke Hebrew, not Greek, at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Therefore, his

70 Brown, NGEINT, p. 472, uses the New Revised Standard Version translation (on the outside of each page) as an aid to the reader. Some other Bibles that translate the Greek word as ‘fornication’ include the KJV and the NASB.

71 David Bivin and Roy Blizzard, Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2001). Biblical scholarship has had to take into account many recent (20th century) findings that have determined that Hebrew was the spoken language in Israel at the time of the Apostles. For centuries many have taught that it was Aramaic, but even renowned Aramaic scholars like Matthew Black and Max Wilcox concede that ‘Hebrew was’ the ‘living language’ and the ‘normal vehicle of expression’ (ibid., pp. 12-13). This understanding rests on a number of findings in different fields. One is the discovery of the bar Kochba letters, dated at 134-135 AD, which were written in Hebrew. Also, much of the literature of Qumran is in Hebrew, not Aramaic (ibid., pp. 14, 20-21). The ratio of Hebrew to Aramaic is ‘nine to one’ and it’s most likely that the Aramaic found was written much earlier, when Aramaic was a carryover from Babylonian captivity (ibid., p. 29). There’s also the witness of the early Church Father, Papias (70-163 AD), Bishop of Hierapolis in Turkey, who wrote, ‘Matthew put down the words of the Lord in the Hebrew language’ (ibid., pp. 23-24).

There is also the three Synoptic Gospels, having been translated the Greek text into Hebrew for Israelis today. There are many places where the Greek words form perfect Hebrew syntax and idiomatic expressions (ibid., pp. 53-65). This confirms Papias. Also, of the 215 ancient coins at the Israel Museum, covering a period of roughly 450 years, from the fourth century BC until 135 AD, ‘99 have Hebrew inscriptions’ and ‘only one has an Aramaic inscription’ (ibid., p. 33; the other 115 coins are Roman).

Interesting to note is that Rabbinic literature of that time was all written in Hebrew (ibid., p. 43). Also, the New Testament declares Hebrew to be the language of Yeshua and the Apostles. Unfortunately, many scholars and translators have said that what the New Testament ‘really meant’ was Aramaic. That Aramaic was used is not to be denied, but just as an Englishman can say, ‘Bon appétit,’ without anyone suggesting that all Britain speaks French as its primary language, so too, could Yeshua use Aramaic words and phrases (Mk. 5:41; 7:34; Jn. 1:42).

The New Testament speaks of the inscription over the head of Yeshua being in Hebrew, Greek and Latin (Jn. 19:20), and of Mary addressing Him in Hebrew (‘Rabboni,’ Jn. 20:16). Paul says that Yeshua spoke to him in Hebrew (Acts 26:14), and Scripture records that Paul spoke to the crowd at the Temple in Hebrew (Acts 21:40; 22:2). There are also other references specifically to the Hebrew language (Jn. 5:2; 19:13, 17; Rev. 9:11; 16:16).

Geoffrey W. Bromiley, General Editor; Everett F. Harrison, Roland K. Harrison and William Sanford LaSor, As-
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thoughts and words would have been rooted in the Hebrew concepts of the word he used. The Greek word that Luke uses will affirm this. The Hebrew word Yakov spoke that day was זְנוּת (zinate). After examining it and derivations of words from it, along with places where it is used in the Old Testament we’ll turn to the Greek perspective on it. By understanding the meaning of the word and surveying the practice of cult prostitution in Israel and in the ancient world it will become clear why Yakov gave the four rules and why the second rule specifically speaks of cult prostitution and not common prostitution.

The Hebrew Noun Zinute (Prostitution)

It’s important to understand what the lexicons (Bible language dictionaries that define biblical words) say about Yakov’s word, whether in Hebrew or in Greek. This way the primary meaning for the word in Acts 15:20 can be seen. Is it cult prostitution, sexual immorality, adultery or something else? In his classic Hebrew lexicon, Francis Brown states that zinute means ‘fornication.’ He lists three categories with Scripture cites concerning fornication:

1. ‘sexual’ Hosea 4:11,
2. ‘international’ Ezekiel 23:27 and

What does Brown mean by ‘fornication’? As we’ll see, all three categories deal first and foremost with cult prostitution. A secondary, figurative meaning comes when God denounces Judah for her whoring after Egypt, which entailed both figurative as well as literal cult prostitution, but all of Brown’s cites speak of literal cult harlotry, except Numbers 14:33.

Brown’s ‘sexual’ for Hosea 4:11 speaks of harlotry (prostitution). The next verse (v. 12) defines this ‘harlotry’ as cult harlotry. God says, ‘My people consult their wooden idols.’ The ‘consulting of wooden idols,’ aligned with harlotry can only mean cult harlotry, not common harlotry. In the verse after that (v. 13) God says, ‘They offer sacrifices,’ which confirms the harlotry as being cultic and not common. This is also affirmed in v. 14 where God states through Hosea that they ‘offer sacrifices with temple prostitutes’ (NASB, NRSV; NIV ‘shrine prostitutes’). In v. 17 the Lord says, ‘Ephraim is joined to idols. Let him

associate Editors, The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, vol. one (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 233, IV Aramaic and the NT, states: With the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947 alike, “it became obvious that Hebrew was indeed” the language of “the rank and file...In a compelling article on, ‘Hebrew in the Days of the Second Temple’ (JBL, 79 [1960], 32-47), J. M. Grintz has offered ...evidence to show that Hebrew, rather than Aramaic, lay behind the Gospel of Matthew. A number of expressions in the Gospel can only be explained on the basis of Hebrew, like the use of ‘Israel’ (Aramaic regularly uses ‘Jews’) and ‘gentiles’ (Aramaic has no word like ‘goyim’).”

The language of Yeshua, the Apostles and all the Jewish people in Israel at that time was Hebrew, not Aramaic. Therefore, Yakov spoke Hebrew at the Council of Acts 15, which means that we have to look ‘in back of the Greek words’ to Yakov’s Hebrew words and mindset in order to fully understand what he said and meant.


73 Dr. Francis Brown, Dr. S. R. Driver and Dr. Charles A. Briggs, based on the lexicon of Professor Wilhelm Gesenius; Edward Robinson, Translator and E. Rodiger, Editor, The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon (Lafayette, IN: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., 1978), p. 276.
alone!’ ‘Fornication’ for Brown, that he describes as ‘sexual,’ is specifically cult harlotry.

The KJV and the NRSV translate the word in Hosea 4:11 as ‘whoredom,’ while the NASB and NKJV use ‘harlotry.’ Both the words ‘whoredom’ and ‘harlotry’ are synonyms for ‘prostitution,’ but these Bibles negate the specific biblical point of cult prostitution by using only ‘whoredom’ or ‘harlotry.’

For ‘international’ Brown lists Ezek. 23:27. The KJV has ‘your whoredom brought from the land of Egypt.’ It’s not hard to imagine what kind of ‘whoredom’ they picked up in Egypt, but we don’t have to imagine it. Only three verses later God says,

‘I will do these things unto thee because thou hast gone a whoring after the heathen and because thou art polluted with their idols.’ (Ezk. 23:30 KJV)

With the use of ‘idols’ God can only be referring to cult harlotry. What we see in verses 27 and 30 is Hebrew parallelism, which is ‘not a repetition of the same sound, but a repetition...of the same thought.’74 It’s ‘the placing of two synonymous phrases or sentences side by side’75 (or one after the other). The biblical phrase in Ezekiel, ‘gone a whoring,’ parallels ‘their idols.’ The ‘whoring’ must be cult harlotry. Brown’s ‘international fornication’ specifically refers to cult prostitution, not common prostitution.

Brown then speaks of Israel’s unfaithfulness to Yahveh (Num. 14:33) as ‘religious’ fornication. Israel refused to believe that God would bring them into the Promised Land. Instead, they chose to believe the lie of the ten spies (Num. 13:25–14:4). There’s no literal harlotry here, cultic or common. The idea is that Israel chose to rebel against God’s word to them. They were unfaithful to Him. This is a figurative meaning for harlotry, but Brown also cites Jer. 3:9 and 13:27, both of which specifically deal with the cult harlotry of the southern kingdom of Judah.

Israel, as the covenant wife of God, is metaphorically seen to be adulterous when she worships and serves other gods:

‘Because of the lightness of her harlotry, she polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees.’

‘As for your adulteries and your lustful neighings and the lewdness of your prostitution on the hills in the field, I have seen your abominations! Woe to you, Jerusalem! How long will you remain unclean?!’ (Jer. 3:9; 13:27)

Adultery ‘with stones and trees’ can’t mean literal adultery, but the worship of pagan gods and the use of cult harlots. The phrase ‘on the hills’ is a reference to where the men of Judah would go to engage in cult harlotry.

Judah was in covenant with Yahveh, figuratively married to Him and Him only (Is. 54:5; Jer. 3:14). Therefore, when Judah worshiped other gods, Judah was committing spiritual adultery (Ezekiel 23:1-49). Judah copied the pagans, setting up stones and trees to the gods and goddesses, and to their eternal shame they would sacrifice animals to them and commit cult harlotry. Only in this metaphorical sense is ‘adultery’ ever used to describe Israel and Judah’s whoring after other gods. Israel was in covenant with God and the closest earthly parallel to that was the marriage covenant of a man to a woman.

In Brown’s category on religious, ‘figurative’ is used (Num. 14:33) to describe Israel’s unfaithfulness and disloyalty to Yahveh. Alongside that is ‘cult prostitution’ (in Jeremiah). He lists two other passages in

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74 Bivin, Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus, p. 89.
75 Ibid.
**The Second Rule—Cult Prostitution**

Ezekiel (43:7, 9), and these also relate to idolatrous harlotry, both the specifics of cult harlotry and also the selling of one’s soul to the idols of wood and stone. All the cites Brown classifies as religious is Israel whoring after pagan gods; cult prostitution (except for Num. 14:33).

Under Brown’s cite of Hosea (6:10) the NASB reads: ‘In the House of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; Ephraim’s harlotry is there; Israel has defiled itself.’ One could try and make a case that this harlotry is common harlotry, as the verse doesn’t give a specific form one way or the other, but Hosea’s theme is not against common harlotry. It’s against the northern kingdom of Israel steeped in sacrificial-sexual idolatry. The verse, therefore, reflects cult harlotry. This is noted in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* when it states that Israel,

‘associated with the syncretistic cult at Gilgal and Beth-aven; this cult was harlotry in a double sense, since actual sexual intercourse was part of the cult (4:13f.) and its idolatry meant faithlessness toward Yahweh (4:15).’

*TDOT*’s ‘sexual intercourse’ and ‘idolatry’ refer to cult prostitution. Hosea 4:15 was also a part of the passage connected to Hosea 4:11 that Brown listed above:

“Though you, Israel, *play the harlot*, do not let Judah become guilty. Also, do not go to Gilgal or go up to Beth-aven and take the oath, ‘As Yahveh lives!’” (Hosea 4:15; see also 1st Kings 12:25-33; 13:1-10)

This verse speaks of the practice of cult harlotry ‘in the Name of Yahveh’ (‘As Yahveh lives!’) In Rev. 2:14 the same perverse sin happens ‘in the Name of Jesus!’). *TDOT* states for Hosea 9:1 that, ‘Israel’s harlotry…in forsaking Yahweh (*sic*) is associated with the fertility cult.’ These fertility cults and their ‘sacred’ harlots are a major theme of the prophets. They cry out against the faithlessness of the northern kingdom of Israel (2nd Kgs. 17:1-23) and the southern kingdom of Judah (Jer. 7:25; 35:15).

Commenting on Hosea 4:15, C. F. Keil writes that Yahveh was telling Judah not to become like her northern neighbor Israel, or else she, too, would share in Israel’s guilt. The reference to Gilgal here,

‘is not the Gilgal in the valley of the Jordan’ (where Joshua first led Israel into the Promised Land; Josh. 4:20; 5:9-10), but ‘northern Gilgal upon the mountains.’

This Gilgal had once been home to ‘a school of the prophets’ in the days of Elijah and Elisha (2nd Kgs. 2:1; 4:38), but it was now the ‘seat of one form of idolatrous worship.’ Keil writes,

‘Bethaven is not the place of that name mentioned in Josh. 7:2… but as Amos 4:4 and 5:5 clearly show, a name which Hosea adopted from Amos 5:5 for Bethel… to show that Bethel, the house of God, had become Bethaven, a house of idols, through the setting up of the golden calf there’ (1st Kgs. 12:29). ‘Swearing in the name of Jehovah (*sic*) was commanded in the law,’ Dt. 6:13; 10:20, ‘but this oath was to have its roots in the fear of

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77 Those Christians were either worshiping Jesus through sacrificial-sexual idolatry or worshipping another god or goddess through sacrificial-sexual idolatry as an acceptable form (they thought) of Christianity.


80 Ibid.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

Jehovah…Going to Gilgal to worship idols, and swearing by Jehovah cannot go together. The confession of Jehovah in the mouth of an idolater is hypocrisy.\(^{81}\)

The northern kingdom of Israel was a land and a people defiled with cult prostitution (from its inception under Jeroboam (922 BC) to its utter destruction in 721 BC). Hosea spoke of this perversion in the verses just before 4:15. It’s here we find the famous passage, ‘My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge’ (Hos. 4:6) because they had chosen to disregard Yahveh and His Law, which prohibited cult harlotry. Hosea 4:12 states that the ‘people consult their wooden idol’ and have a ‘spirit of harlotry.’ Keil writes that this,

‘spirit of harlotry…includes both carnal and spiritual whoredom, since idolatry, especially the Asherah worship, was connected with gross licentiousness.’\(^{82}\)

The category of ‘religion’ into which Brown puts Hosea 4:15 can only be speaking of Israel walking in cult harlotry when Scripture presents Israel as ‘playing the harlot.’ Brown’s three categories all dovetail into cult harlotry. There is nothing ‘common’ about it.

Benjamin Davidson says that zinate means ‘whoredom.’\(^{83}\) He doesn’t list any cites, but says it can also apply to idolatry, which would mean cult harlotry. R. L. Harris, in the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, writes that zinate means ‘fornication.’\(^{84}\) Unfortunately, he doesn’t list any cites, either, but both men will flesh out their meaning of ‘whoredom’ and ‘fornication’ when they speak of the verb that zinate comes from.

The Hebrew term that James used in Acts 15:20 for the second rule, zinate, which Brown translates as ‘fornication,’ overwhelmingly refers to cult prostitution (from the cites that he lists). Only one time did he note a figurative sense in Israel’s rebellion against Yahveh (Num. 14:33).

From its biblical context and usage in the lexicons, the word that Yakov spoke in Acts 15:20 conveys the harlotry of cult harlotry. In Hosea the context revealed its idolatrous meaning. This principle of context also applies to the four rules of James. The placement of zinate (prostitution) immediately after the first rule on sacrificial idolatry points directly to cult prostitution, and not common prostitution (nor adultery, incest or any other form of illicit sex). It’s the primary meaning of the Hebrew word in Scripture.

The Hebrew verb will only deepen this understanding that the word that James used that day spoke of cult harlotry. It would have been understood as such by all the Jewish believers there, including the Apostle Paul. This, despite the fact that other forms of unlawful sex can be associated with its secondary meaning.

\(^{81}\) Ibid., pp. 55-56.
\(^{82}\) Ibid., p. 54. Licentiousness is the throwing off of all sexual restraint.
The Hebrew Verb Zanah (to Prostitute)

Hebrew nouns, like *zanute*, are generally derived from Hebrew verbs. In this case it’s מָנַת (zanah).\(^{85}\) Francis Brown states that *zanah* means,

to ‘commit fornication, be a harlot…be or act as a harlot…Gen. 38:24…Dt. 22:21…improper intercourse with foreign nations…intercourse with other deities, considered as harlotry, sometimes involving actual prostitution…Ex. 34:15-16; Dt. 31:16; Lev. 17:7…especially of Israel, Judah and Jerusalem…figuratively of a lewd woman, Ezek. 16:15…moral defection, Is. 1:21.’\(^{86}\)

Brown’s primary meaning is ‘harlotry’ (‘commit fornication…harlot’) and cult harlotry (‘actual prostitution…especially Israel, Judah and Jerusalem’) and as we’ll see, these primarily refer to cult harlotry. His reference for Gen. 38:24 is to harlotry in general, but it should be cult harlotry. Dt. 22:21 speaks of a new bride being accused of not being a virgin. She was classified as a harlot because she had acted like a harlot (in having sex outside of marriage). Her punishment for not being a virgin was death by stoning. The Lord takes promiscuity very seriously.

Brown’s cite of Ex. 34:15-16 shows God speaking of actual cult prostitution, as Brown states. God says,

‘otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice and you might take some of his daughters for your sons and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons also to play the harlot with their gods.’

Obviously, these harlots are cult harlots (‘gods…eat of his sacrifice,’ etc.), even if they weren’t employed full time in that profession. In the section on *Israel and Baal Peor* (p. 32f.) Israel engages in cult prostitution with the daughters of Moab even before they reach the Promised Land. Brown’s Deuteronomy passage (31:16), as well as his citing of Lev. 17:7, is similar in nature:

“Yahveh said to Moses, ‘Behold! You are about to lie down with your Fathers and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going and will forsake Me and break My Covenant, which I have made with them!’” (Dt. 31:16)

Brown’s cites for the Hebrew verb for fornication all deal with cult prostitution, not only on physical and sexual levels, but also on spiritual and covenantal levels. He then relates how Israel, Judah and Jerusalem could be called *harlots* in going after other gods, which again specifically refers to cult harlotry. He then speaks of the figurative (and derogatory) description of a *lewd woman*, but this ‘woman’ is none other than the southern kingdom of Judah in her apostate sins of sexual idolatry! Ezekiel 16:15 states of Judah,

‘But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame and you poured out your harlotries on every passer-by who might be willing!’

As we’ll see, the ‘harlotry’ of Judah that Ezekiel speaks of is cultic (Ezekiel 16). She was taken into captivity because she worshiped the gods and goddesses of the fertility cults of the pagans around her. Ani-


mal sacrifice and sexual harlotry figured prominently in the fertility cults and this is what made Judah a ‘lewd woman.’

In Isaiah 1:21 the prophet uses the verb zanah (harlotry) to describe Jerusalem and her ungodly behavior; her unfaithfulness, harlotry and murders. These fall under desertion and rebellion to God and the covenant He made with them. In v. 21, zanah is used in both a literal and figurative sense, Jerusalem having sold herself to things of unrighteousness and evil, one of which was cult harlotry (as her biblical history speaks of). Although other behavior can be spoken of as ‘harlotry,’ Brown’s primary meaning for the Hebrew verb zanah, ‘to commit fornication,’ is clearly cult harlotry.

Benjamin Davidson states that zanah means, ‘to commit whoredom, play the harlot; frequently also to commit spiritual whoredom or idolatry.’ Davidson, speaking ‘idolatry,’ reveals the word also acts for cult harlotry.

The Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament states that the basic meaning of zanah is, ‘to whore, commit harlotry (of the woman; Num. 25:1 of the man).’ It also states that originally the word referred to ‘unregulated, illicit sexual behavior between man and woman.’ This last phrase is a poor definition for zanah because it can mean adultery, etc. An adulteress can be called a harlot, but only in a derogatory sense. Adultery is not prostitution. When Scripture speaks of prostitution the context determines if it’s common or cultic. As we’ve seen, the overwhelming majority of the lexical references to harlotry are indeed idolatrous.

TLOT also says that a Hebrew who committed harlotry was ‘an abomination in Israel’ (Lev. 19:29) and that the word is used in a figurative sense ‘to describe apostasy from Yahweh and conversion to other gods.’ It states, ‘To whore away from Yahweh is synonymous with adultery.’ Adultery is true on a spiritual level. Israel was Yahweh’s unfaithful wife for most of eight centuries (1400–600 BC). Literally though, as a people, they were practicing cult harlotry. That doesn’t mean that common harlotry and adultery was unheard of, but their their gross and perennial sin was idolatry mixed with sex (and sacrifice). This is affirmed by what TLOT says concerning Jeremiah (and Hosea):

‘The high hills, mountains, and green trees (2:20; 3:6) are named as the sites of the harlotry (as already in Hosea 4:13), apparently specific Baalistic cultic sites.’

TDOT states that Jeremiah was speaking of cult harlotry:

“Jeremiah frequently uses the symbolism of marriage. Referring to Jer. 2:20 and Canaanite cultic practices he says, ‘Upon every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down as a harlot’ (Jer. 2:20).”

TDOT writes that Jeremiah compares this apostasy to adultery (Jer. 3), and says that Judah ‘participates in

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89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 Botterweck, TDOT, vol. IV, pp. 102-103
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the syncretistic cult.94 In Jeremiah 3 the adultery of Israel is linked with idols, which can only mean cult harlotry (‘under every high hill’).95 Both TLOT and TDOT present the harlotry of Israel and Judah as Baal worship. Repeatedly, Israel and Judah are admonished by God through His Prophets and rebuked for their harlotry—their sacrificial-sexual idolatry as an unfaithfulness wife to God. Israel and Judah were heavily involved in cult prostitution. Their adultery was seen as figurative because of their covenant-marriage to Yahweh (Jer. 3:1, 7-8, 20, etc.).

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament states that zanah means, to ‘commit fornication, be a harlot, play the harlot.’96 The linking of the English word ‘fornication’ with to ‘play the harlot’ reveals how ‘fornication’ is used by many academics. In none of the lexicons has ‘fornication’ meant actual adultery between two human beings. Only in terms of its figurative use does it relate to Israel as an adulteress. In other words, the Hebrew verb speaks of actual cult prostitution that Israel and Judah practiced, not common adultery.

Translating zinute (harlotry) in Acts 15:20, as sexual immorality, one would be hard pressed to understand that its primarily use in Hebrew means cult harlotry. This is the problem with using ‘sexual immorality’ or ‘illicit sex’ to translate the second rule of Acts 15:20.

The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament states that the Hebrew word for harlotry can be used in figurative ways. People or nations can sell themselves to something other than God, yet Tyre and Nineveh were noted for their cult harlotry:

‘In a few instances נמה (zanah, to commit prostitution) ‘is used figuratively in a different sense for the commerce which woos other peoples and the political devices which ensnare them. Thus Isaiah 23:15-18 refers to ‘Tyre’ as ‘the forgotten harlot,’ while Nahum 3:1-7 speaks of the whore Nineveh, who ‘enmeshes the peoples with her harlotry and the nations with her magical arts, v. 4.’97 It can also be used as a warning ‘against surrender to the alien secular wisdom of Greece.’98

William Wilson summarizes zanah and even though he doesn’t specifically mention cult harlotry, his mention of ‘worshipping other gods’ reveals to us that cult harlotry is part of his meaning:

‘to commit fornication, to play the whore or harlot…spoken of a female, whether married or unmarried…Trop. of idolatry;99 the relation existing between God and’ Israel ‘being…shadowed forth by the prophets under the emblem of…marriage…Hos. 1–2; Ezek. 16: 23, so that in worshipping other gods’ they ‘are compared to a harlot and adulteress. It is also said of superstitions connected with idolatry, Lev. 20:6, as to consult wizards, etc…to depart from the faith…whoredom, fornication’ or ‘any breach of fidelity towards God, e.g. of a murmuring and seditious people…metaph. for idol worship.’100

94 Ibid., p. 103.
98 Ibid., p. 586.
99 Sinclair, Collins English Dictionary, p. 1637. ‘Trop.’ is an abbreviation for trope, which means ‘a word or expression used in a figurative sense.’
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Zanah carries a wide variety of meanings, but its harlotry is primarily cultic. This is how all the ancient peoples worshiped their gods and goddesses and this is what enticed Israel to apostasy. Scripturally, adultery is not harlotry. In Israel’s case, however, because the harlotry of Israel involved other gods, this made her both a ‘cult harlot’ and a spiritual ‘adulteress.’ *TDOT* states,

‘Because Jerusalem…committed fornication even though Yahweh made a covenant with her, her fornication is equivalent to adultery.’

Jerusalem, in committing cult harlotry, figuratively became an adulteress. The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* further affirms that *zanah* primarily speaks of Israel’s cult harlotry by saying that most ‘of the occurrences of *zanah* and its derivatives’ refer ‘to Israel’s faithlessness toward Yahweh and worship of other gods.’

*TDOT*’s ‘faithlessness’ speaks of Israel worshipping ‘other gods.’ This can only be cult harlotry, which figuratively made Israel a spiritual adulteress. Biblically, the primary definition of *zanah* (prostitution) is a *prostitution* that is cultic. Ezekiel’s rebuke of Judah vividly reveals this. It’s filled with references to cult harlotry. *TDOT* states that Ezekiel ‘16 and 23 in particular use *sexual terminology* to depict the apostasy of the people.’ In these two chapters, *zanah* and its derivatives occur 42 times. In all the Old Testament the terms occur about 134 times. In other words, more than 31% of the occurrences are in these two chapters where the prophet is denouncing Judah for her cult harlotry, not common harlotry, incest, homosexuality, adultery, premarital sex or sexual immorality.

Cult harlotry was rampant in Judah before the Babylons destroyed Jerusalem, and *TDOT* affirms this by saying that Judah ‘gave herself over to the worship of Canaanite gods’ *(Ezk. 16:16).* *TDOT* also writes that the idolatry was ‘adultery with disgraceful idols,’ again revealing Judah’s lust for cult harlotry.

The lexicons reveal that *zanah* primarily refers to cult harlotry. God was in covenant with Israel and Judah and when they ‘played the cult harlot’ they were being unfaithful to Him, and so, the figurative meaning of an adulteress is also used to convey their spiritual unfaithfulness and rebellion.

Both the Hebrew noun and verb reveal that Yakov’s word primarily refers to cult harlotry, which, placed after Yakov’s first rule on the prohibition of eating sacrificial meat at the pagan shrine, sets in motion the conceptual framework for the last two rules also belonging to the category of sacrificial-sexual idolatry. The Hebrew participle (*zonah*) will cement the meaning of the word in the English language as a harlot, and as we’ll see, overwhelmingly, a cult harlot. It will also reveal that adultery, sexual immorality or illicit sex cannot possibly be what Yakov meant for his second rule to the Gentile believers in Acts 15:20.

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102 Ibid., p. 99.
103 Ibid., p. 103.
106 Ibid., p. 104.
The Hebrew Participle Zonah (Prostitute)

The Hebrew word used to describe a person who commits zinute (noun: prostitution; common or cultic) and who practices zanah (verb: to commit prostitution; common or cultic) is זָנָה (zonah). In English the meaning of zonah revolves around three synonymous words: prostitute, whore and harlot, and only these. Brown\(^{107}\) and Davidson\(^{108}\) describe these women as ‘harlots.’ TDOT states that the verb zanah, ‘is the usual word for the activity of a harlot or prostitute; she is….called a zonah’ (harlot) and that it’s used ‘of Tamar (Gen. 38), Rahab (Josh. 2:1; 6:17, 22, 25)’ and ‘the mother of Jephthah (Judges 11:1), etc.’\(^{109}\)

As is evident, there’s no mention of an adulteress, or a homosexual, etc. Zonah is confined to only meaning a harlot (prostitute or whore).

Schematic on Harlotry in the Old Testament

Of the 137 times that the various English terms for harlotry are used in the Old Testament, 110 times specifically mean cult harlotry. 25 times it can be both, but not once does it refer to only common harlotry, which is extremely telling in relation to James’ use of the word. The following are the 10 terms and times of usage (‘Ocurs’) in English taken from the King James Version Old Testament:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Occurs</th>
<th>Cultic</th>
<th>Either</th>
<th>Common</th>
<th>Neither</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Fornication</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fornications</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Harlot</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Harlot’s or harlots</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Whore</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Whoredom</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Whoredoms</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Whore’s or whores</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Whoring</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Whorish</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. The 5 times that fornication\(^{10} \) and its plural\(^{11} \) are used speak of cult harlotry. 30 of the 37 times that

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\(^{109}\) Botterweck, *TDOT*, vol. IV, p. 99. Tamar posed as a cult harlot and Rahab was a cult harlot. Jephthah’s mother may have been a cultic or common harlot.
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*harlot* appears specifically speaks of Israel and Judah, etc., practicing cult harlotry.\(^{112}\) The other 7 times pertain to either a cult or a common harlot, meaning that it applies to both.

**B. Harlots and harlot's** appear 6 times; 4 times it's a cult harlot, with one of those times specifically being the word for cult harlotry (יְזֶרֶח יָדֶשֶׁא),\(^{113}\) while twice it refers to both.

**C. Three of the 10 times that whore is used speak specifically of cult harlotry, while the rest speak of either cult or common harlot,**\(^{114}\) meaning it can be both.

**D. 20 of 22 times that whoredom is seen,**\(^{115}\) and 31 of the 32 times that whoredoms is written specifically refer to cult harlotry.\(^{116}\)

**E. Of the 3 times that whores or whore's are used, twice it refers to a cult harlot and once to either a cult or a common harlot.**\(^{117}\)

**F. 18 of the 19 times that whoring is seen include cult harlotry,**\(^{118}\) and 2 of 3 times that whorish is used specifically speak of cult prostitution.\(^{119}\)

Of the 137 words\(^{120}\) associated with harlotry, 110 times (80.3% of the time) they specifically speak of cult

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\(^{111}\) Ibid., Fornications: Ezk. 16:15.

\(^{112}\) Ibid., Three times the word for ‘harlot’ is kiday'sha (literally cult harlot; Gen. 38:21 (twice), 22. The rest are zonah (harlot), which in these cites mean a cult harlot: Gen. 38:15, 24; Josh. 6:17, 25; Hos. 2:5; 3:3; 4:15.

These next cites speak of Israel, Judah or Jerusalem as a zonah (harlot), which means they practiced cult harlotry: Is. 1:21; 23:15-16; Jer. 2:20; 3:1, 6, 8; Ezk. 16:15-16, 28, 31, 35, 41; 23:5, 19, 44; Nahum 3:4; Micah 1:7 (3 times). The next 7 cites of zonah refer to either or both a cult and/or a common harlot: Gen. 34:31; Lev. 21:14; Judges 11:1; 16:1; Prov. 7:10; Joel 3:3; Amos 7:17.

\(^{113}\) Ibid., Harlots: 1st Kgs. 3:16; Prov. 29:3; (the first two cites aren’t necessarily cult harlots, but can be); Jer. 5:7; Hos. 4:14 (kiday'sha). Harlot's: Josh. 2:1; 6:22.

\(^{114}\) Ibid., Whore as cult harlot: Dt. 23:17-18 (v. 17 kiday'sha); Ezk. 16:28.

*Whore* as either a cult or a common harlot: Lev. 19:29; 21:7, 9; Dt. 22:21; Judg. 19:2; Prov. 23:27; Is. 57:3.

\(^{115}\) Ibid., Whoredom as cult prostitution: Lev. 20:5; Num. 25:1; Jer. 3:9; 13:27; Ezk. 16:17, 33; 20:30; 23:8, 17, 27; 43:7, 9; Hos. 1:2; 4:10-11, 13-14, 18; 5:3; 6:10. Whoredom as either: Gen. 38:24; Lev. 19:29.

\(^{116}\) Ibid., Whoredoms as cult harlotry: 2nd Kgs. 9:22; 2nd Chr. 21:13; Jer. 3:2; Ezk. 16:20, 22, 25-26, 34 (twice), 36; 23:3 (twice), 7-8, 11 (twice); 14, 18-19, 29 (twice), 35, 43; Hos. 1:2 (twice); 2:2, 4; 4:12; 5:4; Nah. 3:4 (twice).

*Whoredoms* as unfaithfulness (Num. 14:33). This is figurative prostitution.

\(^{117}\) Ibid., Whores as cult harlots: Ezk. 16:33; Hos. 4:14; as either cultic or common: Jer. 3:3.

\(^{118}\) Ibid., Whoring as cult harlotry: Ex. 34:15-16 (twice); Dt. 31:16; Judg. 2:17; 8:33; Ezk. 6:9; 23:30; Hos. 4:12; 9:1; 1st Chron. 5:25; 2nd Chron. 21:13; Ps. 106:39. Whoring as either cult and/or common prostitution: Num. 15:39; Ps. 73:27. Whoring as sacrificial idolatry, which includes cult harlotry: Lev. 17:7; 20:5. Whoring as idolatry, which is cult prostitution: Judges 8:27. Whoring as witchcraft, which speaks of figurative harlotry: Lev. 20:6.

\(^{119}\) Ibid., Whorish as cult harlotry: Ezk. 6:9; 16:30; as either: Prov. 6:26.

\(^{120}\) Jenni, Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament, vol. 1 p. 388, states there are 134 occurrences of zonah and its root. The difference between KJV and the TLOT in their count (137 to 134) is that 5 times the KJV speaks of harlot (3x; Gen. 38:21 [2x], 22), harlots (1x; Hosea 4:14) and whore (1x; Dt. 23:17), but the Hebrew word is יְזֶרֶח יָדֶשֶׁא kiday'sha, the specific word for a cult harlot, which isn’t from יְזֶרֶח zonah (to commit harlotry). So, the KJV count, without kiday'sha, is 132, which is two less than TLOT. It’s possible that the KJV uses another term
Gentile believers immersed harlot, while 24 times (18.3%) cult and common harlotry are meant. This means that 134 times out of 137 times (97.8% of the time) these words refer to cult harlotry. The harlotry that God repeatedly comes against in the Old Testament is overwhelmingly cultic, not common.

This Hebrew-English word presentation takes the foundation out from under those who translate Yakov’s word as ‘sexual immorality’ or adultery, etc., and with that, their interpretation of the four rules speaking of table fellowship is shattered. The Hebrew word that Yakov used that day (zinate–harlotry) directly points to cult harlotry, if only used by itself, but coming immediately after the first rule on sacrificial idolatry it definitely means that Yakov meant cult harlotry, not common harlotry, and certainly not adultery, nor the vague term ‘sexual immorality.’ The next two rules, blood and things strangled, are also part of sacrificial idolatry. All four rules together form Yakov’s conceptual unit against sacrificial-sexual idolatry.

This also reveals how unwarranted the teaching is that the four rules were given because the ‘weaker Jewish brethren’ clung to the ‘outdated’ Law of Moses (because they didn’t realize the full extent of what Christ’s sacrifice meant for them). The Council of Acts 15, though, was called to decide what constituted salvation for the Gentile. Acts 15:20, with its four rules, underscores that issue. The rules have nothing to do with table fellowship to appease the weaker believing Jews, but are a litmus test for the Gentile believer in order to determine if his faith in Jesus was genuine or not. This understanding dismantles the heretical teaching that ‘Mosaic Law is done away with for the Christian’ because the four rules aren’t ‘the only rules’ for the Gentile, but the first of many Mosaic rules so the Gentile could begin to order his life around his new God and His way of living (cf. Rom. 3:31; 7:12, 14).

How can Christians scholars and theologians teach that all the Jewish Apostles somehow missed the Lord Jesus on His understanding of Mosaic Law so many years after the resurrection? Acts 15 took place 18 years after the resurrection in 48 AD (cf. Mt. 13:10-11; Acts 1:1-3; 21:20). Were the Jewish believers ‘weaker’ in their faith because they kept Mosaic Law, or is it possible that the Church has been deceived by Satan through the Pope (Daniel 7:25), with its paradigm of a ‘Law-free Gospel’?

The next three sections will confirm what we’ve seen about zonah being primarily a definition for a cult harlot, even when English Bibles only have harlot, and the sections will also bring out how thoroughly immersed ancient Israel was, before Babylonian captivity, in cult harlotry. These three chapters will round out Yakov’s ‘Family History’ and why he gave these four prohibitions on sacrificial-sexual idolatry to the Gentile believers first.

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for the two, not listed in the 10 above, or that the count of TLOT is off by two, most likely the former.

29
The story of Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38) reveals that the term zonah (female prostitute) is synonymous for a cult prostitute and is conceptually the same as the specific Hebrew word for a female cult prostitute קידשא (kiday’sha). Genesis 38 uses these two different Hebrew words for Tamar, but at first it’s impossible to know if Judah thought that she was a common or a cultic harlot because the text around the first times that zonah is used isn’t descriptive enough to determine what kind of harlot Scripture is speaking of. Further on in the story, though, Judah’s understanding about her is seen when his friend Hirah (Gen. 38:12, 20) uses הקדשא (kiday’sha; cult harlot) to describe the cult harlot that Judah had laid with.

Tamar veiled herself and sat down by the road. She made herself to look like a prostitute in order to deceive Judah. Not recognizing that it was his daughter-in-law, Judah speaks of her as a zonah, a harlot (לזונה, to be a harlot, Gen. 38:15). What kind of a harlot (common or cultic) can’t be determined from this verse.

After three months Tamar is found to be pregnant. She’s charged by Judah with being a harlot and being with child by whoredom (zonah, KJV v. 24 twice). Did it mean that Judah thought that Tamar was a cult harlot? From this verse it can’t be determined either since the context doesn’t reveal nor describe what Judah was thinking. There are two possibilities: Judah thought that Tamar had become pregnant by either common or cultic harlotry.

The only way to tell what kind of harlot Judah thought he had encountered that day is from vv. 21-22. Three times the specific word for a female cult harlot is used. When Hirah tries to locate the woman, to bring her wages to her, he specifically speaks of her being a kiday’sha (cult harlot). The men of the place told him that there hadn’t been any kiday’sha there. Hirah returns and tells Judah that he couldn’t find the kiday’sha (v. 21 twice, v. 22 once).

Davidson defines kiday’sha as a ‘prostitute…devoted to prostitution in honor of idols.’ The NASB (vv. 21-22) calls her a ‘temple prostitute’ and the NIV, a ‘shrine prostitute.’ Unfortunately, the KJV and NKJV only use harlot for vv. 21-22, concealing the true meaning of the biblical word.

The use of the specific Hebrew word for a female cult harlot (kiday’sha), speaking of the same person who is also described as a harlot in Genesis 38:15 (and v. 24), reveals that zonah (harlot) is interchangeable with the specific Hebrew word for a female cult harlot. When harlot is mentioned in vv. 15 and 24 we now realize that Judah thought she had been a cult harlot, and not a common one. Davidson, the NASB and the NIV confirm this for vv. 21-22. The Illustrated Bible Dictionary also states that zanah can specifically refer to kiday’sha, a female cult prostitute, and that it’s identical with it. IBD writes,

‘Tamar is described as both a harlot (Gen. 38:15) and a cult prostitute (Gen. 38:21, RSV mg.). The two Heb. words are used as parallels in Ho. 4:14.’

The Hebrew word for a prostitute (zonah) is conceptually the same as the specific term for a female cult harlot (kiday’sha). TWOT adds another confirmation of this when it writes of temple prostitutes, saying that ‘the usage may be extended to refer to prostitution in general.’

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The use of *zonah* for a cult prostitute is almost 4,000 years old. In other words, it was already ancient in the days of James 2,000 years ago. He could speak of ‘harlotry’ (*zinute*) and everyone at the Council would know that he was speaking of cult harlotry. The use of the Greek word for a *harlot* will also equate her with cult harlotry, context determining if it’s cultic or common.

The primary emphasis in both Scripture and in authoritative lexicons of the Hebrew words for *prostitution* and *prostitute* reveal its overwhelming cultic use. With Tamar there’s no question that what the KJV translates as ‘harlot’ means *cult harlot*. When a Jew like Yakov spoke of harlotry, having already begun with his first rule on *sacrificial idolatry*, there was certainly no need for him to elaborate about what kind of harlotry he meant. Everyone knew he meant cult harlotry. The theme of Acts 15 is Gentile salvation. As sinful as common harlotry is, it doesn’t, unlike cult harlotry, involve union with another god or goddess, which would mean loss of salvation. The chapter on *Jesus and Divorce* (p. 67f.) will further reveal this difference and what is the biblical grounds for divorce between two believers.

The four rules of Acts 15:20 are a conceptual unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry. Yakov warned the new Gentile believers that sacrificial-sexual idolatry would endanger their salvation. To assign the second rule to something other than cult prostitution is not supported by the usage of the word in the Old Testament. The next section on *Israel and Baal Peor* will further reveal this.

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ISRAEL AND BAAL PEOR

Before the Sons of Israel ever entered the Land that Yahveh had promised to them, Israel disgraced herself in cult prostitution. *Webster’s Dictionary* assigns orgies to the Greeks or Romans, but the Assyrians and Babylonians who preceded them had orgies as part of their idolatrous worship, as did the Moabites. The story of Israel at Baal Peor is a story of unrestrained sexual lust in the worship of Baal:

‘While Israel remained at Shittim the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab, for they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor and Yahveh was angry with Israel. Yahveh said to Moses,’

‘Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before Yahveh, so that the fierce anger of Yahveh may turn away from Israel!’

“So Moses said to the judges of Israel, ‘Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor.’ Then behold! One of the Sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the Congregation of the Sons of Israel while they were weeping at the doorway of the Tent of Meeting.”

‘When Phineas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the High Priest saw it, he arose from the midst of the Congregation and took a spear in his hand and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through—the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the Sons of Israel was checked. Those who died by the plague were 24,000. Then Yahveh spoke to Moses saying,’

‘Phineas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the High Priest has turned away My wrath from the Sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them so that I did not destroy the Sons of Israel in My jealousy. Therefore, say, ‘Behold! I give him My Covenant of Peace and it shall be for him and his descendants after him a covenant of a perpetual priesthood because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the Sons of Israel.’” (Numbers 25:1-13)

*The Chumash*, in commenting on what *Pinhas* (Phineas) did, states:

‘*Pinhas*…saved them from calamity’ and ‘put an end to the devastating plague that had taken 24,000 lives in retribution for the orgy of immorality with the Moabite and Midianite women.’ The Hebrews had fallen into ‘debauchery and idolatry.’

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126 Woolf, *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 802. Orgy: ‘1: secret ceremonial rites held in honor of an ancient Greek or Roman deity and usually characterized by ecstatic singing and dancing 2a: drunken revelry b: an excessive, sexual indulgence (as a wild party).’


Israel and Baal Peor

The worship of Baal Peor entailed all this, as did the worship of many other pagan gods and goddesses. The sacrifices the Sons of Israel offered to Baal Peor bonded them to the god. They ate the sacrificial meat (and possibly drank the sacrificial blood, although no mention is made of this), bowed down and worshiped this god and engaged in religious sexual orgies with the women, thereby joining themselves to Baal Peor (Num. 25:3). Yahveh was so angry that He was ready to destroy the whole Camp of Israel, so great was their offense (Num. 25:11). This is biblical fornication and expressly what Yakov didn’t want believing Gentiles doing in their pagan temples,120 while still retaining their ‘belief in Jesus.’

The name ‘Baal Peor’ means that it was the god Baal associated with the top of a mountain called Peor. The god, also known as Baal (Lord) and Molech (King; Lev. 18:21; 20:2f.), originally signified Nimrod deified, the first king of Babylon.131 To the Greeks Baal was known as Bacchus. The Philistines knew Baal as Dagon. He had other names in different countries and different times, but his bloodthirsty and licentious worship rites basically remained the same. Hislop states: ‘The sun, as the great source of light and heat, was worshiped under the name of Baal.’112 This is one of the reasons why the mountains and the high places were used for worship; they were ‘closer’ to the heavens. ‘Infants were the most acceptable offerings at his altar…with the priest of Baal eating of the human sacrifice.’113

It’s not mentioned that Israel sacrificed their infants in Num. 25, but all too often in their history the Bible confirms such monstrous events.114 If infant sacrifice happened at Baal Peor it would only be an additional reason for Yahveh’s fierce anger against Israel.

In Num. 25:1 the Hebrew verb זנות (zanah) is used. It means, ‘to commit whoredom, play the harlot; frequently’ involving ‘idolatry.’135 Israel was certainly playing the cult harlot. All idolatry is sin, but not all idolatry involves cult prostitution. Zanah, in the context of idolatry, always speaks of sexual idolatry, which is apostasy, and not the vague term ‘sexual immorality.’ King David, in his adultery with Bathsheba, didn’t apostatize, as great as his sin was. He slept with another man’s wife. He committed adultery, not cult harlotry. The biblical basis for a divorce between two believers is not adultery, as the Church wrongly teaches, but cult harlotry. I’ll explain why in the section on Jesus and Divorce (p. 67f.).

One could say that cult prostitution falls under the general term ‘sexual immorality,’ but how would anyone know that the term cult prostitution was what James meant if the English translation of the second rule is sexual immorality? It’s not possible because sexual immorality can be adultery, promiscuity or homosexuality, etc.

Unfortunately, even with translations that use ‘fornication’ for the catastrophe at Baal Peor, the problem arises of it being defined by the popular misunderstanding instead of the biblical definition. The difference amounts to placing what Israel did under a heading that is very general (‘sexual immorality,’ as most define ‘fornication’ today) as opposed to the specific understanding of the spirit and practice in which Israel


130 This kind of pagan ‘worship’ was going on all over the world in Yakov’s day. Biblical fornication is sexual idolatry or cult prostitution. Paul had to deal with this same issue in Corinth (1st Cor. 6:15-19; 10:21).

131 Ibid., p. 226.

132 Ibid., pp. 231-232.

133 Ibid., pp. 231-232.

134 Dt. 12:31; 2nd Kings 16:3; 17:17; 21:6, 10; 2nd Chron. 28:1-4; 33:5-6; Ps. 106:34-39; Jer. 7:31; Ezek. 20:31; 23:37, etc.

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engaged in—sexual idolatry. This revealed Israel’s faithless and perverse heart. This is apostasy and Israel was guilty of it many times in her history.

In Num. 25:3 the Hebrew verb that states that Israel joined herself to Baal Peor is צאה导弹 (tzah’mahd). It means, ‘to be bound to, joined to.’ The noun means, a ‘pair, couple, yoke (of oxen, mules, horsemen).’ The verb also means, ‘specific (of a) girl with two lovers’ and to ‘be attached, attach oneself, specif. be (religiously) devoted.’ The Sons of Israel, eating of the idolatrous sacrifice, solemnized a spiritual marriage to Baal Peor. The orgies consummated it. This wasn’t common harlotry.

Here was Israel, Yahveh’s Bride, with another lover, Baal Peor, while the Groom was still in the House! The Shekinah Glory Cloud, the visible manifestation of Yahveh, was continually over the Holy of Holies in the Wilderness (except when it led the way to another camp, Ex. 40:34-38; Num. 10:33-34). Keil says,

“the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab: they accepted the invitations of the latter to a sacrificial festival of their gods, took part in their sacrificial meals, and even worshipped the gods of the Moabites, and indulged in the licentious worship of Baal-Peor…צא导弹 (zanah harlotry) ‘construed with el, as is found in Numbers 25:1), ‘as in Ezek. 16:28, signifies to incline to a person, to attach one’s self to him, so as to commit fornication. The word applies to carnal and spiritual whoredom.’

“The lust of the flesh induced the Israelites to approach the daughters of Moab and form acquaintances and friendships with them, in consequence of which they were invited by them ‘to the slain-offerings of their gods,’ i.e. to the sacrificial festivals and sacrificial meals, in connection with which they also ‘adored their gods,’ i.e. took part in the idolatrous worship connected with the sacrificial festival.’

“These sacrificial meals were celebrated in honor of the Moabite god Baal-Peor, so that the Israelites joined themselves to him. צא导弹 (tzah’mahd) ‘in the Niphal, to bind one’s self to a person. Baal-Peor is the Baal of Peor, who was worshipped in the city of Beth-Peor (Deut. 3:29; 4:46; see’ also Num. 23:28), a Moabite Priapus, in honor of whom women and virgins prostituted themselves. As the god of war, he was called Chemosh.”

Those 24,000 Israelis and Baal Peor were walking hand in hand, and if you would have asked any one of them if they still believed in Yahveh, they would have said, ‘Of course!’ but there can be no ‘pairing up’ of Yahveh’s people with another god. In doing this those Israelis weren’t worshiping the one true God and Him only (cf. Jer. 16:10f.). This is biblical fornication (cult harlotry) and was dealt with by Pinhas, who saved the rest of Israel from certain destruction; so great was God’s anger. Would God’s attitude toward other gods and cult harlotry change when the Gentiles came to believe in His Son? Of course not.

The Hebrew verb in Num. 25:11, that Yahveh used to describe what He was going to do to Israel if Pinhas had not intervened, is כהלא (kahl’lah). It means, ‘to complete, finish, end…to waste, ruin, destroy’ and ‘to

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136 Ibid., p. 646.
137 Ibid.
139 Sinclair, *Collins English Dictionary*, p. 1226. Priapus: ‘in classical antiquity) the god of the male procreative power and of gardens and vineyards.’
141 See Ex. 22:20; 34:12-16; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8; Rev. 18:4-5.
cause to vanish.  Yahveh was very angry with those Hebrews because of their whoring and unrestrained licentious hearts. Israel was God’s wife and the Lord was ready to annihilate the whole Camp. Everyone was affected by their sin because Israel, like the Body of Messiah, is seen by God as one entity.

*Unger’s Bible Dictionary* states,

‘the worship of Baal-Peor was a temporary apostasy brought about by the temptations to licentious indulgence offered by the rites of that deity.’

It’s most likely unintentional that *Unger’s* writes that is was a temporary apostasy, since all who took part in it were killed. Note well the seductiveness of pagan worship with its appeal to the lust of the flesh (the sexual orgies). *The Moabites weren’t unusual* in their ‘worship,’ but representative of pagan worship all over the world. (This will be brought out in the chapter on Cult Prostitution in the Ancient World, p. 44f.) Yahveh prohibited it for His people Israel and so would Yakov in Acts 15:20 for the Gentile believers. Israel was only a tiny island in an ocean of cult prostitution, and sadly enough, Israel all too often drank from the same polluted waters as the rest of the nations.

A number of times in the Old Testament God calls Israel adulterous or a harlot because Israel went after other gods. This related to their idolatry, not their personal marriage relationships. Israel’s adultery was literally cult prostitution—‘adultery’ wasn’t used for an individual who practiced cult or even common harlotry.

The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* explains that there were times that the word ‘harlot’ or ‘harlotry’ could be used for a wicked person or people, etc., but that cult harlot was the chief meaning for the terms:

“Individuals and the Israelite nation as a whole are accused of harlotry when they seek security from mediums and spiritists (Lev. 20:6), military might (Nahum 3:1-4), political alliances (Ezek. 23:5-6) or commerce (Is. 23:17). Because they value material gain too highly,” Israelis “who accept bribes and abandon God’s plan of social justice are also considered harlots (Is. 1:21-23). Above all these, however, idolatry stands as the most common cause for the epithet ‘prostitute.’”

There are many times in the history of God’s people, in the Land that He gave to them, where Yahveh rebuked Israel through His servants the Prophets. From just after Yehoshua’s (Joshua’s) death (c. 1370 BC), until the captivity in Babylon (586 BC), more than 750 years, Scripture abounds with Yahveh grieving and being angry with His people because of their lustful hearts for cult harlotry. He wasn’t speaking of individuals committing adultery, but the people committing apostasy through sacrificial, sexual and spiritual idolatry. Sometimes it would include the worship of Yahveh, while most times it wouldn’t, but every time it was very offensive to God and to those in Israel who were righteous (1st Kings 19:18).

Many Sons of Israel were involved in cult prostitution at Baal Peor. They had sexual orgies and bound

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145 Jer. 2:20; 3:1; Ezk. 16:1-31, etc.
147 In Malachi 2:10-16, God remonstrates the men of Judah for cult harlotry, and also, for dealing treacherously with their wives. This doesn’t mean they’re one and the same, but that both were being committed by them.
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themselves to another god, having eaten of the sacrifices (Num. 25:2). This directly attacked and severed the covenant marriage relationship they had with Yahveh. To eat the meat of the sacrifice was to be one with the god to whom it was sacrificed to, thanking that god for supplying the meat (i.e. for sustaining life). This is what the first prohibition in Acts 15:20 comes against (‘to keep away from the pollutions of idols;’ i.e. the eating of sacrificial meat offered to the idol at the time of the sacrifice). The eating of the sacrificial meat went hand in hand with the idolatrous ceremony of cult prostitution. That’s what an orgy is—a feast of flesh, both animal and human. The sexual orgy crudely symbolized union with Baal Peor, another name for Satan.

In the Mosaic sacrificial system the eating of the sacrifice was done by the Hebrew upon entry into the Covenant (Ex. 12:3-10); and for the official ratification of the Covenant by the Elders (Ex. 24:4-11); and for the sacrifice of Shalom (peace, communion, union), and for the Feasts (Dt. 14:22-27). It was at the Shalom sacrifice that the Israelites, along with his family and friends, sat down with the priest and ate some of the meat of the sacrifice (Lev. 3:1-17).148 This spoke of peace and oneness with Yahveh and of God being pleased with them. In pagan rituals the symbolism was the same, just counterfeit.

In Acts 15:20 James was concerned with the Gentiles continuing to practice sacrificial-sexual idolatry. They, like Israel before them, could think that worship of Jesus and Diana was acceptable, but Yahveh wouldn’t share that view with them. The danger that Yakov envisioned for the Gentile believers was that they might not think it wrong to maintain their previous gods along with Jesus. With its appeal to the lust of the flesh, this practice would destroy the Gentile believer’s covenant with the God of Israel just as surely as it had with those Israelis at Baal Peor. This is why James gave the second rule—the prohibition of cult prostitution.

Those who translate the word as ‘sexual immorality’ or ‘unchastity,’ etc., do a grave injustice to the Word of God and a gross disservice to English readers of the Bible. Why use a word or a term that has no specific meaning (e.g. ‘sexual immorality’), or a word that obliterates the actual meaning (e.g. adultery or unchastity)? The Hebrew word has such a clear and concise meaning—cult harlotry.

By using the general term ‘sexual immorality’ instead of ‘cult harlotry,’ many classify this most abhorrent sin of sexual apostasy with other non-apostasy related sexual sins like premarital sex or adultery. This, of course, has tremendous theological ramifications for Acts 15:20, as well as other places. For example, what constitutes a biblical divorce? Yeshua says that divorce cannot take place ‘except for fornication’ (Mt. 5:32), and the Church has falsely interpreted it as adultery, and thereby, many a Christian marriage has been shipwrecked because of it.

From the meaning of the Hebrews, and from Genesis 38, and now from Israel’s apostasy at Baal Peor, the understanding of Yakov’s word has consistently meant cult prostitution. With Yakov’s first rule speaking against sacrificial idolatry, and his second rule prohibiting cult harlotry, two strong pillars are established toward the concept that Yakov’s four rules are other aspects of sacrificial-sexual idolatry designed to keep the new Gentile believer ‘in the right way.’ The four rules have nothing to do with table fellowship, which only serves the Church’s erroneous anti-Mosaic Law theology.

Israel’s history is filled with the sacrificial-sexual worship of other gods. Cult prostitution was devastating to ancient Israel, and the reason why Yakov gave his four rules to the Gentiles first.

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148 Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, pp. 948-949. ‘The sacrificial feast,’ enjoyed by both priest and offerer alike, symbolized God and Man at table. In the Middle East, no stronger picture of fellowship, prosperity, union, peace, security and of being in the ‘Kingdom of God’ on Earth could be displayed.
CULT PROSTITUTION IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

A brief survey of cult prostitution and how it affected Israel will reveal what Yakov, and every other Jew, knew about their own Family History, and how devastating cult prostitution is. It will again confirm why Yakov’s second rule should be understood the way the Hebrew Scriptures define zanah (and also the way the Greek will define zanah’s counterpart pornay’ah) as ‘cult prostitution’ and not the vague term ‘sexual immorality,’ which totally distorts Yakov’s rule.

Throughout the Tanach (the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament) there are many references to cult harlotry and its sway upon Israel. God forbid His people from practicing it or becoming cult prostitutes. TDNT states:

“The Deuteronomic Law unconditionally forbids cultic prostitution. No girl is to be a temple devotee, no man a קדשׁ (kadaysh, the specific term for a male temple prostitute ‘priest’), “23:17. Profits derived” (from cult harlotry) “are not to be used on behalf ofי ה’ God’s Tabernacle.

God wasn’t interested in tithes, or anything else, given by a cult prostitute, male or female. The term ‘dog’ was a loathsome epithet for the male cult prostitute, many of whom were priests, but this didn’t stop some in Israel from walking in this perversion. The Illustrated Bible Dictionary writes:

“In Dt. 23:17-18, the contemptuous phrase, ‘dog’ evidently refers to a male cult prostitute. In Rehoboam’s time” (922-906 BC) “the presence of such male prostitutes became widespread (1st Kings 14:24). Asa, Jehoshaphat and Josiah attempted to root out this abomination (1st Kings 15:12; 22:46; 2nd Kings 23:7).”

The reason why these men were called ‘dogs’ is because of the way they performed their “worship” on other men. C. F. Keil writes that the kadaysh “received his name for the dog-like manner in which the male...debased himself.”

Here is cult prostitution as homosexual idolatry. The term ‘dogs,’ used as late as the last chapter of Revelation (22:15), reveals the practice was still observed in pagan ‘worship’ in the final days of the Apostle John (95 AD). In the days of Moses, male and female cult prostitution were widespread in Canaan before the Hebrews took possession of the Land. UBD states,

“Israel was in covenant with Yahweh, married to God, pledging herself to Him and Him only (Ex. 19:3; 20:2, etc.). Idolatry was ‘a political crime of the gravest nature, high treason against the King. It was a transgression of the covenant (Dt. 17:2-3), the evil’ (emphasis theirs) ‘preeminently in the eyes of Jehovah (1st Kings 21:25). Idolatry was a great wrong because of the licentious rites associated with it (Romans 1:26-32), thus debauching the morals of its adherents.”

Male cult prostitutes were designated by the specific word קדשׁ (kadaysh). The specific term for the female cult prostitute was known as קדשא (kidaysha, the feminine form of the word for the male). This is what Tamar made herself out to be (Genesis 38:21-22). Some might ask, ‘If Yakov’s second rule spoke of

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152 Wooll, Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 289. Debauch: ‘1a: archaic: to make disloyal, b: to seduce from chastity, 2a: to lead away from virtue or excellence, b: to corrupt by intemperance or sensuality.’
153 Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 949.
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cult prostitution, why didn’t he use the specific words for cult prostitutes?” Yakov used zinite, which was more than sufficient to convey cult prostitution. Also, his four rules weren’t a theological dissertation on cult harlotry, but four concise rules on sacrificial-sexual idolatry. Because of their brevity we know that everyone there knew what he meant. Ben Witherington states that “all four items in the decree were shorthand for things that took place in pagan temples.”

Tim Hegg adds that the rules must have been very well known among both Gentiles and Jews. He cites the use of the Greek definite article (‘the’) ‘before each item in the initial listing,’ saying that ‘they represented well-known entities,’ and both peoples would have been able to identify the meanings by the ‘single terms.’ In other words, everyone understood what Yakov meant by the four rules.

The history of Israel is one sad commentary after another—the people and their leaders indulged in cult harlotry year after year, century after century. There are those who see the God of the Old Testament as a wrathful angry God, ‘out to get you’ as soon as you make a mistake, but the love and long-suffering of the Old Testament God is abundantly clear in the eight centuries that He didn’t destroy the generations of Hebrews that committed cult harlotry. He pleaded with them through His Prophets, although most of the time Israel was deaf to the One who had created her, set her free and loved her.

After the death of Joshua and his Elders, the problem of cult prostitution manifested itself among the people of God and kept them in chains of darkness. Israel wouldn’t be completely rid of this abomination until the northern kingdom of Israel was obliterated by Assyria in 721 BC. One hundred and thirty-five years later (586 BC) the southern kingdom of Judah was decimated and a small remnant was taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon. ISBE states:

‘In the period of the Judges’ (about 1350-1080 BC) ‘religious prostitution was one of the basic causes of the degradation of the people (Judges 2:17). They came to worship both the priestly ephod and certain Baals by means of sacred prostitution (8:27-35).’

ISBE explains that the reason for the destruction of both kingdoms was because the people of God were infatuated with cult harlotry:

‘The captivity of the half-tribe of Manasseh resulted from their participation in the religious prostitution connected with the Canaanite gods (1st Chron. 5:25). The same can be said of the fall of both the northern and southern kingdoms as the idolatrous practices they followed included such rites (Ezk. 16:16-58).’

After the days of King Solomon his son Rehoboam assumed the Throne (c. 922 BC), but foolishness was in his heart. He wouldn’t relieve the heavy taxes that his father had placed upon the people. Instead, he told them they ‘hadn’t seen anything yet.’ This caused the Israelis in the north to rebel, thus tearing David’s Kingdom in two (1st Kings 12).

Rehoboam’s propensity for idolatry was an indication of his wickedness. Son of an Ammonite (pagan) mother, he ‘perpetuated the worst features of Solomon’s idolatry (1st Kings 14:22-24).’ The ‘worst fea-

156 2nd Kgs. 17:1-23; Jer. 26:5; 35:15.
158 Ibid.
Cult Prostitution in Ancient Israel

tures’ of idolatry means that he indulged in cult harlotry, and possibly sacrificed his infant sons. From the time of Rehoboam to the Babylonian captivity (922-586 BC; 336 years), Judah would, more often than not, walk against the Torah or Instruction of God. Hezekiah, a righteous king (715-686 BC) would restore and purify the Temple,

‘which was dismantled and closed during the latter part of his’ father’s reign (2nd Chron. 28:24; 29:3). ‘But the reform extended little below the surface (Isaiah 29:13). Idolatry spread fearfully in the last times of the kingdom of Judah, until it brought down on the people the punishment of captivity in Babylon.”

It’s sad to realize that the Temple of God in Jerusalem was closed because the people were more interested in pagan gods (i.e. cult prostitution) than walking in God’s righteous ways (i.e. Mosaic Law). The reform of Hezekiah didn’t last long because the hearts of the people were lustful and they didn’t want to be restrained. Cult harlotry was an immense problem for the people of Judah—and for God.

King Josiah, another righteous king, began his reign about 644 BC. When he ascended the Throne, male cult homosexuality was socially acceptable in the kingdom and was even being practiced in the Temple of Yahveh! TDNT states:

Josiah’s sharp attack, under which the houses of the kedeshim’ (male and female cult prostitutes) ‘in the Temple were destroyed, shows that the evil had made its way even into the Temple cultus in Jerusalem, 2nd Kings 23:7.”

Cult harlotry severed the covenant protection that Israel had with Yahveh and opened them up to their enemies. Sacrificial-sexual idolatry was brazen unfaithfulness on the part of Israel. It was apostasy, yet Yahveh didn’t immediately act upon it as He had at Baal Peor. It didn’t mean, though, that the people escaped unscathed. ISBE writes, “The degradation of the human being through religious prostitution,”

“becomes a figure for the spiritual infidelity that Israel and Judah show to God. The Old Testament pictures Yahveh as the husband of Israel. For example, Israel and Judah are depicted as faithless sisters who play the harlot, being unfaithful to their Beloved (see esp. Jer. 3:1-3 and Ezk. 23). The deep religious significance of such a figure is apparent when we see the close connection between idolatry and religious prostitution. To demonstrate the faithlessness of Israel, Yahveh commanded the prophet Hosea to take a wife who had been a harlot. Unable to break the habit of her former life, she became a living representation of Israel’s faithlessness to Yahveh. Hosea filled the role of God, who was always willing to forgive.”

God’s faithfulness and forgiveness have been from the Fall. They didn’t begin with Jesus, but were mag-

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159 Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 514.
160 The Hebrew word for Mosaic Law, Torah, means, to teach, instruct or direct, and therefore, the Law’s primary reason is to teach Israel what was right and wrong/sin in God’s eyes. Davidson, The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon, p. 346 states, The verb means, ‘to teach, instruct,’ and the noun means, ‘instruction, direction.’
161 Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 514.
162 There were righteous kings before Hezekiah, like Asa (924-646 BC) and Jehoshaphat (864-840 BC), but their attempts at reform didn’t last any longer than Hezekiah’s (2nd Chron. 14:1-15:19; 17:1-20:23).
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nified and culminate in Him.

The Hebrew language and perspective are very concrete, and therefore, very simple. The abstract is brought into the physical realm so that all can plainly understand what God is speaking about. Yahveh remonstrates His people for worshiping idols of wood and stone, and that’s exactly what they were. How very descriptive and shocking, that Israel would sell its soul to them for a pound of flesh! TDNT states,

“In Isaiah 1:21, the ‘city of Jerusalem, once faithful and the refuge of the righteous, has now become a harlot.’ In Jer. 3:1-4:4, the prophet ‘accuses Israel and Judah of playing the harlot with many lovers (3:2), of committing adultery with wood and stone...(3:9), and of defiling the Land by their πορνειαι’” (Greekpornay’ai, harlotry).”

The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery explains that,

“Israel chose to follow the cults God had warned against (Psalm 106:35-39). Through Jeremiah, God notes the nation’s resulting brazen and degraded state in his accusation: On every high hill and under every spreading tree, you lay down as a prostitute. How can you say, ‘I am not defiled, I have not run after the Baals?’ You are a swift she-camel running here and there, a wild donkey accustomed to the desert, sniffing the wind in her craving; in her heat who can restrain her? (NIV Jer. 2:20, 23-24)”

Can there be any doubt as to the devastating effect cult harlotry had upon ancient Israel? Both the northern and southern kingdoms were wiped out because of it. When the Gentiles would come to believe in Jesus, would they be excluded from personal catastrophe if they indulged in cult harlotry? In First Corinthians and Ephesians Paul addresses this very issue with them (1st Cor. 10:1f.; Eph. 5:3, 5).

Hosea ministered to the northern kingdom from about 759-721 BC. Isaiah served the Lord from about 754-700 BC, and Jeremiah prophesied in the southern kingdom of Judah (c. 631-585 BC), which fell to Babylon in his day. TDNT says,

‘In Jeremiah as in Hosea the charge of infidelity goes hand in hand with an uncompro-
mising rejection of the practice of sacrall prostitution as this was found in the Canaanite
cult, Jer. 2:20; 3:6; cf. Hos. 4:12-14.”

Time after time Yahveh sent His Prophets to plead and to warn the people against their sacrificial-sexual apostasy, and what it would lead to (destruction), but to little avail. On a side note, this didn’t take God by surprise, and it shouldn’t be used by some to declare God’s permanent severing of Israel.

Many ancient peoples would leave their female babies by the roadside because they were seen as a liability to raise (food and clothing). Pagan priests would come along and raise them for cult harlotry. In contrast to the abandoning of their female babies in ancient paganism, Yahveh spoke to Judah, saying that He found Israel abandoned like that, but had compassion for her. As she grew to womanhood, though, she betrayed Him and lusted after other gods. This both saddened and angered Yahveh. God’s anger toward Israel, because of her rebellious heart and idolatrous prostitution, is clearly seen in Ezekiel 16. God’s love


168 Dt. 28:49-68; 31:16.

169 Jer. 16:14-16; 33:6-26; Hosea 1:10-11; Joel 2:18-19; Zephaniah 3:8-20; Rom. 9–11, etc.
and pain for her can also be felt:

16:44 As for your birth, on the day you were born, your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing. You weren’t rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths. 5 No eye looked with pity upon you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion upon you. Rather you were thrown out into the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born. 6 When I passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you while you were in your blood, ‘Live!’ Yes, I said to you while you were in your blood, ‘Live!’”

7:4 “I made you numerous, like the plants of the field. Then you grew up, became tall and reached the age for fine ornaments. Your breasts were formed and your hair had grown. Yet, you were naked and bare. 9 Then I passed by you and saw you and behold! You were at the time for love, so I spread My robe over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine,’ declares the Lord Yahveh.”

9:4 “Then I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. 10 I also clothed you with embroidered cloth and put sandals of badger skin on your feet and I wrapped you with fine linen and covered you with silk. 11 I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands and a necklace around your neck. 12 I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown upon your head. 13 Thus, you were adorned with gold and silver and your dress was of fine linen, silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey and oil and were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty.’

14:4 “Then your fame went forth among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect, because of My splendor which I bestowed upon you’ declares the Lord Yahveh. 15 But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame, and you poured out your harlotries on every passer-by who might be willing. 16 You took some of your clothes, made for yourself colorful shrines and played the harlot. Nothing like this has ever been or ever shall be.”

17:4 “You also took your beautiful jewels, made of My gold and of My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images that you might play the harlot with them. 18 Then you took your embroidered cloth and covered them and offered My oil and My incense before them. 19 Also, My bread, which I gave you, fine flour, oil and honey with which I fed you, you would offer before them for a soothing aroma. So it happened,’ declares the Lord Yahveh!”

20:4 Moreover, you took your sons and daughters, whom you had borne to Me, and sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter?! 21 You slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire!’

22:4 Besides all your abominations and harlotries, you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked, bare and squirming in your blood. 23 Then it came about after all your wickedness. ‘Woe! Woe to you!’ declares the Lord Yahveh! 24 that you built yourself a shrine and made yourself a high place in every square. 25 You built yourself a high place at the top of every street and made your beauty abominable, and you spread
your legs to every passer-by, to multiply your whoredom!"’ (Ezekiel 16:4-25)

The Jewish nation had proven unfaithful over the centuries. Yahveh was hurt and angry. He had given Judah her life, food, precious jewels and fine clothes, and a way of life that was divinely unique in the ancient world, but Judah had chosen to cast all that off for the lusts of the flesh. She would not restrain herself from being like the nations. Over many centuries God had warned her, but she had paid little attention to Him.

Yahveh charged Judah with ungratefulness, unfaithfulness, sacrificial idolatry, cult harlotry and child sacrifice. As the door opened to sacrificial idolatry and cult prostitution it also led to the placing of their infants in the fiery hands of the pagan gods (Ezk. 16:20-21). Judah followed all the nations around her, murdering her own sons and daughters, thinking that it was good. It is repulsive just to think about it. In worshipping the idols of wood and stone Judah had been deceived and lost all sense humanity.

Yahveh had given life to Judah and had exalted her as a free woman, but she chose to be enslaved to other gods. Left unchecked, the abomination spread like wildfire through both kingdoms. God had to deal with them. Both kingdoms were destroyed because of Israel’s lust for flesh—sensuous cult harlotry.

God’s punishment seems to have impressed itself upon the remnant that survived of the kingdom of Judah. After the Babylonian captivity (606-536 BC), never again do the Jewish people engage in sacrificial idolatry, cult prostitution or infant sacrifice. God had finally brought judgment upon His people. He severely punished them for their cult prostitution, etc. They had walked in the ways of the nations around them and had found out that there was an end to God’s gracious and loving long-suffering.

This historical background figures prominently into why Yakov gave the four rules on sacrificial-sexual idolatry to the Gentile believers first, some of whom, in spite of the Decree, would continue to walk in their paganism along with their ‘belief’ in Jesus (cf. 1st Cor. 10:21).

Yakov’s use of zinute (prostitution) means ‘cult prostitution.’ The context, word definitions and history of Israel point directly to this and nothing else. That’s not to say that common harlotry was non-existent, but the second rule that Yakov presented to the Gentile believer specifically dealt with cult harlotry. Any other suggestion as to its meaning (e.g. sexual immorality, unchastity, adultery, or even common prostitution) negates the history of cult harlotry within Israel, the biblical usage of zinute (primarily as cult harlotry), and its placement immediately after the first rule on sacrificial idolatry (which spoke of not eating meat sacrificed to an idol at the time of the sacrifice). With the first two rules speaking of sacrificial-sexual idolatry it’s not unreasonable to think that the third and fourth rules fall into the same category of sacrificial idolatry.

James was concerned about Gentile believers thinking that they could worship Jesus on the Sabbath and go to the temple of Diana on Sunday. The Apostle Paul would deal with cult prostitution among the Corinthians and other congregations he established (e.g. 1st Thess. 1:9; 4:1-8), and the Lord Yeshua Himself would come against it in Revelation (2:14, 20). What had happened in Israel’s past was happening among the Gentile believers in the days of Peter, Paul and John. If it could happen in ancient Israel, where God had commanded Israel not to do the things that the Gentiles did (Dt. 12:28-32), it could certainly happen among ‘former pagan’ Gentile believers in Yeshua, who had never known a God like Yahveh, nor His commandments, which were His way of living out their lives.

170 Ezek. 16:15-16, 18-22, 24-25; cf. 2nd Kings 16:3; 23:10.
171 See Jer. 29:10 and also 25:11-12.
James knew the primary biblical meaning for *zinute* (cult prostitution), as well as all the Jews there that day, and he was well aware of the underlying realities of *Judah and Tamar, Israel and Baal Peor* and *Cult Prostitution in Ancient Israel*. On the one hand, these four rules didn’t have anything to do specifically with ‘what the Gentiles must do to be saved’ (cf. Acts 15:1). On the other hand, it had everything to do with it. *Cult Prostitution in the Ancient World* will reveal that the entire Gentile world was immersed in cult prostitution. This is the reason why James gave the four rules to the Gentile believers first.
CULT PROSTITUTION IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

A brief sketch of cult prostitution in the ancient world will yield further understanding and insight concerning the vast extent of idolatry in the Gentile world. It will also help explain why Yakov wanted the converted pagan Gentiles to stay away from their former places of ‘worship.’

One of Alexander Hislop’s themes in his Christian classic, *The Two Babylons*, is that all the pagan religions had their prototype in ancient Babylon. The names of the gods and goddesses would change over time and in each nation, but their personalities and characteristics would basically remain the same. Because of this they could easily be traced back to their Babylonian prototype. It was in Babylon that cult prostitution began and would spread all over the Earth:

‘The Chaldean (Babylonian) Mysteries can be traced up to the days of Semiramis, who lived only a few centuries after the Flood and who is known to have impressed upon them the image of her own depraved and polluted mind. That beautiful…queen of Babylon was not only herself a paragon of unbridled lust and licentiousness, but in the Mysteries, which she had a chief hand in forming, she was worshipped as Rhea, the great ‘Mother’ of the gods, with such atrocious rites as identified her with Venus, the Mother of all impurity, and raised the very city where she had reigned to a bad eminence among the nations as the grand seat at once of idolatry and consecrated prostitution.’

Semiramis, known as both the Queen of Heaven and Ishtar in Nineveh (the English term for ‘Easter’) encouraged the worst lusts within man to surface and be validated as ‘worship.’ Cult harlotry in the ancient world was not only rampant, it was the accepted, noble and ‘godly’ fixture of pagan life. *ISBE* states:

‘The Code of Hammurabi allowed female prostitutes at any temple. The Gilgamesh Epic pictures such a woman in connection with the temple of Ishtar.’

Hammurabi (1810-1750 BC), noted for his Code of laws, was King of Babylon in the time of Father Abraham. One of the practices of the ‘enlightened’ Babylonian religion consisted in *every teenage daughter* losing her virginity in ‘honor’ of the Babylonian goddess Venus. *ISBE* writes that,

‘the Babylonians *compelled* every native female to attend the temple of Venus once in her life and to prostitute herself in honor of the goddess.’

This was *religion* in the Gentile world. *TDNT* adds that it,

‘was a national custom in…which even daughters of prominent families followed and to which no shame attached.’

This was the ancient Gentile world, carnal and deceived. Alexander Hislop writes of its spread:

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172 Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, p. 5. Read *The Two Babylons—The Full Hislop* for free and note the page differences in the TOC.


174 Hammurabi claimed to receive his laws, known as the Code of Hammurabi, from the god Shamash, the Babylonian god of justice. This Code, unlike earlier Sumerian laws, which ‘focused on compensating the victim of the crime,’ placed ‘greater emphasis on the physical punishment of the perpetrator.’


Cult Prostitution in the Ancient World

“We find from Herodotus that the peculiar and abominable institution of Babylon in prostituting virgins in honor of Mylitta was observed also in Cyprus in honor of Venus. But the positive testimony of Pausanias brings this presumption to a certainty. ‘Near this,’ says that historian, speaking of the temple of Vulcan at Athens, ‘is the temple of Celestial Venus, who was first worshipped by the Assyrians and after these by the Paphians in Cyprus and the Phoenicians who inhabited the city of Ascalon in’” Israel.¹⁷⁸

The Athenian Venus came to Athens from Assyria, which had gotten its Venus from Babylon. Hislop states that,

‘the Assyrian Venus…the great goddess of Babylon, and the Cyprian Venus were one and the same.’¹⁷⁹

Pausanias, whom Hislop quotes, didn’t realize that Celestial Venus had been worshiped before the time of the Assyrians, in Babylon, but such is the case because the Assyrian religion was modeled after the Babylonian system:

‘Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia, was built by Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, in express imitation of Babylon. Its religion would naturally correspond.’¹⁸⁰

Mylitta, whom Herodotus speaks of, was just another name for Venus, the prototype of whom was the Babylonian Queen Semiramis, deified.¹⁸¹ One of the ‘great’ goddesses of ancient Greece was Aphrodite, but she was just the Babylonian Queen by another name:

“This Babylonian queen was not merely in character coincident with the Aphrodite of Greece and the Venus of Rome, but was in point of fact the historical original of that goddess that by the ancient world was regarded as the very embodiment of everything attractive in female form and the perfection of female beauty; for Sanchuniathon assures us that Aphrodite or Venus was identical with Astarte, and Astarte being interpreted is none

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¹⁷⁸ Hislop, The Two Babylons, p. 157. Vulcan, in ancient Israel, was Molech, the god who devoured infants, causing them to be burned alive in sacrifice to him. That’s why Yahweh was so adamant against Israel sacrificing to him (Lev. 18:21; 20:1-5). Read The Two Babylons—The Full Hislop for free.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 304. ‘This, then, was the case with the goddess recognized as Astarte or Venus, as well as with Rhea. Though there were points of difference between Cybele or Rhea, and Astarte or Mylitta, the Assyrian Venus, Layard shows that there were also distinct points of contact between them. Cybele or Rhea was remarkable for her turreted crown. Mylitta or Astarte was represented with a similar crown (Layard, Nineveh and its Remains, vol. ii. p. 456). Lions drew Cybele or Rhea; Mylitta or Astarte was represented as standing on a lion (ibid.). The worship of Mylitta or Astarte was a mass of moral pollution (Herodotus, Historia, lib. i. cap. 199, p. 92). The worship of Cybele, under the name (Augustine, De Civitate Dei, lib. vi. cap. 8, tom. ix., p. 203).’

Ibid., p. 310: ‘We have evidence, further, that goes far to identify this title as a title of Semiramis. Melissa or Melitta (Apollodorus, Bibliotheca, vol. i. lib. ii. p. 110)—for the name is given in both ways—is said to have been the mother of Phoroneus, the first that reigned, in whose days the dispersion of mankind occurred, divisions having come in among them, whereas before, all had been in harmony and spoke one language (Hyginus, Fabulae, 143, p. 114). There is no other to whom this can be applied but Nimrod; and as Nimrod came to be worshipped as Nin, the son of his own wife, the identification is exact. Melitta, then, the mother of Phoroneus, is the same as Mylitta, the well known name of the Babylonian Venus, and the name, as being the feminine of Melitz, the Mediator, consequently signifies the Mediatrix.’
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

other than, ‘The woman that made towers or encompassing walls’ (i.e. Semiramis).*182 The Roman Venus, as is well known, was the Cyprian Venus and the Venus of Cyprus is historically proved to have been derived from Babylon.*183

“On the testimony of Augustine, himself an eye-witness, we know that the rites of Vesta, emphatically, ‘the virgin goddess of Rome,’ under the name of Terra, were exactly the same as those of Venus, the goddess of impurity and licentiousness. Augustine, elsewhere, says that Vesta, the virgin goddess, ‘was by some called Venus.’***184

The Gentiles gloried in licentious cult harlotry. It was authorized by their gods and goddesses. Only Yahveh, the God of the tiny Hebrew nation, came against the ancient world’s lustful worship of flesh.

Many times, by tracing the passing of a name from one language to another, the original name can be detected. An example of this is the Greek goddess Hestia, and the Roman version, Vesta. Hislop states,

‘In Greece she’ (Semiramis) ‘had the name of Hestia, and amongst the Romans, Vesta, which is just a modification of the same name.’185

Each city-state in ancient Greece had its founding god or goddess, as well as the importation of other gods and goddesses. *ISBE* states that families,

‘worshiped Hestia, goddess of the hearth, Zeus as protector of the courtyard, and their own gods and heroes…Each state worshiped Hestia, and also the god credited with its founding. Therefore, Athenians worshiped Athena, but Spartans venerated Zeus.’186

For a Gentile to worship many gods and goddesses was not uncommon—it was normal. This is the reason for the four rules. Cult harlotry was everywhere, and *TDNT* states that Corinth was especially noted for it:

‘the temple of Aphrodite, with its 1,000 hierodules,187 was famous, and an inscription recalls that the goddess answered their prayers for the threatened fatherland in a critical hour.’188

Cult harlotry thrived in Corinth. This is important in understanding the Apostle Paul when he writes about fornication (cult harlotry) in his letter to the Corinthians (1st Cor. 5, 6 and 10).189

Of course Aphrodite was not the only goddess or god that offered cult prostitution in Greece and other lands. *ISBE* writes:

‘Dionysus was worshiped sometimes in orgiastic frenzy…His attributes, that guaranteed

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182 Ibid., see pp. 30-32, 296-297, 318. The encompassing walls signified her association with her husband Nimrod who was the first to make walled cities. This provided men with protection from wild animals and human enemies, and being grateful for that, many submitted to him as the first human king.

183 Ibid., pp. 74-75.


185 Ibid., p. 77.


187 Sinclair, *Collins English Dictionary*, p. 728: ‘(in ancient Greece), a temple slave, esp. a sacral prostitute…from Greek hierodoulous.’ From hiero + doulos (slave). Hiero: ‘holy or divine’ that is to say, a holy slave (of the god) also known as a shrine prostitute.


189 These chapters will be discussed in the section, *Cult Prostitution In The Corinthian Assembly*, on p. 76ff.

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Cult Prostitution in the Ancient World

fertility, closely parallel those of Demeter, who also seems to have controlled agricultural cycles. Demeter was the mother goddess.

TDNT states that cult prostitution,

'was practiced by the class of hierodules whose payment accrued to the goddess. This type of prostitution was widespread in Asia Minor in cults of mother deities; it is also found, however, in Syria and Egypt. Through the Canaanite cults (Baal, Astarte), it penetrated into the religion of Israel.'

IBD writes that many statues have been found of naked goddesses:

'Numerous nude female figurines found throughout the Near East depict the goddesses who were venerated in sacred prostitution.'

This is only a small part of the picture of cult prostitution in the ancient Gentile world. In that world women usually had no rights. Perhaps this, along with satanic deception, and the fact that carnal lust is a very powerful urge of human nature, explains why cult harlotry was the way of life. The ancient peoples had a corrupt understanding of life in relation to God's holy standard (i.e. Mosaic Law). Sex, like the appetites of hunger and thirst, wasn't seen as needing restraint. As mentioned earlier, female babies in the ancient civilized world were seen as liabilities to be gotten rid of:

'Many cultures devalued female babies, so infant girls were often left to die, and then picked up by' cultic priests 'who raised them for ('sacred') prostitution.'

Ancient cult prostitution not only exploited females, but men as well. Greece and Canaan weren't the only places where cult homosexual prostitution (i.e. sodomy) was practiced and condoned. The Illustrated Bible Dictionary speaks of it prevailing in the countries of Syria and Phoenicia as well:

'In the Ugaritic texts of temple personnel we find the qdsim (kedishim, masculine plural for the singular, kadaysh) 'who were…male cult prostitutes. Explicit references to sacred prostitution in Syria and Phoenicia are found in the late texts of Lucian's De Dea Syria (2nd century AD). The prostitution of women in the service of Venus at Heliopolis (Baalbek) is attested as late as the 4th century AD.'

Still, ancient Canaan outdid all the other lands in terms of heterosexual, as well as homosexual, cult prostitution. This, along with infant sacrifice, was most likely what Yahveh meant when He said to Abraham that the sin of the land of Canaan hadn't been filled up, yet. UBD states that, 'Fertility cults nowhere controlled people more completely than in Canaan.' The people of Canaan were totally degenerate and given over to wickedness (see Lot; Gen. 19:1f.). This is why Joshua and Israel weren't to take any cap-

191 Ibid.
197 Gen. 15:16; see also Lev. 18:6-25, esp. vv. 24-25.
198 Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary, p. 512.
tives (Dt. 20:16-18). *DBI* explains the perverse symbolism behind cult prostitution:

‘Fertility cults that worshiped Baal advocated intercourse between worshipers and religious prostitutes, both male and female, to encourage the gods to bestow greater fertility on land, livestock and people.'

*TDOT* confirms that cult prostitution was part of the ancient lifestyle, both of the pagans and of Israel:

‘In Canaanite culture, extramarital relationships in connection with the fertility cult were common. Through sacral prostitution the harlot and her lover became consecrated individuals.’ Also, ‘Apostasy from Yahweh was frequently connected with participation in the Canaanite fertility cult with its sacral prostitution.’

*UBD* and *IBD* declare that Canaan was immersed in cult prostitution and speak of the three major goddesses of fertility:

‘The inhabitants of Canaan were addicted to Baal worship, which was conducted by priests in temples, and in good weather, outdoors in fields and particularly on hilltops called ‘high places.’ The cult included animal sacrifice, ritualistic meals and licentious dances. Near the rock altar was a sacred pillar or massebah, and close by, the symbol of the asherah, both of which apparently symbolized human fertility’ (i.e. ancient pornography). ‘High places had chambers for sacred prostitution by male prostitutes (kedishim) and sacred harlots (kedishoth; 1st Kings 14:23-24; 2nd Kings 23:7).’

‘the worship of the major Canaanite goddesses, Ashera, Astarte and Anath, involved sacred prostitution.’

Canaan was saturated with this form of worship. The reason given to justify cult harlotry had to do with ‘helping the gods’ to bring life-giving rain, and therefore, food for the people to live. To a people ignorant of the true God and His ways (i.e. Mosaic Law), this seemed reasonable:

‘The rainfall of winter and the drought of summer were believed to indicate that Baal had died and that there was a need for him to be brought to life again by magic rites.’

‘Similarly, the Canaanites believed that the gods could be helped to bring about fertility of the soil if the people fertilized one another in the places of worship. Therefore, there was a crude sexuality in the name of religion. Every Canaanite sanctuary had its own prostitutes for that purpose.’

‘Their votaries believed that they could stimulate the fertility of their crops by sympathetic magic when they engaged in intercourse.’

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201 Ibid., p. 100.
202 Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, p. 413. (Baal is another name for Molech.)
205 Ibid., p. 334.
Cult Prostitution in the Ancient World

‘In the Baal cult, spring festivals dramatized, in act, the mating of Baal with the goddess of fertility. Archaeological discoveries have revealed that the devotees of Baal practiced prostitution as a part of their worship.’

By linking Man’s need for food (life) to cult prostitution, Satan elevated lust to a divine duty. The Gentiles didn’t have the knowledge of the God of Israel and His standard concerning life and worship, so there was no restraining guide to their ‘religious’ behavior. So completely different were Yahweh’s rules that, for many centuries, His own people ran to the sin of sacrificial-sexual idolatry, all too happy to copy the pagan Gentiles around them.

In the days of James, the third largest city in the Roman Empire was Antioch, located in what was known as Syria, and is now southern Turkey. It was from this city that Paul and Barnabas were sent out to Jerusalem to determine what the Gentiles were to do in order to be saved (Acts 15:2-3, 22, 30, 35). In those days it was known as Syrian Antioch, to distinguish it from Pisidian Antioch (in what is now central Turkey). In speaking of Syrian Antioch, F. F. Bruce, with typical British understatement, writes:

‘The city’s reputation for moral laxity was enhanced by the cult of Artemis and Apollo at Daphne, five miles distant, where the ancient Syrian worship of Astarte and her consort, with its ritual prostitution, was carried on under Greek nomenclature.’

The repugnancy of this moral laxity, as Bruce speaks of, was dryly noted by the Roman satirist Juvenal, when he wrote that, ‘the sewage of the Syrian Orontes has for long been discharging itself into the Tiber.’ Even Rome, no paragon of virtue herself, could smell the stench of orgiastic cult harlotry that was pervading her from the East. James Pritchard describes the sensuality of Astarte worship from the Ras Shamra texts found in Ugarit (45 miles southwest of Syrian Antioch):

‘holy trees, symbols of the life force…show stylized trees growing out of the navel or the pudenda’ (vagina) ‘of a formalized goddess. Sexual intercourse under these holy trees was thought to transmit the potency and vitality of the goddess (Hos. 4:13-14).’

‘The female deity Asherah is referred to in the Bible as the consort’ (wife or companion) ‘of Baal (Judg. 3:7; 2nd Kgs. 23:4). These Asherahs and Astartes are often described as fertility goddessess. However, the female partner of the weather god appears to bare her breasts in an erotic pose rather than in a maternal gesture. Ancient Syrian seals, which depict her surrounded by stars as the queen of heaven, baring her breasts to the weather god striding across the hills, seem to confirm this.’

‘It is quite clear that prostitution was connected with the cult of Asherah (cf. 2nd Kgs. 23:7). In the same way, the goddess figurines found in’ Israel ‘from the 10th–6th centuries BC (described in the Bible as ‘teraphim’), are to be regarded not only as ‘nourishing goddessess’…but also as symbols of eroticism (see Prov. 5:19).’

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208 Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 224. ‘Antioch on the Orontes (modern Antakya in the Hatay province of Turkey), situated some eighteen miles upstream, was founded in 300 BC by Seleucus Nicator, first ruler of the Seleucid dynasty, and was named by him after his father, Antiochus.’
211 Ibid.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

Turning west to Rome, the ‘center of civilization’ at the time of James and Acts 15, it seems that all the gods of the conquered lands had conquered the citizens of Rome. The city was a mixture of, ‘Italian, Etruscan, Greek, Egyptian and oriental’ (i.e. Babylonian and Syrian, etc.) gods and goddesses.\(^\text{212}\) ISBE states:

‘The mysterious religion of Etruria first impressed the Roman mind, probably giving them the trinity of the Capitol (Jupiter, Juno, Minerva), which had come from Greece …Latium contributed the worship of Diana (from Aricia) and a Latin Jupiter. Two Latium cults, Hercules and Castor’ were there, and ‘the Sibylline Books’ were treated as ‘sacred scriptures for the Romans.’

‘The Greek trinity of ‘Demeter, Dionysus, and Persephone, under the Latin names of Ceres, Liber, and Libera,’ was there 500 years before Yeshua was born in Bethlehem, and the Greek god Apollo came to Rome about 450 BC.

‘Mercury, Asclepius, Dis, and Proserpina’ were relatively new arrivals in the ‘3rd cent. BC,’ but the ‘craving for more sensuous worship’ had the Greek deities entering ‘whole-sale and were readily assimilated.’

In the 2nd century BC, ‘Hebe entered as Juventas, Artemis as Diana,’ and ‘Ares as Mars …It was the Orient, however, that supplied what they really wanted. In 204 BC, Cybele, known as the great Mother, came from Pessinus’ (modern day Anatoli, central western Turkey, near ancient Pisidian Antioch). ‘Her coming gave an impetus to the wilder and more orgiastic cults and the mysterious glamor that captivated the common mind. It struck a fatal blow at the old Roman religion. Bacchus, with his gross immorality, soon followed.’ Although the ‘educated classes sank into skepticism’ concerning belief in the gods, ‘the populace’ was enthralled by ‘superstition’ and the pantheon of gods and goddesses.\(^\text{214}\)

So much for the glory that was Rome. Going through Athens, one of the most cultured and sophisticated cities of the world at that time, Paul observed that it was ‘full of idols’ (Acts 17:16). Confirming this Gentile lifestyle of sacrificial idolatry and cult prostitution, the New Testament declares that all Asia and the world worshiped Artemis (Diana). Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver idols of Artemis (Acts 19:24), speaks of how Paul’s preaching of Messiah Yeshua, as the one and only way, negatively affected his business and the worship of the goddess:

‘And not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be despised, and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship, should even be dethroned from her magnificence.’ (Acts 19:27)

Demetrius wasn’t lying. The whole world worshiped Diana (in one form or another). This brief survey into the ancient Western-Middle Eastern world reveals that cult harlotry was a major reality and morally upheld as right and proper. Into this milieu comes the God of Israel, in Yeshua, whose standard we can now appreciate, was quite radical, and as Demetrius attests, quite repulsive to many Gentiles.

The entire ‘civilized’ world was enmeshed in sacrificial-sexual idolatry—\textit{all} the Gentile peoples. The four prohibitions of Acts 15:20 put the Gentile believers on notice that their former ways of worship were not


\(^{213}\) Bromiley, \textit{The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia}, vol. four, p. 212.

\(^{214}\) Ibid., pp. 212-213.
God’s eyes: specifically Judah

Even as the Apostle Paul affirms, saying:

"In Mosaic Law, that is the knowledge of sin, because you have listened to the voice of Yahveh your God, to keep all His commandments, which I command you today, to do what is right in the eyes of Yahveh your God." (Deuteronomy 13:18)

Acceptable. Many of the Gentile believers in the days of the Apostles would not have considered cult prostitution a sinful act. Yakov was making sure that they understood what would be required of them immediately, or their very salvation would be in jeopardy.

Today, Western man doesn’t go to temples to worship their gods and goddesses this way. He has thrown off the wooden idols for ‘living idols’ (Hollywood movies, TV, ‘common’ harlots, whether paid or consensual, pornographic magazines, books and ‘games,’ etc.). These feed the same sexual lust and draw the same demons of harlotry. This kind of worship is openly flaunted and embraced by the Western world. Not much has changed since the days of ancient Canaan, Greece and Rome. Lustful sensuality is the religion of modern man and seen as ‘normal’ because ‘everyone does it.’

The next chapter, The Greek Perspective on the Second Rule, will confirm that Yakov’s second rule specifically addressed cult harlotry, and so all four rules will be seen as a conceptual unit against sacrificial-sexual idolatry, not some random rules given for table fellowship ‘in deference to the weaker (Jewish) brother.’ With table fellowship dissolving, the foundation is taken out from under those who teach that Mosaic Law isn’t for the Gentile. This is because the four rules are the first rules or laws taken from Mosaic Law, and subsequently, pave the way for the Gentile to learn the other rules of Torah, as he grows ‘in Messiah.’ The four rules were the first of many rules—the beginning of a new lifestyle for the Gentile. In learning Torah they would come to know the entire spectrum of Yeshua’s godly standard for their lives, as the Apostle Paul affirms, saying:

‘All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be perfect, fully equipped for every good work.’ (2nd Tim. 3:16-17)

Even though some congregations of Paul’s may have had a couple of his letters, many congregations in Judah and Syria, etc., didn’t even have one. The Scriptures that the Apostle refers to is the Old Testament, specifically Mosaic Law, because it’s Mosaic Law that reveals what sin is, and also, what is pleasing in God’s eyes:

“Therefore, by the deeds of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the Law is the knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20)

“because you have listened to the voice of Yahveh your God, to keep all His commandments, which I command you today, to do what is right in the eyes of Yahveh your God.” (Deuteronomy 13:18)
THE GREEK PERSPECTIVE ON THE SECOND RULE

The Hebraic Perspective on the second rule in Acts 15:20 revealed that Yakov meant cult harlotry, and even though he spoke Hebrew at the Council, years later Luke would write it down in Greek.215 Looking at the Greek word that Luke penned, and two other words closely associated with it, we’ll see the scope of what the word means, which conceptually is prostitution, the same as it was for the Hebrew word. Context and the ancient pagan culture will determine that cult prostitution is its meaning in the New Testament, as it did for the Hebrew word in the Old Testament. The Greek noun for the second rule is prostitution, while the verb means, ‘to prostitute.’ Another noun is the person who is a prostitute.

At the very least, the second rule of Yakov should be translated into English as prostitution, and as the other three rules relate to sacrificial idolatry, the only proper interpretation for the second rule is cult prostitution. Biblical fornication in the Tanach (Old Testament), as we have seen, is first and foremost, cult prostitution. This carries over into the New Testament meaning for the word prostitution as well. Unfortunately, the use of the term ‘fornication’ for English translations must be ruled out, specifically for Acts 15:20, and in general for all other texts, because its biblical definition is not understood today. Many wrongly think that fornication speaks of adultery or illicit sex.

Placing ‘fornication,’ ‘sexual immorality,’ or ‘adultery’ as the second rule of Acts 15:20 totally obscures what James meant for it, and for his theme of sacrificial-sexual idolatry. The second rule should be translated as ‘cult prostitution’ (or ‘cult harlotry’ or ‘cult whoredom’).

The Greek Noun Pornay’ah (Prostitution)

The Greek word for the second rule in Acts 15:20 is πορνεία (pornay’ah). Walter Bauer’s classic Greek lexicon defines it as,

‘prostitution, unchastity, fornication, of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse…of sexual unfaithfulness of a married woman Mt. 5:32; 19:9.’216

Pornay’ah in Acts 15:20 is translated in most English Bibles as ‘fornication,’ or ‘sexual immorality,’217 but never ‘prostitution,’ yet, the first word Bauer uses to define pornay’ah is prostitution. English Bible translators don’t use prostitution because they may want to give pornay’ah as wide a definition as possible because they don’t realize that the four rules deal with sacrificial idolatry, nor do they understand the theological dilemma in which they place themselves by declaring pornay’ah to be ‘every kind of unlawful

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215 Yeshua, the Apostles, and all the Jewish people in Judah and Galilee spoke Hebrew as their native language (see p. 18, note 71). It also seems that the first half of the Book of Acts was originally taken from a Hebrew source. Bivin, Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus, p. 5, states,

‘The first 15 chapters of Acts show some of the same textual evidence as the Synoptic Gospels of being originally communicated in Hebrew. They deal with events in Jerusalem and are recounted in a Hebrew context. In Acts 15:36 there is a shift to Greek as Luke himself begins to describe Paul’s missionary journeys.’

Yakov spoke Hebrew at the Assembly and it seems that the first half of Acts was originally recorded in the Hebrew language. This only emphasizes that the second rule should first be recognized as coming from a Hebraic context, with Greek confirming the meaning of the word for the second rule of Acts 15:20.


217 Fornication: for example; ASV, KJV, NASB and NRSV.

Sexual Immorality: for example; ESVS, HCSB, NET, NIV and NKJV.
The Greek Perspective on the Second Rule

sexual intercourse’ or ‘sexual immorality.’ If Yakov had meant sexual immorality, what would have been the criteria for establishing what was moral and what was immoral? In ancient ‘civilized’ Greece homosexuality was lawful and morally upheld by society (as it is today in ‘civilized’ countries). What standard would be used to define ‘lawful and moral’ for the Greek believer? If we leave it up to each country or person, there’s going to be a very wide range and diversity of what constitutes ‘lawful and moral,’ much of which God calls sin.

The criteria that establishes what ‘lawful and moral’ are in God’s eyes is Mosaic Law, as understood and interpreted by Yeshua, not by the Pharisees or the Rabbis. Theologians and translators, offering the widest possible definition for pornay’ah in Acts 15:20, place themselves in a tremendous theological bind. If the Law of Moses is not valid for Christians, as they teach, there’s no moral standard or law to condemn homosexuality. Someone might say, ‘but Paul writes that it’s wrong in Romans.’ Was Paul making up his own law, or did he take it from Mosaic Law (Lev. 18:22; 20:13)? If he took it from the Law, doesn’t that mean that the Law was still valid for Paul, and for all those Christians to whom he was writing?

It’s interesting that homosexuality and adultery are sins in the Old and the New Testament. Where did the New Testament get these from? Someone might say, ‘If it’s repeated in the New Testament then we have to abide by it,’ but the point is that God establishes it in Mosaic Law and it’s written of in the New because of Gentile sins. If Gentiles weren’t sinning in homosexuality and cult prostitution these things would not have appeared in the New Testament! Then someone would say, ‘If it’s not in the New, it’s not a sin!’ If a commandment, like the Sabbath, isn’t specifically re-commanded in the New, it doesn’t mean that God abolished it. Paul’s moral compass, for what constituted sin, was the Law of Moses. Paul also spoke of Mosaic Law, when the need arose, to justify a point he wanted to make. If Mosaic Law had been done away with, by him, as the Church teaches, he couldn’t have used the Law ‘to make his points.’

The Church teaches that the moral laws weren’t done away with. Aside from the fact that nowhere in the New Testament does it say that the moral law is the only thing that ‘passes over’ into the New Testament, we’re right back at our starting point: who defines moral law? Who defines what is moral and what is sin—God or Man?

If Christians are ‘free and under Grace’ then there’s no standard that proclaims sin except what is written in the New Testament. For things that the New Testament doesn’t seem to command, like the 7th day Sabbath, Passover, and the Mosaic dietary laws, the Church has made its own laws (Sunday, Easter and

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218 Kittel, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. VI, p. 593 states, ‘In the shameful vices of unnatural sex relations, which spread like a plague in the Graeco-Roman world of his day, Paul sees the outworking of a severe judgment of God.’ Rom. 1:18f. Just because someone ‘believed in Jesus’ it didn’t mean that homosexuality would be seen by him as sin. Even today there are ‘Christians’ who live lifestyles of homosexuality. Some churches even condone such lifestyles by the canard that they were ‘born that way’ and that ‘we must not judge people, but only love them.’ Mosaic Law condemns such ‘lifestyle choices,’ and so did Paul. Torah is the source from which Paul, a staunch proponent of grace, takes his warnings against homosexuality from. He also says that leaders must judge those in the congregation who sin, and he specifically states that homosexuals will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1st Cor. 6:1-11).

219 Rom. 3:20, 31; 7:7, 12, 14, etc.

220 See p. 76, note 299 for cites in 1st Corinthians where Paul confirms the point he’s making by citing Mosaic Law.

221 An accurate reading of the New Testament will confirm that the Sabbath, Passover and dietary laws, to name three major areas of Mosaic Law, are still valid, and that Sunday, Easter and Xmas are traditions of the Church that nullify God’s Word in the New Testament. See Law 102, Grace, Holiness and the Pharisaic Church, Hebrews and the Change of the Law, Law and Grace, No Longer Under the Law?, Take the Quiz! Five Quick Questions about the New Testament, The Feasts of Israel as Time Markers After the Resurrection, The Sabbath
ham, etc.) to take the place of God’s laws. If morality is defined by obedience to God and His Word, which is how it should be, then it’s certainly immoral, and therefore, sin, to keep Church laws that nullify God’s laws, especially when they aren’t commanded to be kept in the New Testament. Also, man-made standards vary within each Christian denomination. Pentecostals and Baptists condemn the mere drinking of a glass of wine as sin, while others, such as Luthers and Episcopalians uphold it. Who sets the standard? God and His Word, or the Church?222

There are five basic categories of sexual practices that are forbidden in the Law of Moses, each of whose punishment is death:

1. Adultery—death as the punishment (Lev. 20:10; Dt. 13:6-11).
2. Homosexuality—death as the punishment (Lev. 20:13).
3. Incest—‘cut off’ (a euphemism for death; Lev. 18:6-29; see also Lev. 20:3-5).
4. Prostitution (common or cultic)—death by fire for a daughter of a priest (Lev. 21:9; see point 5 for the common Israeli woman).
5. Sex outside of marriage—death by stoning (Dt. 22:13-21).223

All these sins can be forgiven today except cult harlotry because it severs the believer from Yeshua.224 All other sexual sins are forgivable through His blood, truly revealing the depth of God’s grace toward His people (Jn. 8:2-11; Acts 13:38-39). One who says that she believes in Jesus, but plays the cult harlot, has severed her covenant relationship with the God of Israel. She has cut herself off from the Lord by this sexually idolatrous act. She has chosen to worship and join herself to another god.

Bauer also writes that pornay’ah can be defined as fornication, but what does he mean by this term? Is it conceptually the same as prostitution, which was his first word, or is it defined by him as, ‘every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse,’ which immediately follows fornication? It’s hard to tell. *The Companion Bible: The Authorized Version of 1611* uses fornication for Acts 15:20, and this, as we’ll see, indicates cult prostitution. Fornication, at one time, seems to have referred to, or at least included, cult harlotry. The Companion Bible’s comment for the second rule states this: ‘In many cases the rites of *heathenism* involved uncleanness as an act of worship. Compare Num. 25:1-15.’225

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222 Alcohol isn’t condemned in the Bible, but alcoholism is. Many mistake the two for the same thing, but they’re not. To drink alcohol is not a sin and doesn’t make one an alcoholic. If it were a sin it would be stated as such somewhere in the Bible (cf. Dt. 14:26; Lk. 7:33-34; 1st Tim. 5:23). The point is that without the Law of Moses the Church has made up her own laws for sin, many of which contradict and nullify God’s Word. Isn’t this concept exactly why Yeshua told us to beware of the *teachings* of the Pharisees and the Scribes? (Mt. 15:1-20; Lk. 11:52)

223 An exception to this is if a man rapes a virgin who is not betrothed to another man (Dt. 22:28-29). He must pay her father fifty silver shekels and marry her (without the option of divorce) if the father consents (see also Lev. 19:20).

The punishment for a human being mating with an animal is death (Lev. 20:15-16), as well as a man knowingly laying with a woman in her menstrual period (Lev. 20:18), but these are asterisks, not basic categories.

224 This only speaks of one who is already a believer in Christ. If a cult harlot comes to believe in Yeshua, her sins will be forgiven and she will enter the Kingdom in purity.

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Heathenism speaks of idolatry. Their comment on Num. 25:1 says that Israel committed whoredom with the daughters of Moab in honor of the pagan god Baal Peor. This, of course, was sexual idolatry. In the note on Num. 25:3, The Companion Bible states that the Israelis prostituted themselves to the god. ‘Fornication,’ for The Companion Bible, specifically for Acts 15:20, is cult prostitution.\(^{226}\) It links pornay’ah in Acts 15:20 to cult prostitution in Num. 25 by using the word fornication. It’s possible that Bauer was defining it the same way, but it’s impossible to determine.

Another word Bauer uses to describe pornay’ah is unchastity. Unchastity is the opposite of chastity or being chaste. Chaste means,

‘not having experienced sexual intercourse; virginal...abstaining from unlawful or immoral sexual intercourse.’\(^{227}\)

Unchastity, then, is a term for one who has had sexual intercourse outside of marriage and is no longer a virgin. The use of the word unchastity for the second rule, though, opens up the interpretation to being seen as any kind of sexual immorality, or as Bauer states, ‘every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse.’ Pornay’ah is now being used in a general sense to describe, in a figurative way, one who goes beyond the biblical sexual norms. The Hebrew word also had this for its secondary meanings, but it primarily spoke of prostitution, and in its biblical context it overwhelmingly meant cult prostitution, yet it could be used in a derogatory way to describe an adulteress, a wizard, or anyone who sold himself to something other than God.

Even though a cult harlot would be unchaste, this word obviously wouldn’t reveal what Yakov meant, for just in and of itself, no one would be able to understand that Yakov was speaking specifically of cult harlotry. Therefore, unchastity is a false and misleading word when placed as the English translation for the second rule. This is also true for ‘sexual immorality.’

Another serious theological problem arises when Bauer states that pornay’ah is ‘sexual unfaithfulness of a married woman, Mt. 5:32; 19:9.’ This, of course, is adultery (an adulteress). One could call an adulteress, a ‘harlot,’ but this is a derogatory term for her. It’s not the specific description of what she was. What Bauer defines as adultery for both biblical cites (pornay’ah, Mt. 5:32; 19:9) doesn’t mean adultery at all, but as we’ll see, ‘cult harlotry.’\(^{228}\) Bauer falls into the same deep pit that most theologians do when they think that Jesus declared that ‘only for adultery’ can a biblical divorce take place. This isn’t what Jesus said nor meant (more on this in the chapter on Jesus and Divorce; p. 67f.).

In his initial definition Bauer gives no indication that the word can mean cult prostitution. He only presents ‘prostitution.’ However, in a veiled comment further on in the lexicon he speaks of ‘idolatry...pagan cults’ and ‘sexual debauchery,’ so, cult prostitution seems to be part of his definition for ‘fornication’ (pornay’ah), albeit, ‘a hard to find’ part. He writes:

‘fig., in accordance w. an OT symbol of apostasy from God, of idolatry; from the time of Hosea the relationship betw. God and his people was regarded as a marriage bond. This

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\(^{226}\) In Israel and Baal Peor (p. 32f., above), this prostitution was specifically seen as cultic, centering around the worship of Baal (Num. 25).


\(^{228}\) The two Greek words for fornication in Mt. 5:32 and 19:9 have one letter difference because 5:32 is the genitive case (‘of’), while 19:9 is the dative case (indirect object), but they are the same Greek word, pornay’ah (prostitution).
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usage was more easily understandable because many pagan cults (Astarte, Isis, Cybele, et al.), were connected with sexual debauchery (cf. Hosea 6:10; Jer. 3:2; 9; Rev. 19:2).²²⁹ The Greek word pornay’ah conceptually lines up with its Hebraic counterpart for both forms of prostitution (common and cultic). Sexual idolatry was the grand design of pagan worship. Bauer speaks of ‘sexual debauchery’ and links it with pagan cults (Isis and Cybele, etc.). When Israel did this they severed themselves or apostatized from God, as we saw in both Israel and Baal Peor (p. 32ff.) and Cult Prostitution in Ancient Israel (p. 37ff.). Yakov wanted the Gentile believers to realize that worship of Diana, Zeus, or Isis, etc., would destroy their covenant with the Jewish Savior. Paul, too, rebuked the Christian Gentiles in Corinth for this very thing, actually using the example of Israel at Baal Peor. He said to them that it was written for their instruction and benefit. Would he have done that if Mosaic Law ‘had been done away with’? TDNT states,

‘The judgment which smote the Israelites, the fore-fathers of Christians (1 Cor. 10:1), in the wilderness when they fell victim to idolatry and lust, and thus tempted God, took place as an example…10:8, 11.’²³⁰

The reference that TDNT makes to 1st Cor. 10:8 is the sacrificial-sexual idolatry of the Baal Peor affair. Paul, writing about it (fornication; KJV) points directly to that specific orgy with his use of ‘23,000:’²³¹

⁶Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.⁷ Neither be ye idolators, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.⁸ Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.’ (1st Cor. 10:6-8 KJV)

‘Fornication’ in 1st Cor. 10:8 should read ‘cult harlotry.’ Paul was actually admonishing the Corinthians: ‘Neither let us commit cult harlotry!’ It would be a major problem among the Gentile Christians. How could it not be?

Other Greek lexicons also confirm ‘harlotry’ as the basic conceptual meaning of pornay’ah, which contextually becomes ‘cult harlotry’ for most cites in the New Testament. Wesley Perschbacher writes that pornay’ah in Acts 15:20 means,

‘fornication, whoredom, Matt. 15:19; Mark 7:21; Acts 15:20, 29.’ adultery, Matt 5:32; 19:9; incest, 1st Cor. 5:1…from the Hebrew, put symbolically for idolatry, Rev. 2:21; 14:8.’²³²

Fornication for Perschbacher, is seen as prostitution and whoredom, as Bauer wrote of. Perschbacher notes that the second problem for Acts 15:20 is fornication or whoredom. It’s unfortunate that translators don’t follow suit and place whoredom there. Even though it wouldn’t be specifically what James had in mind, it would be a major step up from ‘sexual immorality’ or ‘unchastity.’ Again, though, as with Bauer, it’s hard to understand what Perschbacher means by ‘fornication,’ although with ‘whoredom’ following it, it would seem to suggest that it’s similar, but not necessarily cultic. It also may just be a general reference for illicit

²³¹ See p. 87, note 343 for why Paul says 23,000, and not 24,000, as is written in Num. 25:9.
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sex and sexual immorality, etc.

Perschbacher writes of idolatry in Revelation being symbolic, but as we’ll see, it was also actual sacrificial-sexual idolatry. He, too, thinks the Greek word can be used for the term ‘adultery,’ citing Mt. 5:32 and 19:9, and so, he falls into the same pit that Bauer did before him. It’s not that an adulteress couldn’t be called a whore or a harlot (in a derogatory fashion), but it’s not the principle meaning. The Greek definition expands to include those who are incestuous, adulterous or homosexual, etc., but only as a degrading slur. Perschbacher is wrong for translating pornay’ah as ‘adultery’ in Matthew. As we’ll see, there’s not one cite in the New Testament to validate the use of pornay’ah (harlotry) as adultery.235 Timothy Friberg, in his lexicon, expands pornay’ah to include everything sexual, stating,

‘generally, of every kind of extramarital, unlawful, or unnatural sexual intercourse, fornication, sexual immorality, prostitution…a synonym for μοιχεια’ moikay’ah ‘(marital) unfaithfulness, adultery (Mt. 5:32)… metaphorically, as apostasy from God through idolatry (spiritual) immorality, unfaithfulness (Rev. 19:2).’234

For Friberg, as with others, the word can mean any number of different things, with ‘prostitution’ coming at the end (of his first sentence). Pornay’ah can be used to describe things other than prostitution, as we’ve seen, but it’s not the primary meaning of the word in the New Testament, and the Greek lexicons should point that out. If they don’t, who will?

Friberg, too, falls into that same crowded pit that Bauer and Perschbacher are in. He thinks that adultery constitutes a biblical divorce (‘Mt. 5:32’) or as he states, pornayah is ‘a synonym for’ adultery. Also, Revelation is a book that speaks of actual cult harlotry among Christian believers, but Friberg only mentions it in a metaphorical or figurative way, as Perschbacher did, yet, in chapter two, Jesus Himself comes against cult harlotry in two of the seven assemblies in what is now western Turkey (Rev. 2:14, 20-21).

To understand what James meant when he gave the second rule, it should be obvious that the primary meaning of the word should be the first consideration, since no secondary meaning can be inserted without first proving that the primary meaning isn’t meant. Translators, however, have failed to follow this basic principle.

The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament also fumbles over pornay’ah. It states that the word,

‘occurs only 3 times’ (in Acts) ‘in verses recording the prohibitions of the apostolic decree, 15:20, 29 and 21:25…There is no insistence on the Jewish Law, only on the observance of minimal requirements for the interrelationships of Jewish and Gentile Christians, 15:28. Among these is the prohibition of fornication.’235

‘The whole decree is thus presented, not as a ritual order, but as a short moral catechism which mentions negatively the three chief sins (idolatry, murder and fornication’).236

‘The surprising combination of πορνεια’ (pornay’ah, fornication: Acts 15:20) ‘with die-

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233 The Apostle Paul uses πορνεια (pornay’ah) in 1st Cor. 5:1 to describe the man who slept with his father’s wife. Most theologians describe this as incest. It certainly was incestuous, but there’s a twist to it—more on this in the section, Incest in Corinth (p. 78f.)


236 Ibid., p. 593.
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tary regulations is due to the fact that the four prohibitions are based on Lv. 17 and 18. πορνευσα (pornay’ah) ‘here is marrying within the prohibited degrees, which acc. to the Rabbis was forbidden ‘on account of fornication,’ Lv. 18:6-18.\(^{237}\)

TDNT presents its theology of the passage as though it were the only possible interpretation. James made the decree as, ‘a short moral catechism’ that had no bearing on Gentile observance of the Law ('There is no insistence on the Jewish Law'), and yet, TDNT mentions Lev. 17–18 (commandments from the Law) as the basis for the rules! Not marrying one’s sister or aunt, etc., are very specific laws within the Law of Moses (Lev. 18:6-18).

Witherington rightly rejects any connection to these prohibited marriages in Leviticus because the term pornay’ah ‘is not used to describe these sexual sins’ in the Septuagint.\(^{238}\) TDNT doesn’t have a biblical basis for linking pornay’ah in Acts 15:20 with the forbidden relationships of Leviticus 18, only a poor rabbinic basis. The Rabbis, like their Christian counterparts, weren’t using the primary meaning of biblical fornication, but one of the secondary meanings that came about more than a thousand years after Moses wrote Torah. More on that in the section on Jesus and Divorce (specifically p. 69, and note 280).

TDNT presents table fellowship (interrelationships) as the reason why James gave the rules, but this interpretation is not based on a correct understanding of the four rules. TDNT also states that the four rules spoke to the three chief sins of idolatry, murder and fornication, but murder, as we’ll see, cannot possibly be what Yakov meant by blood (rule #4), as we’ll see in the section, The Fourth Rule: Blood, p. 112f. TDNT also says that the four rules were the only rules for the Gentile (minimal requirements for fellowship), but this, too, is a faulty understanding of Acts 15:28, which speaks of not burdening the Gentile with anything more than these (four) necessary rules because the Gentile needed to know them immediately, in order to understand that sacrificial-sexual idolatry would nullify his salvation.

Bauer listed prostitution first and might have used it for translating fornication, while Perschbacher used whoredom as the translation of the word in Acts 15:20, but we couldn’t determine if cultic was part of it. Although prostitution and whoredom aren’t cult harlotry, they’re better than what English Bibles have now. Friberg muddied the waters by ‘throwing everything in’ about pornay’ah, so that all sexual sins were on equal footing (e.g. ‘every kind of extramarital’ sex). He spoke of prostitution, but it seemed like an ‘add on.’ Unfortunately, none of them presented cult prostitution as the New Testament’s primary meaning of pornay’ah. Yet, we’ll see that it certainly is the overwhelming meaning for the word in the section on Cult Prostitution in the New Testament (p. 101f.).

TDNT tried to link pornay’ah (prostitution) with the forbidden marriages of Lev. 18, but if that was correct Yakov would have mentioned more relating to prohibited marriage partners. At the very least, he might have mentioned that a believer should only marry another believer (Mt. 19:7-9; 1st Cor. 7:39). Furthermore, as Witherington pointed out, pornay’ah is never used in speaking of the forbidden marriages in the Septuagint. ‘Incestuous relationships,’ as sinful as they are, isn’t what Yakov meant for the second rule. TDNT’s theology of table fellowship and ‘dietary regulations,’ along with its interpretation that blood relates to murder, isn’t what Yakov had in mind, either.

The Companion Bible of 1611, with its ‘fornication,’ was accurate. From its cite in Acts 15:20 it pointed directly to the Baal Peor fiasco in Num. 25, revealing that fornication for them was sexual idolatry (cult

\(^{237}\) Ibid.

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prostitution). This seems that, at one time, fornication properly related to what pornay’ah meant.

The definitions in the Greek lexicons will narrow considerably when they speak of the person (pornay; i.e. a prostitute) who practices pornay’ah. It won’t primarily have anything to do with adultery, incest, homosexuality or promiscuity. This, in turn, will allow prostitution to take its rightful place as the basic meaning for the second rule, with context, word usage in the Old and New Testaments, and Israeli and pagan history supplying the specific meaning of cult prostitution. Incest, adultery and pre-marital sex are sins that can be forgiven, but cult prostitution technically cannot be forgiven. The only sins that cannot be forgiven are blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and apostasy (1st Tim. 4:1; Heb. 6:4-6). These are direct frontal attacks on the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. Believers who become, or use, cult harlots sever themselves from the covenant that they have with the Father through Yeshua.

The Greek Verb Pornu’oh (to Prostitute)

Walter Bauer writes that the Greek verb πορνεύω (pornu’oh) means, ‘to prostitute, practice prostitution or sexual immorality.’ Using pornu’oh for ‘sexual immorality’ is more of a general ‘catch-all’ than an actual description of what a person might do, but Bauer describes the root of the word when he says it means, ‘to prostitute, practice prostitution.’

Perschbacher is more focused with his definition than Bauer. He says it means,

‘to commit fornication or whoredom, 1st Cor. 6:18; 10:8…from the Hebrew, to commit spiritual fornication, practice idolatry.’

Perschbacher opts for two descriptions of pornu’oh, which are the biblical meanings. With him having ‘fornication or whoredom,’ and referring to 1st Cor. 6:18 and 10:8, it means sexual idolatry. It’s unfortunate that he didn’t specify it. Also, it should be cult whoredom instead of just whoredom. 1st Cor. 6:18 addresses cult harlotry, while 10:8 speaks of the Baal Peor catastrophe. Thousands of Hebrews lost their lives because they ate the meat sacrificed to Baal, worshiped Baal and committed cult harlotry.

Perschbacher also brings in the ‘spiritual’ aspect. This can relate to a person’s walk with God; from actual cult harlotry to any one of a number of other things (e.g. magic, astrology, unfaithfulness, etc.).

Friberg states that pornu’oh means,

‘generally, practice sexual immorality, commit fornication, live without sexual restraint (1st Cor. 6:18)…metaphorically practice idolatry (Rev. 17:2).’

Friberg again presents a broad definition with ‘sexual immorality’ first and to ‘live without sexual restraint.’ One is hard pressed to understand that ‘harlotry’ is the root of the word, and that cult harlotry is the primary biblical meaning. His living ‘without sexual restraint’ can be taken to mean the general attitude of anyone, and his use of metaphorically tells us he doesn’t see the harlotry in Revelation as literal.

These men will change their general descriptions to a very specific one when they describe the person who is a biblical fornicator.

The Greek Noun Pornay (Prostitute)

The Greek noun that is associated with Yakov’s second rule is πορνή (pornay). It describes the person who commits prostitution—a prostitute. The lexicons now become very focused. Bauer says that it’s a,

‘prostitute, harlot. 1 Cor. 6:15. fig. (Is. 1:21; 23:15f.; Jer. 3:3; Ezek. 16:30f.); as the designation of a government hostile to God and his people, Rev. 17:15f.’

There’s no reference to an adulteress or to someone promiscuous or anyone else that might be mistakenly placed into the category of ‘sexual immorality’ or a ‘sexual sin of any kind.’ Bauer’s definition, although limited in not mentioning a cult prostitute, gives the basic meaning of pornay’ah (prostitution) as one who is a harlot. Actually, his reference to 1st Cor. 6:15 speaks of a cult harlot, although most Bibles only have ‘harlot.’ (He also speaks of its figurative use.)

Perschbacher agrees with Bauer, adding ‘whore,’ but then writes ‘an unchaste female.’ This clouds the issue. When his cite is looked up, though, this ‘unchaste female’ is none other than a prostitute. He defines pornay as,

‘a prostitute, whore, harlot, an unchaste female, Matt. 21:31-32; from the Hebrew, an idolatress, Rev. 17:1, 5, 15.’

The ‘unchaste female’ of which Perschbacher speaks of for ‘Matt. 21:31-32’ are prostitutes (NASB) or harlots (KJV):

‘“Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.”’ (Matt. 21:31-32; NASB)

In translating pornay in Mt. 21:31-32 as an ‘unchaste female,’ Perschbacher misses the Lord’s point. Yeshua wasn’t speaking about an unchaste female per se—these women were prostitutes as both the NASB and KJV bring out. ‘Unchaste’ describes their immoral character, but it certainly doesn’t describe who they were.

Perschbacher does recognize, however, that ‘from the Hebrew,’ the woman can be an idolatress. This speaks of sexual idolatry (harlotry plus idolatry), which is cult harlotry and confirms what we saw from the Hebrew word zonah. His ‘idolatress’ is also linked to the Harlot or Whore of Babylon (Rev. 17:1, 5), which is certainly a major reference to cult harlotry, if ever there was one.

The biblical noun should not be watered down to include an adulteress or an unchaste female. L. Ryken, in typical British understatement, speaks of the difference between a harlot and an adulteress:

‘A prostitute, also called a harlot, is a person who provides sexual activity in exchange for material security. Generally a woman, she is distinguished from an adulterer by her lack of discrimination in partner choice.’

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244 Ryken, Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, p. 676.
It’s the harlot’s job to corral as many men as she can, and she certainly wouldn’t say that she was choosing a partner or having ‘an affair.’ A common harlot also calls attention to herself by the way she dresses and acts so that she will attract as many men as she can.

On the other hand, the adulteress is not looking for anyone to detect her. The adulteress usually confines herself to one man in any given time period of her adultery, but even if she has many lovers, she is usually very secretive about it.

An adulteress shouldn’t be labeled a whore or prostitute except in a derogatory way. This is the way the Scriptures speak of Israel in relation to Yahveh. When Israel practiced cult prostitution she was called an adulteress by Yahveh because she was in a covenant-marriage with Him, but the actual practice of her unfaithfulness was cult prostitution in the midst of sacrificial idolatry.

Friberg writes that pornay means,

   to ‘sell…literally, a woman who practices sexual immorality as a means of making a living; harlot, prostitute, whore, 1st Cor. 6:15).’245

Friberg reveals that his definition for ‘sexual immorality’ can contain paid harlots and prostitutes. There’s no mention of an adulteress, but there’s also no mention of a cult harlot.

All three lexicons speak of 1st Cor. 6:15 referring to common harlotry, but upon closer examination (Cult Prostitution in Corinth; p. 79f.) we’ll see that it’s cult harlotry that Paul wrote about.

The Greek lexicons, once searched out, present the primary meaning of πορνεια (pornay’ah), and two Greek derivatives as prostitution (cultic or common), and those who practice it (prostitutes). An adulteress can be classified under pornay’ah, but it should have been noted, only in a derogatory way.

From authoritative Greek and Hebrew sources, Yakov’s second rule speaks of cult prostitution. This is further supported by his first rule prohibiting the eating of sacrificial meat at the pagan sacrifice.

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SCHOLARSHIP AND THE SECOND RULE

The understanding of the four rules addressing sacrificial-sexual idolatry hinges upon the second rule being cult prostitution. Four scholars see the rule as cult harlotry (Knowling, Bivin, Witherington and Hegg), while others consider it a possibility among other interpretations (Williams, Wycliffe and Stern).

It’s very telling, though, that scholars of the caliber of I. Howard Marshall and F. F. Bruce don’t even mention it. Bruce believes that fornication relates to the unlawful marriages in the Law of Moses. The second rule for him means that Gentiles,

‘should conform to the Jewish code of relations between the sexes instead of remaining content with the pagan standards.’

Bruce tries to explain how the Gentiles could be commanded to walk in the Law of Moses by saying that they kept the rules, not because they had to, but ‘voluntarily’ for table fellowship, however, this ‘sleight of hand’ theology is unacceptable. First of all, Gentiles had no say in the forming of the Decree (to accept it voluntarily), and second, one can’t be seen to be doing something voluntarily if it’s commanded of him. Third, there’s no mention in Acts 15 that the rules are for ‘table fellowship.’

Marshall believes that the second rule should be translated as,

‘unchastity, variously understood as illicit sexual intercourse or as breaches of the Jewish marriage law…which forbade marriage between close relatives, Lv. 18:6-18.’

*TDNT* presented the same understanding for the second rule as Marshall, but Witherington dismantled their interpretation by noting that the Septuagint never refers to the prohibited marriages as *pornay’ah*. R. J. Knowling saw the theological conundrum that taking rules from the Law would entail—the Gentile would not be on equal footing with the Jews who kept all the Law. He also negated the rules coming from the Noahide laws, as four of the seven laws of Noah aren’t even covered in the Decree.

David Williams timidly suggests the possibility that a connection exists between the first and second rules, but doesn’t pursue it nor declare that the second rule is cult prostitution. He, too, goes on to say that it might pertain to the forbidden marriages of the Law:

‘there may have been an intended connection between these two’ (pollutions of idols and sexual immorality) ‘for idolatry often involved immorality; but immorality is sometimes taken to mean marriage within the forbidden decrees (cf. Lev. 18:6-18).’

David Stern clouds the issue by listing all the possibilities, including cult prostitution, but suggests none as to what Yakov meant. With fornication being ‘everything’ it effectively ceases to be the rule that pulls all the rules together to form Yakov’s conceptual unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry. Stern says that the second rule is,

‘any form of sexual immorality…sexual unions outside of marriage…along with homo-

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248 Kittel, TDNT, vol. VI, p. 592, and also, p. 57 above.


251 Williams, Acts, p. 266.
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sexual behavior, temple prostitution and other improper practices.\textsuperscript{252}  

Wycliffe sees \textit{cult prostitution} as a possibility for the second rule in Acts 15:20 and says that it was \textit{extremely common} in the world at that time, but does not stand by their insight, stating that it might also speak of ordinary prostitution:

'fornication may refer to immorality in general or to religious prostitution in pagan temples. Such immorality was so common among Gentiles that it mentioned special attention.'\textsuperscript{253}

Some scholars recognize that Yakov \textit{could have} been speaking about cult prostitution, but R. J. Knowling, who wrote his \textit{Acts of the Apostles} in 1900, presented the second rule squarely as such. He stated, 'the heathen view of impurity was very 'lax throughout the Roman empire.'\textsuperscript{254}

‘Impurity,’ as we’ll see for Knowling, refers to cult prostitution. He wrote how some thought that the second rule referred to the forbidden marriages of the Mosaic Law, but he didn’t accept that interpretation because of the way the word was \textit{used throughout the New Testament}!

‘An attempt has been made to refer the word here to the sin of incest, or to marriage within the forbidden decrees, rather than to the sin of fornication…but others take the word in its \textit{general sense as it is employed elsewhere in the NT}…from the way in which women might be called upon \textit{to serve impurely in a heathen temple}…to which \textit{religious obligation}, as Zockler reminds us, some have seen a reference in the word here…we see the need and the likelihood of such a \textit{specific enjoinder against the sin of fornication}.'\textsuperscript{255}

\textit{Fornication} for Knowling meant cult prostitution. This was evident to him from the way the word was used throughout the New Testament and from how Gentile women were called upon to present themselves for service at the ‘heathen temple.’ It’s also seen in his statement that the pagan \textit{religious obligation} dictated, ‘a specific enjoinder against the sin of fornication.’ This could only be \textit{religious} if it were cult harlotry, as opposed to common prostitution.

David Bivin, even though he thinks that ‘blood’ and ‘strangled’ speak of dietary regulations, believes that \textit{pornay’ah} in Acts 15:20 should be,

‘cult prostitutes…’Unchastity’ is a poor translation. The Hebrew equivalent of the Greek noun \textit{primarily} has to do with \textit{prostitution}.'\textsuperscript{256}

Witherington, too, states that \textit{pornay’ah} is \textit{prostitution}, and adds that cult prostitution is part of the basic meaning:

‘the term \textit{πορνεῖα} (pornay’ah) ‘in its most basic meaning refers to prostitution, including so-called sacred prostitution.'\textsuperscript{257}

Witherington also writes that if James had meant adultery he would have used the Greek word for adul-


\textsuperscript{253} Pfeiffer, \textit{The Wycliffe Bible Commentary}, p. 1152.


\textsuperscript{255} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{256} Bivin, \textit{Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus}, p. 109 and note *.

While Knowling and Bivin knew that the second rule meant cult prostitution, only Witherington and Hegg understood it to be cult prostitution and that the four rules were a unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry. It’s very sad that over the last 1,800 years only a few have been able to see the second rule as cult prostitution, while fewer yet have understood the four rules as the basic unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry that it is, and yet, even with that understanding Witherington and Hegg blunder. This correct biblical understanding opens the theological door for Mosaic Law to come through, even though Witherington didn’t realize this aspect of it.

The majority of Christian scholars don’t understand that pornay’ah in Acts 15:20 should be translated as cult prostitution. It certainly can’t be because of its usage in the Scriptures or for lack of definitions in the Hebrew and Greek lexicons, although one does have to hunt for it. It’s because they’ve been deceived into thinking that the four rules were for ‘table fellowship,’ and seeing pornay’ah as cult prostitution doesn’t fit into table fellowship. Their preconceived theology that ‘the Law isn’t for Christians’ excludes cult prostitution from their radar screen of possibilities, but even among those who understand pornay’ah as cult prostitution, their anti-Law theology prohibits them from seeing the four rules as a package deal on sacrificial-sexual idolatry. Knowling and Bivin fall into this category.

It’s understandable, though, because Church teaching on the Law creates a dark veil over the eyes of most theologians. These scholars are experts in their field, and yet, they don’t realize the heresy that they believe and propagate. The power of heretical teaching is deception that leads to false practice. This is why Messiah Yeshua came against heretical teaching so strongly among His own Jewish people (Mt. 15:1-20; Lk. 1:29-33; Rev. 22:16).

It’s a massive theological shift to think about, let alone accept, that Mosaic Law is valid for Christians. Only Hegg correctly understands that the Law isn’t done away with by the decision of James and his four rules, yet unfortunately, Hegg also attaches a dietary interpretation to both ‘strangled’ and ‘blood,’ something that we’ll see isn’t a correct theological interpretation of Acts 15:20. (Worse than that, though, is that Hegg teaches Gentile circumcision, which is a major heresy because it takes the Gentile out of the New Covenant and places him back under the Old.)

The second rule of James has nothing to do with prohibited marriages, adultery or pre-marital sex. Prostitution is the correct general definition for the rule, and as seen from the Hebrew and Greek word meanings, the ancient pagan reality, and scholars, it primarily speaks of cult prostitution. The term fornication seems to have meant cult harlotry, but unfortunately, the popular definitions of fornication present the wrong understanding, and so, the word fornication should not be used today.

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258 Ibid.
260 For why it’s biblically wrong for a male Gentile believer to be circumcised for religious reasons (i.e. to keep Passover and/or the Law) see Gentile Circumcision? Covenantal physical circumcision, which is the only circumcision in the Bible, is a circumcision that is done in order to enter into the Covenant of Father Abraham and to keep Passover and the Law, and it’s totally different from medical circumcision even though the two may look identical.
Scholarship and the Second Rule

**Popular Definitions of Fornication**

Although the ASV, KJV, NASB and the NRSV use the word *fornication* for Acts 15:20, popular definitions of it make the English word very problematic to use. Even with scholarly lexicons, the proper definition is veiled more times than not, and much more so for common sources. *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* states this about *fornication*:

‘The worship of idols is naturally mentioned as fornication (Rev. 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3; 19:2) as also the defilement of idolatry as incurred by eating the sacrifices offered to idols (Rev. 2:21)...At the present time, adultery is the term used of such an act when the person is married, fornication when unmarried.’

*Unger’s* first sentence is much too general and misses the biblical reality of cult prostitution by saying that the ‘worship of idols’ and the ‘eating of sacrifices’ constitutes fornication, but there’s no mention of sexual idolatry as the basis or core of fornication. This is very strange for a biblical dictionary, but it gets worse. The second part states, at ‘the present time’ sexual intercourse outside of marriage is ‘fornication’ (‘fornication when unmarried’). This seems to be how many people use it today, but it’s not the biblical definition for fornication.

*Unger’s* definition excludes married people from the ability to commit fornication because they classify that as *adultery*. This doesn’t line up with the biblical definition at all. Nowhere is that distinction seen. In other words, it doesn’t matter if a person is married or not, they can still commit biblical fornication, which is cult prostitution. *Unger’s* also says that fornication can only be applied to single people (‘when unmarried’), but this contradicts Yeshua. He says that only for *fornication* (KJV Mt. 5:32; 19:9) can a biblical divorce (between two believers) take place. Obviously, the fornicator can be married.

Unfortunately for *Unger’s*, there’s no mention of harlotry. As this is the basic meaning of the word, their definition falls far short and is very misleading. They give a definition for ‘the present time’ (adultery), which doesn’t match the biblical reality. This is totally unacceptable for a biblical dictionary on something this significant.

*Webster’s Dictionary* is a popular source that people might turn to in order to understand what *fornication* in their English Bible means. At this point, though, *Webster’s* lacks biblical credibility. Fornication for *Webster’s* is sexual intercourse between persons other than a man and his wife. This would include both married and single people, but doesn’t speak specifically of prostitution. Fornication for *Webster’s* is either adultery or promiscuity (sex outside of marriage). The reality that biblical fornication is cult prostitution is absent. The word has taken on a popular definition.

*Collins English Dictionary* states that fornication is,

‘voluntary secular intercourse outside marriage...between two persons of the opposite sex, where one is or both are unmarried.’

Again we find a definition that rests on promiscuity, which can also be adulterous. There’s no mention of prostitution, and cult prostitution cannot fall into their framework because *Collins* speaks of ‘secular in-

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tercourse.’ They further state that fornication is ‘sexual immorality in general, esp. adultery.’\(^{264}\)

The Internet encyclopedia *Wikipedia* says that the term fornication comes from the Latin word *fornicatio-nis*, which means, ‘an archway or vault,’ because in Rome, *harlots* ‘could be solicited there,’ and so, the word became a ‘euphemism for prostitution.’\(^{265}\) Despite this fair understanding, fornication for *Wikipedia* is,

> ‘a term which refers to sexual intercourse between *consenting unmarried partners*. In contrast, adultery is consensual sex where one or both of the partners are married to someone else.’\(^{266}\)

Fornication may have been an accurate English representation of cult prostitution at one time, but it certainly isn’t for today, as both these popular books, etc. attest to. The definitions are very misleading and make it impossible for the word fornication to be used in an English Bible because there’s no link to cult prostitution. Of course, for the same reason, *illicit sex, sexual immorality* and *unchastity*, as some Bibles translate the second rule, are also unacceptable.

It’s to the discredit of these popular sources that they don’t present the biblical definition of fornication somewhere in their definitions. This creates a serious problem for trying to understand what James meant in English Bibles that use fornication for the second rule in Acts 15:20, such as the ASV, KJV, NASB or NRSV. All English Bibles should use the precise term of *cult prostitution or cult harlotry* for Yakov’s second rule.

\(^{264}\) Ibid.

\(^{265}\) *Wikipedia* at *Fornication*.

\(^{266}\) Ibid.
JESUS AND DIVORCE

The chief, if not the only grounds for a biblical divorce in the Church is adultery. This position rests primarily on interpreting pornay’ah as adultery in Matthew 5:32. Jesus said that whosoever,

‘shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication’ (πορνείας pornay’ahs) ‘causeth her to commit adultery’ (μοιχασθήσῃ moikas’thay to commit adultery)267 ‘and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery’268 (moikatai, to commit adultery; KJV).

R. T. France states that the cause of divorce, pornay’ah (ASV and KJV fornication; NASB and NRSV un-chastity) ‘means adultery.’269 Robert Mounce agrees and says it ‘undoubtedly refers in this context to an adulterous liaison.’270 The Wycliffe Bible Commentary agrees that adultery is ‘the one cause for divorce allowed by Christ,’271 and David Stern also sees pornay’ah as adultery, stating that a marriage, ‘must not be dissolved for anything less than its direct insult to one-flesh integrity, adultery.’272

The most obvious question to ask, though, is, ‘If Yeshua meant that only for adultery could a divorce take place, why isn’t the Greek word for adultery used as His reason for divorce? Pornay’ah (cult prostitution) is Yeshua’s reason for divorce.

It’s very troubling that scholars present adultery as the reason for divorce when the the Greek word for adultery is used in the very same sentence to speak of the one who is divorced for anything less than pornay’ah. It seems clear, in whatever language is used—if Yeshua had taught that a biblical divorce could take place for the sin of adultery, ‘adultery’ would have been written in the Greek New Testament (reflecting the Hebrew word for adultery).273 The Greek word, though, is πορνεία (pornay’ah, prostitution), not μοιχεία (moiku’oh, adultery).

TDNT states that the Greek word for adultery specifically means adultery, unlike the word pornay’ah, which can have other meanings:

“μοιχεία” (moiku’oh, adultery) “is narrower than πορνεία” (pornay’ah, prostitution)
“and refers solely to adultery.”274

Bauer, too, says that pornay’ah is to be ‘Distinguished from μοιχείαν (moiku’ain) ‘commit adultery.’275

267 The NU text has μοιχασθήσῃ moikas’thay to commit adultery.
268 The NU text has μοιχασθήσῃ moikas’thay to commit adultery.
271 Pfeiffer, WBC, p. 938. Wycliffe places an appendage on the theme of adultery, saying it could also mean ‘unfaithfulness during the betrothal period,’ a time amounting to about a year in ancient Israel. In the Law (Dt. 22:23-27) if the woman was found to have had sex with another man during this period, it would have been seen as adultery because betrothal was officially a part of marriage, so much so, that if the couple wanted to break the betrothal a divorce would be necessary (cf. Mt. 1:18-25).
273 Also interesting to note is what Yeshua says of a woman who is divorced for anything less than pornay’ah (Mt. 19:9)—she becomes an adulteress, not a prostitute. In other words, in the eyes of God she’s still married to the original partner. This is also true for the man who puts her away for anything less than pornay’ah.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

If moiku’oh refers solely to adultery, why would the text have pornay’ah (cult prostitution) if Yeshua wanted to convey that only for adultery a divorce could take place? The Septuagint reveals that the Hebrew and Greek understanding for the words prostitution and adultery remained constant. TDNT states, ‘In the LXX’ (Septuagint) ‘the group πορνευω’ (pornu’oh) ‘to play the harlot...is normally used for the root בנה’ (zanah; to prostitute), ‘while with equal consistency μοιχευω’ (moiku’oh) ‘is used for נָאָח’ (na’ahf, adultery).276

The distinction between prostitution and adultery is not only found in Hebrew and Greek, but in English as well. A prostitute is not an adulteress and an adulteress is not a prostitute. These distinctions are self-evident. Adultery, then, should not arbitrarily be forced into Yeshua’s reason for divorce because He uses a word whose basic meaning is prostitution, and as we’ve seen, it primarily means cult prostitution, nor should it be imposed upon Yakov’s second rule for the Gentile.

ISBE also contrasts the harlot and cult prostitute with an adulteress:

‘Harlot; play the harlot...zana’ (Hebrew, to prostitute); ‘pórne’ (pornay, the Greek word for a prostitute), ‘whore, commit fornication...common whore, prostitute, temple-prostitute. A harlot is a woman who uses her sexual capacity either for gain or for pagan religious purposes. In contrast to the adulteress she is promiscuous and usually shows no regard for who her mate might be.’277

ISBE rightly notes that ‘temple prostitution’ is associated with both the Hebrew and the Greek words for prostitution. It also states there’s a difference between a prostitute and an adulteress, something that is obvious, but seems to have eluded the attention of the Church and most theologians at Mt. 5:32.

TDNT, though, blurs the distinction between prostitution and adultery with its Scripture cites, not accurately understanding them:

‘Examples show that הנה’ (zanah, to prostitute), ‘can be used of the married woman who is unfaithful to her husband (Hos. 1–2; Ezk. 16, 23), or of the betrothed who by law already belongs to her husband, Gen. 38:24. In content πορνευω’ (pornu’oh, to prostitute) ‘here is equivalent to...μοιχευω’ (moi’kuoh, adultery).278

TDNT is wrong when it states that ‘to prostitute’ is ‘in content here...equivalent to’ adultery. It’s not adultery that Tamar was accused of (Gen. 38:24), or specifically what Hosea’s wife walked in, but cult harlotry.

In Ezekiel 16 and 23 the nation of Judah is accused by God of literally practicing sexual idolatry (cult harlotry) and worshiping (sacrificing to) pagan gods. Israel severed herself from her husband Yahveh. Figuratively, she was an adulteress, but her sin was cult harlotry. God would correct her through the destruction of Judah and captivity in Babylon for the remnant.

Hosea’s wife was a cult harlot before Hosea married her. Her ‘adultery’ consisted in returning to cult harlotry. This is not a definition for an adulteress. Gomer didn’t commit adultery with another man, but cult harlotry with many men. Gomer continued in her profession while married to Hosea, and symbolically

Jesus and Divorce

pictured Israel’s unfaithfulness to Yahveh.279 Her whoring spirit pictured the cult prostitution of Israel that gave itself ‘upon every high hill’ to the pagan deities. Israel would be obliterated because of her cult harlotry (2nd Kgs. 17:1-23).

Gomer is a symbol of Israel in its cult harlotry as she would not repent, even given many chances by God. Judah, in Ezk. 16 and 23, is literally practicing cult harlotry as a nation. For TDNT to present these two examples as ‘adultery,’ without detailing their cult harlotry, is very misleading.

TDNT’s ‘betrothed’ of Gen. 38:24 is Tamar. The verse says that she had ‘played the harlot’ and was pregnant by ‘harlotry.’ Judah had promised (betrothed) her to Shelah, his third son (Gen. 38:5, 11, 14). TDNT is technically correct. Even though Judah thought that the one whom he had intercourse with was a cult harlot (as we saw in the section on Judah and Tamar; p. 30f.), he had no way of knowing how Tamar had gotten pregnant; through cult harlotry or adultery. Therefore, the use of ‘played the harlot’ and ‘harlotry’ for Tamar was used either in a derogatory way for an adulteress or a literal way for a cult harlot. After all, she was a product of Canaan, a land steeped in cult harlotry.

In the days of Yeshua the word מויקאת (moikatai; to play the harlot, to prostitute oneself) had come to encompass a number of different sins in the eyes of the Rabbis. Zanah was not an actual definition of the sins, but a general, derogatory ‘catch-all’ for them. TDNT states:

‘Later Judaism gradually broadened the original usage to include adultery, incest, unnatural vice (e.g. sodomy), and unlawful marriages.’280

Even though these sins fell under the heading of harlotry in Rabbinic Judaism, it didn’t mean that the adulterer or homosexual would actually be a prostitute. In the eyes of the Rabbis the people committing sodomy, etc., would be seen as walking at a similar level of unfaithfulness to Yahveh as that of a prostitute, but even with this, Rabbinic Judaism knew that fornication involved ‘especially the sin of paganism’281 (i.e. cult harlotry).

Rabbinic Judaism’s primary meaning for zanah was cult prostitution (and that, even over common prostitution). The Jewish hearers of Yeshua that day fully understood that He was referring to cult prostitution as the basis for a biblical divorce. It would be the same for those who heard Yakov give the second rule, especially after the first rule on sacrificial idolatry.

Bauer and Perschbacher weren’t accurate in linking adultery with porney’ah (prostitution) for Mt. 5:32 (and 19:9), and France, Mounce, Wycliffe and Stern didn’t pick up on the obvious difference between porney’ah (harlotry) and moikuo (adultery) as the reason for divorce. Pornay’ah in these cites (Mt. 5:32 and 19:9)282 cannot be defined as adultery. It defies common sense that Yeshua would use adultery to describe

279 Hosea’s message of repentance was to the northern kingdom of Israel, saturated in cult prostitution and sacrificial idolatry. For the parallel and symbolism to be complete, and for the very reason why God chose her, she would have to have been a cult harlot for her to accurately reflect sinful Israel. This is also hinted at in her name. Keil, Minor Prophets, p. 27, relates that her name means, ‘perfection, completion in a passive sense’ and ‘that the woman was thoroughly perfected in her whoredom, or that she had gone to the furthest length in prostitution.’ The name of her parent, Diblaim, is also telling, as it occurs in ‘Moabitish places in Num. 33:46. ‘The Moabites worshiped their gods through cult prostitution.

280 Ibid., p. 588.

281 In Matt. 19:9, Jesus says, ‘And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, (porney’ah) and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery (KJV; Fornication; NASB immorality. The two Greek words for adultery in the verse are moikatai,
Indeed, have very able Yeshua the official recognition of this. On sexuality why seeing because it has not correctly divided God’s Word in this area (2nd Tim. 2:15). Why as Sam. band? Adultery also, adultery upon had the同意, believing hand, the person, and yet, use an entirely different word meaning prostitution for the cause of divorce. If Yeshua had meant adultery, He would have used adultery as the cause for divorce. To force the meaning of adultery upon pornay’ah (prostitution) totally distorts what Yeshua was teaching.

Also, a major theological problem arises if adultery is seen as the grounds for divorce among believers. Adultery is a very grievous sin, especially to the spouse offended, but what of the sacrificial love and forgiveness of Jesus? Is not the blood of Jesus able to forgive the adulteress and to heal the wounded husband? What makes adultery ‘the unforgivable sin’? Didn’t God forgive King David for adultery (2nd Sam. 12:1-15)? Didn’t Yeshua forgive the woman caught in adultery (Jn. 8:2-11)? If so, why would it be any less for believers in the Kingdom of Messiah (cf. Acts 13:38-39)?

As both believing partners struggle to find Him, the one offended can offer forgiveness to the offender, and the offender, if truly repentant, will be humbled and brought back into the Fold, if she wasn’t already. Why should adultery be seen as severing the marriage? The Church has caused countless divorces and agony because it has not correctly divided God’s Word in this area (2nd Tim. 2:15).

When a believing spouse commits cult prostitution then there is biblical grounds and a need for divorce. Why cult prostitution, but not common prostitution? Because common prostitution, like incest, homosexuality and even adultery, is a sin that can be forgiven by the blood of Yeshua. To not forgive these sins by a believing spouse (for a believing spouse) defies and rebels against the sacrificial concept of forgiveness of that Yeshua exemplifies.

On the other hand, cult harlotry (the worship of another god through sexual intercourse) severs the believing spouse; from God first and then from the spouse. This is a form of apostasy. Divorce becomes just the official recognition of this.

Yeshua used the Hebrew word for harlotry to declare that His idea of marriage between two believers can only be severed by cult harlotry. If a believer divorces his believing wife for adultery or ‘irreconcilable differences,’ he is committing adultery if he marries another, and causing her to be adulterous if she marries another.

Robert Mounce saw the superficiality of the Church interpreting pornay’ah as adultery. He said that Jesus, in declaring adultery to be the only grounds for divorce in Matthew 5, lacks spiritual punch:

‘Some writers consider this section the third antithesis’ of what Jesus had been saying previously, but it’s not ‘clear in what way Jesus intensifies the law on divorce.’

Bravo! Traditional Jewish thinking believes that when Messiah comes He will teach the commandments to Israel on a deeper level. It’s interesting that Yeshua’s teaching on divorce comes on the heels of some very powerful and radical ways of understanding the commandments (e.g. if you hate your brother you have already broken the commandment not to murder). Mounce correctly discerns that the way Messiah’s view on divorce is understood by the Church is not much different then the rabbinic understanding of adultery being the cause for divorce for the ‘uncleaness’ found in Dt. 24:1.

Indeed, Yeshua intensified His generation’s understanding of the commandments, as only the Messiah could do. Mosaic Law is the love of God in verbal form. In other words, it’s God’s definition of love. The

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283 Yeshua is speaking of life in His Kingdom, obviously among believing partners. His Standard (e.g. Mt. 5–7) is for everyone in His Kingdom.

284 Mounce, Matthew, pp. 46-47.
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Law is also the written reflection of Yahveh’s awesome deeds and holy character (Dt. 4:6-8; Rom. 7:7, 12, 14). There’s a tremendous amount of grace in Mosaic Law; the promises to the Fathers, Passover, Exodus, Red Sea, the commandments and statutes, etc., forgiveness of sins through Mosaic sacrifice, and the subsequent fulfillment of the blessed life in Canaan.

Yeshua is the Word of God (Jn. 1:1-3; Rev. 19:13) and as such, He is the living Torah, for Mosaic Law is only the words of God He spoke, written down. Now, the Father extends through His Son a greater promise: eternal life in the New Jerusalem, and because Yeshua is the living Word, He was able to reveal, during His days in Israel, the depths of the words of God in the Law in a way that no one else could. In His Teaching on the Mount, Yeshua revealed the essence of the Law: ‘Love your enemies,’ and ‘turn the other cheek.’ This is such a radical understanding that many Christians theologians say, ‘It can only apply in Heaven. No one can seriously consider living like that here on Earth.’

Yet, who will hit you on the cheek in Heaven? What enemies will you have there to love? Yeshua’s words must apply to His followers today, as He Himself graphically demonstrated. Unfortunately, His words are so far from the accepted norm, so against our carnal nature, that many don’t even consider living that way. Mounce, though, correctly questions if Yeshua’s position on divorce hasn’t changed much from Dt. 24 (and is similar to the world’s), how can it be God’s righteous, perfect and intensified holy standard?

All those who say pornay’ah in Mt. 5:32 (and 19:9) refers to adultery, line up with the Jewish sage Shammai. He lived a generation before Yeshua, and in seeking to understand what God meant by listing ‘uncleanness’ as the cause of divorce in Dt. 24:1 (KJV ‘uncleanness;’ NASB ‘indecency’) he stated that only for adultery could a man divorce his wife.

His opponent in this, and many other theological debates, was Hillel. By the time of Yeshua the view of Hillel had been adopted over that of Shammai. Hillel said that, ‘even if she burns his toast,’ the husband has biblical grounds for divorce, as this could make the wife unclean in his eyes. The point is that there is no intensification of the grounds for divorce on Yeshua’s part if one thinks that adultery justifies divorce. Yeshua would only have been affirming Shammai.

Yeshua, though, was stating something much more radical than Shammai (and the interpretation the Church has given it), and more in line with His other foundational concepts of Torah. Isn’t this radical understanding also hinted at with the Apostles’ response in Matthew 19?

‘And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication (pornay’ah) and shall marry another, committeth adultery (moikatai, to commit adultery), and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.’ (moikatai; Mt. 19:9 KJV)

‘His disciples say unto Him, ‘If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.’ (Mt. 19:10 KJV)

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286 In this area Hillel was right, not that burnt toast was cause for divorce, but regarding the attitude behind it. The reason is obvious. Mosaic Law commanded the stoning to death of an adulteress (Lev. 20:10). Divorce wouldn’t be necessary. ‘Indecency’ or ‘uncleanness’ (Dt. 24:1) should be understood as an attitude and/or action which was not in line with holiness. If a woman was vengeful, contentious, flirtatious or dressed provocatively, these would be Mosaic grounds for divorce. This was a concession to their hard hearts (both men and women) because they hadn’t been given the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit, though, one can pray for the spouse, and one’s own heart, to be softened toward each other, something that just might cause the adulteress or the flirt to repent.

Yeshua declared that except for cult prostitution a man (in His Kingdom) could not get a divorce. This meant the Apostles ‘were stuck’ with their wives! In the days of Yeshua, many, like today, were tossing their spouse away ‘for burning their toast’ so that they could marry the next slice of bread that came through the toaster.

Why would the Apostles think that it wasn’t good? Because they were still carnal men. They hadn’t been filled with the Holy Spirit yet. The Scriptures speak of their hearts being hard (Mk. 6:52; 8:17). This is seen in their quarreling among themselves as to who was the greatest among them (Luke 22:24-27), and in their thinking that Yeshua was talking about literal bread when He told them to beware of the leaven (teaching) of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt. 16:5-12). It’s further seen in Yeshua’s stern rebuke to Peter not wanting Yeshua to die in Jerusalem, and immediately after that, in His warning to the others about dying to self if they wanted to follow Him (Mt. 16:22-38). Finally, their unbelief and hard hearts are seen when they were told that Yeshua had risen from the dead, but wouldn’t believe the report (Mk. 16:9-15; Lk. 24:11).

Cult harlotry is the very simple, and yet, radical and divinely profound explanation for what pornay’ah means in Mt. 5:32. It reveals Yeshua’s holy concept of marriage and divorce (and why the Apostles were so shaken up). It’s also consistent with what Yeshua requires of people in His Kingdom—sacrificial love, death to self, forgiveness, long-suffering and reconciliation.

Some might question the specific use of cult prostitution over common prostitution, as pornay’ah can theoretically mean either one. Is it common prostitution, cultic, or both, of which Yeshua speaks? It has to be the one that’s idolatrous because only if a believer is a cult prostitute or lays with one, will she be cut off from the covenant with God (apostasy), and consequently, severed from her relationship with her earthly believing partner. It’s not as though God couldn’t forgive the person, but when a person reaches this state, as a believer, God knows that she will never repent—she’s gone over a red line. The official act of divorcing her serves to confirm and ratify that which has already happened—high-handed rebellion against the Living God and the tearing apart of her one flesh marriage (Gen. 2:24).

This kind of sin stands in a class all by itself. The person has willfully bound herself to another god. The union with Yahveh or His people has been severed. This is why the plague in Num. 25 took 24,000 sons of Israel. When one has a believing partner that practices cult harlotry, divorce is not only justified, it’s absolutely necessary.288

Common prostitution doesn’t fall into this category. As evil as it is, it can be forgiven because it doesn’t involve the sexually idolatrous worship of, and joining to, another god. All sexual sins for a believer can be forgiven except the one that involves idolatry. Just as there is hope for a believer who commits adultery, incest or homosexuality, there is also hope for restoration if a believer becomes, or uses, a common prostitute because the soul has not merged with another god.

Another reason why Yeshua is referring to cult prostitution is because of His infrequent use of pornay’ah. TDNT writes; the question,

‘of πορνεία (pornay’ah) ‘is seldom dealt with in the preaching of Jesus and the primitive community; it arises more frequently in Paul. As compared with the different judg-

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288 This helps us to understand Paul’s teaching on the marriage of an unbeliever and a believer, in 1st Cor. 7:12-16. The unbeliever who is pleased to dwell with the believer is not continuing in pagan sexual practices, which would corrupt and defile the believer, and isn’t fighting the believer as she walks in the things of the Lord, and is certainly not physically or emotionally abusing her.
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ment of the Greek world and ancient syncretism, the concrete directions of Paul bring to the attention of Gentile Christians the incompatibility of πορναγεία (pornay’ah, cult prostitution) ‘and the kingdom of God.’\(^{289}\)

Why is there a difference between Jesus, the ‘primitive community’ (the community of Jews in Jerusalem that believed in Yeshua), and Paul? The only reason Yeshua mentions it is to display the radical standard of marriage and divorce for believers (He’s speaking to Jews ‘in covenant’ with God, many of whom would come to believe in Him as the Messiah). R. T. France writes that divorce was all too freely practiced by Yeshua’s ‘contemporaries.’\(^{290}\) Yeshua established His Kingdom criteria for divorce.

Yeshua wasn’t warning His Jewish followers about practicing cult harlotry, for that had been expunged from them by the Babylonian captivity 600 years before. He was showing them the Kingdom Standard. That’s why the Apostles were worried. In their carnality they wanted to be able to divorce their wives if they didn’t want them any longer. With Yeshua’s divine teaching on marriage and divorce they realized that they didn’t have that option, and neither do believers today if they’re married to a Born Again believer.

Turning to the Jewish Jerusalem ‘primitive community’ (in Acts) the only reason why pornay’ah is mentioned (three times) is as a warning to the Gentile believer! It’s actually the same warning of Acts 15:20 replicated in 15:29 and 21:25. The Jewish believers didn’t need to be reminded of cult harlotry and what it would do to their relationship with the God of Israel—they knew all too well their sinful Family History concerning cult harlotry and what it had done to their Fathers. On the other hand, the Gentile believers needed to be warned, and this is exactly what Acts 15:20 is all about. Yakov gave notice to the Gentiles that they were not to continue to engage in cult harlotry, so that they would ‘do well’ in their walk with the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth:

“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden (for salvation; as the Pharisees had wanted them to be circumcised and keep Torah for salvation), than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from cult prostitution. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well! Farewell.” (Acts 15:28-29)

Paul needed to address the issue a number of times in his letters because cult harlotry was actually taking place among some of his Gentile believers. He rebuked them for doing it,\(^{291}\) saying that ‘those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.’\(^{292}\)

Yeshua’s sole cause for divorce among His followers is cult harlotry, not adultery, as these four reasons bring out:

1. It doesn’t make any sense—pornay’ah means harlotry, not adultery. If Yeshua had meant adultery He would have used the Greek/Hebrew word for adultery. This, coupled with His use of adultery in the very same sentence, confirms that He didn’t mean adultery.

2. No intensification—Yeshua intensified and revealed the depth of the commandments of Mosaic Law, and in essence, the very nature and will of God. Having adultery as the grounds for divorce

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291 1st Cor. 6:13-20; 10:7-8; 2nd Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19-21 KJV.
292 Eph. 5:3-5; Col. 3:5; 1st Thess. 4:3-8 KJV.
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does not intensify the criteria for divorce, and presents God as not wanting to, or unable to, forgive the adulteress (or adulterer).

- It also doesn’t allow God to redeem the sin in the life of both the adulteress and the offended spouse so they can struggle with His forgiveness and become ‘more like Jesus.’ This is called ‘the furnace of affliction’ or God’s refining Fire, and the Holy Spirit uses it to pierce hard hearts and make them like the heart of Yeshua (cf. Ezk. 36:26-27).

3. The Blood of Forgiveness—the adulteress (or adulterer and prostitute) can be forgiven. The believer who is a cult prostitute cannot be restored to fellowship. The cult harlot has left the covenant for another god. In this, Yeshua is conceptually spring-boarding off of Dt. 13:6-11: ‘the wife of your bosom…to go serve other gods…you must surely kill her.’

4. The rare use of pornay’ah—both Yeshua and the primitive Jewish believing community, by their infrequent use of pornay’ah, as contrasted with Paul, reveal that cult harlotry was not a common practice among the Jewish people at that time. On the other hand, it was a very common practice in the ancient Gentile world.

The sexually idolatrous worship of another god severs the believer from his covenant with the God of Israel. The difference between Mosaic divorce, or that of Shammai and the Church today, is that Yeshua’s standard is infinitely higher. Yeshua wants us to realize our own hard hearts and our need for Him in the midst of this world of darkness. Only with His heart and power can we walk in His Kingdom the way He wants us to walk, which is the way He walked. After all, doesn’t ‘Christian’ mean ‘little Christ’? (cf. Col. 1:18)

Under Mosaic Law a man could divorce his wife for ‘uncleanness’ (Dt. 24:1-4; see also Prov. 12:4). It was variously interpreted in the days of Yeshua as to what exactly constituted uncleanness. That it couldn’t have been sexual idolatry is understood from Mosaic Law in that the punishment for cult (or even common prostitution) was death, and therefore, divorce wasn’t necessary.293 Yeshua says that the reason why God gave divorce to Israel through Moses was because of the hardness of their hearts:

“He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it wasn’t this way.’” (Mt. 19:8, also Mk. 10:5)

In other words, they weren’t able to forgive their wives for the ‘uncleanness’ that they saw in them. It could have been something as serious as a rebellious heart toward her husband or God, or as innocent as an inability to please a hard husband, but this hardness must give way to life in the Spirit when one is saved to serve his wife and to pray for forgiveness in one’s heart toward her for any ‘uncleanness’ that he sees. In contrast, for cult harlotry there is no recipient to forgive—the wife has intentionally severed her covenant with God and her husband. All that is left for the husband to do is to officially and spiritually divorce her. The relationship has already been severed.

One should enter into marriage upon due reflection that the spouse is of God, and that it’s for life, so that in the midst of troubles and storms and ‘uncleanness,’ one has no option for divorce (unless the spouse is a cult harlot). In other words, marriage among believers in Messiah should never end in divorce unless the other is a cult harlot (or an apostate). That’s what the new heart is all about. The theme of the parable of the unjust steward who wasn’t able to pay his master (Lk. 16:1-13) clearly reveals to what extent Yeshua

293 Ex. 34:15-16; Lev. 20:1-6; Num. 25:1-9f.; Dt. 31:16-17 and by inference, Lev. 20:10; Dt. 22:18, 20, 22, 25. That the uncleanness wasn’t adultery is seen in that the punishment for adultery was death (Lev. 20:10; Dt. 22:22). Shammai was wrong about what constituted divorce and so is the Church.
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wants us to forgive each other. Because the servant’s master forgave him much, it would be unthinkable for the servant not to forgive one who owed so much less.

If our spouse sins by being adulterous, who are we, lustful creatures that we are, to withhold forgiveness? Yeshua has forgiven us of so much more. It’s in this life that we must seek the Lord for His heart that is able to forgive, even those who might crucify us, and especially our spouse. That’s why bad things happen to us—so we can see our own hard and vengeful heart and cry out to Yeshua for His heart.294 Yeshua forbids divorce except upon the grounds of cult prostitution. The bar has been raised to the highest of the Heavens because Christians should be filled with the Holy Spirit—Israel at Mt. Sinai wasn’t and that’s why God didn’t declare this nor that Israel should love her enemies, etc. This opens up the biblical understanding about what constitutes grounds for a divorce among Christians.295

In Yeshua, reconciliation of all differences can take place. Theologically, divorce should only happen between two Christians when one partner permanently severs his relationship from Yeshua through cult harlotry (and apostasy, which although possibly harder to recognize, also severs the covenant with God, and if the apostate is married, with the spouse).296 All other sins are forgivable in the mighty Name of Yeshua.297

294 Dt. 30:6; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezk. 36:24-27; Mt. 11:28-30.
295 Yeshua’s statements relate to two believers in His Kingdom. When the Apostle Paul deals with divorce between a believer who is married to an unbeliever, the criteria changes for that situation (1st Cor. 7:12-16).
296 Apostasy is the falling away from Yahveh, never to return. It’s not that the person has backslidden or has become a prisoner of Satan, but on the contrary, the person is now working for Satan and against Messiah Yeshua. It doesn’t mean that the apostate will automatically relinquish the ‘tag’ of ‘Christian,’ either. Some will keep it to deceive believers and family members. Satan is a master of lies and deception. Yeshua doesn’t mention apostasy as a reason for divorce, but concentrates on the specific apostate practice of cult prostitution, yet apostasy of any kind is also biblical grounds for divorce, but again, the apostate may not be married. An apostate will never return to the Lord because he has totally rejected Yeshua, and so, conceptually he is in the same category of a cult harlot, having sold himself to something other than the God of Israel and despising the salvation that is offered in Yeshua.
297 One should physically separate from a believing partner who is a habitual offender in things like adultery, prostitution, incest, physical abuse and emotional abuse, etc. Separate, but don’t divorce (unless the Lord Himself leads you to divorce). Separation should be used as a chastisement for teaching the offender, with an eye to having him set his life in order with the King and not to be enslaved to his carnal passions. It’s also a time for the one who separates to pray and intercede for her spouse, to pray until deliverance and healing come, or the Lord releases you.
CULT PROSTITUTION IN THE CORINTHIAN ASSEMBLY

The letters of the Apostle Paul are not only filled with rich theological gems, but also with stern rebukes to Gentile believers for sins they were committing. Sometimes the Gentile believers weren’t even aware of it (1st Cor. 10:21-22) or if they were, they didn’t exhibit anything that led them to change (1st Cor. 5:1-2). Many of those problems would never have arisen if they had a foundational knowledge of the Law of Moses. That’s not to say they weren’t being taught the Law, but just as mature belief in Messiah Yeshua doesn’t happen overnight, so too, it takes awhile for the Law to become part of a believer’s understanding and walk. That’s why Yakov gave the initial filter of the four rules first (Acts 15:20) and spoke of Gentiles going to the synagogues every Shabat (Hebrew for Sabbath) to learn the Law as they grew in Yeshua (Acts 15:21).

There are three texts in First Corinthians that speak of cult harlotry, two of which aren’t normally associated with it (5:1; 6:12-20) although the word pornay’ah is used in both. The third text is chapter ten where Paul specifically speaks of pornay’ah in relation to the cult harlotry of Num. 25. Translators generally see 1st Cor. 5:1 as only incest, and 6:12-20 as common harlotry. These two texts have been overlooked as places where the Apostle addressed cult prostitution in the Corinthian assembly.

Corinth was the capital of Roman Greece and the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire in the days of Paul. With a population of approximately 650,000 people (400,000 of which were slaves) Corinth was a significant city where Paul founded the Corinthian assembly. Corinth was also steeped in cult harlotry. Many gods ‘inhabited’ the city. There was Poseidon the sea god, and Isis from Egypt, along with Serapis, etc., but Aphrodite was the favorite, and with good reason. She satisfied the lust of the flesh. So common was this ‘worship’ that, to ‘Corinthicize’ someone, was seen as a ‘euphemism for’ cult ‘whoredom.’ Shrines of Aphrodite ‘were everywhere’ in Corinth. Aphrodite was seen as the ‘patroness of harlots’

298 Some problems that Paul wrote of in his letter to the Corinthians included divisions and strife (1:10-13; 3:1-9); pride (4:7-21); the elders not rebuking a man who had slept with his father’s wife (5:1-8); lawsuits against one another (6:1-9); cult harlotry (5:1; 6:18; 10:8); idolatry (8:1); the worship of demons (10:20); the eating of sacrifices to demons and the drinking of blood (10:21); men who would completely cover their heads in the assembly, and women who would not (11:4-16); their perverse way of coming to the Lord’s Supper (11:17-22); their lack of discernment for His Body (11:29-30); and chaos in the assembly when the Holy Spirit would manifest (14:1-19; 27-28; 33-34).

299 There are a number of places in First Corinthians where Paul uses Mosaic Law to establish his point. This would have been meaningless if Mosaic Law had been done away with:

1. Paul encourages the Corinthians to keep ‘the Feast’ (1st Cor. 5:6-8). This can only be Passover–The Feast of Unleavened Bread as he’s just spoken about unleavened bread (Ex. 12:8-20; Lev. 23:6).

2. He sums up his ability to receive funds from the Corinthians by citing the Law (9:8-9f.).

3. He tells them that women should not speak in the assembly, again citing the Law (14:34-35).

4. In 16:8 Paul speaks of staying at Ephesus until Pentecost, which is the Greek word for the Law’s holy day of Shavu’ot (the Feast of Weeks; Lev. 23:15-22; Dt. 16:9-10, 16). Why would Paul ‘note time’ to Gentiles by an ‘outdated’ Jewish feast unless he still kept the Law and taught it to them? (cf. Phil. 3:17; 4:9)


302 Findlay, St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 734.

303 Morris, 1 Corinthians, p. 18, note 3.
Cult Prostitution in the Corinthian Assembly

and was known for her ‘great army of prostitutes.’ At her main temple, which ‘crowned the Acropolis,’ there were over one thousand cult priestesses (i.e. temple prostitutes) to accommodate the religious fervor of the Corinthians in their worship of the goddess.

There wasn’t a great distinction between a cult priestess and a common harlot, either. Whenever the city was in danger, or in matters of ‘grave importance,’ common prostitutes were pressed into the service of the goddess to gratify the need for beseeching her favor. Paul’s Gentile converts, both slave and free, seem to have made up the bulk of the congregation in Corinth. Most of them would have been immersed in the mindset of paganism. That’s why Paul had so many problems with the Corinthian believers. G. G. Findlay notes that many of the Gentile believers were ‘steeped in pagan vice’ and bound up ‘with idolatry,’ which points directly to cult prostitution. After all, why give up the worship of Aphrodite when you could have her and Jesus?

We also know that Paul had a number of Jewish converts in Corinth, but they most likely wouldn’t have been involved in cult harlotry because they would have known Torah and their Family History. As with any small minority in an assembly today, they wouldn’t have been able to affect the behavior of the Gentiles in the assembly who wanted to continue in their pagan ways, thinking that it was alright.

Some of the Corinthians would radically change their understanding of practicing cult prostitution when they would hear Paul’s letter, but some of them would continue to practice it, as is seen from what Paul writes in 2nd Corinthians (6:14-18; 12:21; 13:5). Habits learned over a lifetime and sanctified by one’s culture and society are not only very hard to break, but all too often, seen as ‘normal and right.’ Because of this ‘normalcy’ we catch a rare glimpse of a young congregation where the gross sin of cult prostitution walks hand in hand with ‘belief in Jesus.’ What James warned the Gentiles against in Acts 15:20, Paul actually had to battle!

In presenting these three sections of Paul’s first (preserved) letter to the Corinthians (1st Cor. 5:9-11), the Apostle didn’t outline it with chapter and verse numbers, nor keep everything ‘in order.’ His raising of a concern in one section will continue in another form in a later section as he would think of further things to support his previous words, and other things that needed to be addressed on the topic.

The problem of cult prostitution is first addressed in chapter five. In chapter six there’s a conceptual discourse against it, which is further developed in chapter ten supported by the history of Israel. In chapter ten Paul speaks not only of cult harlotry, but also of the ‘table and cup’ of demons. Three of the four prohibitions of Yakov are actually mentioned by Paul, being practiced by Corinthian Gentile believers in

304 Ibid.
305 Ibid.
306 Findlay, St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 734.
307 Morris, 1 Corinthians, p. 18, note 3. See also Num. 31:1-4, 12-18 for ordinary women being ‘pressed into’ the service of cult harlotry 1,400 years earlier.
308 Ibid., St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 730.
309 Ibid., p. 731.
310 In Acts 18:8 Crispus, the leader of the Corinthians Jewish synagogue, and his household, left the synagogue and assembled with the believers. It’s not unreasonable to assume that a number of Jews followed him. See 1st Cor. 1:14-16 where Paul immersed not only Crispus, but Gaius and Stephanas, who may have been Jewish as well. Also, Paul was in Corinth for a year and a half (Acts 18:11) reasoning with the Jews, etc., about Yeshua being the Messiah (Acts 18:4). It’s not unreasonable to think that a number of other Jews came to believe in their Messiah, too.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

Jesus:

1. the drinking of the fresh blood from an animal sacrifice,
2. the eating of the sacrificial meat at the time of the sacrifice in the pagan temple, and
3. the ‘worship’ of the god or goddess through cult harlots, all in the Name of Jesus Christ.

Incest in Corinth: 1st Cor. 5:1-5

Most Bible commentators understand pornay’ah in 1st Cor. 5:1 to mean ‘incest,’ since the Gentile Christian man had intercourse with his stepmother. So say Morris (‘Paul draws attention to a case of incest’),311 Findlay (the ‘Case of Incest’)312 and Wycliffe (‘the fornication was incest’).313

It certainly was an incestuous affair, but most likely something much worse—incestuous cult prostitution. This is based upon Paul’s own words, and his use of pornay’ah (fornication; prostitution). Commentators have failed to pick up on its uniqueness. Paul writes:

‘It is reported commonly that there is fornication (pornay’ah) among you, and such fornication (pornay’ah) as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife.’ (1st Cor. 5:1 KJV)314

When Paul states that this fornication was such that it was, ‘not so much as named among the Gentiles,’ it must have been a very exceptional case. Note that the woman wasn’t related to the man by blood, but by marriage; his father’s marriage to her. She wasn’t his mother, nor does Paul speak of her as having been his stepmother, but as ‘his father’s wife.’ The father most likely married her later in life when his son was already a man. Therefore, she would have been just ‘another woman’ to him. There would be no childhood emotions attached to this woman, as might be found with a stepmother, which would make their sin ‘that much more’ incestuous.

In most incestuous relationships there is a blood relationship between the two parties, which truly makes it incestuous, but for there not to be one here would make it a far less exceptional incestuous case than otherwise. It’s hard to believe that Paul would think that this kind of incest was so unique as to write that it wasn’t found among the Gentiles. It should be obvious that the reason wasn’t because the woman was his father’s wife.

The woman was most likely a practicing cult harlot. This would account for Paul’s use of pornay’ah (prostitution) and make the incestuous relationship part of an idolatrous sexual rite. If she were ‘only’ a common harlot, again, it wouldn’t make it that exceptional. Her being a cult harlot would not only be unique, but also part of the theme of cult prostitution that Paul will develop from this point on and speak against in chapters six and ten. Here is a Christian worshiping another god through a cult prostitute who is his father’s wife! This must have been a first for the Apostle! The Law’s punishment for sleeping with his

311 Morris, 1 Corinthians, p. 83.
312 Findlay, St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 807.
313 Pfeiffer, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1236.
314 Substituting ‘cult prostitution’ for ‘fornication,’ it becomes clearer as to what Paul was addressing: ‘It is reported commonly that there is cult prostitution among you, and such cult prostitution as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife’ (1st Cor. 5:1).
father’s wife, even if she wasn’t a cult harlot, is death (Lev. 20:11).

Paul’s use of the Greek word for harlotry (pornay’ah), his astonishment at the actual deed, and the punishment he commands the Corinthians to carry out, all suggest that the woman was a cult harlot and that she had intercourse at one of the pagan shrines with the son of the man to whom she was married. If this is the case, and it appears to be, then the only place in the New Testament where pornay’ah has been seen as incest, and only incest, vanishes because it’s incestuous cult harlotry, a truly unique sin in Paul’s eyes. Of course, common harlotry can’t be ruled out, but because of the uniqueness of the event according to Paul, and also the fact that he addresses cult harlotry in vv. 9-11 and the very next chapter, it seems that the woman was a cult harlot. Also, as we’ll see in Cult Prostitution in the New Testament (p. 101f.) whenever pornay’ah is used in the New Testament, it always points to cult harlotry, not common. Therefore, with Paul using pornay’ah, without qualification, it would have to be first taken as cultic.

Cult prostitution with the wife of the believer’s father must have been a first for Corinth, too (‘not so much as named among the Gentiles’). What a horrendous ‘witness for Christ’ this must have been to the unsaved Jewish people in Corinth, as well believers in the assembly and many unbelievers in Corinth, not to mention the cult harlot who he had intercourse with. This is a conceptual problem with ‘freedom in Christ’ when it’s not coupled to God’s boundaries—His Law (Lev. 18:8; 20:11; Dt. 22:30; 27:20). Christians don’t understand His will, and so they sin against God and man unknowingly. This is why Yakov’s second rule comes against cult harlotry and why he gave the four rules to the Gentiles first.

Cult Prostitution in Corinth: 1st Cor. 6:12-20

In 1st Cor. 6:12-20 Paul speaks about what appears to be the sin of cult prostitution among the Gentile believers at Corinth. He initially tackles the Gnostic libertine heresy that says free men can do whatever they want. Because the Corinthian believers were ‘free in Christ,’ some united the two beliefs, logically seeing no need for sexual restraint. This reveals a problem with those who espouse ‘freedom in Christ’ and don’t want to realize that it’s freedom from sin, not license to sin. What is God’s Standard? Is it God’s Law as lived out by Jesus, or whatever anyone thinks is right?

Most theologians consider the harlot that Paul mentions twice (6:15-16), and the harlotry he speaks of three times (vv. 14, 18 twice), to be of the common variety, but can this be considering that Corinth was known throughout the ancient world for its cult prostitutes? Can Paul be writing about prostitution in Corinth, while it had nothing to do with pagan temples and cult prostitutes? There’s nothing in the Greek words for harlot or harlotry, and nothing in the context of this passage to the Corinthians, that means that this harlot has to be a common harlot and not a cult harlot. If anything, those who think her to be a common harlot have the burden of responsibility to prove that she was. They should present clear evidence

315 Paul speaks of handing him over to Satan to deal with his flesh (1st Cor. 5:5). He would be severed from the only fellowship in town, and if unrepentant, would spend eternity in Hell. The punishment seems to have had the desired effect (2nd Cor. 2:3-11), and is conceptually identical to one under the Law of Moses from being ‘cut off from Israel’ (Ex. 12:15, 19; Lev. 7:27; 17:14; 18:29, etc.).

316 Paul speaks of the father in the present tense, and also, he doesn’t say that the woman was a widow. The father doesn’t seem to have been a Christian because he, too, would have been cast out of the assembly. Being a pagan he may have even initiated the event. It might have seemed good, in his pagan eyes. Perhaps that’s why the Christian man did it? To honor his father?
that the Apostle was speaking about common harlotry and common harlotry only, but this cannot be done.

Morris states that the philosophy behind the average Corinthian was a ‘man who recognized no superior, and no law but his own desires.’ In other words, he thought he could do whatever he wanted to do. Enter now some of them who came to believe in Christ as their Savior. Would their thought pattern change in this area? For some Gentiles, no.

Paul begins his argument against this ‘freedom’ by declaring that he, too, is free, and then he says what true freedom is—putting Jesus ahead of self:

1st Cor. 6:12: ‘All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. 13Meats for the belly and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them.’

14‘Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. 15Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid! 16What? Know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? For two, saith he, shall be one flesh. 17But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.’

18‘Flee fornication!’ Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committh fornication sinneth against his own body. 19What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?’

20For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1st Cor. 6:12-20 KJV)

Paul states that, ‘All things are lawful’ to him, and many take this as a cue that the Law has been done away with, but the phrase obviously can’t mean ‘every–thing’ because Paul comes against harlotry in Corinth after he’s just spoken against thieves and adulterers, etc. (6:9-11). Therefore, ‘all things’ cannot mean ‘every thing.’ Paul would never lie, nor break the Sabbath, nor eat pig, etc., because they would be sin for him.

The phrase, ‘All things are lawful,’ can be equally translated as, ‘All things are permitted.’ It seems to imply that Paul was speaking rhetorically, saying, ‘I could also do what you’re doing if I wanted to!’ Paul was not coming against Mosaic Law. Stern thinks that the phrase wasn’t a part of Paul’s teaching, but that

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317 Morris, _I Corinthians_, p. 19.
318 The New American Standard Bible has, ‘Flee immorality.’ This totally distorts the meaning that Paul was writing about (i.e. cult harlotry).
319 Paul uses the phrase twice here in v. 12. It’s also used twice in 10:23, where there’s a natural link to the cult harlotry which Paul is speaking of in chapter six. In 10:23 Paul deals with cult harlotry, the eating of the meat of the pagan sacrifice at the time of the idolatrous act and the drinking of the blood from the sacrifice. This would also align the two texts concerning what type of harlotry Paul was addressing here (cult harlotry).
320 William Mounce, _The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament_ (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), p. 194. Friberg, _ALGNT_, p. 155. It denotes ‘that there are no hindrances to an action or that the opportunity for it occurs, it is possible...predominately as denoting that an action is not prevented by a higher court, or by law it is permitted, it is lawful, it may be done.’ Roman law permitted cult prostitution. This is most likely the ‘freedom’ that Paul was speaking of.
he was *echoing* a Gnostic libertine concept that was ‘in use among a group of Corinthians.’\(^{321}\) This version of Gnostic philosophy espoused that anything and everything sensual was permissible to free men (and even slaves were now ‘free in Christ’). This attracted many with no moral compass and no desire ‘to curb their flesh.’\(^{322}\) They weren’t interested in understanding what was right or wrong, if it inhibited their sinful lifestyle. Just how many believers in Corinth walked this way isn’t known. If it was a specific person, Paul would have addressed it as such, as he did in chapter five, with the man who had intercourse with his father’s wife. Instead, it seems to be aimed at a group in the congregation (see 2nd Cor. 12:21).

Paul qualified ‘all things’ (πάντα, *pahn*’tah), and the qualification was all things that edify and don’t imprison one (v. 12, ‘I will not be brought under the power of any’). Obviously, if one sins it’s not edifying (‘expedient’) and not a ‘freedom,’ but an enslavement. The Apostle confined himself to the realm of a godly lifestyle. Just as God can do ‘any-thing,’ but restricts Himself to righteousness, so too, with Paul. He was free to do whatever he thought best in any situation, but he wouldn’t use his freedom in Christ to justify sin (which is defined by Mosaic Law).\(^{323}\)

Stern believes that Paul incorporates another libertine phrase\(^ {324}\) when he writes in v. 13, ‘Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats.’\(^ {325}\) This speaks of the specific justification that the libertines used for their unrestrained sex. Leon Morris says that this phrase,

> ‘looks like another expression used by the Corinthians. Eating is a natural activity and they apparently held that one bodily function is much like another. Fornication is as natural as eating.’\(^ {326}\)

Sounds logical and reasonable, but we know it’s sin because Mosaic Law speaks against having sex outside of marriage, and against cult harlotry. Without an understanding of Torah (God’s will) there wasn’t any need for sexual restraint. If it’s good to feed the body with food, a natural function, why would it be bad to have sex with a cult harlot? The sexual desire is as natural as eating, so there shouldn’t be any need for sexual restraint. Pagan thinking wasn’t illogical, it was just ungodly. *Wycliffe* states that,

> ‘the moral laxity that polluted the church, apparently’ (was) ‘caused by the application of the truth of Christian liberty to the sexual realm. The question is: If there are no restrictions in food, one appetite of the body, why must there be in sexual things, another physical desire?’\(^ {327}\)

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\(^{321}\) Stern, *JNTC*, p. 451, says that it ‘was not a central principle’ of Paul’s, ‘but a saying in use among a group of Corinthians who would later have been called gnostic libertines.’ On the other hand, Morris, *1 Corinthians*, p. 95, states, ‘It looks like a catch-phrase the Corinthians used to justify their actions, possibly one they would have derived from Paul’s teaching.’ Either way, some Corinthian believers were using this to philosophically justify their unrestrained sexual lust, and that, in relation to other gods and goddesses.

\(^{322}\) Today, being ‘free in Christ,’ means that many Christians walk as the world and don’t even realize it. Many Christian women, following Hollywood and secular society, dress much more sensually and provocatively than the ancient cult harlots of Corinth ever did. These Christian women don’t seem to realize that their immodesty and ungodly dress cause men to stumble. The same is true for how some Christian men dress.

\(^{323}\) Ezek. 11:19-20; Zech. 14:16-19; Mt. 5:19; 22:34-40; Rom. 3:20, 31; 6:1-4f.; 7:7; Jam. 2:9, 11; Rev. 12:17; 14:12.


\(^{325}\) Or, ‘Food for the belly and the belly for food,’ *meat* being a KJV word for food or meal (grain). It’s quite likely this also spoke of their gluttonous eating or feasting at the pagan shrines where cult harlotry took place.

\(^{326}\) Morris, *1 Corinthians*, p. 96.

\(^{327}\) Pfeiffer, *WBC*, p. 1238. No ‘restrictions in food’ is an anti-Law perception of the Good News. Note well 1st Tim.
The lifting of the veil—Acts 15:20-21

Paul countered the libertine philosophy that stressed one’s freedom to do whatever he sexually pleased, with what was profitable for him. He also pointed his readers to Judgment Day, by saying that one day the body and food for it would come to an end (v. 13).

In relation to fornication and the harlot mentioned in the passage, Paul links his argument to idol worship, and therefore, to cult harlotry, by contrasting true worship with pagan worship. He says that the body is ‘for the Lord; and the Lord for the body’ (v. 14), and building on this he says their bodies were members of Messiah (v. 15). The spiritual comparison between being members of Messiah, or members of a harlot, are parallel only if the harlot is a cult harlot, who serves another god.

Paul writes in v. 15, ‘Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid!’ The Greek for ‘take’ is ‘take away.’ Gentiles who believed in Jesus would be ‘taken away’ and made members with this harlot. Something that is missing, if this was just a common harlot, is that Yeshua is God the Son. For the parallel to be complete, for them to be ‘taken away’ and given to another, Paul would have to be speaking of union with a harlot that could offer union with another god.

Leon Morris sees this and presents the possibility that Paul is writing about temple prostitution. He first speaks of the traditional scholarly understanding of ‘union with a prostitute’ being ‘a horrible profanation of that which should be used only for Christ,’ but then he goes on to say:

‘This would be even more so if the Corinthian prostitute was connected with the temple, for then the act would form a link with the (pagan) deity.’

Morris realizes that the words for harlot and harlotry also indicate cult harlot and cult harlotry. With ancient Corinth infested with cult harlotry it would certainly point to this first.

In 1st Corinthians 6:16-17 Paul uses the word ‘joined’ twice:

16 What? Know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? For two, saith he, shall be one flesh. 17 But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.’

The Greek word that is translated joined is conceptually the same as its Hebrew counterpart in the idolatrous Baal Peor affair, in which cult harlotry played a major role. Coincidence? The Greek word is κολλάω (kollah’oh), and means, to ‘join oneself to, join, cling to, associate with.’ It also means, to ‘cleave to, to unite with’ and ‘to attach one’s self to.’

Morris writes that Paul uses it to express, the ‘physical bond with the harlot,’ but there’s more here that Paul speaks of than just a physical bond. The Apostle wrote of the spiritual bond the Corinthians had with Messiah, in v. 17. He used the same Greek word for joined in both verses (16-17). Again, the parallel is strongest if this were a cult harlot. There’s nothing in the context to negate it, but on the contrary, many things that point directly it. Why can’t this be happening in pagan Corinth? Why wouldn’t the Gentile be-

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328 Morris, 1 Corinthians, p. 97.
329 Ibid., pp. 97-98.
333 Morris, 1 Corinthians, p. 98.
lievers, steeped in pagan harlotry, be doing what the Hebrews had done when they came out of Egypt? The Gentiles hadn’t heard from the Mountain, as all Israel had, that they were to have no other gods but Yahveh (Ex. 20:3).

In v. 18 Paul cries out, ‘Flee fornication!’ What kind of prostitution is Paul addressing? It could certainly be both, as the word conveys both types, and if he had meant adultery or homosexuality, there are Greek words that he could have, and would have used, to get his point across. That none of those words are mentioned means that the Apostle had harlotry in mind. That harlotry is what Paul was writing about is further seen from the noun which comes from pornay’ah (v. 18). Pornay (vv. 15-16) can only mean a harlot (common or cultic), not an adulteress, etc.

Paul states their Christian bodies were for the Lord and that the Lord Yeshua owned them (v. 14). Then he added that their bodies were members of Christ (v. 15). Now he tells them that their bodies are the temple or dwelling place of God (v. 19). It’s here that the parallel is strongest and draws closest to the understanding that Paul was speaking of temple prostitution among the Corinthian believers:

18. Flee fornication! Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. 19. What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? (KJV)

Paul’s use of the Greek word for temple, ναὸς (na’ohs, v. 19), is defined as the place where the deity dwelt; in the inner sanctuary as opposed to the outer courtyard.334 Paul is saying that the believer’s body is the dwelling place of God the Holy Spirit. By implication, believers should not go to another temple where another god dwells and join themselves to that god through cult harlotry.

Cult harlotry is seen in the phrase in 2nd Cor. 6:14-16, that the body is ‘the temple of the living God,’ which is synonymous with Paul’s use of, ‘the temple of the Holy Ghost,’ in 1st Cor. 6:19. In 2nd Cor. 6:14-16 it’s crystal clear that he’s speaking of cult harlotry, and this, to the same group of Corinthians:

2nd Cor. 6:14: ‘Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath Light with darkness? 15. And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?’

16. And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, ‘I will dwell in them, and walk in (among) them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’” (KJV)

The Apostle contrasts, ‘Christ with Belial’ (v. 15), warning the Corinthian Christians not to be unequally yoked (v. 14) or joined to a cult prostitute who belonged to an idolatrous shrine.335 He wouldn’t use Belial if it were just a common prostitute, as no religious significance attaches to that kind of harlotry. Also, the use of the word infidel (v. 15) is only used in a religious context.

In 2nd Cor. 6:16 Paul speaks of the ‘temple of God’ and idols. This, too, can only be a contrast between the Lord and cult prostitution. The correlation with 1st Cor. 6 is seen in his use of the concept that God dwells in believers and that believers are the temple of God (1st Cor. 6:19; 2nd Cor. 6:16). It’s also seen in

334 Ibid., p. 99.
335 Most today take this unequal yoking to mean that a Christian shouldn’t marry a non-Christian. As correct as this concept is, the text is primarily warning Christians not to have intercourse with cult harlots.

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his admonition to the Corinthian believers, not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (1st Cor. 6:15-16; 2nd Cor. 6:14).

In 1st Cor. 6:19 Paul states that they should glorify (worship) God through their body, the temple of God (v. 20), and not ‘worship’ another with their body. The context and the parallel to 2nd Cor. 6:16 speak of cult harlotry. True worship is within the believer’s body, the temple or dwelling place of God. On the other hand, one goes to a pagan temple and gives his body to a temple harlot there, ‘to worship’ the goddess. The wording of Paul in both texts is quite striking. Everything points directly to temple harlotry, and not to common harlotry.

Paul writes many times of the Holy Spirit dwelling in believers, without mentioning that they are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Yet here, when speaking of pornay’ah (1st Cor. 6:13, 18 twice), which is either common or cult harlotry, and having used the word for harlot (pornay) twice (in vv. 15, 16), he chooses to employ the concept that believers are the dwelling place or temple of the living God. This parallels the idea that those who use the harlot are going to the temple, or dwelling place, of another god. Paul’s use of pornay’ah (harlotry) and pornay (harlot) then, in this context, should be seen as referring to cult harlotry and cult harlots.

What most scholars say about this passage referring to common harlotry is not acceptable. The parallels are strongest when the passage is taken first and foremost as an admonishment against cult harlotry, especially in a city noted for it throughout the entire Roman Empire.

Here are six reasons that support the position that Paul was speaking about cult harlotry in chapter six:

1. The ancient city of Corinth, in northern Greece, was known the world over for its temple prostitutes. In Corinth, ‘the temple of Aphrodite with its 1,000 hierodules’ was famous.

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337 Colin G. Kruse, B.D., M.Phil., Ph.D., Author; Leon Morris, M.Sc., M.Th., Ph.D., General Editor, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: 2 Corinthians (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), pp. 15-16. Kruse contests this figure of one thousand cult prostitutes in Paul’s day. He writes that Strabo’s statement (where the ‘thousand cult prostitutes’ is taken from) refers to the city of Corinth before the Romans destroyed it in 146 BC. The Romans rebuilt it one hundred years later in 44 BC (ibid., pp. 14-15). It’s very possible, though, that Corinth in Paul’s day had the same number of cult prostitutes for Aphrodite. In the Apostle’s day the city was about a hundred years old, and the ‘capital for the Roman province of Achaia’ (ibid., p. 16). It was also a chief city of commerce in the Roman world because of its location. Kruse even admits that there is ‘no doubt that Corinth was regaining its wealth and prestige in Paul’s time’ (ibid.), and we know that it was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire (p. 76).

Kruse also writes that Corinth in Paul’s day was immersed with pagan worship and that Aphrodite was still the chief goddess: the ‘new Corinth became a centre for the worship of many of the old Graeco–Roman gods. He’ (Kruse speaking of the ancient writer Pausanias in 174 AD), ‘refers to temples or altars dedicated to Poseidon, Palaemon, Aphrodite, Artemis, Dionysus, Helius, Hermes, Apollo, Zeus, Isis, Eros and others. Strabo recorded that in his time there was a small temple to Aphrodite on the summit of Acrocorinth, while’ by the time of Pausanias, ‘the ascent to the Acrocorinth was punctuated by places of worship dedicated to various deities including Isis, Helius, Demeter and Pelagian. On the summit there was still found the temple of Aphrodite, with images of Helius, Eros and Aphrodite herself. Clearly then,’ says Kruse, ‘the new Corinth of Paul’s day was still a center for the worship of Aphrodite, as the old city had been prior to its destruction in 146 BC’ (ibid., p. 15), and therefore, Aphrodite having 1,000 temple prostitutes seems reasonable.

Even if the new Corinth, though, couldn’t rival the old for its thousand cult prostitutes to Aphrodite, how many less did it have in Paul’s day? Aphrodite was the chief goddess, as attested to by the fact that her temple was located on the highest point of the city, and Corinth, being the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire at that time,
Cult Prostitution in the Corinthian Assembly

2. The Greek words for ‘harlot’ and ‘harlotry’ equally mean ‘cult harlot’ and ‘cult harlotry.’ To say that it was only, or primarily, common harlotry that Paul addressed, would have meant that Paul was blind to a reality that pervaded the entire city.

3. Paul’s use of the phrases, ‘the body is the Lord’s…members of Christ’ and the ‘temple of God,’ imply a direct connection to idolatry. These, along with his use of joined, which conceptually links it to the Baal Peor fiasco, lend themselves to seeing the passage as a contrast between Yeshua and other gods, not just a common prostitute. Paul will also speak of the Baal Peor affair in chapter ten, which specifically deals with cult prostitution.

4. Paul’s use of the phrase, ‘All things are lawful unto me’ is also repeated in 1st Cor. 10:23 where cult harlotry and sacrificial idolatry are specifically addressed. This lends itself to chapter six dealing with the same problem with which chapter ten deals with, which is a further teaching against cult harlotry, an extension of the teaching that began in chapters five and six.

5. In an almost identical rebuke to the very same people, Paul, in 2nd Cor. 6:14-17, speaks against cult prostitution. In 1st Cor. 6:19 he writes of the believer’s body being the temple of the Holy Spirit and the dwelling place of God. This he reiterates in 2nd Cor. 6:15-16 with the words ‘Belial’ and ‘idols.’ Paul comes against cult prostitution in 2nd Cor. 6. The parallel to 1st Cor. 6 is obvious.

6. As R. J. Knowling stated, and as the chapter on Cult Prostitution in the New Testament (p. 101f.) will point out, the use of pornay’ah in the New Testament speaks first and foremost of cult prostitution, not common prostitution. For someone to suggest common harlotry over cult harlotry they would have to prove it, but this is not possible.

These six reasons reveal that the prostitution the Apostle spoke of in 1st Cor. 6 was temple prostitution, not common prostitution.

In relation to Torah, Paul is not doing anything in this passage that conflicts with the Law of Moses. He’s not suggesting that one can break any of the laws of Moses, even with his use of the phrase, ‘All things are lawful unto me.’ On the contrary, he’s calling the Corinthians to accountability in the area which Torah is most adamant, even though they are ‘free in Christ’ and ‘under Grace.’

From both a textual and a sociological point of view, the Apostle’s stern warning to the Corinthians in chapter six supports the understanding that pornay’ah in Acts 15:20 also means cult prostitution. Paul’s opposition to it here is exactly what James spoke against in his Decree to Gentile believers. It’s not a coincidence.

would probably have even more than a thousand. However, whatever their number, Paul and the Corinthian Christians would still have had to deal with them and all the other cult harlots of all the other gods and goddesses in Corinth. Whether Aphrodite had a thousand or just five, cult harlotry among the Corinthian believers was a major problem for Paul, and also, for the average sailor. Most likely, what Strabo wrote of Corinth before the Roman destruction, still pertained to Corinth in the Apostle’s day. Krause (p. 14), writes: “Many sea captains squandered their money paying for the services of these cult harlots, so that the proverb, ‘Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth,’ was in use among them.”


More Cult Prostitution in Corinth: 1st Cor. 10

The Apostle Paul begins chapter ten by speaking of the danger of walking in idolatry and how it can sever one from God. Ancient Israel in the Wilderness had much in the way of God’s divine grace upon them; He had saved them from Egyptian slavery, split the Red Sea apart so they could walk through on dry ground and had killed the Egyptian Army, heard Him speak the Ten Commandments from Mt. Sinai and fed them Manna every day, but Israel failed to walk in faith when God tested them (Dt. 8:1-3). Paul cautioned the Corinthians against this faithless attitude, writing specifically against cult harlotry in v. 8. The first four verses of chapter ten express the conceptual unity between ancient Israel and the Gentile Corinthian believers. Paul begins by showing them that the Fathers of Israel were their Fathers, too:

‘For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our Fathers were all under the Cloud and all passed through the Sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the Cloud and in the Sea. And all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink for they were drinking from a spiritual Rock, which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.’ (1st Cor. 10:1-4)

The Apostle wanted the Corinthians to understand that Israel, too, had been in covenant with Yahveh, and that the ‘Body of Moses’ preceded, and was a picture of, the Body of Messiah. Both were chosen of God and both had God’s gracious hand upon them, but people in both could sever themselves from that Grace. Morris sees this parallel and writes,

‘the Israelites, without exception, received the tokens of God’s good hand on them. The fact that most perished (v. 5) comes accordingly with greater force. The cloud was the means of divine guidance at the time of the Exodus (Ex. 13:21-22) when the people passed through the sea (Ex. 14:21-22).’ Their ‘participation in the great events of the Exodus brought the Israelites under the leadership of Moses.’ They ‘were united to him’ in a similar way that we are to Messiah. ‘They were all likewise sustained by the manna (Ex. 16:4, 13f.)…and spiritual drink…which refers to Christ and sees him as following the Israelites and continually giving them drink…Nevertheless…although God had given them such signal manifestations of his power and goodness, the majority failed to enter the Promised Land,’ and that Paul’s warning now, ‘against idolatry is very relevant to conditions in Corinth.’

Paul will go on to link the idolatry of the Corinthians with the debacle of the Gold Calf orgy, and with the ‘craving for food’ that killed many in the Wilderness (Num. 11:4-34). He’ll then present Israel at Baal Peor and use their unfaithfulness to God as a springboard to declare cult harlotry ‘off-limits’ for the Corinthians. The Apostle will then bring the Family History lesson to a close, warning the Gentiles that membership in the Body of Messiah is not a guarantee—one can fall from Grace. Paul writes:

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340 Paul’s Pharisaic training comes to the forefront in, ‘the Rock that followed them.’ It’s not found in Scripture, but the Rabbis teach that a literal rock actually followed Israel for 40 years. We see a similar thing when Jude writes that the Devil contended for the body of Moses (Jude 1:9; cf. Dt. 34:5-6). Nowhere in Scripture is that stated, either. Jude most likely got that from an apocryphal book of the first century BC called, The Assumption of Moses. These are two instances from Paul and Jude (English: Judah), a half brother of Yeshua, that come into the New Testament as fact, but are only rabbinic traditions or fables (see also 2nd Tim. 3:8).

341 Morris, 1 Corinthians, pp. 139-140.
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5“Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well pleased for they were laid low in the Wilderness. 6Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. 7Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.’ 8Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did” (KJV: ‘Neither let us commit fornication as some of them committed fornication), 342 “and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.”343 (1st Cor. 10:5-8)

The reference to the people sitting down to eat and to play (the harlot) is a direct reference to the Gold Calf (Ex. 32:6). Here cult harlotry was practiced in the Name of Yahveh, the Calf being being proclaimed as Yahveh (Ex. 32:4-5, 8). ‘To play,’ speaks of sexual misconduct. It’s another way of translating the Hebrew verb zanah (to prostitute—to play the harlot). Israel sacrificed to, and worshiped, the god of gold, indulging in idolatrous sex in the Name of Yahveh.

Paul’s second reference is to those that fell in one day (Neither let us commit fornication…23,000 fell in one day, v. 8), and is rightly seen by Stern, Morris, Findlay and Wycliffe as the Baal Peor affair. Obviously, fornication here must mean cult harlotry. There would have been no reason to give these sexually idolatrous warnings if some Corinthian Christians weren’t engaged in cult prostitution. Paul continues:

11Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall! 13No temptation has overtaken you, but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. 14Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry!” (1st Cor. 10:11-14)

The idolatry from which Paul warned the Corinthians to flee from was sexual in nature (cult harlotry). The phrase, ‘No temptation has overtaken you, but such as is common to man,’ doesn’t speak of just any temptation, but of cult harlotry (v. 8); idolatry (vv. 7, 14); tempting Messiah Yeshua (v. 9, which involves disbelief and complaining about one’s situation, as the fiery serpents sent among Israel’s belligerence over not having the ‘food of Egypt’ and water they wanted; Num. 20:5-9), and carnal lust for meat (v. 6). Paul told them that he realized cult harlotry was a great temptation (craving or lust),344 but he warned them and pointed out that as those Israelis fell, so would the Gentile Christians who continued in sacrificial-sexual idolatry. These Corinthian Christians didn’t understand that cult harlotry and belief in Yeshua were incompatible. Not all idol worship involves prostitution. In some instances idol worship or


343 This is a reference to Numbers 25:9. Even though Paul seems to be ‘off’ by 1,000, Keil (The Pentateuch, p. 792) states, ‘The Apostle Paul deviates from this statement in 1st Cor. 10:8 and gives the number of those that fell as twenty-three thousand, probably from a traditional interpretation of the schools of the scribes, according to which a thousand were deducted from the twenty-four thousand who perished, as being the number of those who were hanged by the judges’ (i.e. at the command of Yahveh, Num. 25:4-5), ‘so that only twenty-three thousand would be killed by the plague; and it is to these alone that Paul refers.’ This is another example of Rabbinic influence in the New Testament.

344 Christians today are continually bombarded by the spirit of harlotry (Hos. 5:11; Rev. 17:1-6). Newspapers, billboards, television, movies and the Internet are filled with men and women seductively dressed and lewd in their behavior, tempting all who happen to look their way. Pornography (a word from pornay’ah, prostitution) is everywhere, and many believers are ignorantly emulating these shameful and corrupt human idols, similar to how their Corinthian counterparts entertained the cult harlots of Aphrodite, etc. The way that many Christian women dress today would be enough to make the bold-faced harlots of ancient Corinth blush.
idolatry is the burning of incense to a statue, or astrology, or ancestor worship, or magic, etc. Israel entered into cult harlotry through idolatrous sacrifices and orgies (Ex. 32:1-6f.; Num. 25:1-13). Cult harlotry falls under the general heading of idolatry, being the sexual expression of idolatry. By telling the Corinthian believers to flee from idolatry, in 10:14, Paul was reinforcing what he had written in 6:18 (Flee pornay’ah!)

Paul admonishes the Corinthians—don’t commit this abomination against God! The Greek word in 10:8 for fornication is pornay’ah. It’s also used in 1 st Cor. 5:1 (twice), 6:13 (once), 6:15-16 (twice pornay, prostitute) and 6:18 (twice, fornication). Why would pornay’ah be cult prostitution in chapter ten, but only common harlotry (or ‘sexual immorality’) in chapter six? Was Paul addressing two different groups of Christians within the assembly at Corinth; one for chapter six and the other for chapter ten? This could hardly be the case as he doesn’t mention leaving off from one group to write to the other, but continually addresses them as one body in the midst of their cliques (1 st Cor. 1:12-13; 3:1-4, 21; 10:17).

Chapter ten is the Apostle’s follow-up to chapters five and six. Paul is dealing with the same problem and the same people. In chapter five Paul deals with the specifics of the man involved in incestuous cult harlotry. In chapter six he resorts to a philosophical-religious approach (‘All things are lawful’ and the believer is ‘the temple of God’) to deal with the cult harlotry. In chapter ten the Apostle to the Gentiles wrote of the sordid history of Israel in the Wilderness, and how the Corinthians were part of Israel and should therefore learn from their sins (‘examples for us,’ v. 6, and ‘for our instruction,’ v. 11).

In chapter seven, Paul tells them to get married if they can’t abstain (stating in 7:2 to avoid fornication by having a spouse). In chapter eight he speaks of the eating of idolatrous sacrifices, and in nine he declares that he had every right to be paid by the Corinthians for his spiritual services, although he wouldn’t take that right, as it might interfere with the Great News (Gospel). Then he continues his thoughts concerning fornication, from chapters five, six (and eight) into chapter ten.

Why didn’t Paul write chapter ten immediately after chapters five and six (and include eight in the middle)? Paul is dictating a letter. That it may not be the most well-formatted letter for some people doesn’t allow for the fact that Paul was a human being writing a letter nearly two thousand years ago. Most likely, he was dictating his thoughts as they came to him (1 st Cor. 16:21). It’s not uncommon in his letters for him ‘to wander off’ in one direction and then return to a previous thought and expound upon it, but even here, those who would discredit the Apostle concerning chapters five through ten don’t do him justice. The chapters, indeed, reveal a developmental theme of Corinthian behavior in relation to cult prostitution, pagan sacrifices, and their attitude toward one another. Perhaps, if the Apostle had a computer, he could have tidied it up a bit more?

Leon Morris states that chapter ten is not a fresh thought for Paul, but a continuation of the Apostle’s thoughts on cult prostitution:

‘This is not a new subject, for fornication…formed a part of much idol worship. Sacred prostitutes were found at many shrines and Corinth had an unenviable notoriety in this respect. But Paul’s primary reference is to the incident in which “Israel began to indulge in” cult harlotry ‘with Moabite women’ and ‘joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor.’

Morris rightly sees fornication here as cult harlotry (‘idol worship… Sacred prostitutes…many shrines …worshipping the Baal of Peor’), and that this wasn’t the first time in the letter that Paul spoke about it (‘not a new subject’). Paul was further addressing the problem from chapters five, six and eight, as the

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345 Morris, 1 Corinthians, p. 142.
Holy Spirit led him. This wasn’t the first, nor the last time, that Paul would address cult harlotry among his Gentile believers.

Witherington finds, in Paul’s very first letter, that the Apostle addresses pornay’ah (First Thessalonians 50 AD), which was written about a year after the Council of Acts 15 (48-49 AD). He notes the similarity between James speaking of the Gentiles turning to God (Acts 15:19), and therefore, needing to give up idolatry, and Paul saying that the Thessalonians had ‘turned to God from idols’ to serve ‘a living and true God (1 Thess. 1:9).’ Paul also addresses pornay’ah in 1st Thess. 4:1-9, and Witherington says that,

the ‘fuller discussion of Paul’s understanding of the decree comes however, in 1 Corinthians, especially chapters 5-10, where’ (in 1st Cor. 10:7) ‘ειδωλοθυτον’ (aidolo’thutone) ‘refers to meat sacrificed and eaten in the presence of idols.’

Corinth wasn’t an isolated incident. A translation that would vastly improve understanding for 1st Cor. 6:15-16 would use ‘temple harlot’ or ‘cult harlot,’ instead of just ‘harlot’ or ‘prostitute.’ Without it, the translation gives the impression that the fornication from which Paul was telling them to flee from was just common harlotry (6:18), or worse, ‘sexual immorality.’ Obviously, cult harlotry is sexually immoral, but who would be able to decipher, ‘sexual immorality,’ either in Acts 15:20 (48-49 AD) or 1st Corinthians (52 AD), to understand that it was cult prostitution? No one, and herein lies the fault of the translators.

Some questions that people ask are: ‘Why didn’t Paul appeal directly to the Law of Moses if the Law was still in effect?,’ and, ‘Why didn’t he just include the four rules from James?’

Paul appeals to Mosaic Law in chapter ten, relating that ancient Hebrew history was written for Gentile Corinthian example and instruction. He’s giving the consequences of breaking the Law (in picture form; e.g. the Baal Peor affair), to impress upon them what could also happen to them.

Paul dealt with the Corinthians in chapters six and ten, using their own terms and philosophy and the historical, spiritual reality of ancient Israel. Perhaps he saw this as a more powerful way to deal with them than to put forward the rules of James, which they most likely already knew (Acts 16:4-5), but hadn’t been obeying. Findlay adds:

‘To draw a hard and fast line in such questions and to forbid all participation in idolotyth-ta, after the precedent of Acts xv, would have been the simplest course to take; but Paul feels it necessary to round the matter on fundamental principles.’

Paul was dealing with a people steeped in cult prostitution and diabolical philosophy. As a shepherd he was dealing with it in the way that the Holy Spirit was leading him, given the people and the situation. He was teaching them, from different concepts, the reasons for the rules and why they shouldn’t be involved in cult prostitution. Knowling also sees this and adds that just because Paul doesn’t mention the Decree, one shouldn’t think that it did not happen, or that Paul didn’t recognize it:

346 Witherington, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 465. See also further in the letter where Paul seems to hearken back to both 1st Thess. 1:9 and Acts 15:20, when he speaks of the commandments he gave the Thessalonians (4:2), his use of pornay’ah (sexual idolatry) and sanctification (4:3), the passion and lust of the Gentiles (4:5), uncleanness (4:7) and the Holy Spirit (4:8). All these point to the rules and theme of Acts 15:20: sacrificial-sexual idolatry.

347 Ibid., p. 466.

348 Paul also speaks of it in Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3 and Colossians 3:5.

349 See p. 76, note 299 for places in 1st Corinthians where Paul uses the Law to validate his points.

350 Findlay, St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, pp. 731-732.
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‘St. Paul’s language in 1 Cor. 8:1-13; 10:14-22; Rom. 14, may be fairly said to possess the spirit of the Decree, and to mark the discriminating wisdom of one eager to lead his disciples behind the rule to the principle...there is no more reason to doubt the historical truth of the compact made in the Jerusalem Decree, because St. Paul never expressly refers to it, than there is to throw doubt upon his statement in Gal. 2:10, because he does not expressly refer to it as an additional motive for urging the Corinthians to join in the collection for the poor saints, 2 Cor 8:9.’

Paul addressed the Corinthians in ways that we would like to be addressed if we were walking in darkness and thinking that it was Light. His not mentioning the Decree of Acts 15 doesn’t mean that it didn’t happen, or that Paul rejected it, or that he never gave it to the Corinthians.

Mosaic Law was valid for the Apostle. In First Corinthians Paul uses a specific commandment in the Law of Moses to establish his authority and his right to collect funds from them. He relates in 9:8-9 (and 1st Tim. 5:18) that the ox treading out the corn was not to be muzzled (a commandment of the Law; Dt. 25:4). He then goes on to draw the analogy between spreading the Gospel and receiving money from those who benefited from it. The Apostle gives analogies from various forms of work (soldier, farmer, etc.), and then turns to the Law to cement his legal basis for this right. As Morris states, Paul’s use of the commandment is authoritative because the Law settled the issue of Paul’s right to funds:

‘Paul rejects the thought that the principle he is enunciating and illustrating from various fields of human endeavor rests simply on human wisdom (it is not a human point of view). He can show it in the Law,’ which ‘is always regarded as authoritative.’

Paul used the Law to support his argument that he was entitled to financial support from the Corinthians. If the Law wasn’t valid for his Gentile Christians, Paul would not have used it.

The concern that James had in Acts 15:20, about cult prostitution among Gentile Christians, was a stark reality that Paul faced among his Corinthian believers. That Christians would do this, thinking that it was alright, reveals their perverse spiritual condition. The blood of Yeshua forgives things that could not be forgiven under Mosaic Law, like murder and adultery. This, and the fact that the Gentile Christians were just learning to walk in Christ, enabled Paul not to sever them immediately from the believing community for their sacrificial-sexual idolatry (although he acted decisively with the Christian man in 1st Cor. 5:1-5). Yet, is there anyone who would suggest that if those Corinthians continued in cult harlotry, that ‘Grace’ would cover them forever (Gal. 5:19-21)?

The significant places in First Corinthians where pornay’ah appears reveal that cult harlotry is specifically what Paul meant when he wrote of pornay’ah (KJV fornication). Cult harlotry was primarily what Paul had in mind when he wrote chapters five, six, eight and ten.

First Corinthians provides biblical and historical support for how Yakov used the word pornay’ah, even if his context isn’t seen as sacrificial idolatry. Being listed with three other rules on idolatry only strengthens

352 Rom. 3:20, 31; 7:12, 14; 1st Cor. 5:6-8; 7:19, etc.
353 Morris, 1 Corinthians, p. 132. Italics are those of Morris.
355 The reference in 1st Cor. 7:2, where the Apostle offers marriage as a viable option to fornication, can mean cult and/or common prostitution.
the position that Yakov was warning the Gentile Christians to not engage in sacrificial-sexual idolatry. It has nothing to do with table fellowship, and further, it cannot be used to prove that the four rules were, ‘the only rules for the Gentile.’

In the days of Paul, going to pagan temples and cult harlots was as acceptable and honorable to the Gentiles as going to church is today for Christians. There was no social or moral stigma attached to it. ‘Everyone’ did it. Aside from Israel when she was faithful, that’s the kind of darkness that was over the whole world.356

Yakov instituted the four rules as a filter for Gentiles who were entering into Yeshua’s Kingdom. Most of them didn’t have an understanding that temple harlotry and the worship of other gods was wrong. The four rules were the most important laws for the Gentiles to know immediately, because it concerned their salvation. Obviously, though, the four rules weren’t the only rules, just from the fact that they are from Mosaic Law. This proves that Torah is for every believer today. Grace must always be tempered with Law, or people will do what they think is right in their own eyes. Many times, as we found at Corinth, this is sin in God’s eyes.357

The Corinthians had other problems revolving around sacrificial idolatry that needed to be addressed. The next two sections deal with the idolatrous practice of eating the meat, and drinking the blood, of the sacrifice to the idol. The former was Yakov’s first prohibition. The latter was also addressed by him. It was the fourth rule of Acts 15:20.

**Fellowship with Devils: 1st Cor. 10:16-22**

In looking at another aspect of pagan worship from Acts 15:20, the drinking of blood (or a symbolic representation of the blood), the Apostle Paul strongly rebukes some of the Corinthian Christians for drinking the cup of demons!359 Can this really be?! Christians drinking fresh blood to demons and thinking that it’s alright? Paul speaks of how it would make God feel (jealous!), and what it would mean to them (they would be severed—cut off from Messiah!). Both concepts recall Israel at Baal Peor. Paul writes,

“Is not the cup of blessing which we bless, a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the Body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one Bread. Look at the nation of Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the Altar? What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything or that an idol is anything? No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God, and I do not want you to become sharers in (partners with)360 demons” (KJV: ‘and I would not that ye

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356 Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, pp. 14, 20, 57, 60, 77, 95, 133, 174, 199, 230, etc.

357 Dt. 12:8; Judges 17:6; 21:25; 1st Cor. 5–10

358 Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, p. 5. An alternative ‘blood’ drink could be made of red ‘wine, honey, water, and flour,’ as an intoxicant to dull the senses, arouse the passions and lead the pagan further on. Flour would make the mixture thicken so it would resemble blood.

359 1st Cor. 10:16-22. The whole congregation wasn’t doing this, but obviously some (many?) were. This is an example where, if they had been raised in the Law of Moses, they would never have considered this.

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should have fellowship with devils.’) “You cannot drink the Cup of the Lord and the cup of demons! You cannot partake of the Table of the Lord and the table of demons! Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?! We are not stronger than He, are we?’ (1st Corinthians 10:16-22)

It’s not a minor problem that Paul is addressing. His reference to idols and jealousy speaks of how Yahveh felt in the Baal Peor affair (Num. 25:11, 13). It means that Yeshua would cut them off just as Yahveh cut off those Israelis who sacrificed to Baal Peor. What God had done to His people Israel, He was capable of doing to His people Israel who were Gentiles.

Some Gentile believers were drinking the cup of demons and didn’t realize that it was wrong. Their religious culture permitted them to include the worship of Jesus, with the practices of their other gods. Paul told them they couldn’t worship their idols and Yeshua, too. The history of Israel was a stern warning to them. He didn’t want them unaware or ignorant of what would happen to them if they continued.

Those Corinthian believers drank the blood of the sacrifice as part of the ritual of sacrificial-sexual idolatry. As to the seriousness of the matter, Findlay writes:

‘where the feast is held under the auspices of a heathen god and as a sequel to his sacrifice…participation under these circumstances becomes an act of apostasy, and the feaster identifies himself with the idol as distinctly as in the Lord’s Supper he identifies himself with Christ.’361

The reference to the table of demons is the first rule of James: don’t eat meat sacrificed to an idol at the time and place of the sacrifice. Three of the four rules of James are expressly pointed out by Paul in First Corinthians (cult harlotry, sacrificial blood and sacrificial meat). Also, this section is Paul’s closure for chapter eight, where some might think he was condoning the eating of meat sacrificed to an idol in the temple (8:1-13).

In his article, Sacrifices and Offerings in the NT, T. R. Schreiner affirms that Paul was dealing with some incredibly perverse concepts of what it meant, ‘to believe in Jesus.’ He states:

‘how can they sit at the Lord’s table and participate in the benefits of the Lord’s death and at the same time sit down in an idol’s temple and participate in the benefits of that which was sacrificed to idols? Obviously, such behavior is completely incongruous and inappropriate. One cannot have it both ways, gaining the benefits of Christ’s death and at the same time expose oneself to demonic influences (1 Cor. 10:20-22).’362

Schreiner seems baffled that Gentile Christians would do such a thing. This might be because he doesn’t have a full understanding of the ancient Gentile mentality. Be that as it may, this is exactly why James prohibited pollutions of idols and blood (his third prohibition) in Acts 15:20. What’s plain for all of us to see today, wasn’t the way many Gentile Christians in Corinth (and other congregations) saw it, because they were raised in the ways of paganism (e.g. having many gods and goddesses was ‘normal,’ natural, and right). The need for the four rules, and Mosaic Law, was very necessary in the Corinthian assembly.

361 Findlay, St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 732.
**Beef in the Market: 1st Cor. 10:23-28**

The buying and the eating of meat in the marketplace for common consumption is a corollary to what Paul has been addressing. In 1st Cor. 8, Paul *seems* to allow the believer to enter the pagan shrine and eat the sacrificial meat. His reasoning? The ‘idol is nothing.’ This would seem to contradict James, but Morris rightly points out that chapter eight wasn’t Paul’s final word on the subject. It only brings out his thoughts that an idol is truly nothing (compared to Yeshua). Morris writes of chapter eight that Paul,

‘is certainly not giving his own full idea on the matter, for he later says that what is sacrificed to idols is actually sacrificed to devils (10:20). There are spiritual beings behind the idols, though not the ones their worshippers thought. But here this is not the point. Paul is prepared to agree that the gods the heathen worship are no gods.’

The Apostle also speaks of not causing one’s brother stumble, if he sees him in the pagan temple (1st Cor. 8:7-13). By dealing with the issue of temple attendance this way, Paul is saying that the believer should not be seen in the temple, even though the idol is nothing. This is another way of prohibiting the eating of the meat at the pagan temple for the believer who thought that there was nothing wrong with doing it.

When Paul speaks of the sacrificial meat (‘table of demons’) in 10:21, he reveals his final thoughts on the subject by declaring that they weren’t to do that. With ‘meat in the market,’ the *essential* difference is that the believer is *not a participant in the temple sacrifice*. This is an important distinction. In 1st Corinthians 10:23-28 Paul writes:

‘All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor. Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience sake, for the Earth is the Lord’s and all it contains.’

“If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions, for conscience sake, but if anyone says to you, ‘This is meat sacrificed to idols,’ do not eat it for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience sake.”

In chapter six the understanding that all things were lawful for Paul meant that, theoretically, he, too, was able to do anything he wanted, within Roman jurisprudence. For Paul, the phrase, ‘eat anything,’ *would fall within the boundaries* of anything that God declared to be clean. He wouldn’t eat a ham sandwich, because he knew that it was a sin for him and for others. Paul isn’t authorizing the eating of unclean meat. The text is not speaking about clean vs. unclean meat, but about meat sacrificed to idols. He says that it’s alright to eat meat, which had been sacrificed and then sold at the market (or given for dinner in another’s home), as long as the guest wasn’t told by his host that it had been sacrificed. It was for the host’s sake that the guest shouldn’t eat that meat.

From two important passages of Scripture (Acts 15:20; Rev. 2:20), it has seemed to some that Paul is con-

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364 See 1st Tim. 4:4-5, and note well, the *two* qualifications for what makes food acceptable to eat: prayer *and* the Word of God (e.g. Scriptures like Lev. 11) *not just* prayer. See **Law, Grace, Holiness and the Pharisaic Church, Hebrews and the Change of the Law**, and **Romans 14 and the Dietary Laws**, for why the Church’s position on the Law of Moses isn’t biblical.

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...tragic, both James and Jesus in allowing believers to eat meat sacrificed to idols, but James admonished the Gentile believers not to eat meat that was literally just sacrificed on the altar, as Witherington brought out, specifically referring to it in Acts 15:20 as ‘the pollutions of idols.’ In 1st Cor. 10:16-22 Paul forbids the same thing. Eating from the table of demons spoke of eating the just sacrificed animal, the person actually participating in the sacrifice and worship of another god. (The same would apply to the drinking of its blood.)

In Rev. 2:20-21 Messiah Yeshua comes against cult prostitution (fornication) and the eating of the meat at the time of the sacrifice:

‘Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.’ (Rev. 2:20-21 KJV)

Those Gentile Christians at Thyatira were indulging in cult harlotry and eating animals sacrificed to idols. It seems that ‘Jezebel’ taught them that sacrificial-sexual idolatry was an acceptable Christian practice and that eating the sacrificial meat (at the sacrifice) was alright. Yeshua had earlier rebuked her for it, but she had not repented.

Paul allowed believers to eat sacrificial meat sold in the marketplace (1st Cor. 10:23-28), but not at the sacrifice to the god. They’re told by Paul not to ask if it had been sacrificed (1st Cor. 10:25), which implies that all meat sold in the market didn’t come from pagan sacrifices. This is how Paul could say what he does, and not be coming against James or Jesus. Paul allows the Gentile to eat this meat because ‘idols are nothing’ (1st Cor. 8:4, 7, 10), the Earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, and they’re not eating it at the time of the sacrifice.

Some of the meat in the marketplace would come from a pagan sacrifice, the pagan priests selling the excess to the vendors in the market. This was common. Morris states, ‘The priests customarily sold what they could not use.’ Animals might be ‘blessed’ by a pagan priest and then slaughtered in the marketplace by the ‘butcher,’ but not literally sacrificed on the pagan altar. With the blessing of the pagan priest the meat would be seen as ‘fit for consumption,’ having received the pagan ‘seal of approval,’ but it might concern some believers even though it hadn’t been part of a sacrificial ceremony. This is why Paul tells them that they can eat the meat in the market. They just shouldn’t ask if it had been sacrificed.

Paul told them not to eat the meat if an unbeliever said it was from a pagan sacrifice, so as not to confuse the unbeliever in terms of being able to present the Gospel to him. He’s not saying ‘don’t ask,’ if someone puts pork chops in front of you. No, Paul is speaking of a non-Christian home, where meat may have been

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365 See Witherington, p. 16.
366 Ex. 9:29; Ps. 24:1; 1st Cor. 10:28.
367 Morris, 1 Corinthians, p. 120.
368 This is what Paul addresses in Romans 14, not clean vs. unclean meats (as some wrongly teach). This practice also happens in South Africa today, where Moslem ‘priests’ offer their blessing to Allah before the animals are slaughtered for market. At the supermarkets this is the only meat one can buy (unless he goes to a kosher butcher). It has the religious seal of Islam on the wrapper, declaring that the meat was offered to Allah, and is ‘fit to eat.’ A number of believers in South Africa have voluntarily refused to buy the meat, as a witness to others, that Allah is not the true God. This is what Paul was wanting the host to realize, the guest abstaining when he found out the meat had been offered to a god. This is also similar to what Paul dealt with in Romans 14 (see Romans 14 and the Dietary Laws, Law 102, and Common—Acts 10:14).
Cult Prostitution in the Corinthian Assembly

used in a pagan sacrifice, not which meat to eat (clean vs. unclean). In the year and a half that Paul taught the Gentile Christians at Corinth (Acts 18:11), he most likely would have had a few classes on the Mosaic dietary laws.\footnote{Lev. 3:17; 11:1-47; Dt. 12:16, 23; 14:1-21; also see, Kosher—Biblical vs Jewish.}

Ben Witherington notes Paul’s different stance and Greek word for sacrificial meat eaten in the home. He writes:

‘It was okay to eat food sacrificed in a pagan temple at home. Paul specifically chooses a different term to refer to food that comes from the temple and is eaten elsewhere—$\epsilon\nu\pi\omicron\omicron\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron\omicron\omicron$ (aipo’thutone) *(1 Cor. 10:28).* In short, Paul, like James, insists that pagans flee idolatry,’ and cult prostitution, ‘and the temple context where such things’ were ‘prevalent.’\footnote{Witherington, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 466.}

Paul wasn’t rebelling against James, in his allowing the Corinthians to eat meat from the market, even if it had been part of a sacrificial rite. His teaching complements what James wrote, addressing the issue of sacrificial meat in the market.

Paul’s teaching in this area is what some might call halacha—how to walk out one’s faith in a situation that isn’t addressed in Mosaic Law. This situation would never arise in a land that kept the Law, like Israel was supposed to do, because in such a land there would not be any pagan sacrifices (nor shrines or cult harlots). That’s why there’s nothing in Torah that specifically deals with the issue of eating meat from a market, which had been sacrificed to an idol. With the God of Israel coming to the Gentiles, in their lands that were steeped in paganism, this problem arose, and Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, dealt with it in a righteous and compassionate way.\footnote{The decision and four rules of James in Acts 15 were also halacha, a Jewish term for how to walk out one’s faith. Gentiles, coming to believe in the Jewish Messiah, had no precedent or understanding of Torah, or what was sin and what was pleasing to God, and hence, the need to be taught God’s will for how to live out their faith in Messiah Yeshua.}

Along with the eating of sacrificial meat at the pagan altar and the drinking of the blood from the sacrifice, First Corinthians ten deals with cult harlotry and the fact that some Corinthian Christians were engaging in it. Paul warns them to flee from it, presenting the Baal Peor affair to show the Corinthians that their salvation would be nullified if they continued to practice sacrificial-sexual idolatry.

Yakov’s rules were certainly needed in the Corinthian congregation. These passages emphasize the Christian need for the Law of Moses, so that the believer doesn’t sin against God, thinking nothing of it. The Corinthian assembly fell behind none of the other assemblies in the Gifts of the Spirit (1st Cor. 1:4-7), yet their need for instruction in God’s laws of righteousness, is all too evident (2nd Tim. 3:10-17).

A number of places in First Corinthians that seemed to deal with common prostitution primarily spoke of cult prostitution. This problem wasn’t an isolated incident, as Revelation 2:20-21 brought out. Corinth was in Achaia (modern-day northern Greece), while Thyatira was in Asia Minor (modern-day western Turkey), but both were firmly rooted in ancient pagan ways of sacrificial-sexual idolatry.

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369 Lev. 3:17; 11:1-47; Dt. 12:16, 23; 14:1-21; also see, Kosher—Biblical vs Jewish.
371 The decision and four rules of James in Acts 15 were also halacha, a Jewish term for how to walk out one’s faith. Gentiles, coming to believe in the Jewish Messiah, had no precedent or understanding of Torah, or what was sin and what was pleasing to God, and hence, the need to be taught God’s will for how to live out their faith in Messiah Yeshua.
CULT PROSTITUTION IN REVELATION

There are many places in the New Covenant that use πορνεία (pornay'ah, fornication: cult or common prostitution), but none present as clear a picture of its cultic and symbolic use as the Book of Revelation. In Rev. 2:20–21 and 2:14, in both Thyatira and Pergamos, the risen Savior is heard rebuking Christians for practicing cult harlotry and for eating meat sacrificed to idols at the pagan temple at the time of the sacrifice. In the first passage it’s a so-called prophetess within the congregation that was authorizing it. Yeshua warned the assembly at Thyatira:

‘Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.’ (Rev. 2:20-21 KJV)

It’s hard to imagine that Christians would continue in this practice so many years after Acts 15 and Paul’s letters to Corinth, etc., and this, in an area of western Turkey where Paul had once evangelized and taught. More than 40 years after Acts 15, Jesus revealed to the Apostle John that Christians were still practicing cult harlotry and eating pagan sacrifices.

The fact that ‘fornication’ and eating ‘things sacrificed to idols’ are mentioned together means that they were part of the same pagan ceremony, the nature of which was union with the god (or goddess). Christians at Thyatira were being taught that fornication was acceptable, as a Christian. More subtle than all the beasts of the field is the Serpent. If they were asked if they ‘believed in Yeshua,’ they, too, like their Hebrew counterparts in the Baal Peor Affair, would have said, ‘Of course!’

Yeshua calling this prophetess Jezebel, was no light matter. Nine hundred years earlier, a daughter of the King of Sidon named Jezebel became the wife of King Ahab. Ahab ruled the northern kingdom of Israel for 22 years (1st Kings 16:29; 876-853 BC), and Jezebel led Ahab and Israel astray by bringing in cult harlotry through her god, Baal (1st Kgs. 16:31-33). Sacrifice to Baal also meant infant sacrifice, and Jezebel had the true prophets of Yahveh murdered and wanted to do the same to Elijah.372

Everyone who knew Scripture would know what Yeshua thought of this new ‘Jezebel,’ as the original Jezebel was known for her cult harlotry (2nd Kings 9:21-22). Yeshua gave the Thyatira Jezebel time to repent. In 1st Cor. 10 Paul did the same thing because the Corinthians didn’t understand that Yeshua wasn’t like Zeus and Aphrodite. The Gentiles hadn’t been at Mt. Sinai or Baal Peor, and they hadn’t been taken into Babylon captivity because of cult harlotry, but Yeshua’s patience and grace has an end, too.373

Some might say, ‘Well that’s a lot different from when God killed 24,000 Hebrews.’ That’s true, but looking at the whole picture, the Lord also strove with Israel for many centuries concerning cult harlotry, sending His prophets to warn them.374 That Israel hadn’t crossed the Red Sea. That Israel hadn’t heard the Voice and seen the Fire on the Mountain (Ex. 19:16f.), just like the Gentiles.375

Also, Yahveh’s literal presence was with Israel in the Wilderness at the Baal Peor affair, and the reality of Yahveh’s presence existed after the resurrection for the body of Jewish believers in Jerusalem. All of them

374 2nd Kgs. 17:1-23; Jer. 7:25; 35:15.
375 Even with the very Presence of God, Israel still sinned greatly, and many times the Lord exacted immediate punishment (Num. 14:11-37f.; 25:1-9f.; 21:4-6).
heard about the untimely deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). Who killed them? The ‘cruel God’ of the Old or the ‘loving God’ of the New? The two of them had ‘only’ lied to Peter about how much money they had actually gotten from the sale of their property, but the Holy Spirit killed them because they had lied to God. The Spirit would not do so in Jeremiah’s day, nor at Corinth in Paul’s day. The main difference, though, was the actual manifestation of the Lord, or the lack of it, which determined whether the punishment would be carried out immediately, or time given to repent.

That the Spirit of the living God wasn’t manifesting in the same way for Paul, in his congregations, is evident from all the problems that he had with the Corinthians. Many times he had to threaten them, particularly the ones who said that he was a powerful letter writer, but in person, he was ‘weak and nothing.’

Can you imagine a Christian saying that about the Apostle Paul? If lying to Peter was enough for Ananias and Sapphira to be instantly killed by God, how much more those in Corinth who rebelled against Paul’s authority and frequented temple harlots?

Yeshua also rebuked the congregation at Pergamos, another assembly in western Turkey, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) northwest of Thyatira. They were doing the same idolatrous things as Thyatira. Here, though, the Lord speaks to them of Balaam and Israel in the Wilderness. Balaam taught the daughters of Moab to seduce the sons of Israel at Baal Peor. Yeshua said to the Pergamos Christians;

‘I know thy works and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s throne is, and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the Sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols and to commit fornication.’ (πορνευσαι; Rev. 2:13-14 KJV)

With the mention of Balaam, the fornication spoken of has to be cult harlotry, not common harlotry. The Baal Peor disaster is attributed to him via Balak (Num. 22–24). Numbers 31:16 states that Balaam caused Israel to sin at Baal Peor, for which he was killed by Israel (Num. 31:8, Joshua 13:22).

Also, the ancient city of Pergamos was, like Corinth, especially noted for sacrificial-sexual idolatry. The harlotry spoken of would have to be linked to cult harlotry even if the Lord only mentioned fornication in and of itself. The fact that they were eating things sacrificed to idols confirms that the fornication was cult harlotry, and of course, the mention of Balaam causing Israel to stumble, seals it.

Wycliffe states that Pergamos was ‘given to idolatry more than all Asia,’ and that,

the ‘hill behind it was adorned with numerous temples, among which was the great temple to Zeus, who was called Soter Theos, the Savior God.’

Explaining fornication and things sacrificed at Pergamos, Morris states,

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376 2nd Cor. 10:8-11; see also 1:23; 12:20f.
377 Hislop, The Two Babylons, pp. 240-241. The Lord was literally declaring Pergamos to be the place where Satan had established his throne (headquarters). Just as Jerusalem is the home of Yahveh (Ps. 48:2), so ancient Babylon was the Throne of Satan. When Babylon was destroyed Satan transferred his headquarters to Nineveh, and after that, to Pergamos. It was in Pergamos, with the ‘worship of Aesculapius, under the form of the serpent,’ that ‘frantic orgies and excesses’ were practiced, ‘that elsewhere were kept under some measure of restraint’ (ibid.). After Pergamos, Satan’s throne was established in Rome.
378 Pfeiffer, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1504.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

‘Feasting on sacrificial meat and licentious conduct were usual accompaniments of the worship of idols, both in Old and New Testament times.’

David Stern realizes that the problem at Pergamos wasn’t the same problem that Paul dealt with in Corinth when sacrificial meat was sold at the marketplace. He says that,

the ‘issue here is not eating meat used in pagan rituals, but actually participating in idolatrous feasts and sexual sin, thus violating the mitzvot laid down for Gentile believers at’ Acts 15:28-29.

These two Christian assemblies in western Turkey, Thyatira and Pergamos, were criticized and rebuked by Yeshua around 95 AD. They were walking in the same sins that Israel had walked in at Baal Peor 1,500 years earlier. Not much had changed in paganism in all that time. TDNT confirms this:

‘For the author, the OT model for this is the doctrine of Balaam who led Israel astray in the same fashion, Num. 25:1ff.; 31:16. Along the same lines the church of Thyatira is charged with tolerating a prophetess who teaches the same practices, 2:20f.; the name of Jezebel is the OT reference in this instance, 2nd Kings 9:7, 22.’

More than forty years after Yakov made his ruling, Yeshua had to speak against these idolatrous practices at two Christian assemblies in Asia Minor. It wasn’t without divine foresight that Yakov gave those four rules, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The diabolical scheme of Satan has always been to beguile the world into worshipping him instead of Yahveh, even and especially in Israel among His own people. The core of that worship was cult harlotry. This came from ancient Babylon, the great seducer of Man’s heart.

New Testament Babylon is the seducer of all the nations, causing the peoples to worship Satan, getting the Gentile and Jewish peoples to think they are worshiping the true God when in fact they are worshiping Satan in one of his many different guises. The Great Harlot is mentioned in nearly three identical passages speaking about what she has given Mankind to drink—the wine of her harlotry:

Revelation 14:8: “And there followed another angel, saying, ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.’ (πορνείας, pornay’ahs; KJV)

Rev. 17:2: ‘With whom the kings of the Earth have committed fornication (επορνείας, eh pornay’ahs), and the inhabitants of the Earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.’ (πορνείας, pornay’ahs; KJV)

Rev. 18:3: ‘For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication (πορνείας, pornay’ahs) and the kings of the Earth have committed fornication (επορ-

380 Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary, p. 796. The Hebrew term mitzvot means, ‘commandments’ of God (through His authorized agents; e.g. Moses, Yeshua, Paul, Peter and James, etc.). Stern writes that the rules the Gentiles in Pergamos were ‘violating’ came from Acts 15:28-29, the recording of the rules in the letter sent to the Jewish and Gentile community of Antioch, and distributed to other churches (Acts. 16:4).
382 2nd Tim. 3:16-17; 2nd Pet. 3:15-18.
Cult Prostitution in Revelation


ςερονυ, eh’pornu’sahn) with her, and the merchants of the Earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.’ (KJV)\textsuperscript{383}

All nations, Jewish and Gentile, have drunk of the wine of fornication of the Harlot of Babylon. That the term fornication here means more than cult harlotry is obvious. It should be just as obvious that it also includes it. Fornication in these passages takes in all spheres where one can prostitute the soul; from sacrificial-sexual ‘worship’ to financial greed, physical lust, political and even satanic power.

Babylon is the diabolical opposite of the heavenly Jerusalem, where the true God is worshiped. \textit{TDNT} speaks of Babylon and the Harlot as the antithesis of Jerusalem and God, and of her fornication as cultic:

‘In the description of the world power and metropolis of Rome, the counterpart of ungodly Babylon…πορνη’ (pornay, harlot) ‘and πορνευω’ (pornu’oh, harlot) ‘are used as comprehensive terms for its utter degeneracy. Like the city harlots of the day it bears its name on a golden headband, and this name declares its nature:\textsuperscript{384}

‘And upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of harlots and abominations of the Earth.’ (Rev. 17:5)

‘It is the leading harlot of the world, the great seducer of the nations and their kings… They seek its favors politically and economically. But the word embraces more than this. The nations ape the customs of the metropolis \textit{even to whoredom in the literal sense}. Above all, the capital is called πορνη’ (pornay, harlot), ‘as the \textit{center of paganism} with its harlot-like apostasy from the true God.’\textsuperscript{385}

From the Book of Revelation, whether looking at Thyatira, Pergamos or the Great Harlot, the worship of a god or goddess through sex (cult prostitution) was a major part of what has shackled Mankind to Satan. The Gentiles never had a Father Abraham who worshiped the living God, or a Moses who led the Sons of Israel out of Egyptian slavery under the mighty outstretched Arm of Yahveh through the hand of Moses. The Gentiles had no divine Lawgiver who gave His ways of righteousness and sin to Moses for all Israel. Therefore, they had no godly boundaries to restrain their natural human feelings and cravings. With no Torah to restrain them, their lusts were directed by Satan and fueled by their carnal nature.

All the Gentile lands and peoples of the world were immersed in sacrificial-sexual idolatry and ‘loving it.’ It permeated their thinking, their very being and their way of life. Part and parcel with this was the belief that one could have as many gods and goddesses as he wanted. It would be very natural for a Gentile believer to \textit{add} Jesus to his pantheon. Both First Corinthians and Revelation attest to this, the seriousness of the problem, and how widespread it was among professing Gentile Christians.

Of course, not all Gentile believers did this, for there were some ‘God-fearers’ like Cornelius, who had been taught to stop practicing idolatry before they had come to Yeshua. There would also be others who would immediately stop the practice when they found out what Yeshua required of them in this area, because of the Decree of James, the letters of Paul and their learning of God’s ways through Mosaic Law being read and taught to them every 7th day Sabbath (Acts 15:21).

Many of them, though, would sin in ignorance, while others would do it in their pride and self-indulgent

\textsuperscript{383} The Textus Receptus and the NU text are identical in their usage of the Greek words concerning fornication (KJV), yet the NIV wrongly uses adulteries and the NASB immorality in these three cites from Revelation.


\textsuperscript{385} Ibid.
philosophy of ‘freedom in Christ.’ This is what the Apostle Paul had to deal with at Corinth, and this is why Yakov gave the four rules first. The rules have absolutely nothing to do with table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles, but with the placing of godly boundaries over the carnal lusts of the Gentiles.

Yakov would not only tell the Gentiles what they needed to do in order to be saved, but also what would sever them from their Savior. It was because the Gentiles needed to understand this—that they couldn’t worship Yeshua and their others gods, that the four rules were issued. The Gentile religious world, at the time of the Apostles, was a world that was neck-deep in satanic quicksand—and thought nothing of it.

What compassion the God of Israel has for all peoples, in sacrificing His own Son for us. He’s displayed a love that is infinitely beyond our ability to comprehend, but He does expect us to be faithful to Him and to obey His ways—all His ways that apply to us.

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386 How similar is that to what Christians say today about not having to keep the Lord’s Sabbath or His Feasts nor His dietary laws. Pride and ignorance walk ‘hand-in-hand’ in the Church today, to the glory of Satan and the shame of Christ.
CULT PROSTITUTION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

All the places in the King James Version New Testament where the word *pornay’ah* (fornication) and its noun derivatives occur will be listed in order to get a sense of *how* the words are used. *Fornication* is mentioned 32 times in the KJV New Testament and all these times speak of cult prostitution, or include it. Five times it’s found in lists with other sins, and with no context given, it could certainly be common as well as cultic harlotry.

*Fornication—Cult Prostitution*

1. Matt. 5:32: ‘But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of *fornication*, causeth her to commit adultery. And whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.’

2. Matt. 19:9: ‘And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for *fornication*, and shall marry another, committeth adultery. And whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.’

Yeshua declared that cult harlotry (not adultery) is biblical grounds for severing a marriage between two believers. Also, if this harlotry were common, it would be forgivable, and hence, no need for a divorce.

3. John 8:41: “‘Ye do the deeds of your father.’ Then said they to him, ‘We be not born of *fornication*; we have one Father, *even* God.’”

The context speaks of those whom Yeshua said were the offspring of another god (the Devil, v. 44). The Pharisees didn’t answer saying that their earthly father wasn’t involved in common prostitution or adultery, etc. Their speaking of *God* as their Father means that *fornication* here is to be understood as cult harlotry.

4. Acts 15:20: ‘But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from *fornication*, and from things strangled, and from blood.’

As we’ve seen, the text speaks of cult harlotry. Its biblical usage, Hebrew and Greek word definitions, and its listing in the passage immediately after eating the meat of a pagan sacrifice at the time of the sacrifice, confirm this. The next two passages (#5-6) are replications of Acts 15:20:

5. Acts 15:29: ‘That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from *fornication*: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.’

6. Acts 21:25: ‘As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from (things) strangled, and from *fornication*.’

In Paul’s very first letter (50-52 AD), he warns the Thessalonians to stay away from fornication. This comes about three years after Acts 15, and as there’s no qualifier, it’s primarily cult harlotry the Apostle is speaking of:

7. 1st Thess. 4:3: ‘For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from *fornication*.’

This next *fornication* amazed Paul because it was *incestuous* cult harlotry:
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

8. 1st Cor. 5:1: ‘It’s reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles; that one should have his father’s wife.’

As we saw, the next two verses speak of cult prostitution:

9. 1st Cor. 6:13: ‘Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication but for the Lord and the Lord for the body.’

10. 1st Cor. 6:18: ‘Flee fornication! Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committh fornication sinneth against his own body.’

This next verse falls between chapters five and ten of First Corinthians, an area which spoke of cult harlotry, although common harlotry would equally be included in this admonition:

11. 1st Cor. 7:2: ‘Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.’

Number 12 refers to the Baal Peor fiasco (Num. 25) and clearly speaks of cult harlotry:

12. 1st Cor. 10:8: ‘Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.’

Paul continues to address cult harlotry, in this next verse, to the Corinthians who hadn’t taken to heart what he wrote in First Corinthians:

13. 2nd Cor. 12:21: ‘And lest when I come again, my God will humble me among you and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.’

In #14, Judah (Jude) speaks of homosexuality. He refers to the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, cities that God rained fire and brimstone down upon because of their wickedness (Gen. 18–19), but this homosexuality is primarily cultic homosexuality.

14. Jude 1:7: ‘Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.’

Judah’s phrase, ‘going after strange flesh,’ is a euphemism for homosexuality. Homosexuality was certainly a major part of the sexual appetites that plagued the people of Sodom (Gen. 19:5) and Gomorrah. The phrase, though, coupled with fornication, points to homosexual cult prostitution as the major sin.

The Hebrews, following the native Canaanites, would engage in homosexual cult harlotry when they came into the Promised Land. 387 Canaan was a land that outdid all the other ancient lands in its perversions and it was especially noted for its homosexual cult harlotry. 388 It’s not unreasonable to think that Judah was speaking of cultic and common homosexuality when he wrote of, ‘fornication and going after strange flesh.’

The problem of cult harlotry among believers wasn’t easily remedied. The next three cites (#15-17) specifically speak of cult harlotry, and all the following texts would include cult harlotry, although common harlotry can certainly be said to also be part of the meaning:

387 See page 37ff.

388 See page 47f.
Cult Prostitution in the New Testament

15. Rev. 2:14: ‘But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.’

16. Rev. 2:20: ‘Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.’

17. Rev. 2:21: ‘And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.’

18. Rev. 14:8: ‘And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.’

19. Rev. 17:2: ‘With whom the kings of the Earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the Earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.’

20. Rev. 17:4: ‘And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.’

21. Rev. 18:3: ‘For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the Earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the Earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.’

22. Rev. 18:9: ‘And the kings of the Earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning.’

23. Rev. 19:2: ‘For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the Earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.’

The next five cites (#24-28) use pornay’ah in lists and don’t lend themselves to a specific form of harlotry (cult or common), due to a lack of context. As we’ve seen, though, cult harlotry should be given primary consideration whenever pornay’ah is used. Pagan worship, with its cult harlots, was practiced throughout the Roman Empire. Both Paul and John, who wrote the following verses, certainly saw this as a serious problem that they had to deal with. If they were addressing something other than harlotry (e.g. adultery) they would have used those specific Greek words for it. In Gal. 5:19 (#25), Paul does just that, the Textus Receptus having both adultery (moikay’ah) and harlotry (pornay’ah):

24. Romans 1:29: ‘Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers.’

25. Gal. 5:19: ‘Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness.’

26. Eph. 5:3: ‘But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints’ (Hebrew kadosh: holy ones; Greek hagios: holy ones).

27. Col. 3:5: ‘Mortify therefore your members which are upon the Earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence and covetousness which is idolatry.’

28. Rev. 9:21: ‘Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.’

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Three of the cites above (#24, 25 and 26) are most likely speaking of fornication as cult harlotry, not common harlotry, although a general spirit of whoredom (promiscuity) might also have been meant. The latter deals not with idols nor the taking of money for sex, but with carnal sexual indulgence. This is extremely prevalent in Western society today. Cites 27 and 28 can also be said to include both forms of harlotry.

In the KJV New Testament the term fornication is used 32 times (in the 28 cites above). The majority of its usage (17 times) clearly speaks of cult harlotry, while the other 15 would certainly include it. In other words, every text in the KJV New Testament that speaks of fornication specifically addresses or includes cult harlotry. Based on its word usage in the New Testament, translating pornay’ah in Acts 15:20 as ‘sexual immorality,’ or adultery, or unchastity, is a major linguistic and theological error; a serious injustice to those who desire to know what God is saying to them in His Word.

Fornications

Only twice in the New Testament is the plural of fornication used. Both times relate to the same teaching and can be seen as encompassing cult and common harlotry, but certainly not adultery because adultery is mentioned in both instances:

1. Matt. 15:19: ‘For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.’
2. Mark 7:21: ‘For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders.’

The plural of fornication is a way of emphasizing the number of times it occurs in the heart. This is also seen with ‘murders’ and ‘adulteries,’ etc.

In the next section we’ll see that the noun fornicator appears twice in the KJV New Testament. The first instance speaks of incestuous cult harlotry, when the believer slept with his father’s cult-harlot wife (1st Cor. 5:1-5), and the second cite could speak of cult or common harlotry, as no context is given.

Fornicator

1. 1st Cor. 5:11: ‘But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.’
2. Heb. 12:16: ‘Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.’

With 1st Cor. 5:11 coming immediately after Paul spoke of the believer who had intercourse with his father’s cult harlot wife, fornicator here seems to specifically be pointing to him as the ‘brother…not to keep company’ with. Hebrews 12:16, though, primarily speaks of one using a cult harlot, but doesn’t exclude a common harlot.
The plural of *fornicator* is mentioned three times. All of them occur in First Corinthians within 14 verses. They relate to those who go to temple prostitutes. This is one of Paul’s themes in his letter and must have been a theme in his previous (lost) letter as well (1st Cor. 5:9):

1. 1st Cor. 5:9: ‘*I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators.*’
2. 1st Cor. 5:10: ‘Yet not altogether with the *fornicators* of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.’
3. 1st Cor. 6:9: ‘Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither *fornicators*, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,’

The first passage seems to refer primarily to those who use cult harlots, because it was Corinth, and Corinth was well noted for its fervor in worshiping the goddess Aphrodite.

The second reference primarily has to do with cult harlotry, as Paul has just commanded the man’s removal from the assembly for incestuous cult harlotry (1st Cor. 5:4-5).

The third reference also speaks of those who use cult harlots because it immediately follows chapter five, and only three verses later, in 6:12-20, Paul speaks of temple harlots and the temple of the living God.

From this survey of all the places in the KJV New Testament where *fornication* and its derivatives have been used, *fornication* speaks first and foremost of cult prostitution. From just this biblical perspective of *pornay’ah* (prostitution) and how it’s seen in all the New Testament Scripture cites, it’s clear that the second rule of Acts 15:20 should be translated as *cult prostitution*. Yakov meant this, and nothing else, when he issued the Decree; not sexual immorality, adultery, prohibited marriages, homosexuality or even common harlotry.
Schematic on Harlotry in the New Testament

There are 13 English words associated with zanah (harlotry) in the KJV Old Testament, but in the KJV New Testament there are only seven English words. In the Old Testament the various terms for harlotry occurred 138 times in the King James Version. In the New Testament, which is only about a quarter of the number of pages of the Old (about 28%), and which centers around the proclamation of life in the Messiah of Israel, the noun pornay’ah (harlotry) and its derivatives occurs a surprisingly 51 times. Here, as in the Old, the words primarily speak of cult harlotry. These are the terms and times of use in English from the King James Version New Testament, which reflect the Greek term for cult harlot and cult harlotry.

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<th>Only Common</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Fornication</td>
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<td>7. Whore</td>
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Of the 32 times that fornication is used in the KJV New Testament, 17 times it clearly refers to cult prostitution, while the other times would certainly include it. The plural, fornications, is mentioned twice in a list and most likely includes both cult and common harlotry.

Fornicator is mentioned twice, the first one seeming to refer to the man who slept with his father’s wife, a cult harlot. The second could refer to one who used either a cult or a common harlot. The plural fornicators is used three times and reflects the situation of cult harlotry in Corinth.

The four times that the KJV New Testament speaks of a harlot (pornay) all refer to a cult harlot. Of the four times that it speaks of harlots, two are common harlots (Mt. 21:31-32), one can be either (Lk. 15:30), and the fourth is primarily cultic as it speaks of religious Babylon the Great, the ‘Mother of Harlots’.

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389 See p. 27 above.
390 Accordance Bible Software: Fornication as cult harlotry: Mt. 5:32; 19:9; John 8:41; Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; 1st Cor. 5:1 (twice); 6:13, 18 (twice); 10:8; 2nd Cor. 12:21; 1st Thess. 4:3; Rev. 2:14, 20-21. Fornication as cult or common harlotry: Rom. 1:29; 1st Cor. 7:2; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; Jude 1:7; Rev. 9:21; 14:8; 17:2 (twice), 4; 18:3 (twice), 9; 19:2.
391 Ibid. Fornications as either cult or common harlotry: Mt. 15:19; Mk. 7:21.
392 Ibid. Fornicator as one who uses a cult harlot: 1st Cor. 5:11. Fornicator as one who uses either a cult or a common harlot: Hebrews 12:16.
393 Ibid. Fornicators as users of cult prostitutes: 1st Cor. 5:9-10; 6:9.
394 Ibid. Harlot as cult harlot: 1st Cor. 6:15-16; Heb. 11:31; James 2:25.
395 Ibid. Harlots as cult harlots: Rev. 17:5.
The reason why I assign *common* harlotry to the two times that Yeshua mentions it in Mt. 21:31-32 is because cult harlotry among the Jewish people in His day was basically non-existent, God having purged it out of the Jewish people through the Babylonian captivity. The harlots that Yeshua refers to seem to be Jewish.

The four times that *whore* is mentioned are all in Revelation and speak of the ‘Great Whore.’ She is certainly the cult harlot.\(^{396}\)

This overview of the KJV New Testament’s use of *fornication* (Greek *pornay’ah*, prostitution/harlotry) and words associated with it reveals that its primary meaning in the New Testament is cultic. Of the 51 times the words are used, 30 times (58.8% of the time) it specifically speaks of *cult* harlotry. Adding the 19 times that the words can be cult and/or common harlotry makes it 49 out of 51 times (96% of the time) that the New Testament speaks of cult harlotry when the words associated with *pornay’ah* (harlotry) are seen. This is only slightly less than the percentage that was seen in the Old Testament (97.8%).\(^{397}\)

The New Testament’s use and primary meaning of the words for harlot and harlotry follow the Old Testament’s word usage and primary meaning. As Joseph said to Pharaoh about Pharaoh’s two dreams: ‘The dreams of Pharaoh are one’ (Gen. 41:25). The two Testaments reveal the stranglehold that cult harlotry had upon both Jewish and Gentile followers of the God of Israel. Yakov’s word, in Hebrew or Greek, has the same primary biblical meaning. When the Greek New Testament speaks of *pornay’ah* (KJV fornication) as the second rule of Acts 15:20 there can be no doubt that it means *cult* harlotry, especially coming after the first rule on the eating of idolatrous sacrificial meat at the time of the sacrifice. With the third and fourth rules, as we’ll see, being idolatrous, the four rules of Yakov form a conceptual unit against sacrificial-sexual idolatry—the scourge of both Jew and Gentile.

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397 See page 29.

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*Cult Prostitution in the New Testament*
THE THIRD RULE—THINGS STRANGLED

The third rule in Acts 15:20 is ‘things strangled,’ but some think Yakov never said it. The Interlinear has a footnote to the verse, “Other ancient authorities lack, ‘and from whatever has been strangled.’” Marshall explains why some manuscripts don’t have the third rule, and why he thinks that Yakov said it:

‘As the RSV mg. indicates, later scribes re-worded the list of forbidden things; the omission of ‘things strangled’ leaves three words which can be understood in a moral sense—idolatry, unchastity and murder (‘blood’). This alteration was probably made by scribes who no longer understood the first century situation; in course of time the need for the prescriptions about food acceptable to Jewish Christian consciences disappeared.”

With ‘later scribes’ re-wording the text it appears that Yakov gave the rule. Marshall’s explanation that some scribes saw the three rules as ‘a moral package deal’ is interesting. This is because those Christian scribes not only hid a rule of James (strangled), but erroneously presented blood as murder, and unchastity as the meaning for cult prostitution. The next section will reveal why ‘blood’ in Acts 15:20 cannot be equated with murder. As noble as this moral lesson sounds it wasn’t what Yakov addressed, nor was he presenting ‘food acceptable to Jewish Christian consciences.’

Wesley Perschbacher says that strangled means ‘strangled’ or ‘suffocated’ and that it’s ‘the flesh of animals killed by strangulation or suffocation, Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25.”

Friberg agrees and interprets it as the blood not being drained: ‘choked; of animals killed by strangling so that the blood is not drained from them.’ Bauer states that the word ‘strangled’ wasn’t found,

‘in the Septuagint nor in Hellenistic Jewish writings,’ but in Acts ‘it plainly means strangled, choked to death…of animals killed without having the blood drained from them whose flesh’ (meat) ‘the Jews were forbidden to eat…Lev. 17:13f.”

It’s true that Yahveh didn’t want His people Israel to eat meat with the blood in it (Lev. 19:26; Ezek. 24:1-24). To allow the blood to remain within the animal corrupts the meat by its very presence, as many toxins or poisons are carried by the blood and remain in the meat if it’s not properly drained. Most hunters know this, and upon killing an animal, slit its throat and hang it upside down as soon as possible so that the blood drains out. The Greeks also knew this. Bauer states that ‘the Pythagorean dietary laws forbid’ meat from ‘animals that have not been properly slaughtered.”

Ancient man knew to take the blood out of the animal before eating it. In other words, it most likely wasn’t a common practice to sell meat in the marketplace that hadn’t been properly slaughtered, but even if some meat wasn’t properly drained of blood, this isn’t what Yakov was addressing.

Howard Marshall logically, but erroneously, lumps together the third rule (strangled) with the fourth rule (blood), and says that strangling the animal,

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403 Ibid.
The Third Rule—Things Strangled

‘meant that the blood remained in the meat, and the fourth item was blood itself.’ These food regulations resemble those in Lev. 17:8-13.”

Wycliffe also believes it pertains to ‘Meats from which the blood had not been properly removed.’

Bruce thinks the,

“prohibition against eating flesh with the blood still in it (including the flesh of strangled animals) was based on the ‘Noachian decree of Gen. 9:4.”

Stern says it meant ‘meat from animals not slaughtered in a way that allows the blood to flow out.’

Knowling writes that a law against strangling can’t be found in the Law of Moses, but agrees that eating meat with blood in it would be offensive to a Jew. He writes that the rule pertains to,

‘beasts as had been killed through strangling, and whose blood had not been let out when they were killed. For this prohibition reference is usually made to Lev. 17:13; Dt. 12:16, 23…But on the other hand, Dr. Hort contends that all attempts to find the prohibition in the Pentateuch quite fail, although he considers it perfectly conceivable that the flesh of animals strangled in such a way as not to allow of the letting out of blood would be counted as unlawful food by the Jews.’

David Williams also believes that strangled means one shouldn’t eat meat with blood in it.

Most think that the rule strangled means not to eat meat that was strangled and/or has blood in it. One can only begin to wonder why, if Christian scholars believe this, the Church doesn’t practice it today? Why is there no teaching from the pulpit that one shouldn’t ‘eat strangled meat or blood?’ Scholars like to connect strangled with the fourth rule, blood, but however reasonable this may seem it’s not what Yakov meant.

Although these two rules might resemble food regulations, as Marshall wrote, one would be hard pressed to understand why James didn’t include which animals could be eaten when properly slaughtered so as not to offend the Jews. After all, that’s what the rules were allegedly for. If James was going to caution the Gentiles against not eating animals that had been strangled, and therefore, had blood in the meat, he failed to tell the Gentiles which animals God prohibited Israel to eat (Lev. 11; Dt. 14). Could such a major part of the rule have escaped his attention? Perhaps at the time of the ruling (Acts 15:20), but certainly not until the end of the Book of Acts, and nothing is mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament about strangled pertaining to a food regulation or about it being connected to the fourth rule on blood. No, the rule doesn’t concern a dietary regulation even though all those Christians scholars tell us it speaks of strangled animals.

Strangled relates to sacrificial idolatry and only Ben Witherington and Tim Hegg rightly understand this. The rule points to an animal sacrificed to a god by being strangled. It has nothing to do with blood remaining within the victim for the general public to eat. The ‘animal’ in this case would most like-

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405 Pfeiffer, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1152.
409 Williams, Acts, p. 266.
410 Witherington, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 464. Hegg, The Letter Writer, p. 277. Unfortunately, Hegg also thinks it’s a dietary regulation (no meat from a strangled animal because of blood being in it), but this cannot be be-
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ly be a bird. Doves and pigeons were often used as a sacrifice, not only to the God of Israel, but to other gods as well. Birds were plentiful, inexpensive (Lk. 12:6; cf. Lev. 15:13-15, 28-30), and therefore, the ‘perfect’ sacrifice for the common person to bring.

Strangling wasn’t necessarily limited to birds. In Isaiah 66:3 the prophet speaks of an Israeli who sacrifices a lamb being like one who breaks a dog’s neck, something that would certainly fall under the concept of strangling. The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament says the polemic of the prophet attacks the ‘simultaneous engagement in both legitimate and pagan cults.’

In other words, Isaiah is speaking about the dual practice of many Hebrews; sacrificing the required sacrifice to Yahweh (the lamb), but also sacrificing an unclean animal (a dog) to a pagan god. The relevant point is that the breaking of a dog’s neck was part of a pagan sacrificial rite in the days of Isaiah, 700 years before James gave the four rules. Would it be unreasonable to assume that in the days of Yakov the pagans continued this practice of strangling dogs for some of their gods?

The God of Israel also commanded that larger animals would have their necks broken (twisted or strangled). In response to refusing to redeem a donkey with a lamb, the neck of the donkey would be broken. In the ritual attached to an unsolved murder in an open field in the land of Israel, an animal as large as a heifer had its neck broken (Dt. 21:1-9).

It’s well attested in ancient literature that Gentiles sacrificed dogs to their gods. There were dog cults in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. Gula, the goddess of healing in Mesopotamia, had dogs sacrificed to her. TDOT states, ‘dogs were sacrificed to the goddess and there’s ‘evidence of buried dog skeletons.’

Philo (20 BC to 50 AD), a Jewish philosopher born in Alexandria, Egypt who lived during the time of Messiah Yeshua and Yakov, confirms that in his day, ‘pagans were sacrificing animals by means of strangulation.’ Witherington confirms this and says, there is ‘evidence that the choking of the sacrifice,

cause there aren’t any animals mentioned that could be slaughtered properly.

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411 Strangled is defined as ‘suffocation’ or ‘choking.’ The concept includes the wringing of the neck of a bird as well as the breaking of the neck of a larger animal by twisting it.

412 Leviticus 1:14-17; 5:7-10; 12:6-8; 14:1-8, 22-32, 48-53; 15:13-15, 28-30; Mt. 21:12; Luke 2:21-24; Jn. 2:14-16. The priests of Yahweh wrung the neck off the bird and didn’t leave the blood within it, draining it at the Altar. The priests didn’t eat the dedication sacrifice (whole burnt offering; Lev. 1:14-17), but did eat the birds of the sin sacrifice (Lev. 5:1-10; 6:24-26).


414 Exodus 13:13: ‘But every first offspring of a donkey you must redeem with a lamb, but if you do not redeem it then you shall break its neck. And every firstborn of man among your sons you must redeem’ by five shekels of silver given to a Son of Aaron (Exodus 13:13-15; 34:19-20; Numbers 3:46-47; 18:15-16; cf. Lev. 27:6).

415 Dt. 21:4: ‘and the Elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with running water, which has not been plowed or sown and shall break the heifer’s neck there in the valley.’

416 Howard F. Vos, Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Manners and Customs (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), p. 611, speaks of Rome’s Lupercalia on Feb. 15th (now known as St. Valentine’s Day). It was a ‘purification and fertility’ feast with much sexual revelry. The priests, ‘called luperci, sacrificed goats and a dog on the Palatine Hill...Because of this festival’s popularity, the church absorbed it instead of abolishing it. Pope Galesius V, in 494, made it the Festival of the Purification of the Virgin Mary.’


418 Ibid., p. 150.


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The Third Rule—Things Strangled

strangling it...transpired in pagan temples. Citing the Magical Papyri, Witherington writes that with the strangling of the animal the pagans believed that the ‘life breath or spiritual vitality went into the idol.' Both this concept and the strangling of a pagan sacrifice are seen in the Magical Papyri, where the pagan priest is instructed:

‘Take also on the first day seven living creatures and strangle them; one cock, a partridge, a wren...Do not make a burnt offering of any of these; instead, taking them in your hand, strangle them, while holding them up to your Eros until each of the creatures is suffocated and their breath enter him. After that, place the strangled creatures on the altar together with aromatic plants of every variety.’

With the scant information given in Acts 15:20, the third rule, if taken by itself, would be impossible to definitively place within the category of sacrificial idolatry. Strangled can obviously be interpreted to mean the abstention from meat that has been strangled, but coming on the heels of two major rules pertaining to sacrificial-sexual idolatry it lends itself to also being part of that concept. Entirely lacking which animals couldn’t be eaten, strangled can only point to a pagan ritual.

The third rule isn’t a prohibition against eating strangled meat (with blood in it), as sinful as that is. It has to do with an idolatrous ceremony where a bird or an animal is strangled. Yakov included it among the rules because it was most likely a prolific pagan sacrificial practice in his day.

Most Christian scholars never thought of the possibility that strangled could relate to a pagan sacrifice. This points to a greater problem of interpreting Scripture from an already preconceived theological framework. Their perception of the rule, having to fall within a food regulation for table fellowship, is filtered through their false concept that Mosaic Law ‘is done away with.’ If scholars could tackle the Word of God, as Witherington did, they would have been able to see that the first two rules spoke of sacrificial-sexual idolatry, setting up a theme for strangled to also fit into that category.

Things strangled has nothing to do with Jewish dietary regulations or table fellowship. It was a prohibition against participating in an idolatrous pagan ceremony that used strangled animals or birds.

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a ‘prohibition of idol worship in the pagan temples’ (p. 269), but he wrongly thinks that strangled also refers to ‘blood within the meat’ (of meat from the pagan temples), p. 277. If that were the case Yakov would have included the dietary laws from Lev. 11 and Dt. 14, etc., as part of his rules. Even if a Gentile had properly slaughtered and hadn’t strangled the animal he would have to know which meats couldn’t be eaten (i.e. which were clean and which were unclean [forbidden] and also, not to eat any fat; Lev. 3:17; 7:23-25). Yakov never addressed these issues, so strangled cannot possibly relate to blood in meat (a dietary prohibition), but only to an idolatrous sacrifice where the animal or bird is strangled.

Jonathan Gray, Ark of the Covenant (Rundle Mall, South Australia, 2000), pp. 48-49. Today, the Jivaro tribesmen of the Amazon headwaters sacrifice pigs, by strangling, to the fire god of Mount Sangay (an active volcano).


421 Ibid. The demons ‘in back of the idol’ might animate it (1st Cor. 10:20) giving it the impression that the life of the sacrifice had indeed gone into the idol.

422 Encyclopedia Mythical: Eros is the Greek counterpart to the Roman Cupid. Cupid’s arrows speak of him as Nimrod, the first ‘mighty hunter’ (Gen. 10:9). See Hislop, The Two Babylons, pp. 19-40, 187-191, 225-232, 313-316, for why Cupid is not an innocent little ‘love boy,’ but an infant-eating monster—Molech in another form.

THE FOURTH RULE—BLOOD

The Greek word in Acts 15:20 for Yakov’s fourth rule is ἁμαρτίας (ha’matos; blood). Perschbacher says it means ‘blood; of the color of blood; bloodshed; blood-guiltiness; natural descent.’ Bauer states:

‘of human blood…of the blood of animals…Its use as food is forbidden (compare Lev. 3:17; 7:26; 17:10) in the apostolic decree,’ Acts ’15:20, 29; 21:25.’ Some ‘interpret this passage as ‘a command not to shed blood.’ Figuratively, ‘as the seat of life…blood and life as an expiatory sacrifice…especially of the blood of Jesus as a means of expiation …of the (apocalyptic) red color, whose appearance in heaven indicates disaster.’

Friberg follows a similar line of thinking. He states that the word means,

‘blood…human blood…by metonymy, human nature, physical descent…of sacrificial animals, blood…literally pour out blood, i.e. kill…menstrual flow, hemorrhage…literally fountain of blood, i.e. bleeding (Mk. 5:29)…by metonymy, of another’s murder…of Christ’s atoning sacrifice…in apocalyptic language, the red color of blood as symbolizing disaster.’

There are a number of ways that one can interpret blood in Acts 15:20. It can literally mean blood from an animal sacrifice, blood in ‘food’ (meat) being ‘forbidden’ in the Apostolic Decree, as Bauer thinks, or sin (murder, i.e. bloodshed). It can also be the guilt of murder, one’s lineage or symbolic of apocalyptic disaster. How should it be interpreted for Acts 15:20?

Marshall interprets blood in Acts 15:20 as a food regulation; blood within the meat. Wycliffe states that it,

‘refers to the pagan custom of using blood as a food. The last two requirements’ (of Acts 15:20) ‘involved the same offense, for the Jew who believed that ‘the life is in the blood’ (Lev. 17:11) regarded the eating of any blood particularly offensive. This decree was issued to the Gentile churches not as a means of salvation but as a basis for fellowship, in the spirit of Paul’s exhortation that those who were strong in faith should be willing to restrict their liberty in such matters, rather than offend the weaker brother (Rom. 14:1 ff.; 1st Cor. 8:1 ff.).’

It seems strange that Yakov would make two rules (strangled and blood) for the same offense when only one was needed (i.e. ‘blood;’ don’t eat any meat with blood in it, which would take care of the ‘strangled’ rule). Wycliffe sees the rule as being for the ‘weaker brother,’ the Jewish believer. It seems that Wycliffe thinks that eating meat with blood in it is only for strong Gentile Christians.

Stern presents three possible meanings for blood. It could be literal, ‘referring to drinking animals’ blood, or failing to remove it from meat, or figurative, a metaphor for murder.

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429 Pfeiffer, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1152.
The Fourth Rule—Blood

Stern realizes that blood can be referring to the actual drinking of it from a pagan sacrifice, but he doesn’t understand it as such for Acts 15:20, hence, he offers three options from which to choose from without saying which one he thought Yakov meant. At least the idea of drinking sacrificial blood is brought into the arena of possibilities.

Stern also offers a Jewish twist on what Marshall wrote, saying that if strangled wasn’t originally part of the text then one is left with the three things that the Rabbis say a Jew was to die for rather than transgress. A Jew could transgress all the commandments in order to save his (or another’s) life, but not ‘idolatry, fornication or murder’ (San. 74a). This is the ‘Jewish side’ to the Gentile scribe’s interpretation of the three rules ‘on morality.’ Unfortunately, blood would have to be equated with murder. Murder, though, is not a possible interpretation for blood in Acts 15:20.

Bruce also believes the rule reflects the prohibition against eating blood in meat, but he thinks it comes from the Noahide laws. He, too, says it has to do with table fellowship for Jewish and Gentile believers.

Williams says the rule means ‘not to eat any blood itself.’ This must mean for him that it’s blood in meat because he fails to say that the practice of eating (or rather drinking) blood was part of pagan sacrifices.

Knowling also believes it was blood from meat, but suggests that the reason behind the rule had to do with the ancient fascination with what blood symbolized. He writes that it was,

‘specially forbidden by the Jewish law, Lev. 17:10…and we may refer the prohibition …to the feeling of mystery entertained by various nations of antiquity with regard to blood, so that the feeling is not exclusively Jewish, although the Jewish law had given it such express and divine sanction…Nothing could override the command first given to Noah, Gen. 9:4, together with the permission to eat animal food, and renewed in the law.’

Knowling brings out the reverence that the ancients had for blood (mystery; i.e. ‘life’) and that it was universal, not just among the Jews. This accounts for pagan sacrifice as well as Hebrew sacrifice in that blood was seen to contain the life of the animal or person, and isn’t that what we see with Yeshua’s sacrifice?

Knowling further comments that blood should not be equated with murder in Acts 15:20 because of ‘the collocation’ with πνικτου (nik’too, strangled) being ‘against any such interpretation.’

He cites Cyprian and Tertullian as first recognizing this. It means that strangled and blood, because of their being one right after the other in the rules, are part of the same theme (i.e. not eating meat containing blood in it for Knowling). This would rule out blood being equated with murder for him, but unfortunately, it fails to answer why Yakov didn’t tell the Gentiles which animals were acceptable to eat if properly

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431 Ibid., p. 278.
432 Bruce, The Book of the Acts, pp. 295-296. The “prohibition against eating flesh with blood still in it…was based on the ‘Noachian decree’ of Gen. 9:4.”
433 Williams, Acts, p. 266.
435 Sinclair, Collins English Dictionary, p. 316. Collocation means ‘a grouping together of things in a certain order, as of the words in a sentence.’
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slaughtered and cooked.

Witherington says that Gentiles drank (and tasted) blood at their pagan temples, but he errs in thinking that it could also double as murder. Hegg sees blood as ‘something not uncommon in idol rituals,’ but also wrongly thinks that strangling prohibits the eating of meat with blood in it.

The fourth rule is blood. Christian scholarship says that it means not to eat meat that has blood in it. Stern and Williams suggested that it could be blood that was drunk, but they weren’t sure about it. Only Witherington and Hegg thought it related to a pagan sacrifice in which sacrificial blood was drunk. Stern and Witherington brought up that it could also refer to murder, and Hegg believed blood also meant not eating meat that hadn’t been properly slaughtered.

The proper slaughter and roasting (or cooking) of an animal, so there wouldn’t be any blood left in the meat, is a biblical reality. Although both of these, murder and the eating of blood within the meat, are considered sin by God, there’s absolutely no evidence for either of them being what Yakov meant when he spoke of blood in Acts 15:20.

What Yakov meant cannot be determined from the word itself, as the different authorities relate. This is where common sense and context come in. Common sense tells us that murder has to be ruled out because murder was a very serious crime in the Roman Empire and everyone knew it. The need for a Jewish man in Jerusalem to make a ruling on murder wasn’t necessary. After all, how many Gentile Christians were running around murdering people and thinking that it was alright? The rules are prohibitions on things that the Gentiles thought were alright to do in their new faith.

Another obvious point is that there’s no mention of which meats could or could not be eaten. The same reason that things strangled couldn’t be a food regulation also applies to blood. If James had meant that Gentiles couldn’t eat meat with blood in it, so as not to offend Jewish sensitivities, he never once addressed which animals weren’t to be eaten (e.g. pig, horse, lizards, rabbit, shrimp and catfish, etc.).

Theoretically, one could slaughter a pig properly, so that the blood was removed and the pig roasted until it was ‘well done,’ but sitting down with a Jewish believer and offering him some hot pork chops would definitely offend his Jewish sensibilities. This torpedoes the traditional interpretation of the rules dealing with ‘table fellowship toward the weaker brother.’ Yakov, in not indicating which animals weren’t to be eaten, renders the Christian interpretation of table fellowship impossible. Scholars should have known that the eating of bacon, even ‘well done,’ next to a Jewish believer, would certainly offend him, as all the Jewish believers continued to keep the dietary laws and the Law of Moses after the resurrection.

On the other hand, the need to prohibit the Gentile from not drinking the blood from sacrifices offered to idols was very necessary. The eating of the flesh of the sacrifice and the drinking of its blood were major themes of sacrificial idolatry. This is the pagan counterfeit to eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Messiah Yeshua. Pagans believed that the eating of the flesh of the sacrificial victim and the drinking of its blood gave them the life of the victim. ISBE says it’s ‘significant that eating blood was prohibited in earliest Bible times (Gen. 9:4). The custom…prevailed among heathen nations as a religious rite.

440 Acts 21:20, 24; 22:12; 24:14; 25:8; Rom. 3:31; 1st Jn. 5:1-3; Rev. 14:12, etc.
441 Bromiley, ISBE, vol. one, p. 526. See also Psalm 16:4.
The Fourth Rule—Blood

The custom to which ISBE is referring to is the drinking of fresh blood from an animal sacrifice. That it’s not the eating of meat with blood in it is seen from it being ‘a religious rite.’ There are no pagan religious rites that speak of eating blood in rare roast beef. Paul warned the Gentile Corinthian believers against drinking the cup of demons (1st Cor. 10:21). Obviously, the prohibition against drinking blood at a pagan sacrifice was very necessary for Gentile converts to the God of Israel.

The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament states that the concept of blood among the pagan nations was very powerful. Blood ‘is thus understood as the essence of the personal powers that are at work in man and beast.’

This essence is what motivated the pagans to drink the blood because they desired the essence or power of the creature whose blood they were drinking, especially when many of the creatures represented the god or goddess they were worshiping, and so, the psychological power derived from such a sacrifice took on enormous value for them, just as ‘drinking Yeshua’s blood’ does for us. The pagans weren’t wrong in their understanding of the life properties within blood—they were just deceived as to Whose blood they needed. In Manners and Customs of the Bible, James Freeman writes that ‘Hindoo devotees drink the reeking blood from newly killed buffaloes and fowls.’

The Hindoos that Freeman describes were not the ancient temple worshipers of Zeus, Molech or Aphrodite in Greece or Canaan. They do, however, present us with the fact that the drinking of blood in Freeman’s day (1870) was still part of paganism. Alexander Hislop reveals that the religion of the Hindoos originally came from Babylon. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states that blood was also used in other ways:

- a ‘blood friendship is established by African tribes by the mutual shedding of blood and either drinking it or rubbing it on one another’s bodies.’

In ancient Egypt the gods drank the blood of the sacrificial animals. Could the priests and the people be far behind? As King Solomon once said, ‘There’s nothing new under the sun’ (Eccl. 1:9b). Paganism takes many of its principles from the God of Israel and His Kingdom and perverts them. In idolatrous sacrifices the drinking of blood could ‘be commanded ritually’ and one could also be initiated into a pagan cult with ‘a baptism of blood.’

ISBE further writes that Mithraism was of ‘great antiquity in the East,’ and it was widespread in the days of the Apostles. The,

‘initiate was placed in a pit covered with boards on which a bull was slain in such a

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442 Most likely, the Jewish believers at Corinth weren’t drinking blood. They were raised in the Law and knew how offensive it was to Yahveh. Their coming into the Kingdom of Yeshua would only heighten that understanding.


445 Hislop, The Two Babylons, p. 96. ‘Hindoo Mythology…is admitted to be essentially Babylonian’ (see also pp. 15-16, 27, 36-37, 60-61, 65, 70-71, 101, 159, 187, 230, 243-244, 272, 282, 319). For those concerned with Ralph Woodrow’s critique of Hislop, see Avram’s Critique of Woodrow.


447 Ibid., vol. three, pp. 237-238.

448 Ibid., p. 237.
manner that the blood flowed through and drenched the worshiper below,’ and ‘he was thereby filled with the strength and other qualities of the beast,’ and washed in the blood.

This was Satan’s way, through man, of dealing with issues like sin, salvation and eternal life. Conceptually, it’s similar to the way Israel was baptized into the Covenant at Sinai. In Exodus 24:6-8, Moses,

“It’s your good that I go away’ (John 16:7), referring to His sacrificial death. Because Adam’s life was sacrificed, everything else was sacrificed. Everywhere we look we will see this sacrifice in its splendor. The sacrifice of Adam was the first sacrifice of which the New Covenant was said to be similar. It was the sacrifice by which the Old Testament was written.

In Lev. 17:11 it states,

‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood and I have given it to you upon the Altar to make atonement for your souls. For it’s the blood, by reason of the life, that makes atonement.’

Substituting ‘His’ in certain places of the verse, the tremendous significance of Yeshua’s sacrifice is seen:

‘For the Life of His flesh is in His blood and I have given it to you upon the Altar to make atonement for your souls. For it’s His blood, by reason of His Life, that makes atonement’ (for you).

This is how the blood of Messiah Yeshua deals with sin, sin nature, and how believers will be glorified and become exactly like He is now (except that He was always God the Son, while believers will be created to be like Him). This is the New Creation, the New Jerusalem coming down from the Heavens, the Bride of Messiah Yeshua (Eph. 5:32; Rev. 19:7; 21:1-2, 9, etc.) which will make the first Creation pale in splendor.

The eternal life and sinless character that is Yeshua is in His blood. His blood makes new creatures of Adam’s descendants. Everything that is Yeshua is in His blood (and body) and we are given access to this because of His sacrifice (Gal. 3:13-14). This is what He meant when He said, ‘I tell you the truth. It’s for your good that I go away’ (John 16:7), referring to His sacrificial death.

It’s also written that ‘the life of every creature is in its blood,’ and that ‘the blood is the life’ (Lev. 17:14; Dt. 12:23). The ancient peoples understood the connection of the blood and the life being interwoven. That’s why they ate the animal flesh and drank its blood in their pagan ceremonies.

Many times God warned Israel not to eat blood. That’s why most of the Jews left Yeshua that day in Ca-

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449 Ibid., vol. two, p. 681. From an online dictionary: ‘Mithraism—the cult of the god Mithras, which became popular among Roman soldiers...and was the main rival to Christianity in the first three centuries AD.’

450 See Salvation—The Promise! for what Messiah sacrifice and our salvation entails.

451 For where Torah pictures Messiah as a human sacrifice, see Human Sacrifice and Yeshua.

452 Ibid., pp. 234-250.

The Fourth Rule—Blood

pernaum when He said to them,

‘Truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat My flesh and drink My blood have eternal life and I will raise them up on the Last Day.’ (John 6:53-54)

In Dt. 12:16 it states, ‘you must not eat the blood! You are to pour it out on the ground like water.’ This pertains to the drinking of fresh blood from a slaughtered (or a sacrificed) animal. It’s different from eating blood in ‘rare meat’ (e.g. Lev. 19:26). They’re both sin, but only one is idolatrous.

The pagans had the right idea, but were applying it to the wrong reality, for even when Yeshua said what He did about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, He wasn’t looking for Jews to begin chomping on His arms and legs. It’s a spiritual reality that comes to us from Him through His sacrifice and the Holy Spirit.

The reason the fourth rule was given was to prohibit Gentile believers from drinking the blood of a pagan sacrifice. It has nothing to do with blood meaning murder, and thus nullifies the reason why strangled was tampered with and removed from Acts 15:20 by some Gentile scribe, in order to present his moral catechism. Of course, it also doesn’t speak of the three sins that a Jew should allegedly die for, in resisting idolatry, fornication or murder.

It’s evident that the rule on blood doesn’t mean ‘blood within the meat’ because Yakov never spoke of which meats would be considered unclean by the Jews. If ‘Jewish sensitivities’ were supposed to be the reason for the rule, a Gentile eating unclean meat in the presence of a Jew, even if the meat had been properly slaughtered and drained of its blood, would certainly outrage the Jewish believers, and therefore, fail the criteria of the scholars for ‘not offending the Jew.’ How can Christian scholars fail to see this?

Blood centers around what Yakov perceived the Gentile need to be, directly in relation to the issue of his salvation. Drinking blood as part of a pagan sacrifice was not a crime against Rome, but it was a gross idolatrous sin against the God of Israel. Yakov ruled that the drinking of sacrificial blood was forbidden. This rule obviously falls under the category of sacrificial idolatry and cements the four rules of Acts 15:20 as a conceptual unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry. Now the way is paved for Acts 15:21 to be properly understood and implemented, but before that—Acts 15: Some Concerns.
ACTS 15—SOME CONCERNS

Before we get to the section on Yakov’s Concern (p. 164ff.) there are six points I want to address concerning Acts 15. Five are found in Acts 15:10, 19, 21 (twice) and 21:25, and the sixth is the fact that the four rules don’t appear in the same order the second and third time that they are recorded (Acts 15:29; 21:25). Also, many Christian theologians interpret three of these cites (Acts 15:10, 19; 21:25) as proof that Christians don’t have to keep Mosaic Law:

1. The first concern (15:10) has Peter speaking of a yoke that neither he, nor his Fathers, could bear.
2. The second concern (15:19) is Yakov’s statement about ‘not troubling the Gentiles.’
3. The third and fourth concerns (15:21) have Yakov stating that Moses is ‘read in the synagogues every Sabbath,’ and also,
4. speaks of those who preach Moses.
5. The fifth concern deals with Yakov’s admonition that the Gentiles ‘observe no such thing’ (Acts 21:25), and,
6. the sixth point looks at the rules not being written in the same order (15:20, 29; 21:25) and why Yakov (or Luke) might have done this.

Acts 15:10—The Yoke

The yoke that Peter speaks of in Acts 15:10 is Mosaic Law. Many see the Law, in and of itself, as the yoke, but that’s not what Peter meant. Here’s what he said:

‘Now, therefore, why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our Fathers, nor we, were able to bear?’

Bruce writes that ‘a proselyte, by undertaking to keep the law of Moses’ was said to ‘take up the yoke of the kingdom of heaven,’ and that the Law was the burden that the Fathers ‘found too heavy.’ Obviously, he wasn’t thinking of Father David, otherwise known as the greatest king the world has ever seen, outside of his Son Yeshua, of course. David said many things about the Law, none of which seem to correspond with what Bruce writes of it. Here’s a sample of what David wrote:

‘The Law of Yahveh is perfect, restoring the soul. The testimony of Yahveh is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of Yahveh are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of Yahveh is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of Yahveh is clean, enduring

454 Knowling, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 320. It’s a ‘metaphor common among the Rabbis, and also in classical literature,’ cf. Jer. 5:5; Lam. 3:27; Ecclus. 51:26 (Zeph. 3:9) and Matt. 11:29 (Luke 11:46) Gal. 5:1. ‘Psalms of Solomon’ 7:8 cf. 27:32, ‘present undoubted instances of the metaphorical use of the term ‘the yoke’ for the service of Jehovah. In Sayings of the Jewish Fathers,” 3:8, ‘we have a definite…reference to the yoke of Thorah…It would seem therefore that…Peter uses an almost technical word’ for the Law of Moses.

See Mosaic Law and the Ten for why the term Law in the Scriptures, 99.7% of the time, means Mosaic Law.


456 Ibid.

457 David is called πατρι’αρχου (patri’arku; Patriarch, Father) in Acts 2:20 (see also Mark 11:10 and Acts 7:8-9).
Acts 15:10—The Yoke

forever. The judgments of Yahveh are true, they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold. Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned. In keeping them there is great reward.’ (Psalm 19:7-11)

David clearly extols Mosaic Law as something that is godly and beneficial. His different ways of speaking about the Law (e.g. its precepts and judgments) are Hebraic.458 David sings much of the praise of Yahveh’s Torah459 because he knew the wisdom and understanding inherent in it.460

If the laws of God were holy and wise for Moses, David, Isaiah and Jesus, why wouldn’t they continue to be after the resurrection for us? Why would they be any less holy and wise for a Gentile believer who has beengrafted into Israel?461 Yeshua kept Mosaic Law all His life, as did all Christians many years after the resurrection.462 Perhaps the Apostles didn’t understand ‘the yoke’ as Bruce presents it? Bruce errs because of his ‘law-free gospel’ paradigm.463

In making the Law the burden, Bruce, and all those who espouse such an idea, make the God of Israel who gave it, an evil taskmaster. The Jews were set them free from Egyptian slavery by the blood of the lamb (God’s grace), only so God could enslave them to His burdensome Law?

Williams also misses the point when he states that ‘any attempt to revert to a religion of law was to try to test God’464 Stern stumbles as well, but rightly comes against the verse being used to disparage the Law of Moses:

‘Much Christian teaching contrasts the supposedly onerous and oppressive ‘yoke of the Law’ with the words of Yeshua, ‘My yoke is easy and my burden is light.’’465

Stern says that if a person thinks something is pleasant then one can’t project onto him that it’s not. This point, though, can’t be used in defense of the Law because it’s extremely subjective. Most Christians see the Law as a burden, and if subjectivity is the criteria for judging; Mosaic Law, according to most Christians, is very oppressive. The criteria, though, is not how we think or feel about the Law, but what God says about it,466 especially in the New Testament.467

458 Words like judgments and statutes, etc., are synonymous with Mosaic Law and speak of God’s holy Instruction or Teaching (Torah) to Israel (Dt. 4:44-45; 5:1-22; 7:11, etc.) because that’s what Torah means. For testimony equaling Torah see Psalm 78:5; 119:88; 132:12; Is. 8:20. For testimonies see Dt. 4:45; 6:1-20; Ps. 25:10; 78:56; 99:7. For judgments see Lev. 18:4; 5, 26; 25:18; Dt. 4:1, 5, 8; 5:31. For ordinances see Ex. 21:1; 24:3; Lev. 19:37; 20:22; 26:15; Num. 9:3. For statutes, Ex. 18:20; Lev. 10:11; 18:4, 5, 26; 19:19; 20:8; Dt. 6:1. For commandments speaking of Mosaic Law: Ex. 15:26; 16:28; Lev. 22:31; Num. 15:22; Dt. 6:17 and for the fear of Yahveh see Ex. 9:30; 18:21; 20:20; Lev. 25:17; Dt. 4:10; 5:29; 6:2, 13, 24; Mt. 10:28.

459 Psalm 1:2; 37:31; 40:8; 119:1, 77, etc.

460 Dt. 4:5-8; 30:15, 19, 20; 32:47.

461 John 10:14-16; Rom. 11:13-12:5; Eph. 2:1-22; Gal. 6:16.

462 Acts 21:20, 24; 24:18; 25:8; Rev. 12:17. See also, A Snapshot of Church History and Mosaic Law, Have You Ever Wondered?, and The Feasts of Israel and the Church.


464 Williams, Acts, p. 264.


466 Dt. 4:1-8; 12:8; 29:29.

467 Mt. 5:17-19; 22:35-40; Rom. 3:31; 7:12, 14, et al. (et al., means ‘and others’).
Stern writes that the commandments are not ‘an oppressive burden any more than Yeshua’s yoke is,’ and that the yoke of the Law is ‘acknowledging God’s sovereignty and his right to direct our lives,’ and that if God has given commandments, ‘we should obey them.’ All this is true. The Law is not a burden, God is sovereign and He does have the right to direct the lives of Christians by His commandments, which reveal His will—but Peter called something unbearable.

Stern believes Peter’s yoke was legalism—the ‘detailed mechanical rule-keeping, regardless of heart attitude, that some’ Pharisees had. He states it was this ‘yoke of legalism’ that was ‘unbearable.’ As true as the saying that ‘man is not justified by legalism,’ what is written is that ‘man is not justified by the works of the Law’ (Gal. 2:16; cf. 1st Tim. 6:18), even if done from the heart. One cannot be justified by doing good and holy deeds, and that’s Paul’s point. Peter’s yoke wasn’t legalism nor ‘mechanical rule keeping.’

Witherington also believes that the yoke was the Law. He states that Peter, as ‘a Galilean fisherman,’ may not have liked parts of the Law that would have been a burden to him, such as going to Jerusalem three times a year for the annual Feasts (Ex. 23:17; Dt. 16:16). According to Witherington it would have meant the loss of income to support his family.

As logical as this may seem it totally misses the mindset of a Jew like Peter who was all too happy to leave his fishing nets for a week in order to go to Jerusalem on God’s ‘holy vacations’ and worship Yahveh in the midst of all his brethren. After all, it was God who had made him a fisherman and ultimately provided for him and his family. Every Jew knew this, but Witherington, in failing to understand the holiness of the Law and the joy of celebrating the Feasts, stumbles. He also says that the Gentile was being required to become a proselyte to Judaism. This was true, but neither Peter nor his Fathers were proselytes, so that can’t be the yoke, either.

Hegg believes the yoke was the Gentile becoming a proselyte, with the traditional interpretation of Torah and the cumbersome man-made rules the Pharisees had attached to God’s commandments. The Gentile would have to be circumcised, become a proselyte and comply with all the Pharisaic laws in order to become part of Israel (to ‘get in’ to the ‘saved Jewish community’ as E. P. Sanders wrote of). In this, being part of Israel, the Gentile would be saved. Hegg writes,

the “yoke they are unwilling to place upon the backs of the Gentile believers is the yoke of man-made rules and laws that required a ceremony to ‘get in’ and submission to untold number of intricate halachah.”

469 Ibid.
471 Ibid., pp. 453-454. He also speaks of the possibility that Peter spoke of the ‘priestly requirements of the Law’ that the ‘Pharisees and the Qumranites’ wanted all Jews to walk in, and suggests that Jesus may have thought the Law to be heavy (Mt. 11:30). It wasn’t the glorious Law that Yahveh had given to Israel (Dt. 4:5-8; Rom. 7:12) that Yeshua called heavy, but the weight of sin and guilt from not keeping the Law (Mt. 11:28; Rom. 7:7, 17-24).
472 Hegg, The Letter Writer, pp. 265, 280-282. Halachah means ‘the way to walk.’ The Rabbis use it to describe their rules for living in this world. Hegg is greatly mistaken when he teaches that Gentiles should be circumcised. He sees Timothy as a Gentile who was circumcised (ibid., pp. 113-114, 285) and builds upon this fanciful point to present his heretical theology that Gentiles should be circumcised for the right reason (not to be saved, but to keep the law of circumcision; Gen. 17:10-14; Ex. 12:43-48) and therefore, Torah. Yet, why would Paul circumcise a ‘Gentile Timothy’ if he taught against Gentile circumcision (Rom. 4:1-12; 1st Cor. 7:17-19; Gal. 1:6-9; 2:1-5; 5:2; Phil. 3:2-3f.)? Timothy is not an example of Gentile circumcision. His mother was Jewish and
Acts 15:10—The Yoke

The Pharisaic believers who wanted the Gentiles circumcised (Acts 15:1, 5) were looking for them to become proselytes. That a proselyte was considered a part of the Jewish people is seen in Nicolas being counted as such (Acts 6:5). Alfred Edersheim says that the children of a proselyte were ‘regarded as Jews,’ and that once the proselytes ‘were circumcised, immersed in water and offered a sacrifice,’ they became, ‘children of the covenant…perfect Israelites…Israelites in every respect, both as regarded duties and privileges.’

Herbert Loewe (1882-1940), in A Rabbinic Anthology, adds that a “proselyte can say, ‘God of our Fathers’ because he is a full Jew.” Unfortunately, though, Rabbinic Judaism is deceived—and Christianity and Messianic Judaism don’t realize it in this area. Nowhere in the Old nor the New does God authorize a Gentile to become a Jew, even though he becomes part of Israel—in the Old, through physical covenantal circumcision; and in the New through the covenantal circumcision made without hands. Christianity and Messianic Judaism accept the rabbinic conversion of a Gentile, making him a Jew, but this is not found in Scripture, and therefore, it’s not God’s will. It was truly the leading of the Holy Spirit that prohibited Gentile physical covenantal circumcision (which is not a medical circumcision that Gentile babies sometimes have), to be part of Israel in the New Testament.

The Gentile believer in Messiah Yeshua is part of the Commonwealth of Israel, but that doesn’t make him a Jew, Hebrew, Israeli (‘Israelite’), or even a so-called ‘spiritual Jew.’ The Gentile believer is part of...
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

the Seed that Father Abraham was promised, and he has also been grafted into the Olive Tree (Israel; Romans 9–11), but that doesn’t change his racial identity into a Jew or a Hebrew anymore then when a man marries a woman. The man and his wife become ‘one flesh’ (Gen. 2:24), but the woman doesn’t become a man. The Jewish and Gentile believers are ‘one in Messiah,’ but the Gentile remains a Gentile.

Another illustration from the natural realm will help explain what it means for a Gentile to be part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2:1-12). Canada is part of the British Commonwealth, and consequently, all Canadians are part of that commonwealth, but a Canadian is not an Englishman, or a Brit, as many Englishmen like to call themselves. In other words, the Canadian is still a Canadian. Being part of the British Commonwealth means that both the Canadian and the Brit have the same king (or queen) and that their rule of life (law) is built upon the same foundation of English law (the Magna Carta, etc.), but it doesn’t mean that the Canadian is no longer a Canadian, or that he becomes a Brit.

Now for its spiritual application. Any Gentile, like Ruth, who became part of the Covenant that God gave to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their Seed, remained a Gentile and became part of the covenant people (i.e. Commonwealth) of Israel. Ruth, after she said that she was ‘one with Naomi, Naomi’s people and her God’ (Ruth 1:16-18) became part of Israel (without rabbinic conversion or approval, as it didn’t exist back then), but Ruth remained a Moabitess all the days of her life, and all the divine laws of Moses that applied to Jewish women also applied to her.

Looking at Ittai, the Gentile general who served King David, reveals that Ittai remained a Philistine all the days of his life. In other words, Ittai didn’t become a ‘Jew’ even though he was ‘one’ with David and Israel, and even though he lived in Israel, and obviously, had left his own people.

When David fled from his son Absalom, who wanted to murder him and assume the kingship over Israel, David and his entourage hurriedly left Jerusalem. In stopping to reconnoiter who was with him, David saw Ittai and Ittai’s men. Scripture records:

‘And the King went out with all the people after him and stopped at the outskirts. Then all his servants passed before him, and all the Cherethites, all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men who had followed him from Gath (Philistines!), passed before the King. Then the King said to Ittai the Gittite,’

‘Why are you also going with us? Return and remain with the King (Absalom), for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your own place. In fact, you came only yesterday.’ Should I make you wander up and down with us today, since I go I know not where? Return and take your brethren back. Mercy and truth be with you.’

‘Ittai answered the King (as Ruth did to Naomi) and said,’

‘As Yahveh lives!, and as my Lord the King lives! Surely in whatever place my

how the term Jew constitutes ‘Israel,’ ask for the PDF, Jews, Israel and the Jews Today.

Romans 2:28-29 isn’t speaking of a Gentile being a ‘spiritual Jew.’ See, Is the Gentile Now a Jew?

The ASV, KJV, NASB, NKJV and the NRSV have Commonwealth, while the HCSB, NET and the NIV have citizenship. Either is acceptable.

Ruth 1:22; 2:2, 6, 21; 4:5, 10.

David doesn’t literally mean that Ittai had come ‘only yesterday,’ but chooses that phrase to show Ittai that it was alright for him and his men to leave, but in this we see Ittai’s great loyalty to David.
Acts 15:10—The Yoke

Lord the King shall be, whether in death or life, even there also your servant will be!’

“So David said to Ittai, ‘Go and cross over!’ Then Ittai the Gittite and all his men and all their children who were with him crossed over.” (2nd Sam. 15:17-22)

Ittai the Gittite’s loyalty to King David is exceptionally commendable because Ittai was a Philistine from the Philistine city of Gath.481 Ittai served the King of Israel and his God, but he remained a Philistine all the days of his life (2nd Sam. 18:2), as this passage brings out when David says to him, ‘you are a foreigner,’ not, ‘you were a foreigner.’ Ittai was still a Gentile.

Even though as a Philistine Ittai should have been a mortal enemy of David he was truly part of the Commonwealth of Israel and would receive benefits, both temporal and eternal, because of his love for King David and David’s God.482 Ittai is a picture of the Gentile in the New Testament, while King David is a picture of David’s Son, the Jewish Messiah.

Rabbinic conversion is an artificial process that portends to make a Gentile into a Jew, but there’s nothing in the Old Testament nor the New Testament to support this change of racial identity. Nowhere in the New Testament do we see any Gentile being referred to as a Jew or a Hebrew. A Gentile who comes to believe in Yeshua, the King of Israel, doesn’t become a Jew, but remains a Gentile.

All Christians are in Messiah’s Kingdom, but not all are Jews, yet, all are part of the Commonwealth of Israel, the Olive Tree, and the Seed of Abraham. Gentiles, like Ittai, could live in Israel, and so, by citizenship they could say that they were Israeli, to say, an Egyptian or a Roman, but they weren’t an Israeli or a Hebrew or Jew by race, anymore than a Russian man living in Greece, and possessing Greek citizenship, becomes a Greek by race. A Jew is a Jew by race; lineage from Fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Of course, there are some who twist Scripture (e.g. Eph. 2:11), to try and interpret it otherwise, but the word Jew(s), in both the Old and the New Testaments, always refers to a person who was racially born from the Seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.483 God cements this concept in the New Covenant by saying that the Gentile believers weren’t to be physically covenantally circumcised like the Jews (Acts 15, etc.). The Pharisees who believed in Yeshua wanted the Gentiles to (artificially) become Jews via physical, covenantal circumcision (Acts 15:1-6f.), because that’s what they believed should happen, but God, through Paul, Barnabas, Peter and James, overruled them (and rabbinic conversion), reestablishing the biblical concept that Gentiles can be part of Israel, but they don’t become Jews.484

If a Gentile wanted to be part of Israel before Messiah, he could do that by being covenantally circumcised (Exodus 12:43-48), but he still remained a Gentile, or in Hebrew he would be called a גֵּר (ger).485


482 See also Uriah the Hittite, one of King David’s champions, as another example of a foreigner residing within Israel who was one with Israel, but wasn’t seen as a Jew or a Hebrew (1st Sam. 26:6; 2nd Sam. 11:3, 6, 17, 21, 24; 12:9; 23:39; 1st Kgs. 15:5).

483 Gentiles who mistakenly convert to Judaism via the Rabbis are called proselytes and even though the Rabbis say that ‘they are now Jews,’ they are not Jews according to the Word of God, but remain Gentiles.

484 See Acts 15:7-10, 14, 16-17, 19, especially v. 23, where these Gentile believers are still called Gentiles, and also, 1st Thess. 4:1-5 (especially v. 5).
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Proselytism, which artificially makes a Gentile into a Jew, is a rabbinc invention that goes against the Word of God. There is nothing in Scripture to support a Gentile becoming a Jew.

Peter’s yoke wasn’t about becoming a proselyte to keep the ‘man-made rules.’ Peter wasn’t a proselyte and he didn’t keep ‘man-made rules’ (Mt. 15:2 by inference). This wasn’t the burden that he spoke of. The yoke that neither Peter nor his Fathers could bear was the keeping or doing of the Law for eternal life (salvation: justification before God). This is what circumcision (and proselytism) ultimately implied and this is what the Council struck down—the false teaching that the Law was a vehicle for salvation.

The yoke has nothing to do with ‘legalism,’ as spoken of by Bruce and Witherington, nor ‘intricate halachah,’ nor ‘mechanically’ keeping the Law. Stern, Hegg and most Christians also miss it. Marshall, however, rightly perceives that Peter’s yoke was the Law used for justification:

‘The point here is not the burdensomeness or oppressiveness of the law, but rather the inability of the Jews to gain salvation through it, and hence, its irrelevance as far as salvation is concerned.

Exactly, but before Yeshua was born, the keeping of the Law, for justification, is how the Jewish people thought they earned eternal life, despite the view of the New Perspective, which presents Judaism as a faith-based religion that ‘doesn’t look to the Law for salvation.’ This ‘new perspective,’ brought into Christianity by Sanders, Dunn and Wright, follows the ‘party line’ of rabbinc thinking, believing that the Jew wasn’t concerned about salvation because he was part of the Chosen People, which guaranteed him salvation, hence, the Jew didn’t keep the Law for salvation. This, however, is an imaginary ideal based upon a false, non-biblical hope about what it meant to be part of the Chosen People—nowhere in the Law does God speak of eternal life for the Chosen People, let alone guarantee it for keeping Torah. God hints at eternal life in the Prophets and Psalms, but the method of attaining it (faith in Messiah Yeshua and being Born Again) is never explained.

Scot McKnight summarizes some of the New Perspective on Judaism by saying that ‘Israel was elected by God, brought into the covenant and given the law to regulate how covenant people live.’ That’s so good to hear! Israel was given the Law so that she could know how God wanted them to live out her faith in Him. It’s shocking, though, that this ‘new perspective’ has taken 1,900 years to appear in Christianity.

James Dunn, though, speaking of Sanders’ position, fails to understand that the Law was also a way of gaining God’s favor or blessing. He states,

‘the commandments are not a way of earning God’s favor but a way of showing how the people of God should live. That’s the basic point that had to be made in terms of the new perspective.’

Sanders seriously errs if he thinks that the Jewish people didn’t look to the commandments to earn God’s

485 For how a ger differed from other Gentiles living in Israel see p. 202ff.
486 Marshall, Acts, p. 250. Also, ‘What the legalists were trying to do was to place the yoke of the law on the Gentiles, a yoke which the Jews themselves had never been able to bear successfully...as far as salvation is concerned.’
487 Ibid.
488 See Prov. 10:25; Is. 33:14; 35:10; 45:17; 51:11; 55:3; 56:5; 60:15, 19-20; Ezek. 37:26; Daniel 12:2.
489 McKnight.
490 Wright; The Paul Page. This teaching was given on Oct. 25th, 2004.
favor. The Law clearly states that obedience equals blessing,\(^{491}\) which the Rabbis rightly emphasize. It’s actually the way of receiving God’s favor and blessing (Lev. 26; Dt. 28) for one already saved or delivered, being ‘in covenant’ with God through the First Passover in Egypt.

Conversely, one is cursed if he doesn’t obey the commandments and ordinances, which are like the law of gravity. If someone says that gravity doesn’t exist or matter, we know what will happen if he leaps off of a 40 story building. Whether in arrogance or ignorance, if one doesn’t keep all of God’s commandments, statutes and rules that apply to him, he will suffer the consequences in his soul and body, and he will not be a true biblical example of Yeshua, for he will lead others astray into sinning against God and man.

The idea of the Rabbis, that eternal life was given if one was part of the Chosen People, is false, too. There is no Scripture to validate it and it’s not what is practiced in Judaism. Loewe states that Judaism, ‘like Hellenism or Islam, can be expounded and understood without being followed in practice.’\(^{492}\)

Rabbi Akiva (50-135 AD), who is revered in Judaism, even though he, by endorsing a false messiah, caused the Jewish people to lose their nation for more than 1,800 years, realized the danger of relying on ‘being a covenant member’ to automatically guarantee Paradise. It’s said of him,

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that he ‘seemed to hold that the future life is a privilege to be gained through positive up-right living, rather than an inherent right which can only be forfeited as a penalty. Sometimes he asserted God’s mercy to be such that a single meritorious act will win a man admission to the future world.’\(^{493}\)
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Akiva realized that the afterlife could be forfeited by any Jew of the Chosen People. He also thought that meritorious acts or good deeds (of the Law) were necessary for eternal life even if one were ‘in covenant.’ Here we see a well known rabbi stating that being part of the Chosen People was not enough to enter into eternal life, and that Paradise was attained by keeping the Law; a false concept, but very Jewish.

In ‘the New Perspective on Judaism and Paul,’ works of the Law takes on the connotation of being specific Jewish works, such as keeping the Sabbath and circumcision. The works of the Law for Dunn are ‘sociological markers’ of the Jewish community, and so, they’re not seen as ‘merit-seeking works,’ but ‘boundary-marking works.’\(^{494}\) N. T. Wright agrees and says they aren’t the ‘moral works through which one gains merit, but the works through which the Jew is defined over against the pagan.’\(^{495}\)

Wright adds that the ‘works of the Spirit’ are those things that show that one is ‘in Christ’ (e.g. bringing people into the Kingdom).\(^{496}\) Contrary to this pristine, myopic evaluation of first century Judaism, ‘works of the Law’ are both sociological boundary markers (for what nation other than Israel kept Passover and the Feasts of Tabernacles, etc.? ) and all the good, moral works that stem from the doing of the Law. It is equally Sabbath observance as well as taking care of the poor, the widow and the orphan (compassion, justice and love of neighbor),\(^{497}\) and the mighty works or miracles that Yeshua did (Mt. 11:2; Jn. 5:36;

\(^{491}\) Dt. 11:26-28; 28:1-2, 15, 45, et al.

\(^{492}\) Montefiore, A Rabbinic Anthology, p. Ixvi.

\(^{493}\) Ibid., p. 664, note 13.

\(^{494}\) McKnight.


\(^{496}\) Ibid.

\(^{497}\) Ex. 22:22; Lev. 19:18; Dt. 10:18; 14:29; 16:11; 24:17, 19; 26:12; Mt. 5:16; 26:10f.; Gal. 2:10; 1st Tim. 5:10; 6:17-19; Titus 2:11-14; 3:8, 14; Rev. 19:8.
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15:24, etc.), which sprang forth from the love, redemption and freedom pictured in the 7th day Sabbath and the Year of Jubilee, and God’s commandment to love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18c). All these stem from Mosaic Law and are an organic whole, for they reflect the will of the Author.

The Father says of Yeshua, ‘You are My Servant Israel in whom I will be glorified (Is. 49:3).’ Yeshua is the quintessential Israeli (Rev. 22:16). He is the Example par excellence of what being ‘in the Spirit’ means, one thing of which is that He did all Mosaic Law that applied to Him. Torah is the verbal expression of Yahveh—Who He is, what He’s done for Israel, what He wants to do for Israel, and His will for Israel. God has magnified and glorified His Law through Yeshua (‘Yahveh was pleased for the sake of His righteousness to magnify His Law and make it glorious’; Is. 42:21).

How did Yahveh magnify His Law? Yeshua was like a prism through which the Law and the Holy Spirit were magnified and seen (1st Jn. 1:1f.) He is the living Torah, the Word of God (Rev. 19:13) who walked out Mosaic Law the way God intended it to be walked out. The teachings and merciful healings Yeshua did, as well as His observance of the Sabbath and Passover, etc., sprang from the Law and Spirit within, and are our example of how God wants us to live our faith in Yeshua. The Holy Spirit is able to empower believers so that we can do all the works of the Law, as Yeshua did, through the power and fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-24). Torah forms the internal framework so that one can be fully equipped for every good work (2nd Tim. 3:16-17). The Holy Spirit is the life of the Law, who also seeks to write the Law upon the tablets of our heart, so that both God, and His will, have a living place within us.

Claude Montefiore (1858-1938), a noted Jewish scholar, writes that even though the Rabbis can stress the ‘joy of the commandment,’ and that ‘the Law must be fulfilled for its own sake and for the love of God, and not for reward,’ states that when it comes right down to it the Jew must keep the Law in order to be saved. Summing up Judaism’s concept of righteousness and the reward of eternal life, Montefiore states,

‘There is no rigid or worked-out doctrine about Works and Faith. On the whole, the theory of justification by works is strongly pressed.’

This is (attempted) justification (salvation) through the Law, through the works of the Law, which is a rabbinic perversion of what God intended the Law to be used for (as God’s righteous guideline to live out one’s faith in Him). Montefiore also speaks of the individual Jew being regarded as a,

‘bundle of deeds. If he has done 720 good deeds and 719 bad ones, he is more righteous than wicked (with due consequences as regards divine punishment and reward).’

‘At the judgment in the world to come, paradise or hell, is given according to the majority of good deeds or evil.’

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498 Exodus 23:4-5; Lev. 25:8-10; Is. 61:1-2; Lk. 4:18-19.
500 Matthew 11:4-6; 23:23; John 5:36; 9:3-4, etc.
501 Mt. 5:16; Jn. 14:12; Acts 4:8; 8:6-7; Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14; 1st Pet. 2:12, etc.
503 Ibid., p. xxxvi. Italics are Montefiore’s.
504 Ibid., p. xxxv.
505 Ibid.
506 Ibid., p. 596.
Acts 15:10 — The Yoke

Is this a concept of Judaism that wasn’t there in the days of Yeshua and Paul? Has Judaism ‘gone backwards’ in its thinking? Once they were saved by just ‘being in covenant,’ but today it takes the works or deeds of the Law to save them?

The New Testament offers a number of places where official Jewish understanding, as to what constituted eternal life for the Jew, is seen. One place is Acts 15. Did the Gentile need ‘to become a Jew’ and keep the Law of Moses, symbolized in physical, covenantal circumcision, along with faith in Jesus for eternal life? The Law is seen as necessary for salvation by the believing Pharisees and Scribes (Acts 15:1, 5), who weren’t any different, at this point, than their non-believing counterparts.

“Moses” hadn’t placed this yoke upon the necks of Peter and his Fathers—the Pharisees had! This is what Peter and his Fathers (his genealogical fathers as well as the Elders of Israel) had been deceived into believing for more than two hundred years—that God would give them eternal life if they kept the Law. This is the yoke that no one could bear (Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16-17), as Marshall brought out, and this is exactly what Yeshua says when He speaks to the Jewish authorities (Jn. 5:10f.), and the Jewish people, who looked for salvation by keeping the Law. Yeshua said to them in John 5:39:

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, but it is they that testify of Me.”

Yeshua, the highest authority in any matter that He speaks of, reveals Jewish expectation for eternal life residing within the keeping of Mosaic Law. This is confirmed when the Pharisaic leaders in the Sanhedrin say that the common Jewish people was cursed because they didn’t know the Law—“this multitude, which doesn’t know the Law, is accursed!” (John 7:49)

All those ‘cursed folks’ were Jews in covenant, but Jews who didn’t know the Law, or rather, keep it the punctilious way the Pharisees and Scribes did, and so, were obviously not candidates for Heaven. This is a biblical insight into what the Pharisees and Scribes, the highest Jewish authorities who believed in an afterlife, and who would evolve into the Rabbis of today, thought how eternal life was attained (as was also evident with the Christian Pharisees in Acts 15:1, 5).

Obedience to the Law was righteousness, as the Law and Paul state (Dt. 6:25; 24:13; Rom. 10:5), but extending that obedience and righteousness to earning eternal life wasn’t God’s way for eternal life, and hence, Peter’s yoke in Acts 15:10. It truly was an impossible yoke, but it has nothing to do with keeping Mosaic Law as God’s righteous way to walk out one’s faith in Yeshua. Also, in that same Sanhedrin, whose high priest was a Sadducee who didn’t believe in an afterlife, the man born blind, whom Yeshua had given sight to, was despised and rejected. One of them, perhaps the high priest, said to the former blind man, ‘You were certainly born in sins and are you teaching us?! And they cast him out!’ (John 9:34)

The Sanhedrin, the highest religious authority in the days of Yeshua, reveals official Jewish understanding of which Jews would be saved and which wouldn’t. The man ‘born in sin,’ even though he was obviously a Jew, circumcised on the eighth day and part of the Chosen People, didn’t qualify despite the fact that his answers to them were incredibly perceptive. As the religious authorities, the Sanhedrin was supposed to know ‘where a man was from,’ meaning, was Jesus from God or Satan?

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507 Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, p. 322. Writing of John 5:39, he says: ‘Their elaborate searching and sifting of the Law in hope that, by a subtle analysis of its every particle and letter, by inferences from, and a careful drawing of a prohibitive hedge around its letter, they would possess themselves of eternal life,’ but they were ‘utterly self-deceived.’
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

What we see in Scripture is of far greater value than what some rabbis, in idealizing Judaism, wrote. According to the New Testament, Judaism believed that eternal life was attained through the keeping of the Law. This dismantles the New Perspective thinking on the Jewish perception of salvation.

The Rabbis knew that all Israel wouldn’t be saved, even though God had saved all Israel from Egyptian slavery. They knew Israel’s history was permeated with wicked Israelis, some of whom Yahveh had personally destroyed, and many of whom Scripture calls evil.509 The Rabbis knew this side of Israel, too, and believed that obedience to Mosaic Law was the key to eternal life, as Yeshua confirmed that day to the Jewish people (Jn. 5:39). Yes, the Pharisees had added many other rules to the Law, but the concept of earning salvation through the Law was the foundation of their misguided hope; a concept symbolized in physical, covenantal circumcision.

A rabbinic story reveals the problem the Rabbis faced with this teaching. One day a great rabbi lay dying on his deathbed. All his students gathered around him and noticed that he was very sad. They asked him why. He said,

‘‘I am soon going to be before the Holy One and I don’t know if I will be accepted.’ They said, ‘But you are a great rabbi! You have taught us how to walk in Torah and have kept Torah all your life!’ Whereupon he answered them, ‘To you I am great, but in the eyes of the Holy One every wicked thing is seen.’’

This story reveals the problem with trying to use the works of the Law as a gauge to determine one’s fitness to stand in God’s presence on Judgment Day. No amount of good deeds (the holy works of the Law) can give one eternal life, nor the assurance thereof.

It also brings out that being ‘part of Israel’ wasn’t enough, even for a great rabbi. The Gentile, ‘getting into’ the ‘covenant-saved people,’ would still be expected to keep the Law for eternal life (Rom. 2:17, 25; Gal. 5:4). This was the burden that neither Peter nor his Fathers could bear. After Peter spoke of the yoke, his next words in Acts 15:11 confirm this, saying the Gentiles were saved just as he himself had been: ‘But we believe that they’ (i.e. the Gentiles) ‘are saved just as we are, by the grace of the Lord Jesus.’ In other words, Peter could also have said, ‘We used to think that keeping the Law entitled us to Heaven, but we’ve come to see that this was a perverse concept the Pharisees gave to God’s holy Law.’

The Council of Acts 15 met because some believing Pharisees wanted to make Jews of the Gentiles (cir-

508 See John 9:13-34, esp. v. 30. The Sanhedrin was confronted with the Messiah and they knew it. That’s why they made doubly sure that the man had been born blind (by asking his parents; Jn. 9:18-23). There was a teaching at that time that the spittle of a righteous man could open the eyes of a blind man, but only the spittle of the Messiah could open the eyes of one born blind. Now, here was this man who had been born blind looking right at them, while they tried to discredit Yeshua (see also Mt. 21:24f.). It shouldn’t be overlooked, though, that some members of the Sanhedrin (perhaps Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea) voiced their godly objections. Even though it was the Sabbath when the miracle was done, because the miracle was so incredible, these men questioned the ‘party line’ that Yeshua was a sinner (Jn. 9:16).

509 Ex. 32:1-35 is the sin of the Gold Calf; Num. 16:1-40, esp. v. 26, is the sin of Korah; Num. 16:44-45 is the sin of Israel in wanting to stone Moses and Aaron, saying that they had murdered Korah; Num. 13:1–14:45, especially 14:26-38, is the sin of the entire Camp (except for a few) in believing the ten spies and turning Israel against Yahveh and His promise to bring them into the land of Canaan, for which they wandered (and died) in the Wilderness for 40 years (see also Num. 17:5, 10; 18:5). Also, there were the sins of all the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel for which Yahveh finally annihilated it through the king of Assyria in 721 BC, and the sins of most of the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah, with most of the population being destroyed and a tiny remnant (4,600; Jer. 52:28-30) led away into Babylon captivity.
Acts 15:10—The Yoke

circumcision) and attach the Law to faith in Yeshua for salvation (Acts 15:1, 5). Salvation for those Pharisees, or entry into the Kingdom of Yeshua, consisted of faith in Yeshua plus the keeping of the Law (symbolized in circumcision). They hadn’t realized that faith in Yeshua had made them a new creature (2nd Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15) and circumcised their heart (Dt. 30:6), and that keeping the Law and physical circumcision had nothing to do with entry into Messiah’s Kingdom or being Born Again. This is what Peter addressed. He wasn’t speaking against the Law or its good works. He was coming against the Law being added to faith in Yeshua for entry into the Kingdom or salvation.

This was a new concept for those believing Pharisees and for most everyone else there. That’s why the Council convened. The congregation in Antioch had wanted to know what was required for Gentile salvation. It was logical for the believing Pharisees to think the way they did—Gentiles became part of Israel, before Messiah Yeshua, by being circumcised (Ex. 12:48) and keeping the Law (Ex. 12:49; Lev. 19:34; 24:22), but this was the New Covenant and a new way of entering into it (cf. Heb. 10:19-20). There was no precedent in Torah for Gentiles coming into Messiah’s Kingdom. In this Kingdom Yeshua performs the circumcision made without hands (Col. 2:11) that Torah pointed to (Dt. 30:6).

Only after much debate in Jerusalem did the outcome that we read of prevail (Acts 15:7). It most likely took several hours. Then Peter stood up and declared the counsel of God. It seems that Paul and Barnabas already understood this (Acts 15:1-2), but it certainly wasn’t ‘a given.’

Torah had also become enmeshed with the Traditions of the Elders (also known as the Oral Law, which would become the written Talmud; circa 250 AD), but the main point that Peter made was that the Law, symbolized in physical covenantal circumcision, must not be attached to Jesus for salvation. Peter and the Apostles had only come to see this after they realized how God had given them and Cornelius (Acts 10; eight years earlier) eternal life—through faith in His Son plus nothing else. This was the entry point, the middle point and the end point. Led of the Holy Spirit, the commandments and good works of Mosaic Law are the spiritual ‘nuts and bolts’ of how to walk out faith in Yeshua.510 Once in the Kingdom does it matter if one sins against the King or not? Here is where the Law comes to the forefront. It declares what is right and holy, sin and abomination, according to the King, for both Jew and Gentile (Rom. 3:20).

Before Peter and Paul had known Yeshua, they too, had been deceived into thinking that the keeping of the Law would merit them eternal life, but now, in Acts 15:10, Peter was setting the record straight. Paul would do it Romans 3:31, where he writes of establishing the Law for every Christian. The ‘place’ or doing ‘of the Law’ does not cause one to be Born Again, or give one eternal life, as Paul had previously thought, unregenerate Pharisee that he had been. Torah is for a holy lifestyle ‘in Messiah.’ The Law is the criteria for knowing God’s view on what is sin and what is right living (Rom. 3:20; 7:7, 12, 14; 1st Cor. 7:19). Paul wrote the letter of Romans to mostly Gentile believers in Rome who needed to know the place of the Law and the Law’s value in the midst of God’s grace.

Religious doctrines that nullify God’s Word are very hard to perceive when one grows up in them. This was true for those Jewish believers back then and it’s true for Christians today. Tradition blinds people into thinking that their doctrine is of God. When we look at the Pharisees, locked in mortal combat with God the Son, we see how the ‘doctrines of men’ can blind one to God Himself. Only the Spirit of Yeshua can open blind eyes to reveal the deception and produce a desire for godly change.

Paul fought this false teaching on salvation in his letter to the Galatians. His conclusion of the matter, on


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using the good deeds of the Law (symbolized in circumcision) for justification, is seen in Gal. 5:4; ‘You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by Law! You have fallen from grace!’

Paul wasn’t coming against the Law, but its perverse use. Some of the Galatians were seeking to be justified by faith in Messiah and the Law (symbolized in circumcision), but adding anything to Yeshua’s sacrifice denies the sufficiency of who He is and what He did. Once in the Kingdom, though, we should obey the King’s rules. Mosaic Law is meant to be for our lifestyle in His Kingdom, just as it was for Paul.

The commandments of Moses are for our protection and blessing (Lev. 26; Dt. 28–30), and also set us apart (i.e. makes us holy and distinct) from the people of darkness around us. God didn’t give the Law to Israel because He hated her or wanted to enslave her, but because He wanted Israel to be a wise and a blessed people. He wants that for us, too.

In the days of Yeshua, the keeping of the Law was the *Pharisaic* vehicle for Paradise, as it remains today in Judaism. This is an unreasonable use of the Law, which is rightly called works righteousness or legalism. As we’ve seen, though, legalism, when applied to the Law, can be wrongly defined. Many say that it’s the Law itself that is legalism, but the Law or Instruction from God is certainly not legalism, nor a burden, nor oppressive. The Law is God’s holy spoken Word to Israel, a pure reflection of His character in written form (Lev. 18:5; Dt. 4:5-8; Rom. 7:12), and is the written reflection of God the Son, who became flesh and embodies all the Instruction or Truth or ‘words of God’ (John 1:1-3, 14; 14:6; Rev. 19:13).

God never intended that the keeping of His Law would be a means of eternal life. Nowhere in the Law, nor any other place in the Old Testament, does He say that if it’s obeyed the reward will be eternal life. The Law gave Israel the holy rules for covenant relationship with Yahweh and with their fellow Hebrews after they had been saved (set free) from Egyptian slavery. Once we are justified in Messiah and set free from Satan’s Kingdom of sin and death, the Law becomes the divine guideline for how Gentiles and Jews are to live out their faith in Messiah Yeshua.

The yoke that neither Peter, nor his Fathers could bear wasn’t the Law. Peter loved the Law. It wasn’t circumcision. Peter was circumcised, and neither he, nor his Fathers found that unbearable. It wasn’t being a Jew. Peter and his Fathers were Jews, and that didn’t change after they came to the Jewish Messiah. They knew that God had been very gracious to the Jewish people and had chosen them out of all the peoples on the face of the Earth.\(^{51}\) The yoke that neither Peter nor his Fathers could bear was the keeping of the Law for salvation, symbolized in circumcision. This was the burden of the ‘great rabbi’ who was dying. Works righteousness always nullifies faith in the person and work of Messiah Yeshua.

Acts 15:10 can’t be used to prove that the Law, in and of itself, is the yoke that Peter spoke of, and therefore, ‘not for the Gentiles.’ It’s a verse that reveals the bankruptcy of trying to keep the Law for salvation (Rom. 9:30-32). Peter wasn’t doing away with the Law, but the keeping of the Law for salvation, which was a yoke that neither he nor his Fathers could bear—for Peter had found the True Yoke (Mt. 11:28-30).

Acts 15:19—Don’t Trouble Them!

In Acts 15:19, Yakov says not to ‘trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles.’ Many take this phrase to mean that the Jews shouldn’t trouble the Gentiles with the Law of Moses.

David Williams states, ‘nothing more than faith should be asked of them as necessary for salvation.’ Faith for salvation is true because salvation isn’t based on doing the Law, but Williams alters his thinking when he says, ‘once in the kingdom certain things could fairly be asked of them.’ He’s speaking of the four rules of Yakov in relation to his understanding of table fellowship.

Bruce and Witherington see the troubling that Yakov spoke of was aimed at those who wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised. Wycliffe seems to extend their thoughts and states, they ‘should no longer trouble the Gentiles by demanding that they accept circumcision and the law of Moses.’

Hegg thinks the troubling of the Gentiles has to do with not giving them all the rabbinic traditions, just the four rules, which he believes come from the Rabbis. Of course, the Pharisaic concept of the Law included the (oral) Tradition of the Elders (Mt. 15:2, 6; Mk. 7:1-13) as just as authoritative as Torah, but that’s not the point. The four rules weren’t given to the Gentiles as a trade-off in lieu of Pharisaic traditions. They were God’s rules that the Gentiles needed to know in order to secure his salvation.

Three of the four rules come from the Law. In Ex. 34:12, Yahveh warns Israel not to make any covenants with the Gentile pagans in Canaan. He says in v. 14 that He won’t tolerate worship of another god, and He specifically warns them, in vv. 15-16, not to play the harlot, worshiping other gods through (1) cult harlotry or (2) eating of the sacrifice, which would include both the eating of the meat and the (3) drinking of the blood.

In the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:5), Yahveh forbids Israel to worship (which is synonymous with sacrifice; Ex. 10:25-26) another god. In Leviticus 17, Israel is told that they weren’t to sacrifice to demons, play the harlot (v. 7) or drink the blood of the sacrifice (vv. 10, 12-14). In the Baal Peor debacle (Num. 25) Israel sacrificed to Baal, ate of the sacrifice and played the harlot. Within just these cites, three of Yakov’s four rules are seen: not to eat meat sacrificed to idols (at the time of the sacrifice), not to drink the sacrificial blood and not to lay with the women, who acted as cult prostitutes. By including strangling, Yakov was exercising his divine right to legislate (to enact a rule with God’s authority in back of it).

Yeshua gave this to His Body, and set it in motion, saying to Peter,

“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” (Mt. 16:19; see Mt. 18:18 where this authority is also given to the Apostles).

‘The Keys of the Kingdom’ spoke of the authority that God had given to the priests to forgive sin (Lev.

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512 Williams, Acts, p. 266.

513 Ibid.


515 Pfeiffer, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1152.


517 A prohibition against strangling is not literally written in the Law, for birds were strangled in sacrifice to Yahveh, but the point is that the Gentiles were given three laws from Mosaic Law, showing that the Law was obviously valid for Gentile believers, and Yakov commanded yet another rule to those ‘under Grace.’
4:20, 26, 31; 6:7), teach the Torah (Lev. 10:8-11; 14:57; Dt. 31:9-13), *legislate* (make new rules) and adjudicate (judge situations between one man and another, etc. (Dt. 17:8-13; Ezekiel 44:20-24). To *bind* and *loose* were terms for *forbidding* or *allowing* something, respectively, usually in a court setting. The last three ‘keys’ had been usurped by the Pharisees in the days of Yeshua, but Yeshua was giving all of them to His Apostles, and be extension, to Yakov.

Yakov didn’t need to explain what he meant. Everyone understood. He also didn’t go to the Sanhedrin to formulate or authorize his rules. He knew about sacrificial-sexual idolatry from his own Family History Book (the Hebrew Bible) and the state of pagan affairs; past and present. The four rules concisely spelled it out for the Gentile believer—no sacrificial-sexual idolatry! It wasn’t compatible with faith in Yeshua.

The *troubling* that James addressed had to do with those Jewish believers who had previously gone to Antioch and stirred up the controversy. They weren’t officially sent from James, but were part of the believers in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1, 24). They had told the Gentiles that they needed to be circumcised (i.e. keep the Law) along with faith in Yeshua for salvation (15:1, 5). This *troubling* can be seen to relate to both the human troublemakers themselves and their troublesome theology.

Yakov told everyone that the arguing was over (Acts 15:19). He had *judged* the issue and had come to a ruling. R. J. Knowling says that Yakov was the ‘president’ of the meeting and that this was even known in the days of Chrysostom (347-407 AD). That Yakov was the authority is also evident from his use of the emphatic ‘I’ (*ἐγὼ, eh’go*) in, ‘I judge.’ Witherington says the Greek construction for ‘I judge,’

“This makes the ruling more emphatically one of James’s in particular—‘I myself judge/rule’...This way of putting it is equivalent to the familiar Latin phrase *ego censeo* used by Roman rulers and judges.”

Bruce thinks the Council voted on the Decree, but Witherington negates Bruce’s perception on what happened, giving the decision to James. There was no vote:

“Bruce is quite wrong that James is putting forward a ‘motion’ to the assembly. Various parties have spoken and conferred, and now James will conclude the matter. We are indeed dealing with a decree or ruling from a recognized authority.”

Witherington further relates that verse 22,

‘is about the decision to send representatives of the Jerusalem church with Paul and Barnabas with the decree. It is not about confirming the decree by the assembly’s con-

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518 Forgiveness of sin was given in John 20:23. The Apostles taught Scripture and Messiah (Acts 5:25; 15:35; 18:11; 28:31; 1st Cor. 4:17; 1st Tim. 3:2; 6:2-3). Acts 15 was both legislation and judgement; Yakov gave the four rules and determined what the Gentiles needed to do in order to be saved. Cornelius was the first Gentile to come into the Kingdom (Acts 10:28, 34; 11:1-3, 18), and Gentiles coming into the Kingdom of Yeshua had never happened before. The ability to judge is also seen when Paul speaks of the Corinthians judging their Flock (1st Cor. 6:1-6; see also Lk. 22:28-30).

519 See Witherington and Hegg, p. 38 above.


521 The KJV has ‘my sentence’ and the NASB has ‘my judgment.’


523 Ibid., note 437.

524 Ibid., p. 467.
Acts 15:19—Don’t Trouble Them!

...In other words, James is portrayed as more than just another rhetor; he is...a judge or authority figure who can give a ruling that settles a matter. Yakov’s authority is also seen by the way Paul speaks of him, along with two other chief Apostles (Peter and John) in Gal. 2:9, and also, by the way Luke writes about him. Yakov, because he was the oldest half-brother of Yeshua, commanded an authority that was second to none, including that of the Apostles. Bellarmino Bagatti writes that,

‘James...was superior to Peter and Paul, because he was a descendant of David, of the same blood as Jesus, and therefore the legitimate representative of the sacerdotal race.’ No ‘apostle could claim such prerogatives.

Yakov was the second son of Yosafe (Joseph) and Miryam (Mary). He was ‘next in line’ to the Throne of Israel, after his elder brother Yeshua, having been born before his other brothers (Mt. 13:55: Josi, Simon and Judah). This is why Yakov was the Nasi or Prince (rather than ‘President’) over all the Jews (and Gentiles) who believed in Yeshua, including the Apostles.

The debate about what a Gentile needed to do in order to be saved had ended. Yakov made a decision and would not have the Gentiles attacked or troubled by a perverse teaching and perverted teachers. Verse 19 officially put an end to the desire among the believing Pharisees for the Gentiles to be circumcised and keep the Law, along with faith in Jesus, for eternal life. The ruling of Yakov assured the Gentile full partnership with the Jewish believer without his having to be covenantally circumcised. This is seen from what Peter and Yakov say in vv. 7-19, and none of this negates Mosaic Law as a way of life for the Gentile to walk out his faith in Messiah.

Verse 20 laid down the litmus test. Yakov gave his four authoritative rules for the Gentiles. If the Holy Spirit was directing him, and Scripture declares such (Acts 15:28), then these four rules can rightly be called commandments from Jesus to all the Gentile believers through the Prince of the ‘Mother Church’ in Jerusalem.

The four rules were the filter through which every Gentile had to pass in order for his faith in Yeshua to be seen as biblically genuine. Then Yakov said something that still bewilders most theologians 2,000 years later: Go to the Synagogue!!

526 Ibid.
527 Ibid., see Acts 12:17; 21:18. Also 1st Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12.
529 Yeshua had four younger brothers (Mt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3) and two of them, Yakov (James or rather Jacob in English) and Yehuda (Jude or rather Judah) wrote letters that are authoritative (i.e. Scripture). As Yakov is mentioned first in both passages (Mt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3) and he’s the Prince at the Council in Acts 15 and 21, it’s not unreasonable to think that he was the first son born after Yeshua. (Also, Paul mentions Yakov as Yeshua’s brother, and none of the other brothers; Gal. 1:19).
530 See Acts 12:17; 21:18; 1st Cor. 15:7; Gal. 2:9; also Jude 1:1.
531 Conceptually, what is presented for Acts 15:19 can also be applied to v. 28 (‘to lay upon you no greater burden then these necessary [first, primary or most important] things’).
532 See Acts 16:4-5; also 1st Cor. 14:37; 2nd Cor. 8:8 (by inference); 1st Tim. 6:14; 2nd Peter 3:2, 14-16.
Acts 15:21—Go to the Synagogue?!

Acts 15:21 is another example of Scripture not being correctly interpreted by Christian theologians due to bias against the Law of Moses. The verse isn’t understood by scholars, although some are honest enough to say that it’s an enigma. In an anti-Mosaic Law environment this verse doesn’t make any sense. Marshall realizes this and initially writes that ‘James’s concluding statement is puzzling.’ The verse reads,

‘For Moses, from ancient generations, has in every city those who preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day.’

Why did James end his decision on Gentile salvation with that? Marshall presents two possibilities as to what James meant. First he proposes,

‘s since there are Jews everywhere who regularly hear the law of Moses being read in the synagogues, Christian Gentiles ought to respect their scruples, and so avoid bringing the church into disrepute with them.’

On the surface, respect for one another is a godly ideal, but it has nothing to do with the verse. First of all, Marshall seems to be speaking about Jews who didn’t believe in Jesus (‘Jews everywhere’). Those Jews could have cared less about what some Gentiles were doing believing in a crucified Jewish man.

If Marshall meant the believing Jews, Yakov didn’t give enough rules for there to be no dispute among the two groups. A Jewish believer would be very offended by a Gentile believer who didn’t keep the Sabbath day holy, a rule not mentioned by James, but obviously kept by the Apostles and all the Jewish believers. Jewish believers would also be offended by a Gentile believer eating pork, another Mosaic dietary rule not mentioned by James. Respect for Jewish believers cannot possibly be the reason for this verse.

In another stab at an explanation, Marshall says something very ironic:

‘if Christian Gentiles want to find out any more about the Jewish law, they have plenty of opportunity in the local synagogues, and there is no need for the Jerusalem church to do anything about the matter.’

Why would any Gentile Christian want to find out about the ‘antiquated Law,’ if it only placed men in bondage and Christ came ‘to do away with it’? If James was offering this bit of information to the Assembly, with the understanding that the Gentile could, if he so chose, go to the synagogue to learn of Moses, it can only be understood as one going to a prehistoric museum to see the fossils of dinosaurs in order to know what was in the past, but was now no more. The Gentile would come to the synagogue to gape at how all the Jews, believers included, were still following a way that held absolutely no relevance for the Gentile believer.

Marshall is groping in the dark. To throw out the Law, on the one hand, and then offer tips on how to get information about it, on the other, is very strange thinking. It does show, though, the utter futility of a world-class Christian scholar in his attempt to give the verse meaning devoid of the Law being valid.

Marshall realizes that ‘Jewish Christians…continued to live by the Jewish law,’ and that according ‘to

534 Ibid.
535 It’s obvious that the 7th day Sabbath was still considered holy by all the Jewish believers since they all kept the Law (Acts 21:20), which certainly includes the 7th day Sabbath. Also, James speaks of the Sabbath in this very verse (Acts 15:21) as the day when Moses is read (and all assemble to hear him).
Acts 15:21—Go to the Synagogue?!

Luke, many Jewish Christians continued to keep the law. He also states that James, ‘In later literature…was typified as a (Mosaic) law-abiding Jewish Christian.’ With this knowledge, and the fact that the whole believing Jewish community was keeping the Law (Acts 21:20), Marshall is not able to see past his theological paradigm that wrongfully nullifies Mosaic Law for Christian (cf. Mt. 5:18-19; 15:9).

To get around the fact that the Apostles kept Mosaic Law after the resurrection, the Church teaches that the Apostles didn’t understand that Mosaic Law had been done away with. Did God forget to tell them? As far as the Book of Acts is concerned they never seemed to grasp this ‘truth,’ not even Paul.

Samuele Bacchiocchi, who wrote a brilliant work on why the 7th day Sabbath is still holy and valid for Christians today, also failed to understand the full implication of it. He states that the old ways (i.e. Mosaic Law) of the Jews were too difficult for Jewish believers ‘to leave behind.’ The, ‘attachment of the Jerusalem Church to Jewish religious customs may perhaps perplex the Christian who regards the Mother Church of Christendom as the ideal model of his religious life. One must not forget, however, that Christianity sprang up out of the roots and trunk of Judaism. The early Jewish converts viewed the acceptance of Christ not as the destruction of their religious framework, but as the fulfillment of their Messianic expectations which enhanced their religious life with a new dimension. The process of separating the shadow from the reality…was gradual and not without difficulty.’

Bacchiocchi recognizes that all the Jewish believers followed Mosaic Law and that Jerusalem was ‘the Mother Church,’ and therefore, the ideal model of one’s faith-walk, but he failed to realize that if it was right for all of them, if they could believe in Jesus and keep the Law, then why would it be wrong for the Gentiles? Weren’t the Gentiles grafted into Israel (Rom. 11:17f.; cf. John 10:16)? Isn’t Jesus, who kept the Law, their Example, too (1st Jn. 2:6; Rev. 14:12)?

Bacchiocchi writes that the Law faded away, albeit ‘not without difficulty,’ yet we never read in Scripture or church history of the Jerusalem believers, or their spiritual descendants, ever renouncing the Law as wrong or ‘gone.’ Just the opposite is true, as Bacchiocchi himself reveals. The Jewish Nazarenes, the spiritual descendants of the Jewish believers of apostolic Jerusalem, also kept the Law of Moses down to at least the fourth century. Epiphanius, bishop-historian of Salamis and Metropolitan of Cyprus, brands them as heretics—they’re heresy? They kept Mosaic Law!

‘The Nazarenes do not differ in any essential thing from them (i.e. Jews), since they practice the custom and doctrines prescribed by the Jewish law, except that they believe in Christ…They preach that God is one and that Jesus Christ is his Son.’ They ‘differ…from the Jews and from the Christians…from the former because they believe in Christ; from the true Christians because they fulfill till now Jewish rites as the circumcisi-

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537 Ibid., p. 243.
539 Ibid., p. 251.
541 Bacchiocchi, From Sabbath To Sunday, pp. 149-150.
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...ission, the Sabbath and others.543

As Bacchiocchi rightly points out, the picture of the Nazarenes ‘matches extremely well that of the Jerusalem Church’ of the first century (i.e. the Apostles and other Jewish believers). He writes that,

‘The...Nazarenes represent the survival of both the ethnic and theological legacy of’ the apostolic community of Jerusalem.544

The Nazarenes were following in the theological footsteps of all the Apostles and Jewish Christians before them. If the Law of Moses was still valid and operative for all the Jewish believers throughout the Book of Acts, and for at least three centuries after Acts, isn’t it possible that this is the correct understanding of Mosaic Law for both Jewish and Gentile believers today?

Many, not understanding why the Apostles still continued to walk in the Law so long after the resurrection, have the audacity to say that the Apostles didn’t have the full understanding of what Yeshua’s atoning death meant. Is that possible? Jesus didn’t tell the Apostles that they were wrong in this monumental area on their perspective on Mosaic Law? Certainly not in Acts 15 and Acts 21:20, 24, but didn’t Paul differ from them? They can’t prove that from Paul in Acts,545 but they go to a couple of his letters where they think that Paul is ‘doing away with the Law.’ They do ‘the Apostle to the Gentiles’ a great injustice.

ISBE says that Paul’s Gospel was essentially the same as Peter’s (Gal. 2:9), and that there’s no hint in Acts 21:20 of a different Gospel. Paul’s anathema on those who preached a different Gospel (Gal. 1:8f.) is never pronounced upon the Apostles.546 Peter (64 AD) affirms Paul as ‘a beloved brother’ whose letters are Scripture, even though they contain some things that are ‘hard to understand.’547

The Church takes its position on the Law from only some of Paul’s letters. Please note that it’s only to the Apostle Paul that the Church goes for this false doctrine. It’s not to any of the other eight writers of the New Testament, and it’s certainly not found in the words of Jesus (Mt. 5:17-19; 22:38-40; Lk. 16:17). Those few Pauline texts that the Church holds up as proof of the Law’s demise crumble under proper biblical interpretation, just as its interpretation of Acts 15:20 has crumbled.

F. F. Bruce thinks that James spoke v. 21 to appease those Pharisees who ‘lost out’ on circumcising the Gentiles. He says that James really didn’t mean that the Gentiles should go to the synagogue to learn about Moses because the Gentiles weren’t the disciples of Moses and would never become such. He quotes R. B. Rackham to sum up his own position:

‘Moses, so to speak, would suffer no loss, in failing to obtain the allegiance of those who had never been his.’548

544 Ibid. Bacchiocchi also notes, ‘The fact that they retained Sabbath keeping as one of their distinguishing marks shows persuasively that this was...the original day of worship of the Jerusalem Church and that no change from Sabbath to Sunday occurred among’ the Jewish believers even after the destruction of the city in 70 AD. Neither the Apostles nor the New Testament changed Sabbath to Sunday.
547 2nd Pet. 3:15-16; see also Paul on Peter: 1st Cor. 3:21-22; 9:1-6; Gal. 2:1-10.
For Bruce, Acts 15:21 becomes the ‘bone’ that James threw to the disgruntled believing Pharisees, but this explanation is shallow because it makes James out to be a clever politician who wanted to pacify them. Yet, he didn’t pacify them when it came to ‘Jesus and circumcision’ (the very ruling of Acts 15 that he struck down!) and there was no need for James to do so here, especially in light of his godly character and leadership. This interpretation doesn’t fit with the character of James, nor with an honest reading of the text. Note well how self-evident the verse is, which is why Bruce initially back-peddles to let us know that James really didn’t mean what it says; that Gentiles were to go to the synagogue to learn about Moses (Mosaic Law).

Second, Bruce seems to pit Moses against Jesus, as though the two of them were at odds. Didn’t Jesus walk in all the laws of Moses that applied to Him? Jesus, in a very real sense, was the greatest ‘disciple’ that Moses ever had. Aren’t believers supposed to follow Jesus? To be like Him? Or is it just a spiritual thing? The Apostle John says that if one wants to be like Jesus he must keep himself from sin. How can one know what sin is? John says,

‘Beloved, now we are Sons of God, and…We know that when He appears, we will be like Him…everyone who has this hope fixed on Him, purifies himself, just as He is pure. Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness…sin is lawlessness.’ (1st John 3:2-4; see also 2:1-6)

The Law reveals what sin is (Mt. 5:19; Rom. 3:20; 7:7, 12). Without ‘Moses’ the Church fails to see some basic rules that Jesus wants His Bride to honor. She sins against Him by breaking His Sabbath day, not keeping Passover holy, and She eats things that God doesn’t want the Bride to eat, etc. This isn’t the Way of Jesus. Without knowing ‘Moses’ one is a handicapped disciple of Jesus. The Master had these words to say about those scribes who knew the Law and who would enter His Kingdom:

‘every scribe who has become a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven is like a head of a household who brings out of his treasure things new and old.’ (Mt. 13:52)

Yeshua doesn’t denigrate the old, but speaks of its place and importance. The scribe, well versed in the Law, would better understand the New. It wasn’t a contrast, but a complement. Also, if Jesus came to do away with Mosaic Law, where does He say that? If the Sabbath and Passover (1st Cor. 5:6-8) are still in effect then the Law of Moses must be as well (Acts 21:20-24).

Knowling lists three possibilities for consideration for Acts 15:21. One, that Gentiles who had frequented the synagogue before coming to Jesus would more easily accept the rules after they had heard the Law. Two, that unless the Gentiles accepted the restrictions, the ‘Jewish Christians’ would not fellowship with them, and three, that James was telling the Jews ‘not to worry about Moses; he wouldn’t be neglected.’

It’s true that Gentiles, like Cornelius, who were Sabbath-attenders at the synagogues before coming to Jesus, would more likely be able to accept the rules having heard the Law, but why should they if the Law was gone? Also, what of the vast majority of Gentiles who hadn’t been going to the synagogues?

Possibility two is a threat that James gave to the Gentile believers, but there’s nothing in Acts 15:21 that threatens the Gentiles with negation of fellowship. There’s the presentation by James that they cease from pagan sacrificial rites, with the implication that if they didn’t, they would lose their salvation, but this is not a threat—it’s a divine warning that the worship of another god, along with Yeshua, would sever them

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(London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900), p. 325.

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from the Head and the Body, but that was in v. 20, not v. 21.

Point three of Knowling’s is most likely where Rackham got his statement from—Gentiles would still come to Moses, but this wasn’t a popularity contest between Moses and Messiah. James certainly wasn’t concerned about Gentiles coming to Moses, but not Messiah!

Williams, too, offers a ‘stab in the dark,’ saying that since the Jewish Christians were ‘prepared to lay aside their long-standing prejudice against’ the Gentiles, the Gentiles should give up something as well. This makes Acts 15 more like the children’s game than the epoch-making drama that it was. There’s nothing in the text to warrant this ‘tit for tat’ concept.

Williams states that because the Jews had walked in the Law so long, it was tough for them to ‘lay it aside.’ Williams and Bacchiocchi make the Law out to be a nasty social habit that the Jews had picked up, but something the Gentiles should just tolerate. This view presents the Jews caught up in something that they should really give up, but the Gentiles will go out of their way to perform their Christian duty toward them (and not tell the Jews they’re wrong?). Yet, the verse in question implies that the Gentile was to go to the synagogue. Why would a Gentile have to go to a Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath day to appease the Jewish believers caught in the old Law?

Stern says it’s ‘a difficult verse.’ He presents six options, saying that ‘a good case can be made for any of the first four,’ while also stating that ‘it is hard to choose between’ the four. His first possibility was seen before with Marshall: Jewish ‘scruples are to be respected.’ That is, don’t offend the Jews or the Pharisees. How this relates to (all) Gentile Christians going to the synagogue to hear/learn about Moses, especially if they are not to walk in the Law, could only have the opposite effect of disturbing all the Jews (Jewish believers and Jewish non-believers).

Stern’s second view was seen with Knowling and Bruce—Moses won’t lose disciples from the Gentiles. Stern says there will always be disciples for Moses from the Gentiles, but just not from the Christian Gentiles. As we’ve seen, this view isn’t worth considering because it has James being more interested in Gentiles coming to Moses than to Jesus. The only people that this would make happy would be Jews who didn’t believe in Jesus.

Stern’s third view is that some Gentiles were already learning Torah in the synagogue, but hadn’t chosen to convert to Judaism—don’t press them to convert now. That Gentiles didn’t need to convert to become rabbinic Jews is true; that’s a central point of Acts 15, but v. 21 implies that all the Gentiles were to go to the synagogue and learn the Law. There’s nothing inherent in the verse that speaks of conversion of a Gentile into becoming a Jew.

Stern’s fourth opinion says the Gentile Christians will continue to visit the synagogues to learn how to live a godly, ethical lifestyle. He also states that the Council’s view was ‘temporal’ and only applied to the first century, as ‘Gentile Christians have long ceased to visit the synagogue in significant numbers.’ So,

550 Williams, Acts, p. 266.
551 See Bruce, p. 2 above.
552 Williams, Acts, p. 267.
554 Ibid.
555 Ibid.
556 Ibid.
Gentiles don’t need to learn ‘how to live a godly, ethical lifestyle,’ now? Considering their punishments, keeping the Sabbath day holy is certainly more ethical than stealing or lying,\(^{558}\) and no one writes that the Decree was temporal, or that it only hinged on Gentiles ‘visiting’ the synagogues. The Law of Moses was to be learned on the Sabbath day, and the Law will be until, as Yeshua Himself said, until Heaven and Earth no longer exist (Mt. 5:18-19; see also Heb. 8:13; Rev. 12:17; 14:12).

Stern’s fifth view states that the Gentile Christians going to the synagogue would ‘eventually become Jews.’\(^{559}\) As he points out, this view is contradicted in the New Testament. His sixth pint is that the Gentiles, in going to the synagogue on the Sabbath, would keep on hearing the four rules of James ‘emphasized over and over and will keep being sensitized to them’ (as per Knowling). Aside from the fact that they wouldn’t hear a prohibition against *strangling*, it stands to reason that they would hear and be sensitized to many other rules and wonder why they weren’t keeping them, especially when they saw their Jewish brethren who believed in Jesus following them. This would certainly make for two different classes of believers, something Yeshua never intended in His Kingdom and what Knowling also saw.

Witherington also slips here. He sees Acts 15:21 as a witness to the Jews in the synagogue that the Gentile believers were no longer practicing sacrificial-sexual idolatry.\(^{560}\) How this can be read into the verse is hard to fathom. Could good Sabbath attendance by Gentile Christians at the Jewish synagogue negate Sunday sexual-worship of Aphrodite at the pagan shrine? Some Corinthian believers went ‘to church’ on the Sabbath and then visited the temple harlots and drank the blood of the animal sacrifices on Sunday (1st Cor. 10:18-22). No, the practice of sacrificial-sexual idolatry could continue even with good synagogue attendance on the Sabbath.

Witherington also states that, ‘Avoiding idolatry and immorality was the heart of the Mosaic Law, as the Ten Commandments make clear,’ so, Moses in v. 21 speaks of the Ten and the *Shema* (Dt. 6:4-5) because ‘surely it was the Ten…along with the *Shema* that one could…regularly…hear read in synagogues.’\(^{561}\) The problem with this is that nowhere in Scripture is Moses ever (only) equated with (just) the Ten, but all of the commandments, statutes and rules of Mosaic Law.\(^{562}\) Also, the Rabbis didn’t read the Ten every week, as Witherington implies, but only twice a year, as it came up in their reading of the Torah (in Ex. 20 and Dt. 5), because they didn’t want Jews to think that the Ten were ‘all the commandments’ that God required of them.

Others, seeing how shaky these all these interpretations are, come up with a linguistic twist to try and discredit the plain meaning of Acts 15:21. They say that the only reason Moses is mentioned is because James is telling everyone where he got the rules of v. 20 from (i.e. the Law). This teaching centers around the Greek word that links vv. 20 and 21. Their interpretation states that there’s nothing binding on the Gentile except the four rules, which they wrongly see as rules for table fellowship, while also not realizing that *strangled*, as a prohibition, isn’t written in the Law. This is another fruitless attempt to discredit

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\(^{557}\) Ibid.

\(^{558}\) The Sabbath’s greater moral value is seen in that the divine punishment for its violation (death), is greater than that of stealing or lying, two highly ethical commandments in and of themselves (Ex. 31:12-17; 35:1-3; Lev. 6:1-7).


\(^{561}\) Ibid., p. 96.

\(^{562}\) See *Mosaic Law and the Ten*. 

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Torah for every Christian. The Greek word that links Acts 15:20 to v. 21 is γὰρ (gar, ‘for, because’). Friberg defines it as,

‘a conjunction’ (for or because) ‘that basically introduces an explanation or an exhortation or a word that expresses cause or reason for, because,’ or ‘an exclamation to point to a self-evident conclusion.’ 563

Bauer says that it can also mean that the phrase or sentence written after it is the ‘tip of the iceberg’ as to the author’s thought on the topic:

‘often the thought to be supported is not expressed, but must be supplied from the context, e.g. (he has truly been born) for we have seen his star.’ 564

Wright sums up the meaning of gar by saying that it’s always that which explains ‘something that has just gone before’ it. 565 The proponents of gar would tell us that Yakov was only explaining in v. 21 that he took the rules of v. 20 from the Law...that’s why Moses is mentioned. To use gar this way seems to defy common sense, though, because there’s no reason in their explanation as to why Moses is mentioned ‘from ancient generations...in every city,’ having ‘those who preach him...being read in the synagogues...on every Sabbath day.’ Yakov didn’t just mention Moses, he was extremely specific about him. Verse 21 hardly seems to be just a passing reference as to where Yakov may have gotten the four rules from.

Yakov tells everyone that Moses was preached ‘from ancient generations.’ If he had only been telling the Assembly the source of the rules, there would have been absolutely no need for him to tell the assembly of Jewish believers 566 that Moses had those who preached him ‘from ancient generations.’ All the Jews there knew that.

If Yakov had only been telling the Assembly the source of the rules, there would have been absolutely no need for him to tell the Jewish assembly that Moses was preached ‘in every city.’ All the Jews knew that, too. Why the need to mention where Moses was preached if Yakov was only mentioning Moses as the source from where he had gotten his rules from?

Also, ‘Moses being preached in every city’ cannot be used to say that James was just giving Moses honor by mentioning him, as some others might think. What would be the need for doing that, since he, more than any other, was the symbol of the Law, which the Gentiles ‘didn’t need to keep’?!

If Yakov was mentioning ‘in every city’ only for the Jews at the Council, this statement would also seem out of place for another reason. Most of the Jews at the Council lived in Jerusalem, and although some would go to the synagogue, many would go to the Temple (Acts 2:46; 3:1, 3; 4:1; 5:20-21; 21:26). The Law was only read in the synagogues on the Sabbath day, not at the Temple, yet all the Jewish believers

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563 Friberg, Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament, p. 96. ‘γὰρ (gar) a conjunction basically introducing an explanation.’ Bauer, GELNT, p. 151: a ‘conjunction used to express cause, inference, continuation, or to explain.’


565 N. T. Wright: Paul in Different Perspectives: Jan. 3rd, 2005. The ‘function of gar always being to explain something that has just gone before.’

566 It remains to be seen if there were any Gentile believers from Antioch at the Council, as the other members of the congregation that were sent from Antioch with Paul and Barnabas could have been believing Jews (15:2). Be that as it may, whether there were a few believing Gentiles from Antioch at the Council or not, it wouldn’t affect the meaning of the verse nor the fact that the vast majority of those present were Jews. Acts 15:22-23 says that all the Apostles, Elders and believing Jews were there, while Acts 15:6 speaks of the Apostles and the Elders discussing the matter.

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Acts 15:21—Go to the Synagogue?!


Yakov saying that Moses was ‘in every city’ means that he knew that wherever a Gentile lived he would be able to learn Torah, the will of God for the Gentile in the Kingdom. This is especially brought out by Luke’s use of the Greek word for ‘preachers’ in verse 21. More on that in the next section, The Preachers of Moses.

If Yakov had only been telling the Assembly the origin of the rules, there would have been absolutely no need for him to tell the Jewish assembly that Moses was ‘read in the synagogues.’ All the Jews knew that. Moses ‘being read in the synagogues’ meant that Yakov assumed that the Gentiles would learn the Law as they heard it read. Why go to the synagogue and hear the Law if it wasn’t meant to be applied to one’s life?

The Law was read in the synagogue every Sabbath. It wasn’t like a church sermon that might use a few verses of Scripture and then close the Bible. Three to six chapters of the Torah were read in sequence, verse by verse, every Sabbath. From Genesis through Deuteronomy everyone heard the Torah and could apply it to their life. A rabbi might give a message on a part of what was read, but the synagogue service centered around the Law being read aloud every Sabbath. Most Jews didn’t have Torah scrolls in their homes. To hear and learn the Word of God one had to go to the synagogue every Sabbath. Where else could a Gentile go to hear and learn the words of the living God to instruct him in the Way? Of course, at this time, there was only the Gospel of Matthew (44 AD). It’s 48 AD, James will write his letter about 49 AD and Paul will write his first letter (Thessalonians) about 51 AD.

If Yakov had only been telling the Assembly the origin of the rules, there would have been absolutely no need for him to tell the Jewish assembly that Moses was ‘read in the synagogues every Sabbath.’ All the Jews knew that. Gentiles were welcome in the synagogue. This is well attested. Paul, whenever he went to a synagogue with his Message of Life, always addressed the Gentiles who were also there. They could be God-fearers (Acts 17:17; 13:46, 48; 14:1-2) or those who hadn’t taken any official steps, but were attracted to the Jewish God and His way of living.

Yakov’s mention of the Sabbath also reveals that the issue of Sabbath vs. Sunday hadn’t begun yet. In other words, believers, both Jewish and Gentile, continued to keep the Seventh day Sabbath holy until around 120 AD, when what would become the Roman Catholic Church brought in Sunday to replace the Lord’s Sabbath.567

If the believing Gentiles weren’t already coming and being directed to the synagogue to learn Torah, why would James mention Sabbath, synagogue, Moses and all the cities in the world? Wouldn’t it have been enough for him to just mention Moses? Or not to mention him at all, as everyone knew where the rules came from? Yakov could have said,

‘I’ve taken three of the four rules from Moses and added a self-evident one. The Gentiles needn’t be concerned with any other Mosaic commandments except to love the God of Israel and their neighbor.’

He didn’t say that, though. What some do in using the Greek word gar, to project their theological bias against Torah into v. 21, discredits the plain meaning of the text and reveals how desperate they are to distance themselves from God’s holy Law. Those who use gar this way, use it not as a means to properly in-

567 Bacchiochi, From Sabbath to Sunday, pp. 165-212ff. See also, Why Sunday?, A Snapshot of Church History and Mosaic Law and The Feasts of Israel as Time Markers After the Resurrection.

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interpret the verse, but to pervert and suppress the divine meaning of God’s Word in favor of their man-made tradition (that Mosaic Law is not for Christians).

The Greek word gar does absolutely nothing to disrupt the understanding that James wanted the Gentiles to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and learn Torah. Actually, it’s self-evident from the text, if one can cast aside anti-Law sentiments and just allow the text to speak for itself. Yakov’s statement in v. 21 reinforces and caps his filter decision of v. 20, because gar truly explains why Yakov gave only four rules. Putting the three verses together presents an overview of the text. It’s really just one long sentence:

‘Therefore, I judge that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from the pollutions of idols and from cult prostitution and from what is strangled and from blood, for Moses, from ancient generations, has in every city those who preach him, being read in the synagogues on every Sabbath day.’ (Acts 15:19-21)

Yakov only gave the much needed four rules because he knew that the Gentile believers were already learning the rest of the rules (Mosaic Law) as they went to the synagogues. There wasn’t any need to trouble the Gentiles with circumcision/keeping Mosaic Law for salvation—this is also brought out in v. 24, in the letter that’s written to Antioch. Yet, the Gentiles did need to be immediately warned against sacrificial-sexual idolatry, and hence, the four rules prohibiting those deadly sins. Yakov could just as well have said,

‘I’ve given these four rules for the Gentiles, and no more, because we’ve all seen that the Gentiles have been going, and we believe, will continue to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day to learn God’s Law. This way they’ll grow in the knowledge of Messiah Yeshua and walk in the Way of Life, alongside their Jewish believing brethren.’

The Gentile believers were already learning the commandments at the synagogues and Yakov had every reason to believe that the Gentile believers would continue to go to the synagogues to learn Mosaic Law. Continue to go to the synagogue?

Verse 21 has Yakov speaking to the Jewish believers what they, and he, had already seen in this area of Gentile salvation and Mosaic Law for at least eight years. Yakov assumed the paradigm would continue and this is where gar comes to the forefront as it truly explains why he gave only these four important rules instead of many others (e.g. Sabbath and dietary laws, etc.). The Gentile believers were already learning Torah in the synagogues.

Yakov had observed for eight to ten years, from Cornelius in Acts 10 to his Decree in Acts 15,⁵⁶⁸ that the traditional synagogues continued to be a place of assembly and learning for Jewish and Gentile believers. Cornelius, his family and friends, most likely kept going to the same traditional Jewish synagogue after they came to faith in the Jewish Messiah. There were probably Jews there who also believed. Cornelius’ new faith in Yeshua would only enhance his life of learning Torah at the synagogue. Many of the Jewish and Gentile believers in Israel and Syria, etc., would continue to assemble in traditional synagogues until around 80 AD.⁵⁶⁹

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⁵⁶⁸ Acts 10 took place about 39-40 AD. Acts 15 was about eight to ten years later, in 48-49 AD.


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Acts 15:21—Go to the Synagogue?!

All the Gentile believers who attended the congregation in Antioch would also have been learning Torah. This assembly originally consisted of only Jewish believers (Acts 11:19) and would be modeled after a traditional synagogue. Later, Gentiles joined them. Would the new Gentile believers change Sabbath to Sunday, and Passover to Easter? Who was learning from whom? Who had come into a new religion and a new way of life?

By Acts 15 Paul had only gone on one missionary journey, about a year earlier in 47 AD, in what is today Cyprus and south-central Turkey. His experience of having to leave some synagogues wasn’t the norm (Acts 9:31). The congregations that Paul established, which many today would call ‘house churches,’ would in fact have been seen by the Apostles as ‘house synagogues’ (places of assembly) where they would teach Torah and speak of Yeshua. Note also that Paul didn’t have a monopoly on establishing assemblies or ‘house synagogues’ (Acts 11:19; Gal. 1:22).

The word synagogue comes from the Greek and by definition can mean ‘a Christian assembly.’ Yakov uses it in referring to Christian assemblies (James 2:2; see also Acts 9:1-2; 26:11). It would be used for the assembly of Jewish and Gentile believers at Antioch, other believing assemblies, and also, traditional Jewish congregations. In other words, both a synagogue of Jews that didn’t believe in Jesus, as well as an assembly like Antioch, made up of (only) believers (Jewish and Gentile), could equally be called a synagogue. This adds to the understanding of what Yakov said in Acts 15:21, about Moses ‘being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.’

Yakov already knew that the Gentiles were going to the synagogues on the Sabbath day to learn Mosaic Law. Actually, the word ‘church,’ as a distinct entity separate from the Jewish people, wasn’t in his or the Apostles’ vocabulary. He assumed they would continue to go to the synagogues to learn the Law on the

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569 The cardinal prayer of the synagogue is the Amida, where the congregation stands to recite 18 prayers or blessings to God. About 80 AD, another ‘prayer’ was added in order to ferret out believers, who by this time were considered heretics. By 132 AD the disastrous bar Kochba rebellion against Rome began. Jewish believers fought alongside their Jewish brethren (who didn’t believe in Yeshua). About a year later, Rabbi Akiva proclaimed bar Kosiba, the general of the rebellion, to be the Messiah. Akiva also changed bar Kosiba’s name to bar Kochba (son of the star, a reference to the ‘star of Messiah’ prophecy in Num. 24:17). Jewish believers refused to fight for this false Messiah. Many were tortured by bar Kochba and his followers and bitter feelings arose on both sides. This caused further division.

Rabbi Akiva, in proclaiming a false Messiah, caused catastrophic damage to the Jewish people. After Rome crushed the rebellion and killed Akiva and bar Kosiba, Rome changed the name of the land to Philistina (Palestine) in derision of the ancient enemies of the Jews, and Jerusalem to Aelia Capitolina (naming it after one of their gods, Jupiter Capitolinus). They barred Jews from living in the city, restricting even their visits to only one day in the year, the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26-32), to mourn the wholesale slaughter of the Jews and the destruction of the city and the Temple. This was meant to further humiliate the Jewish people. In backing the rebellion against Rome and proclaiming bar Kosiba to be the Messiah, Akiva caused the Jewish people to be without their own homeland for more than 1,800 years (from 135 to 1948).


571 Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, p. 388. Synagogue: a ‘collecting, gathering; a Christian assembly or congregation, James 2:2’ (where James speaks of a believing synagogue, ‘for if a man comes into your synagogue with a gold ring’). Mounce, TALGNT, p. 432, has exactly what Perschbacher has. Bauer, GELNT, pp. 782-783: a ‘place of assembly...a Christian assembly-place can also be meant’ (James 2:2). A ‘meeting for worship, of the Jews...Transferred to meetings of Christian congregations.’

572 The Greek εκκλησία (ekklaysia), translated into English as ‘church,’ means an ‘assembly’ or congregation, but literally speaks of those ‘called out.’ Originally it pictured the Greek ‘town meetings’ of free men called out of
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Sabbath day. Yakov was making a statement of observation, as well as one of expectation. Wherever Gentiles were there would be synagogues in which they could learn Mosaic Law—believing and non-believing synagogues.

Turning to Cornelius, Witherington thinks there were a number of Gentiles like Cornelius, both in the Promised Land and throughout the Roman Empire. He asks, ‘Has Luke exaggerated the apparent prevalence of people like Cornelius and the importance of their involvement in the synagogues of the Diaspora and the holy Land?’

‘Luke is quite careful in the way he presents the progression of things. Cornelius is not a pagan, nor is this a story about a mission to those Gentile lands. Cornelius is seen as significant in that his case raises the questions about preaching to pagans and going not only into their homes but into their lands. In other words, he is cast as a bride figure standing at the boundary between Judaism and paganism, and living in a very Hellenized city full of Gentiles, yet, in the Holy Land.’

‘Often overlooked is the fact that Luke suggests that there were such Gentiles as Cornelius, not only in the Diaspora, but in Israel as well. ‘What is important about these people for Luke is that time and again they are seen as the bridge between Judaism and Christianity, and on various occasions they are seen as the most likely of those who are within or associated with the synagogue to give their lives to Messiah’ (see 18:7-8).

“Luke’s obvious interest in folks like a Cornelius or a Titus might be because he himself, and/or Theophilus, had been a ‘God-fearer’ before” coming to Yeshua. Yakov held up a paradigm that he knew all the Jews at the Council would be able to follow. Moses was

the populace to vote on civic matters. The New Testament’s spiritual use of the word relates to believers being ‘called out of darkness into His marvelous Light’ (1st Pet. 2:9), and may very well be the reason why Paul chose to use this word instead of synagogue. Believers are the ‘Called Out Ones,’ the Greek equivalent of the Hebraic, ‘Chosen People.’ Where it says, ‘to the church at Corinth,’ it could read, ‘to the assembly (or congregation) at Corinth’ or, ‘to the called out ones of Corinth.’

Eklaysia was first used of Israel 330 years earlier in the Septuagint. It speaks of ‘the Church in the Wilderness’ at Mt. Sinai (i.e. Israel; e.g. Dt. 4:10; 9:10; 18:16; also Acts 7:38). That’s why Paul used ekklaysia over the newer term synagogue—what God had begun at Mt. Sinai was continuing in Yeshua. In no way did his use of the word ‘church’ oppose Israel or Mosaic Law. The Church didn’t begin in Acts 2 on Pentecost (the Mosaic holy day of Shavu’ot; Lev. 23:15-21; Feast of Weeks; Ex. 34:22). Jewish believers were filled with the promised Holy Spirit on that day (Ezk. 36:27; see Acts 2:46-47; 5:11-12, 42 where ‘the Church’ met in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem). Paul’s ‘churches’ were ‘house assemblies’ (1st Cor. 16:19; Phlm. 1:2; see also Rom. 16:5, 10-11, 14-15, 23), which Jews would call ‘house synagogues.’ Also, it doesn’t seem that Paul began the congregations in Rome (1:13, 15), Ephesus (1:15; 3:1-4) or Colosse (1:3-4, 9), even though house churches are mentioned in two of those letters (Rom. 16:5; Col. 4:15). The assemblies in Rome, etc., were most likely begun by Jews from those cities who had been in Jerusalem for Shavu’ot (Acts 2:1-10f.). They came to believe in Yeshua there and had returned to Rome, Ephesus and Colosse to share the Good News with their Jewish brethren.

574 Ibid., p. 340, note 46.
575 Ibid., p. 341, note 51.
576 Ibid., p. 344.
577 Ibid., note 64: Most likely, ‘Theophilus had been a prominent Gentile who was a synagogue adherent before his ...conversion to Jesus (see e.g. 17:4).’
Acts 15:21—Go to the Synagogue?!

proclaimed and taught in all the synagogues in every city on every Sabbath day and the Gentile believers were coming, and would continue to go, to the synagogues to learn all the laws and rules of Moses that applied to them.  

Hegg believes that the Gentiles would go to the synagogues every Sabbath and learn the rules of Moses so that they could walk in them. He then poignantly asks, where else could the Gentile go to learn about the one true God? There was no other place in all the world.

The Gentiles didn’t need ‘to become Jews’ in order to be saved, but the Gentiles did need to be told what would disqualify them from membership in the Kingdom of Yeshua (v. 20). Yakov, and every believing Jew, knew that the Gentile believers were already going to the synagogues to learn of Moses, and Yakov assumed that it would continue (v. 21).

In declaring Acts 15:21 to everyone at the Council, Yakov was specifically thinking about the Law of Moses for the Gentiles. With that, he presents Torah as God’s lifestyle of righteousness and sanctification for both Gentile and Jewish believers. Torah was part of every Gentile Christian’s life back then, and therefore, it should be part of every Christian’s life today.

The need for the Law has not yet disappeared (Mt. 5:18-19; Heb. 8:13). Verse 21 is the ‘period’ at the end of that long sentence. It’s the logical complement and explanation for vv. 19-20, and why Yakov gave only four rules. The Gentiles would learn the rest of the Law at the synagogue. Verse 21 was also given to assure the Jews at the Council that Torah would be a part of the Gentile’s life—just not the salvation part.

In the synagogue the Gentile would learn all the other rules of the Kingdom that pertained to him. Not every law of God applied to the Gentile, just as every law didn’t apply to Yeshua nor the Jewish believer. For example, Yeshua didn’t need to keep the laws pertaining to the offering up of the daily sacrifice (Ex. 29:38-42) because He wasn’t a priest in the Temple (Heb. 8:4). He was not of the lineage of Levi and Aaron, but of Judah and King David, and so, while He was in Israel He wasn’t a priest. Yeshua, though, kept all the commandments, statutes, judgments and rules of Moses that applied to Him, and if Christians want to be like Him, shouldn’t they also?

Praise God that Yakov didn’t stop at verse 20, but went on to speak of Moses being taught in the synagogues on the Sabbath day. Because of verse 21 we know that there are more than four rules that God wants the Gentile believer to walk in. This verse authoritatively establishes that.

578 “James could not have said v. 21 without qualification if the Apostles were the authors of Sunday as the new Sabbath.” (I’m indebted to Anthony Kniffen for that insight.)

579 Hegg, The Letter Writer, pp. 73, 17-22.

580 Ibid., p. 73. Gordon Tessler (The Genesis Diet; Raleigh, North Carolina: Be Well Publications, 1996, p. 116). Tessler also speaks of going to the synagogue to learn the Law, as well as the Decree pertaining to cult harlotry and the drinking of blood from a pagan sacrifice.

581 e.g. Acts 21:20-24; 25:8; 28:17; see also Rom. 3:31; 7:7, 12, 14.

Acts 15:21—The Preachers of Moses

Some theologians and commentators connect the phrase in Acts 15:21, ‘those who preach him’ (i.e. the preachers of Moses) to v. 19 (‘don’t trouble them’), to try and denounce ‘Moses’ (Mosaic Law). The verse reads:

‘For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.’ (Acts 15:21)

Their teaching speaks of ‘not troubling the Gentiles with Mosaic Law,’ but both the connection and the teaching aren’t biblical. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament is an example of this:

‘The verse is probably to the effect that we do not wish to burden Gentile Christians with the Law (v. 19). There are enough preachers of Moses. We desire to preach the Gospel.’

TDNT admits that the interpretation of v. 21 is ‘much debated’ (as we saw in the previous chapter). Their connecting it to v. 19, to explain it, though, opposes the understanding that James wasn’t speaking about the Law as a burden or trouble, but about the troublemakers who had gone to Antioch and had caused strife among the believers with their troubling theology of ‘faith in Yeshua plus circumcision.’

Yakov wasn’t contrasting ‘Christian preaching’ about Jesus with ‘Jewish preaching’ on the Law. Even with those believing Pharisees who ‘wanted Moses,’ it wasn’t just Moses, but Moses (the Law symbolized in circumcision) and faith in Jesus (15:1, 5). It was never ‘Moses vs. Jesus,’ and preaching as to content (Moses or Jesus) was never brought up. Acts 15 was a theological gathering on what the Gentiles needed to do in order to be saved (Acts 15:1f.). It wasn’t a pastors’ conference on preaching the Gospel.

To contrast the ‘preachers of Moses’ with those who preached the Gospel is contrary to the meaning of the context, and also, to the primary meaning of the word for ‘preach.’ It has little to do with what we might normally associate with the word (i.e. a Christian preacher bringing a sermon in church). The Greek word that Luke used for ‘those who preach him’ (NASB) reveals that Yakov wasn’t speaking about Jewish ‘preachers’ of the Law (i.e. the Rabbis), but the Jewish official of the synagogue who would go out into the Jewish neighborhoods and literally call the Jewish people to worship, announce the days of the feasts (spring-boarding off of the new moons in Israel) and proclaim synagogue news and events. In Hebrew the man was known as a shamash (servant, also called a gabbai). He’s the model and prototype for the Christian office of deacon.

Luke used the word χηρυσόντας (kayrus'ontas), which in this case is better translated into English as one who announces or proclaims the things of Moses (when the Sabbath and Feasts are, and community related news, etc.). He doesn’t preach Moses. This isn’t the rabbi, but the servant of the synagogue doing a community service. The shamash proclaimed his message on the streets. Yakov is not speaking of those ‘who preach Moses,’ in counter-distinction to preaching Jesus.

Walter Bauer defines the verb χηρύσσω (kay'ruso), from which Luke’s word stems, and reveals that even though it is used of Christian preachers, the man doing it would better be called an evangelist or herald:

‘announce, make known by a herald…proclaim aloud… gener. speak of, mention publicly …of proclamation that is relig. in nature…of the proclamation or preaching of the older prophets…of contemporary preachers…of Jewish… the preaching of John the Baptist,

584 Ibid.
Acts 15:21—The Preachers of Moses

and proclamation of the Christian message in the widest sense...preach, proclaim

someth. Mt. 10:27.\textsuperscript{585} (emphasis his)

The only ‘Jewish things’ mentioned are the ‘older’ (i.e. OT) Prophets and John the Baptist, neither of which could be classified in the category of rabbis ‘preaching’ a message on Moses in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Bauer’s ‘announcer’ would be ‘in the streets,’ publicly, as a herald.

Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida, in their Semitic Domain Lexicon, write that the primary idea behind *kay’ruso* is one who officially announces or proclaims something, acting as a herald:

“to announce in a formal or official manner by means of a herald or one who functions as a herald—‘to announce, to proclaim.’\textsuperscript{586}

The verb *kay’ruso* primarily speaks of the act of an official who proclaims or announces something as a *herald*. It doesn’t mean a rabbi bringing a message from the Torah. This is further brought out by the noun, which speaks of the official who proclaims. This preacher\textsuperscript{587} or proclaimer in Greek, is κηρύξω (kay’ruks), which stems from the verb κηρύσσω (kayruso) to proclaim.

The ancient pagan, Christian and Jewish meaning of *kay’rus* is primarily an official herald who proclaimed something *in the streets* for the populace to hear and know, or he could be someone like the former demon possessed Gentile man proclaiming to his friends and neighbors what Yeshua had done for him (Mk. 5:20). Generally speaking, the man is an official proclaiming something, in the streets, for an authority (and that’s how Paul could use it of himself). He is like the old English town criers, who officially announced various edicts and public events to the people, walking from one neighborhood to another. Friberg says *kay’ruks* is a,

‘herald, one who proclaims public announcements, summons to assemblies, carries messages, etc.; in the NT one who acts as God’s official human messenger, preacher, proclaimer (1st Tim. 2:7).’ (emphasis his)\textsuperscript{588}

Thayer defines *kay’ruks* and confirms that the man is a herald who has official authority to proclaim:

‘common in Greek writings from Homer down; a herald, a messenger vested with public authority, who conveyed the official messages of kings, magistrates, princes, military


Joseph Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Accordance Bible Software; Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software, 2011), n.p., κηρύσσω; ‘from Homer down...to be a herald; to officiate as herald; to proclaim after the manner of a herald’ (emphasis his).

Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, p. 238; ‘publish, proclaim, as a herald, 1 Cor. 9:27; to announce openly and publicly, Mark 1:4’ (emphasis his).

\textsuperscript{587} The ASV, KJV, NASB and NKJV use *preach*, while the HCSB, NET and NRSV use *proclaim* for the Greek κηρύσσοντας (kayrus'ontas), which Luke uses in Acts 15:21.


Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 431: ‘herald, whose duty it is to make public proclamations...in a relig. sense...preacher, one who proclaims...of Noah...2 Pet. 2:5. Of the apostle Paul...1 Tim. 2:7.’
commanders, or who gave a public summons or demand, and performed various other duties. In the N.T. God’s ambassador, and the herald or proclaimer of the divine word ... one who summoned to righteousness, of Noah, 2 Pet. 2:5; used of the apostles, as the divine messengers of the salvation procured by Christ and to be embraced through him, 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11."⁵⁸⁹

The ancient herald or proclaimer was held in high esteem in the days of Homer, as well as in the days of the Apostles. Aside from being dependable and loyal to the one who sent him to proclaim, TDNT states that the herald,

‘had to have a good voice...if a herald does not have a powerful voice, he is useless. This condition is related to his task...the herald had to declare official decrees and announcements. He could do this only if he had the voice. He is like the heralds who...went through smaller villages with a bell and publicly read official proclamations with a loud voice.’⁵⁹⁰

Official decrees and announcements...although this herald can conceptually be linked to the term apostle (i.e. a sent one, which is what the Greek word apostle means), or an evangelist (proclaimer of good news), TDNT states that the New Testament ‘manifestly avoids it’ for the apostle and evangelist.⁵⁹¹ The reason for this, they say, is that the preaching or the proclamation of Yeshua’s person and work is the central theme of the New Testament, not the earthly messengers (i.e. the preachers) who proclaim (preach) Him. TDNT states:

‘For the true preacher is God or Christ Himself...hence there is little place for the herald.’⁵⁹²

The New Testament avoids the term for the Apostles because the Christian preacher is more like an evangelist on the street corner who proclaims the risen Savior, as Paul did in Athens (Acts 17:15f.), and as Peter did in the Temple (Acts 3:1-12f.). He’s not the pastor in a church giving a message on Scripture. Yakov wasn’t speaking of a rabbi giving a sermon on the Sabbath, but of the shamash going through the Jewish neighborhoods and announcing synagogue times and when the holy days would be, etc. Therefore, a Gentile believer in any city would be able to find where the synagogue was and when it met.

The word is only used twice by Paul, speaking about himself (1st Tim. 2:7; 2nd Tim. 1:11) being a proclaimer of Christ, and once by Peter, relating that Noah was a preacher (proclaimer) of righteousness (2nd Pet. 2:5). In the Septuagint it’s only seen in two places. The first time, after Joseph has been elevated to second in command to Pharaoh and the servants (proclaimers/heralds) proclaimed, ‘Bow the knee!’

“And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had, and they cried out before him,

‘Bow the knee!’ So he set him over all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:43)

The only other time it’s seen in the Old Testament is when King Nebuchadnezzar had a gold statue of himself made. He commanded ‘the preacher’ to tell everyone to bow down and worship the statue when the king’s favorite melody was played:

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⁵⁹¹ Ibid., p. 696.
⁵⁹² Ibid.
“Then a herald cried aloud: ‘To you it is commanded, Oh peoples, nations, and languages, that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.’” (Daniel 3:4-5)

The reason the word preacher was used was to alert us to the fact that it wasn’t the Jewish rabbi who taught Moses in the synagogue, but the Jewish herald who proclaimed ‘Moses’ in the streets, calling the people to the synagogue. Complementing this, in Acts 15:21, Yakov speaks of the one who preaches Moses, and that Moses is read in the synagogue. The two phrases are conceptually different: ‘those who preach him in every city’ (the herald/shamash), and ‘being read in the synagogues every Sabbath’ (the one who reads from the Torah; a rabbi or any Jewish man, and who might comment on it): 593

‘For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.’ (Acts 15:21)

The preacher of Moses called people to the synagogue for worship services and announced the times of Feasts, etc. He wasn’t the one who gave the sermon, but was like the town criers of old, who went through a town proclaiming news. 594 This preacher is very different from the concept of a Christian preacher or evangelist in a church.

TDNT writes that the Rabbis ‘make frequent reference to the herald,’ who is ‘to proclaim.’ The Hebrew word they used is קָרָץ (karuz; which is phonetically close to kayruks). It means, ‘crier,’ and appropriately enough, he is spoken of as a rooster, ‘who summons the faithful to wakefulness in the morning’ 595 to attend the daily synagogue services, which would begin around dawn. They state that the Jewish herald or shamash, ‘goes through the town and makes something known’ 596 by his proclaiming or crying out loud, just like a rooster.

Karuz is directly linked to the Hebrew verb קָרָץ kara, and Davidson says it means ‘to cry, call out, shout…proclaim…invite.’ 597 The definition conceptually lines up with the Greek meaning of Luke’s Greek word. The Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament states of kara:

“to call is (a) common Sem(itism)...the noun...proclamation....In Akkadian where, as in Arabic, the root...exhibits...the specialized meaning to invite...The basic meaning...is apparently to draw someone’s attention with the sound of the voice in order to establish contact...The verb...has various nuances...i.e., to call to, to call out, to commission, to

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593 The reading of Moses (the Law) in the synagogue would be done by several men called to read from the Torah scroll, not just one individual. These men were usually members of the congregation, with no official status. A rabbi, or some other man of learning, could give a sermon on the text, but this didn’t always happen because many synagogues didn’t have a rabbi. It was the reading and hearing of the Word that was important (cf. Rom. 10:17).


595 Ibid., 3a.

596 Ibid., 3b.


Brown, The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon, pp. 894-895: to ‘call, proclaim’...cry, utter a loud sound...make a proclamation.

THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

call on, to announce, proclaim...a genuine proclamation such as Tomorrow is a feast for Yahweh! (Exod 32:5) In the case of an official decree such as the one just mentioned it ‘usually means to proclaim, i.e., in the absolute sense of the pronouncement of a proclamation (Lev 23:21)...The meaning to read developed from the connotation to proclaim, announce, apparently because reading was originally reading aloud in public, e.g., in the case of official decrees.  

This definition speaks of one who, by virtue of his voice, draw’s attention to himself in order to proclaim community news, in the streets, and perhaps a time when the next holy day is, etc. Interesting to note is that Yahweh specifically commands that His feasts are to be proclaimed to Israel, and this is exactly what the shamash does:

“These are the feasts of Yahweh, holy convocations which you must proclaim at their appointed times.” (Leviticus 23:4; see also vv. 2, 21, 37)

The Rabbis took the Lord seriously—proclaiming the Feast times was a function of the shamash. He was an official assistant to the nasi (the prince or ruler of the synagogue). The shamash was the ‘mouth, arms and legs’ of the nasi (and by extension, that of the congregation) in providing for the physical needs of the faith community from the congregation’s resources. He might collect funds and/or food from some of the members during the week to administer it to the poor and needy, and was available to serve the nasi in whatever needed to be done in the physical realm. He also officially announced the rulings of the synagogue, called the people to the Sabbath assembly, and proclaimed the days of the feasts, etc. The counterpart to the Jewish shamash is the Christian deacon.

Just as the town criers of England, 300 years ago, would go through the neighborhoods of a city and announce royal and public news, similarly the Jewish shamash would make his rounds in the days of Yakov. He not only told the current news as such, but called the people to the synagogue on the Sabbath and other days ‘to hear Moses.’ These Jewish preachers would be found, not only in Israel, but on the streets of every pagan city all over the world (in which there were Jewish neighborhoods). These men would be able to tell both visiting Jews and curious and/or believing Gentiles where the nearest synagogue was and when they met. Yakov was specifically pointing to these Jewish town criers in referring to ‘those who preach’ Moses (Acts 15:21). This is a far cry from ‘Christian preaching on Jesus vs. Jewish preaching on Moses,’ and also, from just mentioning Moses, as the source of Yakov’s rules. It reveals that Yakov was clearly expressing that a Gentile, in whatever city that he lived or found himself in, would not have a problem finding out where Mosaic Law was read on the Sabbath day.


599 If the new believing assemblies were like the synagogue in terms of their structure and function, and it seems that, to a great extent, they were, then there were no plates passed around on the Sabbath to collect tithes and offerings because in Israel tithes and offerings went to the priests in the Temple, not to the rabbi in a synagogue, if a synagogue even had a rabbi. The members of a community would support the synagogue with funds and/or crops, over and above their tithes and offerings (and the rabbi supported himself by working in a secular field, like Paul did; 1st Cor. 9:1-18) even though, of course, the people would give gifts to the rabbi in appreciation of him. Outside Israel, tithes and offerings would also be sent to the Temple, but this, in the form of money (not animals or crops; cf. 1st Cor. 16:3; 2nd Cor. 8:4, 19-20; 9:5) and the people would also support their synagogue with other funds and/or crops, which the shamash would pick up.

For more on believing assemblies and church officials being a reflection of the synagogue, see Synagogue and Church Officials.

600 The fact that these Jewish preachers spoke in the streets about where Moses was read (i.e. the synagogue) is fur-
Acts 15:21—The Preachers of Moses

Acts 15:21 reveals what Yakov and the believing Jewish community had seen over the past eight to ten years concerning the Gentiles. The Gentile believers had already been going to the synagogues (both believing and unbelieving synagogues) to learn about their new God and His ways through the Law of Moses, and Yakov assumed that this would continue into the future, which it did (until after the death of the Apostles, except for John). This means that Gentile believers should still be learning the Law today, so that they can walk in all the Lord’s ways of life and wisdom that He has for them.601

Should the Gentile go to the traditional Jewish synagogue today?602 Perhaps, but the reason why Yakov directed them to the synagogue was to learn Mosaic Law. Everyone today has a Bible and can learn to walk in all the laws that apply to him or her. This is the essence of Acts 15:21.

Yakov was concerned about the Gentile. Not being raised in the Law the Gentile literally didn’t know Adam from Eve, and he certainly would be ignorant of God’s rules on how to love Him (e.g. keep the Sabbath holy), and his neighbor (e.g. not to charge interest on a loan; Ex. 22:25). Yakov wanted them to come to maturity in Messiah. How could they do that without the Word of God (the Old Testament; 2nd Tim. 3:10-17)? Almost nothing of the New Testament had been written when Acts 15 took place—neither Paul, nor anyone else, had written any letters,603 and although it’s believed by some scholars today that Matthew wrote his Gospel in 44 AD,604 he wrote it for the Jews—the other three Gospels for the Gentiles wouldn’t be written for at least another decade after Acts 15 happened. The Gentile believer had to go to the synagogue to learn God’s Word (the Old Testament) and what it said of his new God and His ways for all of Israel, both Jew and Gentile who loved Messiah Yeshua.

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601 Other brought out by TDNT in a passage that has a rabbi drawing a crowd to himself and then directing them to the Law (in the synagogue) to find out about life:

Rabbi Alexander cried out, ‘Who desires Life?! Who desires Life?!’ Then the whole world gathered round him and said, ‘Give us life!’ Then he spoke to them Psalm 34:12: ‘Who is the man who desires life…? Keep your tongue from evil…avoid evil and do good…Perhaps someone will say, I have kept my tongue from evil and my lips from deceitful speech, I will now give myself to sleep, but it then says, ‘Avoid evil and do good,‘ and by good is meant the knowledge of the Law, for it is said in Prov. 4:2, ‘For I gave you good doctrine, do not disregard My direction’” (instruction, Law). Kittel, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. III, p. 702.

The point here is that the rabbi wasn’t preaching a sermon on the street, but calling the people to the synagogue to learn Mosaic Law, just as Yakov spoke of when he used the word ‘preach’ in Acts 15:21.

602 Some might say that Acts 15:21 is not mentioned in the letter (vv. 15:22-32), but the Council sent two prophets, Judah and Silas (Acts 15:32) to relate by word of mouth (v. 27) to the believers in Antioch, all that had been discussed at the Council. It’s highly unlikely that they forgot to relate the essence of v. 21. Besides, the Gentiles at Antioch were already learning the Law of Moses at the believing Jewish synagogue (‘church’) in Antioch. It would have been superfluous to have written it to them.

603 With 2,000 years of Christian anti-Semitism, and Jewish apologetics against Messiah Yeshua, the Synagogue today can be extremely hostile to a believer because it’s anti-Yeshua. Also, Judaism has taken into itself spirits of witchcraft in the form of Kabbalah and New Age, etc. The important thing to ascertain from Yakov’s admonition to the Gentile, about going to the synagogue, is that the Gentile is to learn Torah the way Yeshua lived it. There is a vast difference between learning about the commandments from a traditional Jewish rabbi, and learning and living Torah with Yeshua’s Spirit, as He Himself spoke of (Mt. 16:5-12, et al.). One is a very deep and dangerous pit, while the other is a divine treasure chest.

604 Eusebius states that Matthew wrote his Gospel ‘about 12 years after the death of Christ. Some scholars believe …as early as AD 40-45.’
Everyone has Bibles today, and yes, Jewish and Christian Bibles are basically the same. One difference is that some of the books of the Tanach (Old Testament) are arranged in a different order, but they’re all there. The words in an English Christian ‘Old Testament’ Bible are basically the same words that an English speaking Jew finds in his English Tanach.605

Today, believers can read the first five books of Moses (and the rest of the Tanach), asking the Spirit of Yeshua to open their eyes as to what God wants them to see and do. There are also house assemblies and congregations that keep Sabbath, Feast days, and dietary laws, etc. They offer new Gentile believers a place to learn the fundamentals, but a word of warning: some of these congregations mix truth with gross error, which means that that kind of an assembly is not for you, even if it’s ‘the only one in town.’606

605 Jewish translators of the Hebrew Tanach into English steer around prophecies of the Messiah that point directly to Yeshua. At these places they may alter some Hebrew word meanings so the Jewish person won’t be able to make a connection ‘to Jesus.’ This is where their belief system ‘takes over.’ One place where this happens is the virgin who would conceive the Messiah (Is. 7:14). I explain why the current Jewish teaching for Isaiah 7:14 is wrong, in The Virgin Conception of Messiah and Isaiah 7:14 and also, Recognize This Man?

A literal case of a deliberate alteration of a Hebrew word (actually, one Hebrew letter) is found in Psalm 22:16, which speaks of Messiah’s hands and feet being pierced (his crucifixion), but in the English Tanach it speaks of those surrounding the person who is afflicted, as being ‘like a lion at his hands and feet.’ I address this in Lion Hands. Aside from this intentional and malicious change, the vast majority of the texts, for Jews and Christians, are similar, if not identical.

Someone might say that this is not right, but this also happens with Christian translations of Greek New Testament texts that point out the Law’s validity. One such place is Hebrews 4:9. Both the Textus Receptus and the NU have the same Greek words for the verse, but the KJV and NKJV speak only of a ‘rest’ that ‘remains for the people of God,’ while the NASB and NRSV, as well as others, correctly speak of ‘a Sabbath rest’ that remains for the people of God. The Greek word is sabbatismos, a technical term found in ancient literature for Sabbath observance.

Samuele Bacchiocchi, in The New Testament Sabbath (Gillette, WY: The Sabbath Sentinel magazine, 1987) says that the writer of Hebrews is teaching that a “Sabbath keeping is left behind for the people of God.” The Greek word sabbatismos is found in ‘Plutarch, De Superstitione 3 (Moralia 166A); Justin Martyr, Dialogue With Trypho 23, 3; Epiphanius, Adversus Hæreses 30, 2, 2; Apostolic Constitutions 2, 36, 7.’ Andrew Lincoln admits that ‘in each of these places the term denotes the observance or celebration of the Sabbath. This usage corresponds to the Septuagint usage of the cognate verb sabbatizo (cf. Exodus 16:30; Leviticus 23:32; 26:34f.; 2nd Chronicles 36:21), which also has reference to Sabbath observance.’

Hebrews 4:9 speaks of striving by faith to enter into the eternal Sabbath rest (a Sabbath rest remains for us to enter into), and with it ‘matter of factly’ speaking of the Sabbath, and not Sunday, it reveals that literal Sabbath observance and celebration were still being practiced, and that Sunday hadn’t come into the faith community. The Book of Hebrews was written about 67 AD.

606 Two major heretical teachings that some ‘Hebrew Roots’ assemblies espouse are the denial of the eternal deity of Messiah Yeshua as God the Son, and that the male Gentile needs to be physically (covenantally) circumcised in order to keep Passover (this latter teaching is also a major heresy of the One Law movement). There is only one physical circumcision in the Torah and that is a covenantal circumcision (see Gen. 17:1f.). See Gentile Circumcision? for while it’s wrong.

The teaching that Yeshua was not always deity is also false. Their ‘Yahshua’ as many of them call the Messiah, has no power to save them then the Jesus of the Jehovah Witnesses or the Mormons. For why that is see Yeshua—God the Son.
Acts 21:25—Observe No Such Thing!

Acts 21:25 is the third and last place where the four rules appear. The KJV states that the Gentiles should ‘observe no such thing.’ There are two possible Hebraic interpretations for what Yakov meant, and neither one of them negates the Law for the Gentile. The first interpretation is that the Nazarite Vow, which Paul was entering into (v. 23f.), wasn’t to be taken by a Gentile. The second is that the Gentile was not to be (physically covenantally) circumcised.

Due to the two different Greek texts there are two different English translations for the verse. Only the Textus Receptus (KJV, NKJV) has the phrase observe no such thing. Without discussing which Greek text might be the one that Luke actually wrote, I’ll deal with both of them. First, the two texts will be written out in English and then I’ll comment on the NASB, which is translated from the Greek NU text, which doesn’t have the phrase. After that the KJV translation will be explained because the translation of the Greek text seems to point to the Law’s demise. These two Bibles reflect the differences in the two Greek textual traditions. The meaningful differences of the KJV are placed in italics.607

NASB—Acts 21:25: ‘But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.’

KJV—Acts 21:25: ‘As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.’

The NASB doesn’t have the Greek phrase ‘observe no such thing, save only’ that the KJV (and basically the NKJV) has. The New Revised Standard Version (also NU based) reads much like the NASB and makes it clear that there was a letter sent (as do the other two, also). This will figure prominently into the biblical understanding of the verse:

NRSV—Acts 21:25: ‘But as for the Gentiles who have become believers, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.’ (Cf. Acts 15:30)

In both the NASB and the NRSV there’s no phrase that seems to be saying that the Gentiles have only four rules (‘save only’); James is just reiterating the decision of Acts 15:20. There’s nothing in the verse in the NU Greek text that lends itself to coming against a Torah lifestyle.

With the KJV’s ‘observe no such thing, save only’ the term save only seems to be saying that the four rules are the only rules that a Gentile has to keep.608 The problem with this is the translation of the Greek phrase εἰ μή (ae may) as save only. Bauer says it means except, if not or but.609 If we place if not into the sentence it doesn’t make any sense:


The KJV, and to a great extent the NKJV, are based on the Textus Receptus, which seems to be a more authentic manuscript tradition than the NU, and therefore, a truer reflection of what was originally written, although 98% of the two texts, along with the Majority Text, agree with one another.

608 Be that as it may, how many Christians know anything about the four rules, let alone keep them, even as the Church interprets them?

609 Bauer, GELNT, p. 220; also Perschbacher, NAGL, p. 119.
‘that they should observe no such thing, *if not* that they keep themselves from things offered to idols…”

Placing *except* in the verse reads like this:

‘As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, *except* that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.’ (Acts 21:25)

Both Berry’s Greek *Interlinear* translation (of the Textus Receptus) of the Greek phrase,610 and the New King James Version use *except* in their translation of v. 25. Using *except* not only makes the verse compatible with what was written in Acts 15:29f., but changes the tone of the verse from ‘these are the only commandments a Gentile needs to do’ to ‘even though the Gentile *can’t observe this* (‘observe no such thing,’ v. 25), they can and should do the four rules.” That’s a shift in understanding from the Gentiles having *only* four rules.

Placing *but* within the verse further shows that James wasn’t speaking of *only* four rules. He was reiterating what the Gentiles needed to do in relation to what he had just said to Paul:

‘As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, *but* that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.’

Inserting *but* presents a much different thought from *save only*. It seems that James wanted the Gentiles to know that even though they couldn’t do whatever it was that he was speaking about to Paul, they could and should keep the four rules.

As for the longer phrase, that they *observe no such thing*, Bruce uses this to come against the Law. He writes,

‘The elders added the assurance that they had *no* thought of going back on the terms of the apostolic decree, and imposing legal requirements on Gentile believers. So far as they were concerned, said the elders, *all that was required of them* was that they should abstain from eating flesh that had been sacrificed…As for the Gentile believers, of course, we have already agreed that *nothing* is to be imposed on them apart from the abstentions detailed in the apostolic letter.”611

Bruce is certain that no other legal requirements from the Law were necessary for the Gentile. All ‘that was required of them’ was that they keep the four rules. Marshall takes a similar position, saying,

‘the fact that Paul was being asked to *behave in this way in no sense implied that similar demands would be made of the Gentiles*. The *fundamental freedom of the Gentiles from the law* had been established at the meeting described in chapter 15 whose decision is now reaffirmed. It seems strange that the Jerusalem decree should be repeated verbatim (cf. 15:20, 29) to Paul who was well aware of its contents.”612

Paul’s ‘behavior’ meant that he was entering into the Law’s Nazarite Vow (NV), but Bruce insists that

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Acts 21:25—Observe No Such Thing!

Paul couldn’t have taken it because it lasted for at least 30 days. Bruce thinks the vow of the four men was going to be complete in seven days. He suggests that the four men had contracted some ‘ritual uncleanness during their vow’ and that Paul was going to pay for their expenses, but as Marshall counters:

‘Bruce apparently assumes that Paul could share in the rite although he had not shared in the defilement. This view does not explain the preliminary visit to the temple for’ (Paul’s)
‘purification in verse 26.’

Great point! Why would Paul need to be purified with them if he wasn’t defiled? If he was just paying the expenses for their purification he would not need to be purified, but Paul says to Felix in Acts 24:18 that he was purified (cf. 21:26-27). Of course, even if Paul wasn’t taking the vow he would still be seen as supporting the Law and animal sacrifice because the four men were involved in both. If Paul thought that the Law had been done away with, his compliance with the suggestion to pay for the sacrifices of the men and be purified with them would certainly have gone against his theology, not to mention his conscience.

If Paul thought that the Law had been nullified for Christians, this would have been the perfect place for a showdown. Wouldn’t it have been much better for Paul to tell the truth to James, and all the Jewish be-

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613 Ibid., p. 345, note 1. Bruce is on the right track, but heading in the wrong direction. Perhaps the controversy and enigma over what Paul entered into with those four Jewish men (Acts 21:23-24) would be solved by suggesting that the seven-day purification rite (Acts 21:26-27) was just that: a seven-day period that one had to complete before he was able to enter into the 30, 60 or 100 day Nazarite Vow. In other words, it was a preliminary purification or cleansing rite that one did before he took the Nazarite Vow.

Acts 21:26-27 speaks of ‘days of purification,’ not ‘days of separation’ as is said of the Nazarite Vow in Numbers 6:2, 4, 6, 8, 12, 13, 21 twice, with vv. 18-19 speaking of the consecrated or set-apart head or hair (NKJV). One can only speculate as to why no information on a preliminary purification rite is known today, but the fact is that there’s no record of a seven-day Nazarite Vow, either. A seven-day purification rite, to be accomplished before taking the Nazarite Vow, was most likely what Paul and the four men were involved in.

Another possibility is that it may have been a special seven day time of purification for Jewish men coming from outside the land of Israel (Judah and Galilee). This would deal with their perceived uncleanness of having been among the idolatrous pagans (i.e. the Gentiles). On the other hand, with more Jews living outside the land of Israel than within, and many hundreds of thousands coming to Israel for each of the three annual holy Feasts (Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles) it would seem far too long a time for pilgrims to have to prepare for the Feasts (as well as the sheer numbers making it an ‘impossible’ practice), but it could apply to the Nazarite.

If this was a seven-day rite of purification before one took the Nazarite Vow, on which Paul initially embarked (Acts 21:26-27), both the concept and the sacrifice that would have been offered for him and each of the four men at the end of their purification (Acts 21:24, 26) seem to parallel the Nazarite rite of purification if he became defiled (Num. 6:9-12). A Nazarite would be defiled if someone suddenly died in his presence (Num. 6:9). He would have to shave his hair ‘on the seventh day’ (Num. 6:9; Acts 21:24, 27) and on the eighth day, bring either two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest as a sin sacrifice and a burnt sacrifice (Num. 6:10-11; cf. Acts 21:26) as well as a lamb for a guilt sacrifice (Num. 6:12). Then he would begin his vow anew. Here is not only a seven-day time frame of purification from defilement (Num. 6:9; Acts 21:26-27), but also the shaving of the hair of the head on the seventh day, spoken of as the day of his cleansing (Num. 6:9; in Acts 21:24, 26, purified, NKJV). With the sacrifices on the eighth day the man’s head became sanctified again (Num. 6:10-11, 18-19) and he was able to begin the Nazarite Vow afresh, or in the case of the four men and Paul, to begin it.

This seven-day ritual of purification may very well have been adopted in Paul’s day for any Jew wanting to take the Nazarite Vow. This understanding only emphasizes the central point of Acts 21:20-27—Paul was entering into (the preliminary stage of) a NV (the shaving of the hair, Num. 6:9; Acts 21:24). He would have offered sacrifices for himself and paid for the sacrifices of the four men (Num. 6:10-12; Acts 21:24, 26) to show everyone that he still kept the Law of Moses (Acts 21:24) as a Christian, 25 years after the resurrection!

lievers, that Jesus had done away with sacrifice and Mosaic Law? If Jesus wants believers to walk in His Truth, and these Jewish believers were walking in falsehood about the Law, why wouldn’t Paul have addressed the issue here in Acts 21:20-27? Paul wasn’t shy when it came to standing up against Peter in Antioch, when he thought that Peter was wrong (Gal. 2:11). Most people today don’t see Peter as Paul’s equal, but in those days, Peter was the chief Apostle and recognized as such by all the believers in Jerusalem and beyond. Paul had enough fortitude to confront Peter in Antioch, so why not with James in Jerusalem—if he thought that the Law wasn’t for Christians?

The four men were under a Nazarite Vow, as no other vow entailed the shaving of the head (Num. 6:18; Acts 21:24). Although Marshall lines up with Bruce in the ‘only four (rules) and no more Camp,’ he says that for Paul to take the Nazarite Vow was not out of line. He sees Paul as having kept the Law! In relation to the vow, Marshall states that Paul’s action,

‘would make it clear that he lived in observance of the law, but many scholars have doubted whether the historical Paul would have agreed to this proposal.’

It seems very strange for Marshall to speak of the ‘fundamental freedom of the Gentiles from the law,’ base it on Acts 15, and then turn around and say that Paul kept the Law. Are there two totally different sets of rules in Messiah’s one Flock Kingdom?

Be that as it may, many scholars disagree with the ‘Paul’ presented in Acts 21, saying that their Paul would never have done agreed to the Nazarite Vow, but the authority of James, the integrity of Luke, and the Holy Spirit inspiring the words, all stand behind the facts of Acts—the historical Paul entered into the Mosaic Law’s Nazarite Vow, and he gave the four rules and more to his Gentiles (cf. 1st Cor. 5:6-8; 7:19; 11:1). Paul took the Nazarite Vow, which meant that he was going to offer animal sacrifices to God in the Temple at Jerusalem, 25 years after the resurrection. This is 55-58 AD!

After centuries of the Church teaching against Mosaic Law, many are shocked when they learn that Paul took a Nazarite Vow. The observance of the vow meant the sacrificing of at least three animals for each of the four men (Num. 6:9-21). The Apostle agreed to pay for all the animal sacrifices for them and for himself (Acts 21:23-24), at the conclusion of the Nazarite Vow.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary also teaches that Acts 15 meant that the Gentiles were ‘free from the Law,’ but should keep the four rules so that no offense would be given to the Jewish believers. They state that the four rules in Acts 21 were meant to emphasize that. Isn’t it amazing how scholars can twist Scripture? Williams agrees and writes that ‘no legal requirement was to be laid upon the Gentiles as necessary for salvation.’

As true as there being ‘no legal requirement for salvation,’ Williams then says that the four rules would be required of the Gentiles. He, too, says that it’s odd, and out of place, that James would repeat the four rules verbatim, but he says it may simply have been a literary device of Luke’s, or done for the benefit of those present with Paul.

616 Cf. Gal. 2:4-5.
618 Pfeiffer, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1165.
619 Williams, Acts, p. 366.
620 Ibid.
Knowling, though, true to his integrity, cuts to the heart of the problem by saying that the Gentiles were ‘on a different footing’ from the ‘Jews who became Christians,’[621] because they couldn’t observe something that the Jews could. He says that James’ repetition of the rules emphasized his commitment to the Decree and that he expected Paul to show that he had ‘no desire to disparage the law.’[622]

Stern rightly states that the accusation against Paul (Acts 21:21) was a baseless lie. Paul was accused of teaching Jews not to circumcise their sons and to stop observing the Law. Obviously, others were misinterpreting Paul’s letters before the 21st century (e.g. Gal. 2–5; cf. Rom. 3:7-8; 2nd Peter 3:14-17). Stern offers three points to refute it. One, Paul kept the Law: he circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3); he observed the Feasts (20:16); he said that he believed in the Law (24:14) and that he had ‘committed no offense against the Law’ (25:8). Also, at the end of his life he stated that he had done nothing to offend the Jewish people or the Customs (i.e. Law) of the Fathers (28:17).[623]

Two, Stern says that Paul’s teaching, that the Gentiles need not observe the Jewish Law, was never given to the Jewish believers (1st Cor. 7:18; Gal. 5:2-6).[624] Here Stern wrongly sees that the Gentile was subject to a ‘Law-free Gospel,’ but this places the Gentile in a completely different faith category than that of the Jewish believer. Is this what Grace is all about? Then where is that Grace for the Jewish believer?!

Because he’s Jewish he has to keep the Law, but Gentiles don’t have to? Stern creates two totally different Flocks for the Shepherd, who came to make both Flocks one (John 10:16; Eph. 2:16; 3:6). Shouldn’t God’s holy Instruction (Torah) apply to every believer? Except for biblical circumcision, Paul makes no distinction in his writings.[625] James (2:8-12; 4:11-12) and John (Rev. 14:12), as well as the Lord Himself (Mt. 5:17-19) don’t seem to differentiate between Jew and Gentile, either. In other words, aside from physical covenantal circumcision, the Gentile and the Jew should observe the same laws. There’s no section in Paul’s letters that is ‘just for Jews’ and another that’s ‘just for Gentiles,’ with different rules. If the Jews were keeping Mosaic Law, while the Gentiles didn’t have to, there would seem to have been a need for different sections specifically addressed to each group, as every church Paul wrote to had both Jews and Gentiles in them. Stern, though, as we’ve seen, in not along in the ‘No Law’ Gospel Boat!

In his third point Stern presents the much overlooked fact that the New Testament doesn’t need to repeat truths already evident from the Old Testament—it ‘assumes them,’ and so did Paul.[626] Excellent point! Just like a sequel to a good book or a good movie, the New Testament doesn’t have to list every law of the Old in order for them to be considered valid.[627] Of course, many Christians decry this, saying that if it isn’t listed in the New, they don’t have to do it!, but this is a superficial and spurious position that comes from their being entrenched in the ‘No Law! Gospel.’

Christians think that the New is ‘completely different from the Old,’ specifically concerning Mosaic Law, but being grafted into Israel (Rom. 11) means that the Gentile was to learn about his new Family History and his Family’s way of living (Torah, Prophets, Writings and New Covenant). Also interesting to realize

[624] Ibid.
[625] Rom. 3:31; 7:7, 12, 14; 1st Cor. 7:17-19; 2nd Tim. 3:16-17.
[627] Witness the church called the Church of Christ—they won’t have any musical instruments in their church services because this practice isn’t specifically mentioned in the New Testament.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

is that the New Covenant wasn’t made or promised to the Gentiles, but only with the House of Israel and the House of Judah (Jer. 31:31-34). The Gentiles become part of Israel (Is. 49:6; Rom. 11:11f.; Eph. 2:11f.) and their allegiance should be to the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16) and His ways of living, as exemplified in Messiah Yeshua.

Stern also believes that Paul’s keeping of the Law was affirmed in Acts 21:24, with Paul’s subsequent obedience to Yakov’s suggestion of taking the vow (v. 26).628 Those who don’t want to see Paul like this, tacitly proclaim Luke to be a liar. As there’s no indication that Luke was a liar, Acts clearly reveals that the Apostle Paul kept Mosaic Law—as a Christian!

Stern also writes that Mishna Nazir (Nazarite) says that the time of the Nazarite Vow was ‘one to three months in length.’ He states:

‘clearly, the four men were poor; otherwise they could have bought their own sacrificial animals and gifts.’ Paul ‘as patron must do more than merely pay the expenses; he too must be accepted by the cohanim (priests of the Temple) ‘and be ritually purified.’629

As patron and participant630 Paul was in agreement that the Nazarite Vow, and therefore, animal sacrifice after the resurrection of Jesus, were still valid (and actually, this was Paul’s second Nazarite Vow recorded in Acts).631 Hegg rightly discerns that there were ‘no competing values between the death of Yeshua and the offering of sacrifices in the Temple.’632 With all the Jerusalem Christians keeping Mosaic Law (Acts 21:20), many would sacrifice and take the Nazarite Vow on a regular basis to honor Yeshua because the Nazarite Vow pictures a very special consecration to God, such as only the High Priest of Israel had (Lev. 21:10-11; Num. 6:6-8). Of course, anyone taking the Vow was seen to hold God’s Law in the highest esteem. This is the reason why James directed Paul to take the Nazarite Vow—to prove to all the believers (and providentially to us today!) that what they had heard about Paul was a slanderous lie, and that he still walked “orderly, keeping the Law” (Acts 21:24).

629 Ibid. Stern writes of Paul being ritually purified, which speaks of the seven days of purification before Paul could begin the Nazarite Vow.
630 Paul was a participant in the vow, walking alongside those who had just begun the purification rite. Paul was told in Acts 21:24 to ‘take them and be purified with them,’ and in v. 26, it says that, ‘Paul took the men and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the Temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering (an animal sacrifice) should be made for each one of them’ (NKJV). With the purification rite completed, Paul would have begun the Nazarite Vow with the four men. Someone might say that God stopped Paul from taking the vow because it was wrong, but there is no Scripture to support that.
631 Acts 18:18 states, ‘Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.’ Scholars are perplexed that Paul would do such a thing, yet Marshall, Acts, pp. 344-345, believes it was a Nazarite Vow. Williams, Acts, pp. 321-322, says it was based on a NV. Stern, JNTC, pp. 290-291, doesn’t think Paul’s vow of Cenchrea was a strict Nazarite Vow, saying that it could only be done in Jerusalem, but Williams overcomes Stern’s objection by revealing that Josephus (War 2.309–314) writes that such a thing was possible, and Marshall, Acts p. 300, citing Mishnah Nazir 3:6; 5:4, says that the shaving of the hair for the Nazarite Vow was permissible outside Jerusalem and Israel.
The phrase *observe no such thing* doesn’t refer to the nullification of the Law, but theoretically to the Nazarite Vow that Paul was entering into. Yet, if the Gentiles were to walk in the Law of Moses, why would James tell them not to observe the Nazarite Vow? Why shouldn’t the Gentiles be able to observe the Nazarite Vow and animal sacrifice, if the Jewish believers did? Biblically they could have. The Gentile believers should have been able to keep the Nazarite Vow and sacrifice animals. God had ordained it from the days of Moses, but in Paul’s day the Temple was in the hands of a wicked high priest and Sanhedrin. They were extremely anti-Yeshua, and they certainly weren’t going to recognize believing Gentiles as part of the House of Israel. As a result of this the Gentile wasn’t able to take, and complete, the Nazarite Vow, which called for the sacrifices to be done in the Temple.

Upon completion of the vow each person was to sacrifice three different animals upon the Altar of the Temple (Num. 6:13-20). This is something that the Gentile would not have been able to do, but not because sacrifice had been ‘done away with.’ It’s obvious from this very passage that animal sacrifice was still-taking place among all the Jewish believers, including the Apostle Paul, at least twenty-four years after the resurrection.

The Nazarite Vow is one possibility as to what James meant when he said that the Gentiles should *observe no such thing* because he had just directed Paul to take the vow. The Gentiles weren’t able to observe the vow at that time, but in Yeshua’s Kingdom of a thousand years on this Earth in Jerusalem, both Jew and Gentile will be able to sacrifice in the Temple (Ezk. 43–48; Zech. 14:16-21; Rev. 20:1-10).

In this case *observe no such thing* may point to the Nazarite Vow, but certainly not to the Gentile being ‘Law-free.’ This understanding, coupled with the fact that ‘save only’ should be translated as ‘except,’ or ‘but,’ reveals that James didn’t mean the Gentiles had only four rules. The emphasis shifts to the believing Gentiles not being able to observe the Nazarite Vow, but James would not have directed the Gentiles to the synagogue to learn the Law, in Acts 15:21, only to reverse himself in Acts 21:25 and not explain why.

Having said all that, the correct interpretation of *observe no such thing* refers to the prohibition against Gentile circumcision. The context, as well as the way the sentence reads, points directly to this. The first indicator is the slander against Paul, that he was teaching Jews not to circumcise their sons (Acts 21:21). That, along with the fact that James says that they had sent a letter about this (NRS), reveals that Gentile circumcision is the subject of what the Gentile wasn’t to do. The KJV also speaks of the letter, without literally saying it, though:

‘As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing…’ (Acts 21:25 KJV; cf. Acts 15:23f.).

written and concluded refers to the letter of Acts 15:23 that Yakov wrote to the assembly at Antioch, which was also circulated in other believing assemblies (Acts 16:4-5). The letter put to rest the question of Mosaic Law, symbolized in Gentile circumcision, being attached to salvation. The phrase, *we have written and concluded*, as well as his reiteration of the four rules, and also, the slander against Paul, teach-

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635 Bromiley, *ISBE*, vol. one, p. 692. Regarding the arrest of Paul in Jerusalem, which takes place in Acts 21:26-36, *ISBE* places this event in the year 54 AD.

UBD, pp. 486-488, thinks it took place in 58 AD.

Douglas, *IBD*, part 1, p. 281, has 59 AD. For *IBD*, Paul’s arrest happened 29 years after the resurrection.
ing Jews not to circumcise their sons, all point directly to Yakov’s decision of Acts 15, six to eight years earlier, that Gentiles weren’t to be circumcised (and concerning the so-called Hebrew Roots movement, *nothing* is ever given in New Testament Scripture for the Gentile to be biblically circumcised ‘at a later time,’ for any reason).

Because of the Nazarite Vow’s holiness, the lies against Paul were rectified when he took the Vow. *This* reveals that the Apostle Paul’s theological position on Mosaic Law, which he taught his Gentiles as well; 1st Cor. 4:16-17; 11:1), and that he believed that circumcision was still required *for the Jewish believer and his sons*. *Observe no such thing* speaks of the *Gentile believer* (and his sons) *not* being circumcised.

Many have thought it out of place that Yakov repeated the four rules in speaking with Paul. *636 On the contrary,* this was a most appropriate time for him to reiterate the rules. After having told Paul to take the Nazarite Vow, to declare that circumcision for Jewish male babies was still intact, and that Paul kept Mosaic Law, Yakov immediately declares that covenantal circumcision *still* doesn’t apply for the Gentiles, but they do have to implement the four rules. It was *extremely* appropriate for James to state the four rules. He *clarified what was most incumbent* upon the former pagan Gentiles after he had just spoken of what they *weren’t* to do—physical covenantal circumcision. The Gentile wasn’t to be circumcised in order to become a Jew,*637* and keep the Law for salvation. Circumcision was given to the Jew as the *sign* of the covenantal relationship that he had with God because of the covenant that God made with Father Abraham (Gen. 17:1-14, 23-27). Many say that the New Testament is totally different from the Old, and so no one needs to keep the Law, but if that’s true, why is the Jewish believer still required to circumcise his sons (Acts 21:20-24)?

We Jews are also adopted into the Family of Israel who love Messiah, just as the Gentiles are.*638* It’s by the *circumcision made without hands* that we all enter in (Phl. 3:3; Col 2:11). The *sign* has changed. *That’s* why Peter and Paul could say that biblical, physical circumcision wasn’t necessary for the Gentile, but that all must keep the (other) commandments and statutes of Moses as they apply to them.*639*

Would non-circumcision make the Gentile less valuable than the Jew? Of course not.*640* The Gentile, by being Born Again, receives the circumcision made without hands, which does for him what physical circumcision symbolizes—the creation of a new nature.*641* *This* makes the Gentile (and the Jew!) acceptable to God. Physical covenantal circumcision doesn’t change the Adamic nature. It doesn’t matter *spiritually* if one is physically circumcised or not (1st Cor. 7:17-20), only racially. Yet, wouldn’t the continued circumcision of Jewish sons create a problem if Gentile sons weren’t circumcised? After all, if both parents were to keep the Law, how could one be required to circumcise his son, while the other was forbidden to do so? The theological reason for this is because the Gentile was never part of the Abrahamic covenant, but the Jew is, and the Gentile doesn’t come into the Kingdom through Abraham, but Yeshua.

Yeshua said that He had *another* Flock and that the two would become *one* Flock (Jn. 10:16). Here’s a

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637  God *never* intended for a Gentile ‘to become a Jew.’ No Gentile is ever seen ‘becoming a Jew,’ in Scripture. Gentile conversion is a rabbinic perversion. For more on this see *Is the Gentile Now a Jew?* and *Gentile Circumcision?* Also, see *The Stranger and the Native Born*, on p. 202.

638  Acts 15:7-11; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:1-5; 6:15.

639  Acts 15:1, 7-11; Rom. 3:20, 31; 1st Cor. 7:19.


641  Dt. 10:16; 30:6; Ezek. 36:26.
hint of a ‘marriage union,’ with the Gentile taking the place of the (uncircumcised) wife in order to woo her husband, the Jew, to Messiah by her prayers and holy conduct. Gentile prayers and love for the Jew is happening today.\footnote{This concept, of how one enters Messiah’s Kingdom (by being Born Again; John 3:3, 5), and the position of the Gentile to the Jew (like a Jewish husband to his wife), further refutes Hegg’s position of Gentile circumcision ‘for the right reason’ (see p. 120, note 472). James declared that the Gentiles weren’t to be circumcised—period! (Acts 21:25) Nothing is ever mentioned about it being possible, ‘for the right reason,’ in Acts or anywhere else in the New Testament. Acts through Revelation covers approximately 70 years (30-100 AD). During this time Gentile believers were having many sons, yet there’s not a single reference in the New Testament validating physical covenantal circumcision for them. It’s hard to believe that an alleged issue of this magnitude could have been overlooked by the nine writers of the New Testament (and the Holy Spirit!), ‘if circumcision for the right reason’ was a valid theological position. On the contrary, Paul expressly comes against it when he tells the Gentiles, who came to Messiah uncircumcised, to remain that way (1st Cor. 7:18; see also Gal. 2:3), yet two chapters earlier he exhorts the Gentile Corinthians to keep the Feast (Passover/Unleavened Bread!; 1st Cor. 5:6-8). Gentile circumcision, ‘for the right reason,’ was never an option in Apostolic times. The circumcision made without hands (being Born Again) allows the Gentile (and the Jew!) to come into Messiah’s Kingdom and keep Passover, etc. Physical covenantal circumcision for the Gentile is the wrong sign for the wrong covenant and is a sin of presumption. For more on this see \textit{Gentile Circumcision}?} Also, a by-product of not circumcising the male Gentile means that the racial Seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is preserved for God’s end-time purpose—to display His faithfulness and forgiving loving-kindness to Israel after the flesh.\footnote{Is. 62:1-12; Jer. 23:5-8; Rom. 11:25-32.}

\textit{Observe no such thing} doesn’t refer to the Nazarite Vow and still less to the Law—it refers to Yakov’s decision that the Gentile wasn’t to be circumcised (Acts 15:19-29). It fits well with Paul being accused of teaching Jews not to circumcise their sons, Yakov saying that he had \textit{written} something, and also, his repeating of the four rules (Acts 15:22-29; 21:25).

The emphasizing of the four rules also reveals \textit{exactly} what Yakov was referring to. In other words, if the four rules hadn’t been stated, some scholars could say that there were \textit{other} things ‘written and concluded’ that Luke didn’t mention. It would open up endless speculation and other perverse interpretations. Thank God that Yakov restated the four rules!

\textit{Observe no such thing} focused first on the Nazarite Vow to point-out that animal sacrifice was still in effect for all the Apostles at the Temple in Jerusalem 25 years \textit{after} the resurrection, and theoretically, for the Gentile believer as well. Just from the perspective of the Nazarite Vow, Mosaic Law is confirmed for every Christian today.\footnote{See \textit{Mosaic Sacrifice and the Blood of Jesus} and \textit{Mosaic Sacrifice in the New Testament}.}

\textit{Observe no such thing} cannot be used to teach that Yakov’s four rules to the Gentiles were the only rules for them or that they didn’t have to keep the Law. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit, through Yakov, was making sure that everyone knew that Paul still kept the Law, and by extension, that everyone else should, too. Yakov reemphasized the four rules of Acts 15 to make sure that the Gentiles knew what they \textit{should} implement in relation to what they \textit{shouldn’t do}—physical covenantal circumcision.

A look of the three passages where the four rules are seen is both insightful and enigmatic: insightful in that it confirms blood as sacrificial blood that is drunk, and enigmatic in that the order of the four rules changes after initially being spoken of by Yakov in Acts 15:20. Rule two, cult prostitution, and rule four, blood, trade places with each other after Yakov first declares it in Acts 15:20:

Acts 15:20: “but to write to them
1. to keep away from the pollutions of idols
2. and of cult prostitution
3. and of things strangled
4. and of blood.”

Acts 15:29:
1. “to keep away from meat sacrificed to idols
2. and blood
3. and strangled things
4. and cult prostitution, from which keeping yourselves you will do well. Goodbye.”

Acts 21:25: “And concerning the Gentiles having believed, we wrote, having decided (that) they avoid both,\textsuperscript{646}
1. the meat offered to idols
2. and blood
3. and strangled (things)
4. and cult prostitution.”\textsuperscript{647}

The Greek word in Acts 15:20 for the first rule (ἀλισγημάτων alisgematone—pollutions of idols) changes to a different Greek word in the letter of 15:29 and is reiterated again in 21:25 (εἰδωλοθύτων aedolothotone—meat offered to idols, i.e. sacrificed). The change emphasizes that it’s an animal sacrifice; not just any food offered to idols (and that eating it at the time of the sacrifice was prohibited).\textsuperscript{648}

Any food (grain, vegetables and fruit, etc.) could be given to a pagan priest as the idol’s representative, or sacrificed to an idol. The Greek word for the first rule in 15:20 could theoretically encompass these non-

\textsuperscript{645} Eating blood is sin at any time. The differentiation here is between blood that would literally be drunk at a pagan sacrifice (idolatry), and that which is found in a rare hamburger or steak (a dietary regulation).

\textsuperscript{646} The King James Version does not have the word both. It’s not found in the Textus Receptus, which is the basis for the KJV.

\textsuperscript{647} Brown, NGEINT, pp. 472-473, 499. I’ve used ‘cult prostitution’ for the three passages, as this is what the word means, instead of the nebulous ‘sexual immorality’ found in NGEINT.

\textsuperscript{648} Bruce, The Book of the Acts, pp. 299-300. A report by Eusebius, HE 5.1.26, reveals that later Christians understood blood in Acts 15:20 (15:29; 21:25) to refer to that which was drunk (rather than blood in rare meat, blood not properly drained, or blood shed by murder). It states that one of the martyrs of Vienne and Lyon, France (177 AD) protested his accusation by asking, ‘How could Christians eat children when they are not allowed even to drink the blood of brute beasts?’ The only place in the New Testament that this prohibition could come from would be the rule on blood in Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25.
animal foods, but the Greek word for the first rule in Acts 15:29 and 21:25 specifically means *animals* sacrificed to idols *at the time of the sacrifice.* Yakov was speaking of an idolatrous animal sacrificial rite, not the offering of grain, fruit or baked goods.

Diverting from the original order listed in Acts 15:20, number two (*cult prostitution*) and number four (*blood*) are switched in the letter of Acts 15:29 and in Acts 21:25. Why does this happen? Perhaps because this is a more ‘natural’ or chronological order for the rules in which they were enacted. *Blood* that would be drunk at a pagan sacrifice is placed immediately after the sacrifice of the animal to the pagan god. It’s the order of a pagan ceremony:

1. sacrifice the animal,
2. drink its fresh blood, and later, after it’s roasted,
3. eat the meat of the sacrifice,
4. and ‘worship’ the god or goddess through cult prostitution.

The Greek word for both in Acts 21:25 is το (τοι). It means ‘both,’ in the sense that it ‘connects … clauses, thereby indicating a close relationship between them.’

Yakov (or Luke?) most likely saw the close relationship or order of events between the animal being sacrificed and its blood being drunk, and wrote the letter, and reiterated it (Acts 21:25), accordingly. Yakov said, to ‘avoid both’ the sacrificial meat and its blood. The term *blood* is now intimately connected to rule one on sacrificial idolatry and speaks of the idoler drinking it after the animal was sacrificed. This excludes *blood* from referring to murder or blood in rare roast beef (the Church’s deceptive teaching on ‘table fellowship.’

The rearranging of the two rules could further be displaying the idolatrous nature of the Decree by taking the two primary rules (*animals sacrificed to idols* and *cult prostitution*) and making them standout as ‘bookends,’ with the drinking of the blood and the strangling of a sacrifice being ‘enclosed’ by the two major points. This ordering of the rules further affirms them as a unit or a ‘package deal’ on sacrificial-sexual idolatry.

*Switched Rules* emphasizes that the four rules of Yakov are a conceptual unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry and that *blood* speaks of it being drunk from an animal sacrifice. Rules two and four seem to have been switched in order to better portray the conceptual theme of the rules by showing their chronological order in a sacrificial-sexually idolatrous ceremony.

This new order also has the two most obvious sacrificial-sexual rules at the ‘front and the back,’ thereby ensuring that *everyone would understand* that the rules dealt with sacrificial-sexual idolatry. How could Christian scholars miss this? Also, with the word *both,* the sacrificial blood that would be drunk is grammatically tied to the animal that had just been sacrificed to the pagan god.

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649 In English, the wording for the first rule in both Acts 15:29 and 21:25 may be different, but the Greek word is the same. It stresses that it’s an animal sacrificed to an idol, and that the meat was eaten *at the time of the pagan ceremony* (see p. 15ff., and p. 95ff., above).


Yakov’s Concern

Most theologians see the four rules of Acts 15:20 as taken from the Law of Moses, with at least two rules being of a non-moral, dietary character (*strangled* and *blood*). Others see the rules coming from the Noahide laws. Both groups think that the rules were given for *table fellowship* so the Gentile would not offend his Jewish counterpart who was still ‘attached to the Law.’ The interpretation of *table fellowship* will be discussed first, then the Noahide view, and then Yakov’s concern for Gentile salvation: sacrificial-sexual idolatry.

Table Fellowship

Scholars center their interpretation of Acts 15:20 around table fellowship even though it presents a theological dilemma for them. They have to acknowledge that three rules come from the Law of Moses and that some are ‘just ceremonial.’ This is justified by saying that it was to assuage the sensitivities of the Jewish believers who still walked in the, unbeknownst to them, outdated Law of Moses.

Various Interpretations of the Four Rules of Acts 15:20

1. The First Rule: Pollutions of Idols
   1. Meat sacrificed to idols and eaten at the sacrifice, with the remains sold in the marketplace.
   2. Meat sacrificed to idols and only eaten at the cult sacrifice.
2. The Second Rule: Pornay’ah
   1. Sexual immorality.
   2. Unchastity.
   3. Adultery.
   4. Fornication.
   5. The prohibited marriages of Lev. 18:6-18.
   6. Cult prostitution.

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652 Williams, *Acts*, p. 266. The Decree touches ‘on both the ethical and ceremonial aspects of the law.’
653 Marshall, *Acts*, p. 243: ‘fellowship at table with Gentiles.’ Williams, *Acts*, p. 266: so the Gentile and Jew could ‘live in harmony with one another.’ It would be impossible for the Jew to ‘have any dealing with the Gentile believers unless the latter observed these basic requirements.’ Pfeiffer, *WBC*, p. 1152: ‘fellowship between Jew and Gentile.’
659 KJV. Brown, *NGEINT*, p. 472; the NRSV margin translation has *fornication*.
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3. The Third Rule: (Things) Strangled
   1. Proper animal slaughter and the draining of the blood (based on Lev. 17) so as not to eat meat with blood in it.662
   2. Prohibition against eating flesh with the blood still in it (based on the 'Noachian decree of Gen. 9:4').663
   3. A pagan sacrifice that was strangled.664
4. The Fourth Rule: Blood
   1. Murder.665
   2. The eating of meat with blood in it.666
   3. The drinking of fresh, raw blood from a pagan sacrifice.667

Everyone correctly understands the first rule, although most don’t distinguish that Yakov only meant sacrificial meat at the time of the sacrifice. Pornay ah (#2) wasn’t seen by the Church as cult harlotry, which would have opened the possibility that the rules were a coherent unit on idolatry, and therefore, rules three and four were artificially assigned to food regulations.668 The interpretation of the rules in this manner allows most theologians to present them as table fellowship, and to continue to teach that Mosaic Law isn’t valid for Christians.

If blood (#4) related to table fellowship (the prohibition against eating blood in meat), Yakov would have said which animal meat could be eaten and which couldn’t, so as to prevent offending the Jewish believer. This, supposedly, was the purpose of the rules, yet no reference is ever made to any prohibited animals, but eating pig, squirrel or rabbit would certainly offend every Jew at the picnic table.

In other words, if Yakov was getting that specific, saying that blood should not be found within meat one was eating (a dietary regulation), and that the animal should be properly slaughtered and drained of its blood (i.e. not strangled, #3), he should have told the Gentiles which animals were acceptable meats to eat and which weren’t. Theoretically, the situation arises that a Gentile could butcher a pig according to acceptable slaughter practices; slitting the throat, draining the blood, and skinning it, etc., and then roasting it until it was ‘well done,’ but can you imagine the Gentile sitting down with his Jewish friend and offering him a hot slab of ham with his eggs? Great way to start a conversation!

It also begs the question that the pig is not the only meat that is forbidden by God and that would obviously offend every Jew at the table. What if the Gentile were to offer shrimp? It doesn’t have any blood, nor

need to be slaughtered properly, yet God forbids this creature along with cats, dogs, horses, catfish, squid, crab and shark, etc., etc., etc. (see Lev. 11; Dt. 14).

Yakov never addresses this food issue in Acts 15, Acts 21, or any other place. No unclean meats are ever mentioned that might offend a Jew. This is why blood cannot relate to dietary regulations of the Law, and this is why table fellowship is a pathetic theological interpretation of the rules. Blood must be seen as the pagan ritual of drinking it, as part of sacrificial idolatry. The very idea that the rules were given so as not to offend the Jews boomerangs right back into the face of those who declare them to be for ‘weak Jewish sensitivities.’ Witherington saw this and said:

“The rules that James offers are much too limited to regulate matters of table fellowship, for, as Wilson says, ‘they do not even guarantee that no forbidden meat or wine (for example, pork or wine from libations) is used.’”

One might argue that the Gentiles would learn about the forbidden animals as they went to the synagogue and heard the Law read on the Sabbath (Acts 15:21), but this totally misses the point. Aside from most theologians not wanting the Gentiles to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath in the first place, it might take six months or longer for a Gentile to even hear Lev. 11 or Dt. 14 read, so as ‘to learn’ about the dietary laws. It’s not as though the Gentiles had their own Bibles and could read them whenever they wanted. That’s why the Gentiles were going to the synagogues in the first place—to hear the Word of God and to learn the laws that applied to them.

If a Gentile possibly didn’t hear about the dietary laws for six months, did it mean that he wasn’t to fellowship with the Jewish believers for that length of time? If so, is there any hint of that written in Scripture? No, blood cannot relate to the dietary laws.

As for blood equaling murder, every Gentile knew the punishment that Rome exacted for it. No believing Gentile needed to be admonished about murdering people.

In biblical law the eating of blood in rare meat is sin (Lev. 3:17; 7:26-27; 19:26; Ezek. 33:25), but not necessarily idolatrous. The eating of blood that the Bible speaks of as idolatrous is seen in drinking it at a pagan sacrifice. Drinking the raw blood of an animal was part of the worship of many pagan gods and goddesses. This was done to attain the characteristics of the god and the benefits thereof, and as Paul found out, there certainly was a need for this prohibition at Corinth, where the Corinthians didn’t fall behind any congregation in the power (charismata) of the Holy Spirit (1st Cor. 1:4-7; 10:20-21).

Blood and strangled are just two aspects of the four rules that have been misinterpreted. Turning to rule two, some think that pornay`ah means, not to marry within the prohibited relations of Lev. 18:6-18, but pornay`ah cannot be interpreted as pertaining to ‘prohibited marriages’ because in both the Old and New Testaments it always refers to (cult) prostitution.

Witherington insightfully saw that the Torah regulations found in Lev. 18, for ‘prohibited unions between close relations,’ were never addressed in the Septuagint as pornay`ah. This is another reason why the rule cannot speak of ‘prohibited marriages.’

Other Christian theologians see pornay`ah as sexual immorality, unchastity or fornication (popularly de-

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fined), but these water down the Greek word to the lowest common denominator and hide the biblical definition of the word, the context, and its historical environment. Sexual immorality can be made to mean anything sexual, and consequently, it means nothing specifically. ‘Unchastity’ is light years away from revealing what pornay’ah means, and fornication, today, is just another word for sexual immorality.

From both its Hebrew and Greek usage the meaning of Yakov’s second rule is cult harlotry. The history of ancient Israel, and the world at large, confirmed this, as well as Yeshua’s use of pornay’ah as the only biblical grounds for divorce between two believers (Mt. 5:32). First Corinthians, Revelation, and the way the word is used throughout the New Testament further support this understanding.

Why don’t most scholars translate the second rule as cult prostitution? Placed right after the prohibition on not eating the meat of an idolatrous sacrifice at the time of the sacrifice, the context of sacrificial idolatry could have been recognized centuries ago. Ben Witherington III (1998) seems to have been one of the first major theologians to present the four rules as a unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry.

The Church’s anti-Mosaic Law bias has blinded its scholars. That’s why pornay’ah, blood and strangled weren’t properly understood. Separating and annulling the Law of God from the New Covenant, scholars handicap themselves and fall into major heresy. Their understanding blinds them to God’s Word. Theological blindness is not confined to the Pharisees. It adversely affects hundreds of millions of Christians today (most of the Body of Christ) in their walk with God.

With most theologians thinking that they are, ‘free from the Law,’ it’s hard to imagine how they can present any rules as coming from the Law. Knowing was quick to point this out. If the Law was done away with for Christians, how could Yakov do this, and more importantly, how could Paul allow it? If the Law was done away with, why didn’t Paul tell James? When would the Jewish believers learn this ‘vital truth’? Furthermore, if the rules were only to be kept by Gentile Christians ‘in the presence of the Jews,’ as Bruce said, the Jews, and especially the Jewish Apostles, would certainly have been offended when they found out about the hypocrisy.

There are other theological and practical problems with interpreting the rules as applying to table fellowship. The first is that it creates two separate and distinct groups of Christians within the Kingdom of God, with two very different standards of sin, and therefore, lifestyle. On what day will the two groups (in the same congregation) assemble on? Should majority rule or should they meet on both Sabbath and Sunday? Of course, this is theologically absurd, and in practical terms, ridiculous. The Jew must keep the Sabbath day holy, and if he doesn’t it’s sin, but the Gentile doesn’t have to keep it at all? Welcome to the Wall of Separation in reverse (Eph. 2:14)! Is the Kingdom of Jesus a democracy? Who makes the rules for sin and how a Christians is to live his life—the Church or God?

Sadly, very sadly, this is a major reason why most Jews over the last 19 centuries, won’t even consider Jesus a viable option as the Messiah of Israel. With the keeping of Sunday, Easter, and Christmas, and the eating of unclean meats, Jews see Christianity as just another pagan religion. They know that Mosaic Law is from God. They also believe, and rightly so, that the Messiah of Israel wouldn’t change God’s Sabbath to Sunday, and do away with the Law, yet isn’t this exactly how Christians present the Jewish Messiah to the Jewish people?

Theologians get around the Law being kept by all the Jewish believers (Acts 21:20) by saying that they didn’t realize it had been done away with, ‘nailed to the Cross!’, but this creates a larger problem than it seems to solve. How could all the Jewish believers think that the Law was still valid? Were they all, including the Apostles, who had been specifically taught by Yeshua about the Kingdom, after the resurrection (Acts 1:1-3), just so pig-headed to listen and obey the teaching of their risen Savior in this vital area?
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

Were they that attached to the slavery of the Law that they openly defied and rebelled against their King’s express wishes against Torah? Or did Jesus forget to say anything to them about it in Acts One, or Acts Two, or Acts 28?

What of Paul, the Church’s ‘No Law!’ champion? He also kept the Law to the extreme point of Nazarite Vow and sacrifice 25 years after the resurrection! (Acts 21:20-26) Are their two Pauls in Scripture? One for Acts and the other that wrote his letters? Nowhere in Acts nor anywhere else in the New Testament, does Paul, or the other 11 Apostles, ever say that the Law is not for Christians.

Having two theologically different communities of faith is totally foreign to God and His Word. A major theme of Torah is that there is one law for both the native-born Hebrew and the (Gentile) stranger.

The Gentile Christian is one with Israel. Messiah Yeshua declared that even though there was another Flock (i.e. the Gentiles), the two would become one and have one Shepherd:

‘I have other sheep (Gentiles) which are not of this Fold (Jews). I must bring them also and they will hear My Voice and they will become one Flock with one Shepherd.’ (John 10:16)

Wouldn’t it seem strange for His Jewish sheep, but not His Gentile sheep, to observe the Sabbath, Passover and dietary laws? In this ‘one Flock’ it would be a sin for a Jewish believer to eat shrimp, but a Gentile Christian would be ‘free’ to eat it? What kind of a kingdom would that be? It would be a divided kingdom with diametrically opposed rules for lifestyle and for what constitutes sin.

It also makes the God of Israel out to be the one erecting a ‘middle wall of partition.’ There’s nothing in Rom. 11:17-21, 24-27, where the Gentile isgrafted into the cultivated olive tree (Israel), or Eph. 2:12-22; 3:6, where the Gentile is part of the Commonwealth of Israel and made into ‘one new Man’ with the Jewish believer, to support a different theological lifestyle for Gentile Christians.

Table fellowship is not why Yakov gave the four rules. Nowhere is table fellowship mentioned in Acts 15; nowhere is it the reason for their holding the Council, and nowhere in the Word of God is it said to be the reason for giving the four authoritative rules. The commandments of Yakov were given in relation to


673 See p. 202f., Two Different Kingdoms? The Stranger and the Native-Born, for Scripture cites and a greater understanding of who this stranger is.

674 Don’t let some anti-Mosaic Law English translations of Eph. 2:15 mislead you. This verse speaks about the laws that separated Jews from Gentiles, not the entire Law (Ex. 23:33; 34:12; Dt. 7:3-11; Jos. 23:11-15; Acts 10:28). Ask me for the PDF on Eph. 2:15 to understand why translations that imply Mosaic Law ending are wrong.

675 Marshall, Acts, p. 255: ‘the letter carries on with a firm tone of authority. The decision reached by the church was regarded as being inspired by the Spirit, who is throughout Acts the guide of the church in its decisions and actions.’

Williams, Acts, p. 270: ‘the council’s decision had been reached under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (cf. 10:19; 13:2f.) This belief is made explicit in verse 28, where the form of expression does not mean that they put themselves on a par with the Spirit, but only that they were willing to submit to his guidance.’

Bruce, The Book of the Acts, p. 299: ‘The decree is regarded as binding in the letters to the seven churches of proconsular Asia (Rev. 2:14, 20), Toward the end of the second century it was observed by the churches of the Rhone valley (which had close links with those of Asia) and...Africa.’
what a Gentile must do in order for his faith in Jesus to be seen as biblically genuine.

The Book of Acts tells us ‘what happened.’ It’s very hard to argue cognitively with what it states about Paul, and all the Jews, keeping the Law of Moses 25 years after the resurrection (Acts 21:20, 24). Some realize the futility of trying to bend those two verses and honestly state they don’t understand it. How could Paul take the Nazarite Vow if the Law was ‘no more’?

Others teach that Paul was only being, ‘a Jew to the Jews.’ He was just observing the Nazarite Vow so

676 The biblical reality of the four rules of Acts 15:20 is that they are commandments from Yeshua. Yakov didn’t make these up on his own, and they’re not suggestions. Just as the writings of Paul are seen as Scripture and meant to be obeyed, so too, the ruling and the four rules of Yakov. Paul said, ‘If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandments’ (1st Cor. 14:37; 1st Tim. 6:14; cf. 2nd Pet. 3:2, 14-18).

677 Knowling, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 451. Marshall, Acts, p. 346, citing Stahlin and including himself. Bruce, The Book of the Acts, pp. 406-408. Bruce argues that the Elders and James were lacking understanding as to why Paul followed their counsel and took the vow: “Therefore, in their naïveté, they put a proposal to him” (p. 406). Bruce thinks that Paul was only going along with them as part of his stated policy—to be ‘a Jew to the Jews’ (1st Cor. 9:20). ‘Paul fell in with their suggestion,’ relieving ‘them of embarrassment’ (because of what they had heard about Paul teaching the Jewish Christians not to circumcise their sons). Bruce also writes that Paul ‘cannot be fairly charged with compromising his own gospel principles.’

On the contrary, Paul most certainly would be charged with unethical behavior if his reasons were as Bruce has stated. Paul expressly took the Nazarite Vow to show everyone that he kept the Law (Acts 21:24). Keeping Torah doesn’t mean to keep it only when in Jewish society (‘He himself was happy to conform to Jewish customs when he found himself in Jewish society,’ Bruce, p. 406). Bruce says that among the Gentiles, though, Paul would ‘conform to Gentile ways.’ What does that mean? What was the ‘way of the Gentiles’? (See Ezek. 20:32; 1st Peter 4:3) Did Paul sacrifice to idols in Corinth? Did he eat pigs in Ephesus? Did he desecrate the 7th day Sabbath in Athens? Did he keep Sunday, Christmas and Easter in Rome?

Being, ‘among the Gentiles,’ also presupposes that there were no Jews among the Gentiles, but wherever there were Gentile converts to Yeshua there were also Jews who believed in Him (Acts 13:42; 14:1; 17:17; 18:4; 19:10, etc.). How would Paul walk then? Would he keep Mosaic Law or not? (See Rom. 3:8; 6:1-3)

Bruce’s Paul seems to be a deceiver of the highest order, because the taking of the Nazarite Vow meant that Paul esteemed and walked in Torah all the time. Paul would not say to God that he would keep the Sabbath day holy among the Jews, but not among the Gentiles. Paul would have been extremely unscrupulous if he had taken the Vow only to appease James and the other Jewish Apostles. The stated reason for Paul taking the Vow was so,

‘all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law.’ (Acts 21:24)

If Paul only took the Vow to appease James then he was deceiving James, and all the other Jewish believers there, but Scripture records that Paul kept Sabbath and Torah all the time (Acts 24:14; 25:8; 1st Cor. 5:6-8; 7:19). Also, in Acts 20:16 and 1st Cor. 16:8, Paul orders his life around Shavu’ot (the Law’s Pentecost or Feast of Weeks; Lev. 23:15-21; Dt. 16:16; cf. Acts 18:18; 20:6; 27:9).

What being ‘a Gentile to the Gentiles’ meant for Paul was that he would associate with them; something he never would have done as an unbelieving Pharisee (Acts 26:5). This is why he rebukes Peter—for not associating with the Gentile Christians, when Peter knew better (Gal. 2:11-15; Acts 10:15, 28, 34-35). It doesn’t mean that Paul or Peter ate unclean meat, as some wrongly teach, as there’s no food mentioned in Gal. 2. It also means that Paul would relate to Gentiles on their own terms, bringing the Gospel to them in ways that they could understand (see Acts 17:15-30f., where Paul doesn’t voice his thoughts about their idolatry, but speaks of Messiah to them in a way that they could understand, for they didn’t know the God of Mosaic Law as the Jews did). It didn’t mean that he would sin against God in the process, by breaking the Sabbath, eating pig, keeping Easter or ‘living like a Gentile sinner,’ as he writes (Gal. 2:15; 1st Tim. 5:22).

Concerning what Paul says in 1st Cor. 9:21, that he was ‘under law toward Christ,’ the law Paul speaks of is Mo-
as not to offend the Jews. If this was the case, Paul would have been a chameleon, not an Apostle. Still others have the hutzpah (Jewish for audacity), to say that Paul was ‘afraid for his life!’, from James and the Jewish believers. This, they say, was the reason why the Apostle Paul did something that he never would have done, had he not been stiff-armed, but this makes Paul out to be a very weak and unprincipled man, something that Scripture does not bear out. 678 It also makes James, and the other Apostles, out to be more like ‘the James Gang,’ 679 than living examples of Yeshua’s love and way of life.

Other scholars simply say it didn’t happen! It was just fanciful writing on Luke’s part! He made it up! These scholars say the Paul they know would never have allowed it, and that’s true! Their image of Paul would never have allowed it to happen. Their Paul set them ‘free from the Law,’ but the biblical Paul declares freedom from sin, not God’s holy Law (Rom. 7:12, 14).

With some of the words of Paul, theologians are able, to theologize the Law away,’ because they mistake Paul’s coming against the Law, in relation to salvation and circumcision, for his entire view on the Law. They’re not convincing, though, when they try to explain why Paul elevates the Law (Rom. 3:31; 7:7, 12, 14; 1st Cor. 5:6-8; 7:19), and here in Acts, the only recourse some have is to declare Luke a liar!

Marshall, in relation to Luke writing about Paul taking the Nazarite Vow, to show everyone that he kept the Law (Acts 21:24), states that,

‘many scholars have doubted whether the historical Paul would have agreed to this proposal. A. Hausrath put the objection most vividly by saying that it would be more credible that the dying Calvin would have bequeathed a golden dress to the mother of God’ (Roman Catholicism’s allegedly sinless and deified Mary), ‘than that Paul should have entered upon this action. Luke, it is claimed, has invented the incident to show that Paul was a law-abiding Jew. Even Stahlin….argues that Paul would never have accepted verse 24b.’ 680

679 The James Gang was a band of notorious outlaws in the Old West, who lived in the 1870s, and were led by Jesse James.
Yakov's Concern—Table Fellowship

These scholars seem to think that Luke, *the Gentile* (Col. 4:10-14), had nothing better to do than to *fabricate* an Apostle Paul who kept the Law! Whatever possessed the good doctor to do such a monstrous thing?! In other words, what was Gentile Luke’s motivation for doing it?

If the Law had been done away with, the *biblical* Paul would have voiced his opposition to James. In that he doesn’t, we know that it wasn’t. Paul still kept the Law and exhorted his Gentiles to do the same, as he himself wrote in his letters, of imitating or following him as he followed Messiah Yeshua (Rom. 3:31; 7:7, 12; 1st Cor. 5:6-8; 7:19; 9:8; 11:1; 14:34).

David Williams, who espouses table fellowship, nevertheless writes that *Paul kept the Law all his life*. He also refutes those who say that Paul was against the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15:20-21 (by his not specifically presenting it in his letters; e.g. Rom. 14; 1st Cor. 8:10; Gal. 1–5). Williams says that ‘there is nothing in all his writings to suggest that he disapproved of them.’

He states that Paul ‘believed that his own teaching *upheld the law* (Rom. 3:31),’ and ‘his epistles are full of exhortations to live by the letter no less than by the spirit of the law (cf., e.g. Rom. 13:8-10; Eph. 5:1, 3ff., 31; 6:2f.;)’

‘Of course he knew now that obedience to the law could no longer be regarded as the *basis of salvation* (cf. Gal. 2:15), but for Paul the law remained the *authoritative guide to Christian living*...Broadly speaking, this was the conclusion reached by the Jerusalem council.’

According to Williams, *Mosaic Law* is ‘the authoritative guide to Christian living.’ That’s also what God intended it to be (Dt. 4:5-8; Rom. 3:31), but if Paul didn’t nullify the Law, who did?

The nullification of Mosaic Law is the heretical and, yes, demonic teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, not the New Testament, and Protestants have all too gladly wallowed in this slime infested heresy, ‘up to their necks,’ without so much as questioning it!

The Roman Catholic Church, about 120 AD, threw out God’s holy Sabbath and castigated the Law ‘as Jewish,’ and with their diabolical attitude toward, ‘the Christ killers’ (i.e. the Jews), gave birth to the oxymoron, *Christian anti-Semitism*.

The nullification of the Law has done much to drive a wedge between Christians and Jews. It’s not of God, but of Satan, as Daniel writes:

‘And he shall speak pompous words against the Most High and shall *oppress the saints* of the Most High and think to *change times and laws*. Then the *saints* shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time.’ (Dan. 7:25)

To *change the times* speaks of the observance of God’s holy times (the Sabbath and Passover, etc; Lev. 23). The *laws* speak of Mosaic Law. Obviously, the nullification of the Law by the Roman Catholic Church did not take God by surprise. It’s the Roman Catholic Church that has oppressed the saints (true Christians) with its persecutions of Christians. Also, to fill the vacuum created by its jettisoning of Mosaic

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*rians.’ Acts 21:24b states, ‘and that all may know that those things of which they were informed about you (Paul) are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and *keep the Law.*’


682 Ibid., p. 261.

683 Ibid.

THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

Law, it brought in false doctrines and pagan ceremonies. It’s unfortunate that the Reformers continued to follow this heresy of the Roman Catholic Church.

One of the places that Christians scholars point to, to prove their theological position on the Law being annulled, is Mt. 5:17-18. The Lord Yeshua says that He came to fulfill the Law, but that it wouldn’t depart until Heaven and Earth weren’t around anymore:

17 ‘Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.’

18 ‘For truly I say to you, until Heaven and Earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is fulfilled.’ (Mt. 5:17-18)

Scholars explain that the meaning of fulfill is that Jesus did away with the Law by His sacrifice and established ‘love’ as the criteria for His Kingdom. This artificially juxtaposes Law and love. There is even Scripture that would seem to support their interpretation:

‘Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the Law.’ (Rom. 13:10)

‘Bear one another’s burdens and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.’ (Gal. 6:2)

Was Paul showing us ‘a new way’ when he spoke of fulfill? Hardly. To summarize the commandments of God into a single concept was nothing new to the Jewish people, of whom Paul was one all his life (Rom. 11:1). In the Talmud (Makot 23b-24a) there are a number of such summaries from the Scriptures:

“Rabbi Simlai said, ‘Six hundred and thirteen commandments were given to Moses’” (a traditional ‘count’ of the number of commandments in the Law).

“David came and reduced them to eleven (Psalm 15).”

“Then Isaiah reduced them to six (Is. 33:15-16), Micah to three (Micah 6:8), and Isaiah … to two, as it is said, ‘Keep judgment and do righteousness’ (Is. 66:1).”

“Then Amos reduced them to one, ‘Seek Me and live’ (Amos 5:4). Or one could say Habakkuk: ‘the righteous shall live by his faith’ (Hab. 2:4).”

These reductions or conceptual summaries of Mosaic Law in no way do away with any of the rules or commandments. They present a rallying point around which the Jewish people can focus. Paul does the same thing in Romans 13:10 and Galatians 6:2.

In a well known rabbinic story that goes back a generation before Yeshua, it’s said that,

“A pagan came before Shammai and said to him, ‘Make me a proselyte, but on condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I am standing on one foot!’ Shammai drove him off with the builder’s measuring rod, which he had in his hand. When he appeared before Hillel, Hillel told him, ‘What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary. Now, go and learn it!’”

Obviously, neither Simlai nor Hillel would have thought that he was doing away with the 600 plus other commandments of Mosaic Law by summarizing it. Can Jesus ‘fulfilling,’ then, in Mt. 5:17, be biblically

686 Ibid., p. 33. From the Talmud, Shabat 31a.
interacted to mean that He would do away with the Law so Christians wouldn’t have to keep it? He had just stated, in the very same breath of Mt. 5:17, that He hadn’t come ‘to abolish the Law.’

In Mt. 5:18, Yeshua speaks of the Law remaining until ‘all is fulfilled.’ Here, too, the Church takes the position that, ‘all was fulfilled’ at the crucifixion. That the work of salvation that Yeshua came to do, the giving of His life in sacrifice for Israel, was accomplished at the crucifixion, is above argument. In His death we find life. In His death we have forgiveness of sins and are able to die to self and attain His nature. In His death we have access to the Spirit of God. All was fulfilled concerning the redemption of Israel, and those who come into her, but did that redemption mean that the Law was no longer valid?

Correctly interpreting Yeshua’s thoughts on the Law in v. 18, He speaks of the Heavens and the Earth departing first before any letter of the Law is nullified. It’s very simple. As the Heavens and the Earth are still with us and won’t be gone until the Day of Judgment, it’s reasonable to say that Yeshua’s view of the Law for us today is the same as when He walked in Israel (cf. Heb. 13:8; 1st Jn. 2:6). Mosaic Law will no longer be necessary at Judgment Day because then we will become like He is now and then the Law will truly be written on our hearts (Jer. 31:33). The critical point that torpedoes the position of the Church on Mosaic Law and also cements the proper understanding of this entire passage is presented by Yeshua in the very next verse:

‘Whoever, then, breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven, but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.’ (Mt. 5:19)

The Kingdom of Heaven didn’t officially begin until Acts Two; after the sacrifice and resurrection of Messiah Yeshua. His reference to the Kingdom of Heaven, in Mt. 5:19 can only mean that in His Kingdom Mosaic Law is still valid. In Yeshua’s Kingdom those who break the least of the commandments will be called least in His Kingdom. Conversely, those who keep the least of the commandments of the Law will be called great in the Kingdom of Yeshua. The choice is ours to make. This understanding of the validity of Mosaic Law for us today is from our Lord Himself.

The Church’s interpretation of Matthew 5:17-19 is blatantly wrong, as well as their theology that Mosaic Law has been done away with. The following five points explain what Yeshua meant when He said that He came to fulfill the Law:

1. The basic and elementary understanding of what fulfill means, which is also the most profound, is simply that Yeshua was referring to all the places in the Old Testament which spoke of a coming Messiah and who would also suffer and die for Israel—and there He was, fulfilling that promise to Israel.

1. After His resurrection Yeshua specifically spoke of this fulfillment in Luke 24:44: ‘These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you; that everything written about Me in Mosaic Law, the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled’ (see also Luke 24:25-27, 45-49; Jn. 1:45; 5:39; Acts 3:18, 22-26; 4:2, 33; 13:29, 32, 38-39).

a. This fulfillment includes Yeshua satisfying the prophecies in the Old Testament about a suffering Messiah, which would also include prophecies concerning a Messiah who would be born in Bethlehem and beaten on the cheek with a rod (Mic. 5:1-2), and who would suffer and die an atoning death for Israel (Is. 52:13–53:12; Zech. 12:10; 13:1).

b. Yeshua also fulfilled the Prophets’ words of His ministry of healing (Is. 35) and His teaching of the Kingdom of God (Is. 55:3; 56:5; 60:19; 61:7-8; Jer. 32:40; cf. Mt. 5–7; Acts 1:1-3).

c. Yeshua came to fulfill the promise of God to Adam and Eve, that her Seed would crush the head...
of the Snake (Gen. 3:15). Yeshua’s sacrifice fulfills this prophecy. Satan is defeated.

2. Conceptually, Yeshua’s use of fulfill has nothing to do with the nullification of Mosaic Law, but with the completing or fulfilling of what the Law pointed to—the Messiah of Israel (Gen. 3:15: 49:10; Dt. 18:18-19) and His redemptive Work for Israel, which would include Gentiles who became part of Israel (Is. 49:1-6f.; Rom. 11:11f.).

2. Fulfill also means that Yeshua presented Himself as the fulfillment of the pictures of the Messiah, which are called types and shadows.

1. Yeshua fulfilled what the Passover lamb pointed to—Him and His sacrifice. The First Passover paved the way for Yeshua to be the Passover Lamb of the Second Passover. The Second Passover parallels the first—freedom from Egyptian slavery speaks of freedom from Satan’s Kingdom of Darkness (Col. 1:13-14; 1st Pet. 2:9).

2. Yeshua’s fulfillment of the Passover does not do away with God’s commandment to celebrate the Passover (Ex. 12:14; 1st Cor. 5:6-8; Rev. 5:1-14). On the contrary, the meaning and the glory given to God for the First Passover is now infinitely amplified. This concept also applies to the other Feasts of Israel, and to the 7th day Sabbath, which Yeshua fulfilled, but did not do away with.\(^{687}\)

3. Another area of fulfill is Yeshua’s holy and sinless life. He fulfilled all the holy and righteous demands of Mosaic Law, and as such, was the quintessential Israeli—the Example par excellence of what it means to be a true Son of Israel, exemplifying in His Person what circumcision in the flesh means (Dt. 10:16; 30:6)—full and unreserved submission to God. He’s the model that every believer strives to emulate—fully consecrated to His Father, which meant keeping the Law from His heart (Ps. 40:7-8). Should Christians strive for anything less? (1st Cor. 11:1; 1st John 2:4-6; 3:1-5)

1. One of the Christian arguments against keeping the Law is that it’s legalism, but Yeshua kept all Mosaic Law that applied to Him and was never legalistic about it. As our Example, shouldn’t we?

4. Yeshua’s sacrifice fulfills Israel’s need to not only be forgiven of her sins, but to also be given a new nature (His nature). This is promised to Israel by God to Israel through His servants, Moses, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

1. Yeshua’s sacrifice didn’t nullify the Law, but on the contrary, it put into motion God’s fulfillment of His word to Israel that He would actually make Mosaic Law her nature (her heart), and He would cause her to walk in its commandments and rules by placing His Spirit within her in order for her to keep Mosaic Law from a heart of love,\(^{688}\) just as Yeshua did. How, then, could the New Testament do away with Mosaic Law? It’s the very opposite of what God had spoken about the New Covenant through His prophets Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34)\(^{689}\) and Ezekiel (Ezk. 36:24-27).

2. Yeshua’s sacrifice for our sins didn’t cancel the Law, it canceled our sin indebtedness (Col. 2:14) and changed our nature to walk in the Law’s holy ways (Rom. 6–8), just as Yeshua walked.\(^{690}\)

5. Fulfill also speaks of Yeshua’s sacrificial death making a way for Gentiles to come into the New

\(^{687}\) See [The Sabbath and Yeshua](#) and the YouTube video, [The Sabbath — A Picture of Yeshua](#).

\(^{688}\) Dt. 30:6; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezk. 36:24-26; Joel 2:28-29.

\(^{689}\) The Hebrew word for Law in Jeremiah 31:33 is קְרָ税务总局 (Torah), which is the specific word for Mosaic Law. Some read ‘law’ in English and say it’s (just) the Ten Commandments, but Torah refers to all Mosaic Law.

Covenant (Is. 42:6; 49:6). God’s extending of the New Covenant to the Gentiles in no way negates Mosaic Law, nor His Word to Israel and Judah about eventual exaltation among the nations (Ezk. 36:22-27; Rom. 11:25-29).

In places where love is said to fulfill the Law, like Rom. 13:10, love is seen as the ultimate or central motivation for relationship, either with God or Man, but this cannot mean that the Mosaic Law is annulled because the core of Mosaic Law is love of God (Deut. 6:4-5) and love of man (Lev. 19:18). All the other commandments of the Law are God’s way of defining what love of God and love of man is. The two great commandments of the Law are seen by Yeshua as the foundation, or the two branches of the divine tree from which all the other commandments hang from or have their reason for being. Yeshua said, ‘On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets’ (Mt. 22:40).

In other words, every commandment, statute and ordinance, etc., has its reason for existence in either the love of God or Man. If God the Father were a tree made up of two branches, full of fruit on each branch, the names of the two branches would be ‘love of God’ and ‘love of Man.’ The fruit on the branches would be all Mosaic Law, for according to Messiah they tell us how God wants us to love Him and Man.

The Church artificially contrasts ‘Love vs Law,’ but this is a perversion because the essence of the Law is love (Dt. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18). Mosaic Law is God’s written reflection of Himself and His holy character. The Law shows Israel what is sin and what is pleasing to Him. If a father tells his son to come to him, the son knows the will of his father by his words. He can choose to obey or disobey. Israel, both Gentile and Jew, knows the will of God by His Words—Mosaic Law. Yeshua saying, ‘love one another as I have loved you’ (Jn. 13:34) added a divine dimension to the rule to love our neighbor as ourself (Lev. 19:18). God the Son loved His creation as a man, and now, the Apostles were to love one another as they had been loved by the Father through the Son (Jn. 14:5-11). This doesn’t do away with Mosaic Law anymore than God having told Israel through Moses to love Him and each other (Dt. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18).

Witherington saw the four rules as a unit on sacrificial idolatry, but failed to grasp the full theological significance of Acts 15:20-21. He said the rules were given so the Jews outside of Israel wouldn’t be offended by Gentiles continuing to practice idolatry ‘by going to pagan feasts.’ Yet, good church attendance didn’t negate sacrificing to other gods and laying with cult harlots, as Paul testified to (1st Cor. 10; 2nd Cor. 6). Witherington also states that the rules were for table ‘fellowship’ (and that it was ‘important to James,’ as a witness to non-believing Jews that the Gentiles were not practicing sacrificial idolatry any longer). How much of a witness it was to non-believing Jews is debatable, but fellowship can’t be the reason for the rules, as Witherington himself states. Also, because of his anti-Law theology he, too, confusion the Judaizers with Peter, Paul and James by saying that the Judaizers, ‘wanted Gentile Christians to be Torah observant.’ The Jewish Apostles wanted the Gentiles to be Torah-observant! That’s what Acts 15:20-21 is all about. The Judaizers wanted the Gentiles to (artificially) become Jews and keep the Law (symbolized in circumcision) in order to be saved. This is what James ruled against.

Hegg, following Witherington, sees the rules as a ‘prohibition of idol worship in the pagan temple.’

692 Ibid., p. 439: ‘so that both groups may be included in God’s people on equal footing, fellowship may continue, and the church remain one.’
693 Ibid., p. 463.
694 Ibid., p. 465. See also p. 166f., above.
695 Ibid., pp. 647-648.
also wrongly thinks the rules were for table fellowship between the two groups and for the prevention of ‘accusations of idolatry’ in the Jewish community. He, too, believes that *strangled* means a dietary restriction (i.e. no eating meat from an animal that had been strangled because of the blood being in it). Clearly, however, James didn’t give the rules for fellowship, non-believing Jewish approval nor as food regulations. Hegg does, though, correctly state that the Gentile was to learn and keep Mosaic Law.

Acts 15 deals with the issue of Gentile salvation, not table fellowship. The four rules speak of sacrificial-sexual idolatry. They were given as a *filter* and a standard to the Gentile so that his faith in Jesus could be seen as biblically genuine. Traditional Christian scholarship, interpreting Acts 15:20 as table fellowship, exposes its flawed theological presupposition against Mosaic Law. Devoid of Torah, and actually anti-Torah, these Christian scholars, commentators and translators ingeniously invent their own seemingly biblical explanations for passages in the New Testament that speak of the Law, and their explanations are backed up by all the ‘machinery of scholarship’ and two millennia of Christian tradition. Understood from the Hebraic Perspective, though, their theological illusion is glaringly apparent. As Dorothy and her friends were told, ‘Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain!

The Church assigns the four rules to table fellowship and says that these were the *only rules* that a Gentile had to keep, but this places the Gentile outside the Torah-observant believing Jewish community. The theological nightmare this presents was seen at the picnic table. The interpretation of ‘table fellowship’ separates the Gentile from the Jewish believer (and the traditional Jew) by placing him in a different category regarding what is and isn’t sin. What the Messiah has brought together the Church has torn asunder. Table fellowship was not what Yakov had in mind when he gave the four rules, as important a concept as that is. The Apostle Paul spoke of this distortion of God’s Word when he told the Ephesian Elders:

> ‘For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore, take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the assembly of God, which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the Flock. Also, from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore, watch and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day, with tears.’ (Acts 20:27-31)

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697 Ibid., p. 281: Hegg writes of, ‘acceptance of Gentiles within the Torah community,’ which speaks of table fellowship with Jewish believers *and* the approval of the non-believing Jewish community. Also, p. 277, for Hegg speaking of not eating strangled meat with blood in it.

698 Ibid., pp. 73, 83, 288-290.


700 If the Church had been walking in Mosaic Law for the last 1,900 years, they would have seen the Jewish people as their relatives, and not as their enemies (‘Christ killers!’). Persecution of the Jews would never have happened ‘in the Name of Jesus’ and the Jewish people would have seen Gentiles both loving them and keeping Mosaic Law. This would have led them to find out more about Jesus as their Messiah. Tragically, the very opposite has happened. More Jews have been murdered and persecuted, as official Church doctrine, in the ‘name of Jesus,’ than all other names combined. Infants have literally been ripped out of the arms of their screaming mothers, and synagogues burned to the ground with the Jewish people of the town inside them...all in the name of Jesus. Is it any wonder that the name of Jesus is a curse word in the Jewish community? The history of the Church toward the Jewish people has been demonically cruel and devoid of God’s love. If you’re not familiar with the persecution of the Jewish people by the Church, over the last 19 centuries, you might want to read Max Dimont’s paperback book, *God, Jews and History*, or any other Jewish history book, starting from the time after Jesus.
Noah and Acts 15:20

F. F. Bruce writes that Yakov’s four rules came from the Noahide laws.701 This interpretation seeks to circumvent the fact that the rules have their basis in Mosaic Law, and interesting questions and problems arise from this teaching on Acts 15:20. First, though, what are ‘Noah’s laws’ for the Gentiles? The Gentiles were required to be,

1. ‘practicing justice and
2. abstaining from blasphemy,
3. idolatry,
4. adultery,
5. bloodshed,
6. robbery and
7. eating flesh torn from a live animal’ (and, ‘also not to drink blood taken from a live animal.’
This last part was added at a later date.)702

All four rules of Yakov could conceivably fall under Noah’s third category of idolatry: eat no meat at the idolatrous sacrifice, don’t practice cult harlotry, keep away from strangled animal sacrifices and don’t drink the blood of a sacrifice. Yet, like their Christian counterparts, the Noahide people don’t see all of Yakov’s rules as pertaining to idolatry. Also, no law of Noah specifically speaks of any of Yakov’s rules.

If Yakov’s first rule on not eating sacrificial meat was placed under idolatry (#3), and pornay’ah was seen as adultery (#4), and blood was seen as murder (#5), there’s still no place for strangled.703 In all this, only three of Noah’s seven laws have been touched, but this is how Bruce and other theologians align Yakov’s rules with Noah. Of course, Yakov’s rule on blood cannot be equated with murder, and so this negates it from being Noah’s ‘murder’ (#5), and Yakov’s rule on pornay’ah doesn’t mean adultery (#4).

Some might suggest that strangled from Acts 15:20 be placed in #7, but the Rabbis created #7 to prohibit the Gentile from literally severing a limb from a living animal and eating it raw. Strangled doesn’t fit here.

The addition to #7 (not to drink the blood from a live animal) referred not to drinking it at a pagan sacrifice, nor to eating blood in half-cooked meat, but of eating the blood in the severed limb of a living animal (along with the raw meat). Today, though, it seems that the Rabbis interpret it to mean not to drink or to eat blood, which can be seen as both a dietary regulation and a prohibition against idolatry.704

Isn’t it strange that Yakov would seem to use only three of Noah’s seven categories for the Gentiles? The Rabbis say that, ‘a righteous Gentile’ was to do all of Noah’s laws, but Yakov never mentions justice (#1), blasphemy (#2), or robbery (#6). If the four rules were taken from the Noahide laws, why didn’t Yakov just give the Gentiles all the Noahide laws? Also problematic for those who think that the rules came from Noah is the fact that the name of Moses is mentioned in Acts 15:21, not Noah’s.

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703 Some might try to place strangled in #3 (idolatry), but those who espouse the Noahide laws, like Bruce, see it as a dietary regulation, not as part of idolatry.
704 JAHG–USA (Jews and Hasidic Gentiles–United to Save America) The Noahide Laws. ‘Hasidic Gentiles’ is a term for Gentiles who keep the Noahide laws.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

Gentiles who follow the Noahide laws say that all Gentiles should observe them. Not that the laws of Noah are bad, but this can’t be justified from Acts 15:20 nor anywhere else in the New Testament.\(^\text{705}\) One has to really stretch Yakov’s four rules into being taken from the Noahide laws, even under a false interpretation.

Unfortunately, it’s not possible to give Scripture cites where God gave the seven laws to Noah for the Gentiles (except for murder and not eating ‘live flesh’ with its blood; Gen. 9:4-6), because they come from the Talmud. The idea that God gave these laws to Noah, and therefore, to the Gentiles, so some could be righteous and ‘go to Heaven,’ comes from the Pharisees, the spiritual Fathers of the Rabbis.

Nowhere in Scripture are the seven Noahide laws seen, as being given to Noah in the same way that God gave Mosaic Law to Israel. It’s ironic, though, that the laws Noah did know, clean and unclean animals, are not part of the rabbinic Noahide laws,\(^\text{706}\) and Noah was a Gentile!

What is the theological purpose of F. F. Bruce, and all those who espouse Yakov’s rules, as coming from the so-called Noahide laws? Those that place the four rules of Yakov within the framework of the Noahide laws are saying that God gave certain rules for the Gentile, through Noah, before the Law was given to Israel at Mt. Sinai. Hence, James was only relating to the Gentile believers what they should be observing. Theologically, for Bruce, this means that the rules didn’t come from Mosaic Law, and so, Church theology, that the Law isn’t for the Christian, remains intact. This interpretation, though, is just another ingenious attempt at explaining Acts 15:20 so that the Gentile doesn’t have to keep Mosaic Law.

When one starts out from a false premise (that the Law is not for the Gentile), and tries ‘to fit Scripture into it’ (Acts 15:20), the result is heretical teaching. Aside from the problems that have been seen with the four rules of James trying to fit into the Noahide laws, this is just ‘table fellowship’ with a twist. The same theological problems arise: there would be two totally different faith communities—one for the Jew (who kept the Law), and one for the Gentile (who didn’t have to keep the Law). Also, ‘law is still law!’ If the Gentile under Grace and free from the Law, how can Bruce & Co. say that Gentiles are to keep some of, or all of, the laws of Noah? Of course, the scene at the picnic table is still a mess: ‘Chitlins and gravy, anyone?!’

Although Edersheim speaks of the Noahide laws being in force at the time of James,\(^\text{707}\) yet both Witherington and Hegg prove that they didn’t exist in the days of the Apostles.\(^\text{708}\) This understanding places a

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\(^\text{705}\) Gentiles who follow the Noahide laws are deceived into believing that it’s all a Gentile needs to do for eternal life. It’s Judaism’s version of salvation for the Gentile. Of course, these Gentiles don’t believe in Yeshua as their Savior. They’re called Bnei Noach (Sons of Noah). This position, while rabbinic and false, found a staunch adherent in Noahide leader Vendyl Jones, a former Baptist minister whom many label as an apostate. Having personally met Mr. Jones in Jerusalem in 2005, I can attest to his apostasy. Among other things, he denies both the deity and the atoning work of Yeshua, and he actively seeks to destroy the faith of believers in Jesus.

\(^\text{706}\) Yeshua—God the Son is considered blasphemy and idolatry by the Rabbis, and so whomever believes in the biblical Yeshua must not even consider becoming a so-called Bnei Noach. See more on the deity of Yeshua in Messiah’s Deity and Micah 5:2, What Word Became Flesh? John 1:14 and Yeshua—His Deity and Sonship.

\(^\text{707}\) Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah, p. 1014.

\(^\text{708}\) Witherington, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 464, note 428: ‘There is no real evidence that these seven were already viewed in NT times.’

Hegg, The Letter Writer, pp. 266-268 and note 570. Nothing ‘even remotely akin’ to Noahide Law ‘is found in the…Mishnah’ (about 300 BC–200 AD).
Yakov’s Concern—Noah and Acts 15:20

Noahide interpretation of Acts 15:20 outside the realm of possibility. Some might say that Yakov gave it to the Gentile believers first, before the Rabbis thought it up and began giving it to the Gentiles, but it’s hard to believe that the Rabbis would follow James, the Jewish-Christian, in this. Witherington says that there is no Jewish background or ‘parallel to the enumerating of these four items together.’ Also, neither James in his canonical letter in the New Testament, nor Paul, ever speak of Noah, let alone any Noahide laws to the Gentiles, which confirms that the four rules of Yakov didn’t originate with the Noahide laws.

If properly interpreted, the four rules of James can only be placed into one Noahide law: idolatry. If not properly interpreted, as Noahide people teach, the rules may be falsely squeezed into three or four laws of Noah. Although this concept finds ‘a way around’ the Law of Moses as the origin of the rules, it doesn’t account for the rules being given so as not to offend the believing Jews. The rules cannot rightly be assigned to table fellowship, as is evident from the picnic table fiasco, and even though Noah knew clean from unclean animals, there are no rules about clean and unclean animals in the Noahide laws. If one wanted to believe that the seven rules of Noah were for the Gentile believers, it still wouldn’t deal with the problem of offending the Jewish believers who ate only clean meat, not to mention their keeping of the Sabbath and the Feast days.

Also a problem with the Noahide position is that Noah’s laws are still law. Even if just a few were given to the Gentile, it would place the Gentile ‘under law’ and in a separate and certainly unequal category with his Jewish counterpart. This would make the Gentile ‘a second class citizen,’ which is something God never intended.

The four rules were the most important rules that the Gentile needed to know in order for his faith in Yeshua to be seen as genuine. Acts 15:21 reveals that Gentile Christians were learning Mosaic Law every Sabbath day (not Sunday).

God’s rules are either for both Jew and Gentile or they’re for neither. Either the Sabbath is still holy or it’s not, but it cannot be holy for the Jewish believer, while ‘just another day’ for the Gentile. The Body of Christ is one Flock called Israel, with Yeshua as its Head. Yeshua hasn’t changed (Heb. 13:8). He’s still a bacon-rejecting, Sabbath keeping, Passover observing Savior and He wants His Body to follow Him, not the Pope. The Church has built an heretical wall, separating Christians from following their Savior, with its ‘Law-free Gospel.’ There aren’t two different sets of laws for in His Flock. The Apostle Paul clearly spoke of faith in Yeshua and Mosaic Law working together in this point-blank rhetorical question and answer:

‘Do we then make void the Law through faith?! Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the Law!’ (Rom. 3:31; see the NKJV)

It doesn’t get any clearer than that.

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710 Acts 21:20; Rom. 7:12; 1st Cor. 7:19; Rev. 1:10.
Sacrificial-Sexual Idolatry

Ben Witherington III writes that it's 'no exaggeration to say that Acts 15 is the most crucial chapter in the whole book.' It certainly is, and not only because the Gentile didn't have to be circumcised and keep the Law for salvation, as significant as that is. With a proper biblical interpretation of verses 20-21, the Law of Moses is validated and authorized for every Gentile (and Jewish) believer today.

Sacrificial-sexual idolatry was the satanic scourge of the ancient world and the way of life for the Gentile. Yakov dealt with the major issue first. Eighteen years after the resurrection the Assembly at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem because of the conflict over what constituted Gentile salvation (Acts 15:1-4).

The Apostles and other Jewish believers assembled and listened to the arguments presented. After 'much dispute' or Jewish arguing (Acts 15:7), Peter stood up and told his story about how the first Gentile, Cornelius, had been saved (Acts 10:1-11:18). He said that the Gentiles had received salvation in the same way as the Jews had: 'through the grace of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah' (15:11). Everyone was silent. The Holy Spirit had spoken through Peter. The rabbinic concept of keeping the Law for salvation was dealt the death blow it deserved. God had never intended the Law to be used as a vehicle for eternal life (Acts 15:10; Rom. 3:31; 8:3-4).

Then Yakov, the literal half brother of Yeshua, arose and affirmed what Peter had said, adding his own insight (Acts 15:13-18)—God was raising up the fallen ‘Tabernacle of David’ (the Kingdom of David that had lain in ruins for a thousand years), through His/His Son, and God was inviting the Gentiles to be a part of it (Is. 42:6; 49:6; Amos 9:11). As Prince of the Council, Yakov sealed the decision (Acts 15:19) and issued the four rules (v. 20). Why the four rules? Why didn't he just declare that the Gentiles were saved by faith in Messiah Yeshua without needing to become circumcised, and let it go at that?

Yakov was concerned that Gentile believers might think that they could continue to practice sacrificial pagan rites along with 'faith in Jesus.' This would seriously affect their salvation. The four rules he presented to the Gentiles were the essence of idolatrous temple practices. Yakov ruled and warned the Gentiles about something that would jeopardize their very salvation. Yakov's concern was valid. The Apostle Paul had to deal with sacrificial-sexual idolatry among some of his Gentile believers in Corinth (1st Cor. 6:19-20; 10:21) as well as in other cities, and about 50 years later the risen Messiah would rebuke two of the seven Assemblies in Revelation for practicing it as well (Rev. 2:14, 20).

Gentile continuance in sacrificial-sexual idolatry was the reason Yakov issued the four rules. It had nothing to do with table fellowship. As a Jew he knew the history of ancient Israel, as well as the past and current conditions in the pagan world. He also knew that God the Father desired for His people to be totally devoted to Him through Yeshua. If Gentiles continued worshiping other gods, along with belief in Yeshua, it would cost them their eternal life. The four rules were a salvation issue for the Gentiles—the very reason the Council of Acts 15 convened.

Israel committed cult prostitution with the women of Moab (Num. 25), yet they 'still believed' in Yahveh, even after they had joined themselves to, and become 'one' with Baal Peor through the sacrifices and orgies. It's this walking in both the Camp of God and the Camp of Satan that Yakov addressed in Acts 15:20. In a very real sense, Yakov’s ruling took care of ‘the two pluses.’ He said,

712 See p. 168, note 672 for the time frame.
713 Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1st Thess. 4:3.
Yakov’s Concern—Sacrificial-Sexual Idolatry

Jesus plus the Law couldn’t earn salvation, and
Jesus plus Zeus wouldn’t be tolerated.

The first three commandments of the Ten Commandments address idolatry. Other commandments reveal the punishment. Unger’s writes:

‘The individual offender was devoted to destruction (Ex. 22:20); his nearest relatives were not only bound to denounce him and deliver him up to punishment (Dt. 13:2-10), but their hands were to strike the first blow when, on the evidence of at least two witnesses, he would be stoned (Dt. 17:2-5). To attempt to seduce others to false worship was a crime of equal enormity (Deut. 13:6-10).’

Sacrificial-sexual idolatry was Yakov’s concern when he issued the four rules to the Gentiles. God addressed ancient Israel in a similar vein when He took her out of the darkness of Egypt. The eating of unclean meat, as sinful as that is, was not the primary thing that made the Gentile defiled in the eyes of the Jewish people. In Acts 10:28, Peter told Cornelius and the Gentiles gathered in his house, ‘You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a Gentile or to visit him.’

Peter spoke of the mere association with Gentiles as being off-limits. This was not just a rabbinic tradition. It was Gentile pagan ‘worship’ that defiled the soul of the Gentile. This made them spiritually unclean and would continue to defile believing Gentiles if they practiced it, even if they said that they ‘believed in Jesus.’ Witherington writes,

“Jews believed that the chief source of Gentile impurity was their contact with ‘the defilement of idols,’ not their contact with non-kosher food.”

The four rules were to be observed immediately by the Gentiles, in response to salvation, not for table fellowship with Jewish believers. Was Gentile faith in Messiah Yeshua genuine? These rules would reveal that at a very basic and crucial level. Most of the Gentiles coming into the Kingdom of Yeshua didn’t have any idea who the God of Israel was and what He required. Where would they find out that worshiping other gods was wrong? Where would they find out how God wanted them to walk out their new-found faith? This is where the synagogue and the Law of Moses come in. Acts 15:21 assumes that the Gentile believer was to live a lifestyle of Torah so that he could truly be one with the House of Israel and not offend his believing Jewish brother—nor the God-Man who had died for him.

There’s a parallel with the Sons of Israel entering the Promised Land and the Gentiles entering the Promised One. It has to do with worshiping the God of Israel and Him alone. This was Yakov’s motivation and concern in giving the four rules. In the Ten Commandments it’s written, ‘You must have no other gods beside Me!’ (Dt. 5:7; see also Ex. 20:3; 22:20)

714 Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 515.
715 It was this way from the beginning. Joshua said to Israel, ‘Be strong then, to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses so that you may not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you will not associate with these nations, these which remain among you, or mention the name of their gods or make anyone swear by them or serve them or bow down to them, but you are to cling to Yahveh your God, as you have done to this day’ (Joshua 23:6-8; see also Dt. 7:3; Ezra 9:12–10:4f.).
717 The Gentile believer is grafted into Israel (Rom. 11:13-31) and part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-22; see also p. 143, notes 571-572.)
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

In Dt. 12, Yahveh begins to define what it means not to have any other gods. Among other things, Israel wasn’t to have anything to do with pagan altars, other than to destroy them (vv. 2-3), and they weren’t to eat the blood of any sacrifice (vv. 16, 23). In speaking of the pagan altars and the eating of blood (of the sacrificed animale), conceptually, the three other rules can be placed right alongside them (the eating of the meat sacrificed to the god at the altar, the strangling of a sacrifice and cult prostitution). All four rules were acted out around a pagan altar. 718

When Yahveh was leading His people Israel into the Promised Land He wanted them to know what would jeopardize their covenantal relationship with Him. God was doing the same thing for the Gentiles through Yakov. This is further seen even to the extent in how Yahveh closes Deut. 12 and how Yakov closes his letter to the Gentiles. In Dt. 12:28, Moses says,

‘Be careful to listen to all these words which I command you so that it may be well with you and your sons after you forever, for you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of Yahveh your God.’

In his letter to the Gentiles, Yakov writes,

‘that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from cult harlotry. If you keep yourselves free from such things you will do well! Shalom to you!’ (Peace to you! Acts 15:29)

The parallel between Dt. 12 and Acts 15:29 is seen in both what is commanded about sacrificial idolatry and in the closing, ‘that it would be well’ with each group to obey the commandments. Both Moses and Yakov were warning the people what would not be tolerated. Did it mean that God wasn’t going to give any more commandments to Israel after Dt. 12? Or that Dt. 12 was all the commandments that God had for them? Hardly. Acts 15:20 is not the last of the commandments for the Gentile, either.

Deuteronomy 12 is the first place in Deuteronomy where Yahveh explains or defines, in a greater way, His commandment of not having any other gods except Him. 719 This is the reason why Yakov gave his ruling. The Gentiles were known for having many gods and goddesses in their pantheon, and the inclusion of Jesus would have posed no problem for many of them. This was seen at Corinth, Pergamos and Thyatira. That’s why these four rules were singled out. They had to be obeyed immediately. The rest of God’s rules would be learned later. With the warning of Yakov, the Gentiles would understand that their faith must be in Yeshua and in Him alone. ISBE describes the pagan mindset of the Gentile believer:

They “would gladly have accepted Christ along with Mithra and Isis and Serapis…The same person might be initiated into the mysteries of half a dozen pagan divinities and also be a priest of two or more gods. Some had not the slightest objection to worshiping Christ along with Mithra, Isis and Adonis.”720

718 See p. 131f., where the three major rules are seen before Deuteronomy.

719 There’s mention of breaking down altars (Dt. 7:5), an admonition not to forget Yahveh by bowing down and following other gods (Dt. 8:19), and a warning against being enticed to turn away from Yahveh (Dt. 11:16), coming before Dt. 12, but Dt. 12 begins the formal teaching of what it means to follow Yahveh, in relation to other gods, as well as how to observe His other commandments. Before Dt. 12 God speaks of commandments, statutes, judgments and ordinances, preparing Israel to receive His Instruction, but He doesn’t fully explain what His commandments, statutes, judgments and ordinances are. Of course, in Dt. 5 there are the Ten Commandments, where the first three speak of not worshiping any other gods, but in Dt. 12ff., it’s fully addressed.

Yakov knew the pagan mindset and that Yeshua could breach no rivals. With knowledge of God’s standard comes His wisdom and discernment as to what is pleasing to Him and what is sin (Dt. 4:5-8; Rom. 7:7, 12, 14; 1st John 3:1-5). When God’s wisdom is lacking, all sorts of heresies can enter (e.g. ‘the Law is abolished; the rules were given as a concession to Jewish sensitivities;’ and Sunday assembly instead of Sabbath holiness, etc.).

Without a standard from God in these areas the way is open for pagan holy days and pagan ways to be ‘baptized in the Name of Jesus,’ with everyone doing what appears to be right in his own eyes. The Church has sanctified pagan holy days in opposition to the holy days of God! ‘Baptizing’ a pagan celebration to an idol (e.g. Easter) doesn’t give it biblical legitimacy, but it does make for a tradition of the Church that nullifies God’s Word. Moses warned Israel about this kind of thing:

“Be careful to obey all these words that I command you today so that it may go well with you and with your sons after you forever because you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of Yahveh your God. When Yahveh your God has cut off before you the nations whom you are about to enter to dispossess them, when you have dispossessed them and live in their land, take care that you are not snared into imitating them after they have been destroyed before you. Do not inquire concerning their gods saying, ‘How did these nations worship their gods? I will also do the same!’ You must not do the same for Yahveh your God because every abhorrent thing that Yahveh hates they have done for their gods. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. You must diligently observe everything that I command you. Do not add to it nor take anything away from it!” (Deut. 12:28-32)

What has the Church done in ‘baptizing’ pagan Sunday, Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas? The Church has taken celebrations to gods and goddesses and incorporated them into the worship of Jesus, the very thing God warned Israel against! The Church has a dark veil over her eyes. She’s caught in her traditions that nullify God’s Word and doesn’t even realize it’s sin! When it is brought to the attention of church officials it’s usually rationalized away: ‘Oh, we don’t worship Nimrod or Adonis. We worship the birth of Christ.’ Where has God given the Church authority to sanctify pagan holy days ‘for Jesus’? Also, where does Scripture speak of celebrating the birth of Jesus? The Church errs greatly because it has thrown out God’s holy standard—the Law of Moses.

The need to know what comprised salvation for the Gentile caused the Assembly in Jerusalem to convene. It was established that the Gentile was saved in the same way that the Jew was. Yakov declared the four rules and then uttered one verse of Scripture that reveals that believing Gentiles were already learning and keeping Torah. Yakov didn’t command the Gentiles to go to the synagogue because he knew that for more than eight years that Gentile believers were learning Torah in the Jewish congregations in which they attended. These congregations were also called synagogues. The Assembly in Antioch, where the term

721 This phrase is used to denote Israel going astray after other gods (Dt. 12:8; Judges 17:6; 21:25). The opposite is to do what is right in God’s eyes (Dt. 13:18; 1st Kings 15:5, 11; 2nd Kings 22:43).

722 A powerful example of Gentile observance of the Law is seen about 195 AD. All the congregations in what is now Turkey, Syria and Israel kept the Passover. This angered Bishop Victor of Rome (whose office would soon become that of the Pope). The Bishop demanded that those congregations celebrate Easter instead of the Jewish Passover, but Polycrates, the bishop of all the Assemblies in Turkey, ‘claiming to possess the genuine apostolic tradition transmitted to him by the Apostles Philip and John, refused to be frightened into submission by the threats of Victor of Rome.’ Bacchiocchi, From Sabbath To Sunday, pp. 198-199ff. If Gentile believers weren’t learning Torah in the days of Acts 15:21, why would all those congregations be keeping Passover a hundred and
‘Christian’ is first mentioned (Acts 11:26), was an assembly of Jewish and Gentile believers who obviously kept the Law (Acts 21:20, and by inference 20:6, 16; 22:12; 27:9), and Paul’s Gentiles assembled in ‘house churches or house synagogues’ and also learned the Law, along with their believing Jewish brethren. The Gentile believers were already going to synagogues and learning the Law before Acts 15, and Yakov realized that, so there was no need to compel them to go.

All these assemblies met on the Sabbath day and celebrated Passover. Ancient Church history confirms that. Sunday and Easter, ham and ‘no Law,’ didn’t enter the Body of Messiah for more than 40 years after Paul’s death. No Gentile believer was assembling on Sunday or keeping Easter in Paul’s day. None. That wouldn’t begin until about 100-120 AD, when all the Apostles were dead. These ancient Christian traditions are easily seen to be unbiblical in that there are no Scriptures stating that believers should observe either of those days, and of course, pagans kept them both, in honor of ‘their Christ,’ more than a thousand years before Yeshua was born in Bethlehem.

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723 Acts 20:20; Rom. 16:5; 1st Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 1:2 (see also p. 143, notes 571-572).  
724 Rom. 3:31; 7:7, 12, 14; 1st Cor. 5:6-8; 7:19.  
725 Bacchiocchi, From Sabbath To Sunday, pp. 165-198.
Conclusion

Yakov’s second rule in Acts 15:20 was seen in Hebrew and Greek to mean *prostitution*, with the biblical emphasis on cult prostitution. The second rule, appearing immediately after the prohibition of eating sacrificial meat at the sacrifice, raised the theme of sacrificial idolatry. *Things strangled and blood* followed suit.

The Hebrew word for Yakov’s second rule (*zinute*; prostitution), and its derivatives in the Old Testament, overwhelmingly spoke of cult harlotry. *Judah and Tamar* revealed cult harlotry being practiced in Canaan in the days of the sons of Jacob, and the Baal Peor affair at the time of Moses revealed how easily the Sons of Israel were seduced, and the devastating consequences that cult harlotry had upon Israel.

In both Israel’s history, and that of the ancient world, cult harlotry was rampant. It was the sin that brought down both the House of Israel and the House of Judah. Yakov certainly knew his Family History, and also, that of the pagans. He didn’t want the Gentile believers to wrongly think that they could ‘add Jesus’ to their gods and could continue in sacrificial-sexual idolatry unscathed.

In the sections on Corinth and Revelation both Paul and Yeshua rebuked Gentile believers for practicing cult harlotry. Those *Christians* thought it was alright to do it. In the survey of the Greek word *pornay’ah* (harlotry) and its derivatives in the New Testament, its use was overwhelmingly seen as referring to cult harlotry, not common harlotry (and certainly not adultery, sexual immorality, unchastity, or sex outside of marriage, etc.).

Once the smoke screen of scholarship was blown away, the four rules of Yakov were seen as the conceptual unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry they were intended to be. Yakov’s admonition was very simple: tell the Gentiles what would sever them from Jesus (Acts 15:20) and encourage them to walk in God’s ways by learning His Torah (Acts 15:21).

Today there aren’t many Christians going about thinking that eating meat and drinking blood sacrificed to idols, or lying with cult harlots, would be acceptable to Jesus, but great is the importance of correctly understanding Acts 15:20-21. It can no longer be used by the Church to teach that Gentiles had only four rules to obey, and it cannot be spoken of as given for table fellowship, out of Gentile consideration for the weaker Jewish brother. *Acts 15:20-21* exposes the satanic deception of a ‘Law-free Gospel.’

The goal for followers of the Messiah is understanding the Hebrew Bible (Genesis through Revelation) from its Hebraic Perspective.726 God chose Abraham, not Socrates. He bound Himself (in covenant) and interwove His ways (Torah, Prophets, Writings and New Testament) to Israel, not Greece. He revealed Himself in power (the Passover and Exodus; Yeshua crucified and resurrected) to Israel, not Rome. His reality and character are reflected in His words in the Hebrew Bible, not the Koran. *IBD* describes *language* as a reflection of a *nation’s cumulative experiences*, and that is why it’s so important to understand God’s words from The Hebraic Perspective:

‘it is an axiom of linguistics that any culture, no matter how primitive, develops that vocabulary which is perfectly adequate to *express its thought and desires.*’727

*Only Israel encountered* the God of Creation! Only Israel was freed from Egyptian slavery, walked

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726 The Hebraic Perspective centers around the place of the Law of Moses in our lives (Rom. 3:31) as interpreted by Yeshua, not by the Rabbis, Talmud or *halacha*. Yes, there are some insights that can be learned from them, but many who study them, not grounded in Messiah, have shipwrecked their faith on the rocks of the Rabbis (Mt. 16:6-12; 23:1-33; Lk. 11:27-28, 37-54; Titus 1:9-16).

THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

through a divided and dry-bed Red Sea! Only Israel heard the Voice of Yahveh as a nation (Ex. 19:16ff.) and was given the wisdom of God (Mosaic Law!: Dt. 4:5-8)! No other nation had these things happen to them and no other people was promised a land or entered into a covenant with the Living God (Dt. 10:15; 29:1). No other people was given the New Covenant and no other people had the true Messiah promised to them (Jer. 31:31-34; Micah 5:2). The Hebrew Scriptures, especially the New Testament when it comes to Mosaic Law, needs to be understood for what it is saying, as The Lifting of the Veil has begun to reveal. The Scriptures are Israel’s privileged possession (Rom. 3:1-2; 9:1-5) and now belong to every believer:

‘Ask now about former Ages, long before your own, ever since the day that God created Adam on the Earth. Ask from one end of the Heavens to the other! Has anything so great as this ever happened or has its like ever been heard of?! Has any people ever heard the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the Fire as you have heard and lived?!’

‘Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and by terrifying displays of power, as Yahveh your God did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes?! To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that Yahveh is God! There is no other beside Him! From the Heavens He made you hear His voice to discipline you. On Earth He showed you His great Fire, while you heard His words coming out of the Fire, and because He loved your Fathers, He chose their sons after them!’

‘He brought you out of Egypt with His own presence, by His great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves to bring you in, giving you their land for a possession as it is still today. So acknowledge today and take to heart that Yahveh is God in the Heavens above and on the Earth beneath! There is none other! Keep His statutes and His commandments, which I am commanding you today, for your own well-being and that of your sons after you so that you may remain long in the Land that Yahveh your God is giving you for all time!’ (Dt. 4:32-40)

Yahveh gave His will to Israel when He gave her His Law. Keil says, the

‘object of the glorious manifestation of His holy majesty upon Sinai’ was the giving of ‘the Law through Moses to the congregation of Jacob as a precious possession,’ and ‘Israel was distinguished above all nations by the possession of the divinely revealed Law.’

In the Beginning, the Gentiles learned the Law until the door was closed in their face by what would become the Roman Catholic Church, but in the End, the Spirit of Messiah Yeshua is opening the door that no church can shut! The Gentile (and the Jew) are learning Torah again! Praise Yeshua!

With the proper Hebraic understanding of Acts 15:20-21, Church theology on the Law is completely shattered. This understanding is a radical departure from Church theology, but it’s Gods time for Christians to enter into the fulness of God’s Wisdom for their lives. Many Gentiles have seen this and are walking in their ancient Hebraic heritage as part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2:11-22). Theologians can try and theologize Acts 15:20-21 away, but it’s a losing cause because they’re fighting their own Lord.

Yeshua is lifting the veil of deception from the eyes of His Bride so that she can see more clearly who He is. Thank God for Yakov’s Concern! Because of it believers are beginning to walk in the freedom of

God’s perfect Law of Liberty:

‘May Your forgiving loving-kindnesses also come to me, Oh Yahveh! Your salvation according to Your word! So I shall have an answer for him who reproaches me, for I trust in Your word. Do not take the word of Truth utterly out of my mouth, because I wait for Your ordinances. I will keep Your Law continually, forever and ever, and I will walk at liberty (freedom!) for I seek Your precepts. I will also speak of Your testimonies before kings and shall not be ashamed, and I shall delight in Your commandments, which I love! I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate upon Your statutes!’ (Psalm 119:41-48)

‘But one who looks intently at the perfect Law, the Law of Liberty (Freedom) and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer, but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does!’ (James 1:25)

‘I would not have come to know sin except through the Law.’ (Rom. 7:7c)

“whoever says ‘I abide in Him’ ought to walk just as He walked.” (1st John 2:6)

‘And the Dragon was enraged with the Woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the Commandments of God and have the testimony of Yeshua the Messiah.’ (Revelation 12:17)

Let us walk in the Way of our risen Savior! He hasn’t changed! There’s much divine treasure for us to learn of our God in the Hebrew Scriptures, both Old and New.730

730 Even though the words of the New Testament are Greek, the underlying thought process and concepts of it are Hebraic in nature.
IS ACTS RELIABLE?

Is the Book of Acts a reliable document from which to draw theological understanding? Being inspired by the Holy Spirit and part of the New Testament one would assume that, but some Christian theologians say it’s a poor historical account and not to be trusted. That, as we’ll see, is just a smoke screen for those who don’t want to believe what Luke writes about Paul and Mosaic Law. In my article, Paul & Acts, it’s clear that the Apostle is a Jewish man who kept Torah all his life.\(^{731}\) It’s quite a jolt to those who think that Paul did away with the Law. That’s why they say that Acts ‘can’t be trusted.’

Those who attack both Luke and his Book of Acts use the unscrupulous tactic of character assassination. Their scholarship is questionable at best because Acts is an extremely trustworthy document. Luke has faithfully recorded the essence of the speeches in Acts, including Paul’s. Both F. F. Bruce and I. Howard Marshall confirm this. Neither of them uphold the Law for believers today, so no one can accuse them of furthering their own theological agenda when they speak of the accuracy and reliability of Acts, specifically of ‘Luke’s Paul.’ Writing of Acts, Bruce states,

> ‘even if there are aspects of...Paul at which we might scarcely guess if we did not have his letters, the picture of him that Luke gives is ineffaceable.’\(^{732}\) And in giving us this picture...Luke has made a great, indeed, a unique contribution to the record of early Christian expansion. His narrative, in fact, is a sourcebook of the highest value for the history of civilization.”\(^{733}\)

Bruce praises Acts for its accuracy, and he also realizes that it’s the only divine historical account of the early Church. He also states that without Acts we would be at the behest of those who denigrate the Jews and the God of Israel. He writes,

> ‘The importance of Acts was further underlined about the middle of the second century as a result of the dispute to which Marcion and his teaching gave rise. Marcion of Sinope was an exceptionally ardent devotee of Paul who nevertheless misunderstood him. About AD 144 he promulgated at Rome what he held to be the true canon of divine scripture for the new age inaugurated by Christ. Christ, in Marcion’s teaching, was the revealer of an entirely new religion, completely unrelated to anything that had preceded his coming (such as the faith of Israel documented in our Old Testament). God the Father, to whom Christ bore witness, had never been known on earth before: he was a superior being to the God of Israel, who created the material world and spoke through the prophets. Paul, according to Marcion, was the only apostle who faithfully preserved Christ’s new religion in its purity, uncontaminated by Jewish influences. The Old Testament could have no place in the Christian canon. The Christian canon, as promulgated by Marcion, comprised two parts: one called The Gospel (a suitable edited recension of the third Gospel), and the other called The Apostle (a similarly edited recension of Paul’s nine letters to churches

\(^{731}\) See Paul and Acts.  
\(^{732}\) Sinclair, Collins English Dictionary, p. 787. Ineffaceable means, ‘incapable of being effaced; indelible.’ As the Mafia might say, Luke’s Paul can’t be ‘rubbed out.’ What’s written of Paul in Acts accurately reflects both what he entered into (the Nazarite Vows) and his positive theological position on Mosaic Law.  
\(^{733}\) Bruce, The Book of the Acts, p. 16. Bruce quotes Tertullian (p. 14, note 58) as having said of the Book of Acts, ‘Those who do not accept this volume of scripture can have nothing to do with the Holy Spirit, for they cannot know if the Holy Spirit has yet been sent to the disciples, neither can they claim to be the church, since they cannot show when this body was established or where it was cradled’ (Tertullian, Prescription against Heretics 23).
Is Acts Reliable?

and his letter to Philemon).\textsuperscript{734}

The Church has misunderstood Paul, just like Marcion. Even if it doesn’t faithfully adhere to every jot and tittle of Marcion’s beliefs, it nevertheless conveys that they are an entirely different religion, not the continuation of Mosaic Law that God intended with Yeshua. Bruce says that because of Marcion the leaders of the faith felt compelled to define the canon of Scripture with greater clarity to ensure the true promulgation of God’s Word:

‘For them, The Gospel comprised not one document only but four, and those four included the full text of the one which Marcion had published in mutilated form. For them, The Apostle included not ten but thirteen Pauline letters, and not Pauline letters only, but letters of other ‘apostolic men’ as well. And, linking The Gospel and The Apostle was now seen to have greater importance than ever, for not only did it validate Paul’s claims but it validated the authority of the original apostles; those whom Marcion had repudiated as false apostles and corruptors of truth as it is in Jesus. The position of Acts as the key-stone in the arch of the Christian canon was confirmed.’\textsuperscript{735}

Bruce further states that Luke’s vindication of Paul, as a true Apostle, was not his primary purpose in writing Acts:

“Luke does in passing, show that Paul’s commission was as valid as Peter’s, and that both men were equally faithful to their commission. But these secondary aspects of his work acquired special importance in the second century, in view of the Marcionite’s tendency to claim Paul peculiarly for themselves, and also in view of tendencies in other quarters to play down Paul’s record in the interests of Peter’s or James’s. Tertullian, for example, points out the inconsistency of those sectarian (the Marcionites in particular, no doubt) who rejected the testimony of Acts, but appealed so confidently to the unique authority of Paul. ‘You must show us first of all who this Paul was,’ he says to them. ‘What was he before he became an apostle? How did he become an apostle?’”\textsuperscript{736}

‘Paul in his letters gives his own answer to such questions, but for the independent corroboration one would naturally appeal to Acts, when once that work had been published. But this the Marcionites could not do: Acts did vindicate the claims made by and for Paul, indeed, but since it simultaneously vindicated claims made by and for Peter, its testimony was unacceptable. Acts shows…Peter and the rest of the Twelve were true and faithful apostles of Jesus Christ (which the Marcionites denied).’\textsuperscript{737}

Christians today who say that Acts cannot be trusted as a faithful theological witness are part of the family of Marcion, whether they know their distant relative or not. They, like Marcion, discredit Luke to suit their own false theology and ‘run to Paul!’—yet Bruce, to his eternal credit, even with his anti-Law theology, sees Paul in the Book of Acts as fully Law-observer. He writes:

‘Christianity’ for Luke is ‘no innovation, but the proper fulfillment of Israel’s religion. He is at pains to present Paul as a loyal and law-abiding Jew. This comes out particularly in

\textsuperscript{734} Ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{735} Ibid., pp. 4-5.
\textsuperscript{736} Ibid., p. 14.
\textsuperscript{737} Ibid.
the speeches made by Paul in his own defense in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome. In those apologetic speeches...Paul claims to believe everything in the law and the prophets and to have done nothing contrary to Israel’s ancestral customs. The one point at issue between him and his accusers is the resurrection faith: by this he means the faith that Jesus rose from the dead...Jesus’ resurrection is for him the confirmation of the Jews’ national hope.

F. F. Bruce couldn’t find the ‘Paul of the Church’ in the Book of Acts, but he helps to confirm that Mosaic Law is for every Christian. With Paul being Torah-observant all his life, how can anyone possibly think that it’s theologically wrong to keep the Law, especially when Paul writes of ‘imitating’ or ‘following’ him as he followed Christ?

Marshall, too, believes that the Book of Acts is very reliable, but first he states that Luke has taken a lot of ungodly criticism (character assassination) because of his presentation of Paul as Law-observant. In speaking of Ernst Haenchen’s ‘mammoth commentary on Acts,’ Marshall writes,

‘Anyone who may have thought that R. Bultmann represented the ultimate in historical scepticism in regards to the New Testament was in for a shock...The result was that Luke’s historical accuracy was apparently torn in shreds; the narrative was claimed to have little basis in tradition, and to be full of historical inconsistencies and improbabilities, and to be basically the product of the fertile mind of a historical novelist with little or no concern for such tiresome things as facts.’

Marshall refutes Haenchen’s claim from a number of authoritative sources and states that Luke’s historical background was exceptionally accurate:

‘One of the major contributions of Ramsay to Lucan study was his demonstration that on matters of detailed historical background Luke shows remarkable accuracy.’

Marshall then cites the work of A. Sherwin-White who speaks of Luke’s reliability in relation to Rome and her culture. He says Acts demonstrates,

‘that for the most part Luke portrays the first-century Roman scene accurately. The conclusion to be drawn is that if Luke is right about the details of the story, he is likely also to be right about the main episodes.’

Marshall goes on to say that although the speeches in Acts are not verbatim, as no one had recording devices in that day, they are nevertheless accurate portrayals of what Peter, Paul and the rest said:

‘British scholarship has in general defended the view that the various speeches placed in the mouths of Peter, Paul and others were, if not verbatim accounts of what was actually said, at least compositions based on tradition and expressing the structure and the details of the earliest Christian preaching.'
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We may not know every word that was literally spoken, but we can be sure that what Luke writes is an accurate representation of the substance of the speeches, and therefore, what is written about Paul in Acts, regarding his Nazarite Vows and his position on Mosaic Law, confirm that Paul kept the Law of Moses all his life. In zeroing in on ‘the problem’ (Paul’s Law observance), Marshall writes:

‘It is this point, perhaps more than any other, which has led to skeptical estimates of the historical value of Acts. The case against Luke is summarized in an essay by P. Vielhauer which argued that Luke’s presentation of Paul’s attitude to natural theology, to the Jewish law, to Christology and to eschatology was quite inconsistent with the picture that we get from Paul’s own letters. This article has had an extraordinary influence in persuading scholars of the unhistorical character of Acts. In fact, however, the case has been strongly criticized, and in our opinion convincingly destroyed, in a brief discussion by E. E. Ellis. Some general observations by F. F. Bruce confirm the point. This is not to say that there are no points of tension between Luke’s portrait of Paul and his own writings; it is to affirm that in our opinion they are not so substantial as to make us dismiss Acts as unhistorical.’

‘The effect of our…comments is to show that there is a strong case for regarding Acts as an essentially reliable account of what it reports.’

Acts is reliable. Can it be, then, that Church scholarship has misunderstood and misinterpreted Paul’s letters concerning his thoughts on the Law of Moses in relation to a biblical lifestyle? Indeed, this is the case. What Luke writes about Paul’s Torah observance is a biblical fact. It’s also an extremely powerful refutation to anyone who claims that Paul did away with the Law, or that we ‘cannot take theology’ from the Book of Acts.

Did the Apostles ever stop worshiping at the Temple in Jerusalem because ‘sacrifice was done away with by the one-time sacrifice of Yeshua’? Did Paul think that the Temple was no longer valid because believers ‘are the Temple of God’? The Book of Acts upholds God’s Torah, His Temple and sacrifice in Jerusalem at the Temple—with the Apostle Paul leading the way!

Some scholars and commentators, though, stuck in Church theology, say that the Lord’s Apostles, many years after the resurrection, still didn’t realize that Torah, Temple worship and sacrifice were no longer necessary or good! After stating that the Temple in Jerusalem would be superseded by the Body of believers, R. J. McKelvey writes,

‘Some time elapsed, however, before the full ramifications of the work of Christ became apparent, and in Acts we find the apostles continuing to worship at the Temple of

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748 Ibid., p. 43.
749 Ibid.
750 Three times Paul speaks of believers being the Temple of God (1st Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2nd Cor. 6:16).
McKelvey would have us believe that Stephen was gifted with knowledge that neither Peter nor Paul ever had. Marcion would have been proud of Mr. McKelvey. Here is a Christian scholar interpreting the Book of Acts to suit his theology. There’s no mention in Acts, or anywhere else for that matter, that it was wrong for the Apostles, including Paul, to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, or that they would later come to some ‘greater understanding’ that Temple sacrifice and Torah keeping weren’t right. Could it be that the Holy Spirit forgot to have someone mention those monumental points to the Apostles? According to many Church scholars like McKelvey the answer is ‘Yes.’

As for McKelvey’s alleged ‘insight,’ that Stephen and his ‘Hellenistic-Jewish party’ had, Witherington, in his own analysis of Acts Seven, writes that Stephen is not coming against either the Law or the Temple. He was chastising the Jewish leadership for failing to keep the Law and the Prophets!

‘Clearly enough, Stephen believes the Law and indeed all of Scripture to be God’s word, and so the ultimate indictment is that God’s people have failed to keep it, including the prophetic portions which foretold the Righteous One. Stephen’s speech is not Law or temple critical, it is people critical on the basis of the Law and the Prophets.’

Witherington writes that Stephen didn’t think that the Temple or sacrifice were abrogated by the sacrificial death of Yeshua. Stephen says nothing against the Temple, but against the Jewish leadership—a leadership that refused God’s Messiah even though they said that they believed in God. Witherington shows us that McKelvey’s understanding of the passage is not that of Stephen’s nor the Lord’s.

Bruce and Marshall don’t keep, or are even sympathetic to keeping, the Law of Moses. On the contrary, they both believe the Law to have been done away with, but this only confirms Torah for all believers

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752 Yeshua speaks of the Father looking for those to worship Him in Spirit and Truth, and of the time that was coming when it wouldn’t be possible to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem (Jn. 4:21-23), but this doesn’t negate Temple sacrifice. This is clear from Yeshua’s words, and Acts (where it’s written that believers met daily in the Temple), and Ezekiel’s Millennial Temple (Ezk. 40–48), where sacrifice is a daily reality.

Some might point to the Letter to the Hebrews, but again proper interpretation of the Letter is essential for understanding what the author is presenting. For instance, although Heb. 8:13 says that the Old Covenant is obsolete, it doesn’t say that it has disappeared, but that it is ready to disappear. The writer, like the Apostles, believed that the End was near and that Yeshua was going to return in his lifetime. When the Body of Messiah is glorified, Mosaic Law will no longer be needed because all believers will be glorified like Messiah Yeshua and truly have the Law written ‘on their hearts’ (Jer. 31:31-34). Until then, Mosaic Law remains valid for all believers (Mt. 5:17-19; Lk. 16:16; Rev. 12:17; 14:12).


754 Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 285, speaks of a ‘law-free gospel.’ He interprets Acts 10 as the ‘abrogation of ceremonial food laws’ (p. 206) saying that it actually began when Jesus declared ‘all foods clean’ in Mark 7:14-19. Bruce, though, has clearly misunderstood the text. The KJV rightly translates Mark 7:19, ‘Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?’ Also, just from Peter’s words in Acts (10:14, 28, 34-35; 11:8) we know that Peter didn’t think that Yeshua had declared all foods clean because Peter had never eaten anything unclean. Marshall, *Acts*, pp. 180-181, 198, also misinterprets Pe-
by two significant scholars who don’t follow it. They have shown that even Paul, and of course all the other Apostles and believers, kept Mosaic Law throughout the time frame of Acts (30-64 AD). Luke does us a tremendous service in reporting Paul’s Torah lifestyle. Most likely he emphasized this in order to squelch the malicious rumor that Paul didn’t keep the Law (Acts 21:21).

The Book of Acts is divinely inspired, accurate and very reliable. There is nothing in it that speaks of the Law’s demise or even hints at it. On the contrary, there are numerous places where Mosaic Law is strongly upheld, and that, by the Apostle Paul—the very one whom the Church declares did away with it!

The Book of Acts is a trustworthy historical-theological narrative from which we can base theology upon. Those who say that theology cannot be taken from the Book of Acts, may not realize it, but they’re members ‘in good standing’ in the Church of Marcion.

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755 Another major indication that the Law hadn’t been abrogated is Luke’s use of the Feasts of Israel as time markers. In Acts 20:6 Paul and his friends spend the days of Unleavened Bread (Passover week) at Philippi. In Acts 20:16 Paul is hurrying to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost (the Feast of Weeks; Lev. 23:15-21; Dt. 16:16). In Acts 27:9 Luke speaks of inadvisable sailing weather because ‘the Fast’ (the Day of Atonement; Lev. 16:1-34; 23:26-32) had already passed. Why would Luke, a Gentile, use the Feasts as time markers for his Gentile audience unless the Law was still valid? Paul, too, uses the Feasts as time markers. The Apostle writes in 1st Cor. 16:8 of staying in Ephesus until Pentecost. First Corinthians was written about 53 AD, while the Book of Acts was written about 64 AD. In other words, the Apostle to the Gentiles first used the Feasts of Israel as time markers. See The Feasts of Israel and the Church and The Feasts of Israel as Time Markers After the Resurrection.
REALITY RAMIFICATIONS

Many Christians love Jesus with all their heart, but in ignorance eat pig, assemble on Sunday and keep Easter and Xmas, etc. The Apostle Paul pleaded with the Corinthians involved in cult harlotry and didn’t immediately cast them out of the congregation because they were only babes in understanding the Word. They did it in their pride and ignorance, and he wanted them to repent.

Today the Lord is calling His people to stop all pagan practices and learn to walk in His Torah (His Instructions for living). The admonition in Revelation ‘to come out of her My people’ reveals Yeshua’s desire for His people to stop practicing the ways of darkness, thinking that it’s His Light:

“And he cried out with a mighty voice saying, ‘Fallen!, Fallen!, is Babylon the Great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her prostitution and the kings of the Earth have committed acts of harlotry with her and the merchants of the Earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.’”

“I heard another voice from the Heavens saying, ‘Come out of her My people! So that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues, for her sins have piled up as high as the Heavens and God has remembered her iniquities!’” (Rev. 18:2-5)

Understanding God’s Word, from His perspective, brings greater discernment of what is right and what is wrong according to Him. The Holy Spirit is wanting the Bride to get ready for Messiah Yeshua. My own wife, Ruti, said,

‘God is not a polygamist. He wants one people, one Bride. That’s why Torah and the Sabbath are also for the Gentile—the Gentile coming into, and becoming one with Israel, not Israel going out and becoming pagan. The wild olive branch is grafted into the natural olive tree, and not the other way around.”

Many say they don’t have to keep the Mosaic commandments, but they don’t realize that the commandments are God’s blessing and safety for us. They are God’s wisdom for us. Mosaic Law is the verbal reflection of the One who gave it and its authority is established (Dt. 4:5-8; 2nd Tim. 3:14-17).

Torah is for all followers of Yeshua, Jew and Gentile. For a biblical Gentile community to assemble together they would all have to come together on the Sabbath. For them to celebrate the time when the Passover Lamb was slain for their freedom they would celebrate Passover (1st Cor. 5:6-8). They would even come to the understanding that if they had a house with a flat roof (to walk on), they would want a parapet on it (a type of fence or railing so that people wouldn’t accidentally fall over the edge).

Many a Gentile finds himself as the ‘only one’ that sees the significance of Torah. Spouse, friends and church haven’t been touched by this. It’s very lonely, but this is similar to how Father Abraham felt when God told him to leave the people and lands he knew behind him (Gen. 12:1-4). We are to follow Yeshua and trust Him. It’s designed to be a precious time of spiritual growth into His Image.

756 Rom. 11:15-29.
757 Quote from Ruti Yehoshua (Jerusalem, Israel, 16 December 1996).
758 Dt. 22:8: ‘When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof so that you will not bring blood guilt’ (murder) ‘on your house if anyone falls from it.’
**Reality Ramifications**

The Church needs to repent of its anti-Law theology and turn from its pagan ways to the Word of God. Sunday and Christmas, etc., are pagan, anti-God and anti-Semitic. They have no biblical basis. They should be thrown out and replaced with God’s holy times and ways. This would also cause Jews to be astonished and take a second look at Messiah Yeshua.

Idolatry of any kind must not be practiced. Yeshua calls His people to be holy (1st Peter 1:13-19). The New Age movement dates all the way back to ancient Babylon. It’s sorcery in modern clothes. As King Solomon once wrote, ‘There’s nothing new under the sun’ (Eccl. 1:9c). Transcendental meditation is sweeping the Western world, with people ignorantly using mantras, and thereby, invoking demons.

On some continents ancestor worship still exists among Christians. Reading the daily horoscope (astrology), Tarot cards, Ouija boards, crystals, beads, pyramids and Eastern religions (Islam, Zen, Buddhism, etc.) are all part of the lure of the satanic Fisherman. Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah) is of Satan. Harry Potter, magic, Dungeons & Dragons and all other so-called fantasy books and games are open doors into the Kingdom of Darkness (Lev. 19:26; Dt. 18:9-14; Acts 19:11-20). These sins need to be repented of and renounced ‘by the blood of Yeshua.’ Ask Messiah Yeshua to sever all connections with those people, spirits and practices and to fill you with His Holy Spirit and His ways.

**A Word about Torah**

Some people might want to stone the blasphemer (Lev. 24:16) and perform other such acts of zealous righteousness, but there are a few considerations to take into account before the first stone is thrown. The Law was given to a nation that was a theocracy. Yahveh literally directed Israel through His Torah, His High Priest Aaron, His mediator-king (Moses) and His Shekinah Glory Cloud. There was no authority but His. Under Joshua and King David it was similar, but not so in the days of Messiah Yeshua when the Jewish people were ruled by Rome. That’s why the Sanhedrin needed permission from Rome (Pilate) to have Yeshua crucified (murdered). They didn’t have authority to enact the death penalty.

For the person to be stoned in King David’s day the man would first have to be brought to the town’s elders to be judged. It wasn’t the responsibility of any one individual ‘to take the law into his own hands.’ For instance, if a believing Gentile in Corinth had speared the believing Gentile who had been involved in incestuous cult prostitution (1st Cor. 5:1f.), he would have been arrested, tried for murder in a Corinthian (Roman) court, found guilty and executed. They wouldn’t have awarded him the Covenant of Peace, as God gave to Phineas for his zeal (Num. 25:11-12).

Paul gave sinners time to repent (e.g. the ones accused of drinking the cup of demons, and those involved in cult prostitution, etc.), but regarding the one who had had intercourse with his father’s wife, Paul demanded that he be cast out of the congregation (1st Cor. 5:1-5; perhaps Paul only knew the specifics of this man, hence, why no similar action was taken against the others?). Not repenting of it would have meant eternity in Hell for him.

This is just one example of how Torah is affected or ‘shifts’ in a nation that is not Torah-observant, but we must be equally aware that we’re not to spiritualize the commandants (i.e. just to look for the principles

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759 See Kabbalah, which is Babylonian witchcraft in Jewish clothes.

760 In killing Zimri and Cozbi, Phineas followed the judgement of God, as given to Moses (Num. 25:4-5), and as a priest, Phineas was also a judge who had authority to act (Dt. 17:8-13).
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‘behind them’ and do these instead of the commandments themselves.761 This is not the primary reason why the commandments were given. The commandments are still in effect unless something overrides them, like circumcising a Jewish son on the Sabbath day (Jn. 7:21-24).

Yeshua came to reveal the deeper meaning or essence of Torah, but He didn’t do away with any of it.762 He unveiled the commandment not to murder by revealing that hate was its essence—but the commandment not to murder still stands. Yeshua revealed the divine essence of the commandments for us in His Kingdom. That’s how Paul could say that the Law of Moses is spiritual.763 The commandments are God’s spiritual pillars of righteousness. or right living.

The Holy Spirit is preparing the Bride of Messiah by taking the veil away from her eyes so that she can see the beauty of God’s holy Torah, which is a divine reflection of Yeshua. That’s why Acts 15:20-21 needs to be seen for what it is—the passage in the New Testament, after the resurrection, that brings the Gentile into Torah so he can walk alongside his believing Jewish brethren who are walking the same way. This is what makes Acts 15 truly epoch-making in our day!

### An Insight

These next set of quotes are excerpts from a letter of my wife, Ruti, to a friend of hers. She speaks of what God desires for His people Israel:

‘The Jewish man who comes to faith in Messiah Yeshua has a dilemma. Where can he go for fellowship and remain true to the God of Israel and the Hebraic understanding? If he remains in the unbelieving Jewish community he is polluted and adulterated by the anti-Christ spirit that permeates Judaism. This includes Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah) that is interwoven into the writings, and the manic-mitzvah764 oriented belief system, which is a poor substitute for the Blood of Assurance andRuach haKodesh’ (the Holy Spirit).

‘If, on the other hand, he goes into the Gentile Church (and this includes many of the Messianic fellowships), he must enter a form of worship and practice that is scripturally unsound (anti-Torah) and anti-Semitic in attitude. Sunday, Easter, Thanksgiving765 and Christmas are all pagan, as well as the symbols of the cross,766 the fish,767 the Star of

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761 For instance, to try and keep Sunday as the Sabbath by not working on it, but resting, etc. The problem is that God never said one could change His holy day (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11, etc.) by shifting its concept to another day. Some Christians think they can, quoting Romans 14:5-6, but it speaks of choosing one’s days for fasting, not which day one can keep for his ‘Sabbath.’ (See Romans 14 and the Dietary Laws)

762 Mt. 5:17-19; 22:35-40; Lk. 16:16-17; John 10:35: ‘and Scripture cannot be broken;’ Rom. 3:31; 1st Cor. 7:17-19; Heb. 8:13; Rev. 12:17; 14:12, etc.

763 Romans 7:14.

764 Mitzva is the Hebrew word for ‘commandment.’ The word has also come to mean a ‘good deed’ in terms of keeping the commandments. Jewish people do ‘mitzvot’ (plural; good deeds) in their desire to be seen as righteous and to merit eternal life.

765 See Thanksgiving Day—Pagan?

766 Hislop, The Two Babylons, pp. 197-205.

767 The word for fish in Greek is ψαρός (ick’thus). It’s an acronym: each Greek letter has been made to represent a word meaning: Jesus Christ God’s Son Savior. In Hebrew the word for the fish god was Dagon דגון (dah’ goan).
Reality Ramifications

David,768 and the so-called ‘pictures of Jesus,’ etc. Yeshua is leading the called out Jews and Gentiles to a Torah lifestyle rich in biblical Hebraic expression. God Himself is the Author of this Hebraic expression because it’s His essence and His heart. As we surrender ourselves to doing the will of the Father, which is Yeshua’s heart, Ruach haKodesh will lead us to leave both perversed Camps. This doesn’t mean that those Camps are devoid of

Half fish and half man, it fell down and broke into pieces in front of the Ark of the Covenant of the God of Israel (1st Sam. 5:1f.). Dagon is identified with Bacchus, who was known as Ichthys (the fish god) many centuries before Jesus was born. Hislop, The Two Babylons, p. 247 and note 6 states that it was, “From about AD 360, to the time of the Emperor Justinian, about 550...that our Lord Jesus Christ began to be popularly called Ichthys, that is, ‘the Fish,’ manifestly to identify him with Dagon.”

Dagon was also known by other names. Hislop writes that, “Saturn and Lateinos are just synonymous, having precisely the same meaning and belonging equally to the same god. The reader cannot have forgotten the lines of Virgil, which showed that Lateinos, to whom the Romans or Latin race traced back their lineage, was represented with a glory around his head, to show that he was a ‘child of the Sun’ (god). Thus...it is evident that in popular opinion the original Lateinos had occupied the very same position as Saturn did in the Mysteries, who was equally worshipped as the ‘offspring of the Sun.’ Moreover, it is evident that the Romans knew that the name ‘Lateinos’ signifies the ‘Hidden One,’ for their antiquarians invariably affirm that Latium received its name from Saturn ‘lying hid’ there. On etymological grounds then, even on the testimony of the Romans, Lateinos is equivalent to the ‘Hidden One,’ that is, to Saturn, the ‘god of Mystery’” (ibid., p. 270).

“Latium Latinus (the Roman form of the Greek Lateinos), and Lateo, ‘to lie hid,’ all alike come from the Chaldee ‘Lat,’ which has the same meaning...The name ‘lat’ or the hidden one, had evidently been given, as well as Saturn, to the great Babylonian god. This is evident from the name of the fish Latus, which was worshipped along with the Egyptian Minerva, in the city of Latopolis in Egypt, now Esneh (Wilkinson, Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians, vol. iv. p. 284, and vol. v. p. 253), that fish Latus evidently just being another name for the fish-god Dagon” (ibid., note §).

“Ichthys, or the Fish, was one of the names of Bacchus, and the Assyrian goddess Atergatis, with her son Ichthysis, is said to have been cast into the lake of Ascalon (Vossius de Idololatria, lib. i. cap. xxiii. p. 89, also Athenaeus, lib. viii. cap. viii. p. 346, E). That the sun-god Apollo had been known under the name of Lat, may be inferred from the Greek name of his mother-wife Leto, or in Doric, Lato, which is just the feminine of Lat. The Roman name Latona confirms this, for it signifies ‘The lamenter of Lat,’ as Bellona signifies ‘The lamenter of Bel.’

“To identify Nimrod with Oannes, mentioned by Berosus, as appearing out of the sea, it will be remembered that Nimrod has been proved to be Bacchus. Then, for proof that Nimrod or Bacchus, on being overcome by his enemies, was fabled to have taken refuge in the sea, see Chapter IV, Section I, p. 129f. When, therefore, he was represented as reappearing, it was natural that he should reappear in the very character of Oannes, as a Fish-god. Now, Jerome calls Dagon, the well known Fish-god Piscem moeroris (Bryant, Mythology, vol. iii. p. 179) ‘the fish of sorrow,’ which goes far to identify that Fish-god with Bacchus, the ‘Lamented one,’ and the identification is complete when Hesychius tells us that some called Bacchus Ichthys or ‘The fish’ (Lexicon, sub voce ‘Bacchos,’ p. 179); Hislop, The Two Babylons, p. 114, note 8.

There are some who say that the Philistine Dagon wasn’t a fish god, but a god of grain, as the Hebrew word for grain 137 (dah’gahm) and ‘fish’ 27 (dahg) come from the same Hebrew verb, which means ‘to multiply.’ Davidson, The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon, p. 146, states that Dagon was a ‘large fish,’ properly the ‘name of an idol of the Philistines worshipped at Ashdod.’ He writes that a noun can also mean ‘grain.’ There was a Dagon in Mesopotamia who was a god of grain, but it seems that the Philistines, who lived by the Mediterranean Sea, had Dagon as their fish god.

Brown, NBDBG, p. 186: In 1st Sam. 5:4, when Dagon had fallen down with hands and head cut off before the Ark of the Covenant, the trunk (body) of Dagon is literally called his ‘fishy part’ (as it was made in the form of a fish). However one might understand the Philistine Dagon, the reality remains that Ichthys was the name of at least two pagan gods and worshipped as such. The name Ichthys only began to be identified with Jesus, late in the fourth century, and that, by the Roman Catholic Church...so why do Christians, who profess to follow the Word of God, have a fish symbol on their car bumpers and Bibles? Where in Scripture is Jesus ever symbolized as a
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helping us in our walk, but in these things we need to look to Him for His guidance, seeking only to please Him. We are no longer our own, but have been bought by His precious blood and delivered out of darkness to serve Him in the newness of His Spirit within us.’

‘I believe the Ruach’ (Spirit) ‘is showing us today that the Gentile believer is also called to serve the Jewish people. How is this walked out? By coming out of Babylonian (Church) practices and moving into obedience of the Torah of the God of Israel, led by His Spirit. This way the Jewish unbeliever who is coming to faith in Yeshua is not made to stumble, but is rightly, truthfully restored to his or her God through His Son, the Messiah, who does not look nor act pagan. This, of course, holds true for the Gentiles coming to Messiah as well, that they are not led into pagan practices, either.’

‘We are created to reflect God and His Truth. Let us walk hand in hand as one people with the One who is Truth.’

The Holy Spirit wants all Christians to emulate Jesus, from the inside-out. The Church’s anti-Mosaic Law teaching has desensitized Christians to pagan holy days and and pagan ways, and they have become ‘Christianized.’ How can one tell if something is pagan or not? What is the standard by which to judge things? The holy Scriptures correctly understood.

Pagans were worshiping their gods a certain way one day, and the next, the Roman Catholic Church took it and ‘baptized’ it for its people. When the Protestants came along they blindly followed many of Rome’s practices and theologies. This is the problem when one throws out the standard of Torah. It creates an ignorance and a vacuum for satanic things to come in, and make no mistake about it: Sunday, Easter, Xmas and eating pig, etc., is demonic: it’s Satan’s counterfeits to God’s days and ways.

The Roman Catholic Church filled the vacuum with those satanic ‘holy days’ and concepts, and today, most Christians believe that these pagan days and ways are of God. When many find out otherwise, tradition is so strong that they don’t believe it. The veil is still over their eyes.

The Torah of Yahveh is the standard by which to judge religious concepts and practices. If people would read Torah they would know that God has given us His standard with His holy days and dietary laws, etc., and they would come to see the conflict between what the Church teaches and what God commands for those who believe in Yeshua. The Torah of Yahveh is not only the first five books of the Bible, but all the Bible, especially the words of Yeshua, and the rest of the New Covenant, as seen through the eyes of Yeshua, not the anti-Torah Church.

The God of Israel is not pleased with what the Church has done. This is clearly seen in the admonitions that He has given to Israel (Dt. 12:28-32; Acts 20:25-35; 2nd Tim. 3:16-17; 2nd Pet. 3:14-18; Rev. 18:2-5). With Torah observance each believer can have a fuller walk with Yeshua and be a greater Light unto both the Jew and the Gentile that need to come to Messiah Yeshua.

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Fish or Ichthys? Yeshua is the Lamb of God, not the Fish of God. Hislop’s theme is that the Roman Catholic Church is a bastion of Babylonian paganism and is the Babylon of the New Testament (Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21). Hislop’s book is a ‘must read’ for every Christian because it overwhelmingly proves that the Roman Catholic Church is not a Christian church.

768 See The Star of David for an understanding of why believers should not wear it, and read Jesus the Fish God? for why believers shouldn’t wear the fish symbol, either. (These two articles negate the so-called ‘Messianic Seal.’)

Reality Ramifications

Some Advice

Our carnal hearts continually wander from the attitude of sacrificial service and ‘washing the feet’ of the brethren, which is Yeshua’s heart and attitude. When we walk in this attitude the rest of Torah is easy to do. God doesn’t expect us to walk in all the rules of Torah overnight, but He does expect us to begin. He wants us to grasp the concept that all the Law that applies to us is for us. In keeping His commandments and rules, in being aware when we break them or sin, we are saying to Abba El (Papa God) that we recognize His Authority to govern our lives. He knows what is good for us, and what is sin and will destroy us. Walk in His Torah and let His Spirit lead you.

Torah is commanded, not suggested. If God demands it of us, we want to acknowledge this in our heart and not give way to the teaching of the Church nor the ‘wearing away’ of our belief by ‘well-meaning’ friends who think otherwise. This isn’t forcing someone to do His commandments; that’s not His way. It’s being honest about what is required and expected of us (cf. Luke 17:10). This is the target or the goal—to do His will in all areas of our life with the ever-present help of the Holy Spirit.

Please don’t try to do all the commandments at once. Read the Word daily and include Torah in it. The Lord will lead you into observing the commandments at a godly pace. Trying to do them all ‘yesterday’ will only bring confusion and disappointment. Trust Yeshua. He will guide you, strengthen your walk and deepen your understanding of Him and His Word.

Don’t let legalism stop you. Fear of legalism is a stumbling block for some. Under the guise of caution there’s little to no movement toward the doing of the commandments. Legalism is the strict enforcing or perversion of a law. Legalism is not equal to the Law (except in the mind of too many Christians). If you’re driving 61 miles per hour in a 60 mph zone and a policeman gives you a ticket, that’s legalism—but the law is good. The Law was given so there won’t be chaos and accidents on the Highway of Life.

There were times that Yeshua had to correct me concerning a legalistic attitude. A heart that is open to Him will be led into His ways.

If you’re afraid of making a mistake or fear becoming legalistic, you’ve already sinned by being afraid. Don’t be afraid (Mk. 5:35-36). Deal with the fear. Take it to your Father, who is gracious in forgiving and in granting wisdom and strength to overcome the fear. He delights in setting us free!

Legalism is part of what we have to deal with in our lives. Legalism is part of our carnality. We are going to make mistakes. God allows this as part of our experiential training in righteousness. We must come to Him and His Torah as little children. No one has all the answers, but oh what joy there is in discovering some of them!

Keeping the Sabbath is not legalism. It’s God’s law and blessing for His chosen people Israel, both Jew and Gentile. Yeshua kept the Sabbath day holy all His life and He never did it legalistically. He has given us His Spirit that we might follow His example.

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770 John 13:14-17, 34-35.
771 There are many commandments that apply to only certain individuals. The commandment of the parapet is only directed to those who have houses with a flat roof to walk on. If one doesn’t have a house with a roof on which people can walk, one isn’t expected to observe or to fulfill this commandment.
772 For a divine Scripture reading plan see the Scripture Reading Schedule.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

Our understanding is faulty. That’s why (His) love covers a multitude of sins. We should be excited with joy that He is teaching us His Torah (Genesis through Revelation). He will correct us as we walk with Him. He’s a good Abba (Papa). Our learning Torah is like a child going with his Abba to the park on an adventure. He will take good care of us.

The teachings of the Rabbis can be insightful. They can flesh out understanding of a commandment or a passage of Scripture, but realize that the Rabbis can be very wrong, extremely shallow and perverse (Mt. 16:5-12; 23:1-36). Be careful. Pray before swallowing. If you’re not sure, or if you want another opinion, feel free to contact me.

I’ve seen too many sincere Christians fall into the tar pits of Judaism; a Judaism that has been anti-Christ since the Gold Calf debacle. Also, without the infilling of His Spirit, we all too easily fall prey to the spiritual Magician who loves to seduce and lead astray to damnation. If you don’t have the infilling of the Holy Spirit, seek it diligently! Study the Word (2nd Tim. 2:15). Learn Hebrew. It will open up hidden treasures for you. Yes, I know it’s difficult, but the rewards are sweet.

To abstain from all unclean animals is Torah. To ‘keep kosher’ the Jewish way is both Torah and devastatingly rabbinic. There’s a big difference. The Rabbis have added much of their leaven to the Word and have perverted the laws. God wants us to eat only meat that is clean according to His Torah. ‘Keeping kosher’ means different things to God and Orthodox Judaism. One of the differences is that the observant Jewish community does not allow the eating of dairy and meat together, but this is not scriptural. A faulty rabbinic interpretation of Ex. 23:19 is the reason for this. Judaism also requires different dishes for dairy and meat meals, even though neither the meat that they eat, nor the dairy, is unclean.

773 For an outline of some of the idolatrous and perverted things of Judaism see Jewish Idolatry and also, God—The Missing ‘o’, Talmud and Authority, The Kipa and Kosher—Biblical vs Jewish.

774 See p. 227 for contact information.

775 See Kosher—Biblical vs Jewish for why the Rabbis are wrong about the separation of meat and dairy foods.

776 The Jewish view of Ex. 23:19 (of not boiling a kid in its mother’s milk) is that one should not eat meat and dairy together, thus avoiding the possibility of eating the meat of the kid and the milk of the mother together. Of course, the possibility exists that one can eat the meat of the kid and the milk of the mother at different times. Extending the rabbinic interpretation to all meat and dairy, one finds the impossible situation of chickens, which don’t give milk, but are nevertheless prohibited from being eaten with dairy products.

The Rabbis have misunderstood Ex. 23:19. It has nothing to do with the separation of meat and dairy, but with an ancient pagan fertility rite. This prohibition comes immediately after the fall harvest, the Feast of Tabernacles (Ex. 23:16, 19; 34:22, 26), or just before it (Dt. 14:21-27). The prohibition was aimed at stopping Israel from copying the magical procedure of the pagans, in the hope that their future harvest would be bountiful.

Freeman, Manners and Customs of the Bible, p. 73, #133 states, this ‘injunction is put in connection with sacrifices and festivals’ (and not a dietary regulation). The seething of a kid in his mother’s milk was an idolatrous practice done ‘for the purpose of making trees and fields more fruitful the following year…on the authority of an ancient Karaite comment on the Pentateuch…it was an ancient heathen custom to boil a kid in the dam’s milk and then besprinkle with it all the trees, fields, gardens and orchards.’

Pfeiffer, WBC, p. 73 states, ‘in the Ugarit literature discovered in 1930 it was learned that boiling a kid in its mother’s milk was a Canaanite practice used in connection with fertility rites (Birth of the Gods, 1:14).’

Harris, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, vol. I, p. 285, writes, “Since a Ugaritic text (UT 16: Text no. 52:14) specifies, ‘They cook a kid in milk…the biblical injunction’ was ‘directed against a Canaanite fertility rite.’”

777 The eating of dairy with meat is strictly forbidden by the Rabbis, but this isn’t found anywhere in Scripture. This
Reality Ramifications

If God leads you, go to a synagogue service. Tell anyone at the synagogue, who asks you why you’re there, that you’ve found the Messiah of Israel and He’s leading you to keep Torah. Don’t expect accolades, but perhaps you can attend their worship services and learn Hebrew. Don’t be afraid to be a living witness for Yeshua to the Jewish people. They need to know, but realize that your Scripture witness should spring from the Tanach, not the New Testament, as the Jewish people don’t believe in the New Testament. Realize, too, that you might be asked to leave. Do so in a godly and loving manner.

Most Christians today don’t fully understand how pervasive pagan worship was in Yakov’s day. All the world was deeply involved in it. From Chile to China and from Ireland to India, all the world was enslaved to pagan gods and goddesses and their cruel practices. The names of the gods and goddesses would change in each country, but what tied them all together was their similar rites, practices, ceremonies and doctrines, which all stemmed from Babylon. For an excellent account of this, read Alexander Hislop’s Christian classic, The Two Babylons.

Rabbinically, the Law, symbolized in circumcision, was necessary for eternal life. This false teaching is mimicked by the Catholic Church with its (sprinkling) baptism. Circumcision, though, was given to Abraham as a sign of his covenant relationship with God. He was already walking with God (Genesis 12, 15, 17). Circumcision was the sign of his faith, not the guarantee of it. God expected Jewish infants to grow in their faith.

Water baptism is a picture or sign of being Born Again as a new creature; one that is destined to be like Yeshua is now, glorified (2nd Peter 1:4; 2nd Cor. 5:17). Believers, too, must grow in their faith. Yeshua, coming up out of the waters of His baptism pictured His coming forth or being begotten by His Father (Jn. 8:42; 16:27-28; 17:8) as the Word and the Light of Gen. 1:3. In Hebrew it speaks of the Spirit fluttering, like a bird, over the waters, whose waters pictured the Father. He said, ‘Let there be Light!’ (Gen. 1:2-3), and Yeshua came forth from those Waters. This was reenacted when He came up out of the waters of His baptism, the Spirit alighting upon Him as a dove and the voice of His Father proclaiming His Son.

We’re called to walk in an intimate relationship with God, to keep His Torah and to teach our children to walk in it (Dt. 6:4-7f.). As we do this we are their example and are preparing them to worship the King in the way that He desires when He comes to rule for 1,000 years upon this Earth in the city of Jerusalem (Rev 20:6). It’s time for God’s people Israel, both Jew and Gentile who love Yeshua with all their heart, to come out of Babylon and all her ways of darkness, as God commands in Rev. 18:4:

“And I heard another Voice from Heaven saying, ‘Come out of her My people!, so that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues!’”

rabbinc prohibition is perverse because it sets up something as sin, which God doesn’t call sin. The separation of meat and dairy dishes, pots and pans, etc., stems from the ruling to separate meat from dairy. This is part of ‘Kosher the Orthodox Jewish way,’ but it isn’t found in God’s Word. On the contrary, Father Abraham served the Lord and two angels meat and dairy at the same meal and they ate it (Gen. 18:8).

778 See BOOKS AND CDS for my Hebrew course and audio teachings on holiness, etc.

779 See the 36 Jewish Newsletters at The Seed of Abraham under JEWISH NEWSL and The Prophecy Card for tools to use and information to share with Jewish people about their Messiah.

780 See Sam the Rock Thrower for how to witness to a Jewish person, and also, p. 201, note 779.

781 Read and/or download The Two Babylons for free at The Two Babylons—The Full Hislop.

782 For the Father, pictured as water, see Gen. 1:2-10; Psalm 104:3; 148:4; Is. 8:6; 55:1; Jer. 51:16; Ezk. 1:24; 2nd Peter 3:5; Rev. 22:1, 17.
APPENDIX

Two Different Kingdoms? The Stranger and the Native-Born

The following sections reinforce the two themes, that Yakov gave the four rules as a filter against sacrific-ial-sexual idolatry and that Mosaic Law is for every Christian. There are five different Hebrew words for Gentiles who resided within Israel. Mosaic Law applied to only two of them—the slave (by circumstance) and the ‘stranger’ (by his choice).

Stranger is an English translation for ger in the KJV, NKJV and NASB. The NIV uses alien and the NRSV uses resident alien, which is the most correct.\(^783\) The five Hebrew words are all found in the Passover chapter, Ex. 12:43-48, where the Lord says who can, and who cannot, take part in His Passover:

1. son of a foreigner ……… ben nay’char ………(ben nay’char) ………No ………Ex. 12:43
2. hired worker ……….. saḥ’ere ………(sah’chere) ………No ………Ex. 12:45
3. temporary resident ………. hōwesh ………(toe’shav) ………No ………Ex. 12:45
4. slave …………………… eh’ved ………Yes ………Ex. 12:44
5. stranger; resident alien ……… יָרָד ………(ger) ………Yes ………Ex. 12:48

Why one could or couldn’t be a part of Israel (i.e. to eat the Passover) revolves around his heart toward Is-rael and her God. The meaning of each Hebrew word brings this out:

1. The foreigner could not eat of the Passover (Ex. 12:43). The noun means ‘what is strange, foreign;’ the verb, ‘to estrange, alienate…to seem strange…to reject.’\(^784\) TWOT says it speaks of ‘a foreign god,’ ‘Dt. 32:12,’ and ‘everything foreign (Neh. 13:30).’\(^785\) This person worships other gods and wants to be alienated from Israel, her God and His Torah, all of which appear ‘strange’ to him.

2. The hired worker could not eat of the Passover (Ex. 12:45). The noun means, a ‘hired laborer, hireling.’\(^786\) He’s not interested in the God of Israel, but only in finding work (cf. John 10:12-13).

3. The temporary resident could not eat of the Passover (Ex. 12:45). This is a person who is also called a ‘sojourner.’\(^787\) He’s a migrant, a ‘temporary, landless wage earner.’ The word can also be ‘a synonym for a hired servant (Lev. 22:10; 25:40).’\(^788\)

4. The slave could eat of the Passover after his Hebrew master had him circumcised (Ex. 12:44). The

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\(^783\) Some Bibles, like the KJV, NET and HCSB, don’t make a distinction between the foreigner (#1) and the stranger (#5). This is unfortunate as it seems that God is contradicting Himself (e.g. the KJV for Ex. 12:43 has God saying that the stranger [#1] cannot keep the Passover, but in v. 48 the KJV has God saying that the stranger [#5] can keep it!). Also, ‘stranger’ isn’t a good word for #5: resident alien (NRSV) is much better because it begins to convey the reality that the person is actually part of Israel in ‘residing’ among Israel.

\(^784\) Davidson, The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon, p. 549. Another word that is associated with ben nay’char is zar (יה) and is translated into English as ‘stranger’ or ‘enemy,’ but this word is also used of an Israeli who is not of the family of Aaron (Lev. 18:4) nor of Levi (Lev. 1:51). Koehler, HALOT, vol. 1, p. 279.


\(^786\) Davidson, The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon, p. 715.

\(^787\) Ibid., p. 352.

\(^788\) Harris, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, vol. 1, p. 412.
slave served his master, doing his will and was ‘one’ with his master (Genesis 17:9-13, 23-27).

5. The stranger or resident alien could eat the Passover once he and all the males in his house were circumcised (Ex. 12:48). The verb means ‘dwell for a time.’ Once circumcised, this man kept the Sabbath laws (Ex. 20:10; 23:12) and was as loyalty to God as the native-born (Lev. 20:2).791

a. This Gentile was to hear the Law read (Dt. 31:12), and all the Feasts applied to him (Ex. 12:19; Lev. 16:29; Num. 9:14; Dt. 16:14).

b. Death was the punishment to the ger if he sacrificed to a foreign god (Lev. 17:8f.), and he was also forbidden to eat blood (Lev. 17:10-13). The special cleansing of the red heifer’s ashes applied to him (Num. 19:10), as well as all the laws of forbidden sexual unions (Lev. 18:26).

c. It’s written that Yahveh loves this Gentile, giving him his food and clothing (Dt. 10:18). He wasn’t to be oppressed by the Israeli and he enjoyed the same rights as the native-born Hebrew (Ex. 22:21; Lev. 19:3; Jer. 7:6). He was to be helped if he was poor (Lev. 19:10; Dt. 14:29; 16:11) and he could take of the gleanings of the olive trees and vineyards, which were reserved for him, the widow and the orphan (Dt. 24:20-21).

This Gentile was equal to the native-born Hebrew, but was called a stranger or resident alien, or more properly, a ger (#5). Yahveh’s Mosaic Law extended to him. If God’s Law applied to this Gentile in the midst of Israel under the Old Testament, how much more under the New Testament, where the Gentile has been circumcised in the heart by God? (Col. 2:11)

The Gentiles come into Israel through the New Covenant, the covenant that God gave to the House of Israel and the House of Judah (Jer. 31:31-34; Eph. 2:13). They are to learn the laws (rules) of the God of Israel that they might gain greater spiritual knowledge of Yeshua and walk in His ways, with their Jewish believing brethren (Dt. 31:12-13; Acts 15:21; 1st Cor. 4:16-17; 11:1; 1st John 2:6; Rev. 14:12).

The following is a partial list of cites which speak of the ger (#5, stranger/resident alien):

- Ex. 12:19: ‘Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses, for whoever eats what is leavened, that person must be cut off from the Congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the Land.’ (This pertains to Passover week.)
- Ex. 12:43-45, 48: “And Yahveh said to Moses and Aaron, ‘This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner (#1) shall eat it, but every man’s slave (#4) who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it. A temporary resident (#3) and a hired servant (#2) must not eat it.’"
- Ex. 12:48-49: ‘And when a stranger (#5) dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to Yahveh, 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. One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you.’ (Exodus 12:49)

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790 Ibid., p. 134.
791 Harris, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 156.
792 Ibid. Although the stranger (#5 ger) is in a separate category from other non-Hebrews, there are times when the word seems to be used as a general designation for anyone not of Israel (e.g. Dt. 10:19; 28:43). It’s possible that a #1 could become a #5 (Is. 56:3, 6-7).
Lev. 7:7: “The trespass offering is like the sin offering. There is one law for them both. The priest who makes atonement with it shall have it.”

Lev. 16:29: ‘This shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month on the tenth day of the month you must humble your souls and not do any work, whether the native or the stranger who sojourns among you.’ (This is for the Day of Atonement.)

Lev. 17:12: “Therefore, I said to the Sons of Israel, ‘No person among you may eat blood, nor may any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.’

Lev. 18:26: You ‘are to keep My statutes and My judgments and must not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the stranger who sojourns among you.’

Lev. 24:16: ‘Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of Yahveh must surely be put to death—all the Congregation must stone him. The stranger as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.’

Num. 9:14: ‘If a stranger sojourns among you and observes the Passover to Yahveh, according to the statute of the Passover and according to its ordinance, so he must do. You shall have one statute both for the stranger and for the native of the land.’

Num. 15:14-16: ‘If a stranger sojourns with you, or one who may be among you throughout your generations, and he wishes to make a sacrifice by fire as a soothing aroma to Yahveh, just as you do, so he shall do. As for the Assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you, a perpetual statute throughout your generations. As you are, so shall the stranger be before Yahveh. There is to be one law and one ordinance for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you.’

Num. 15:29: ‘You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is native among the Sons of Israel, and for the stranger who lives among them.’

Num. 15:30: ‘But the person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or a stranger, that one is blaspheming Yahveh, and that person must be cut off from among his people!’

Num. 19:10: ‘The one who gathers the ashes of the heifer must wash his clothes, and be unclean until evening. And it shall be a perpetual statute to the Sons of Israel and to the stranger who lives among them.’

Num. 35:15: ‘These six cities shall be for refuge for the Sons of Israel, and for the stranger (#5), and for the sojourner (#3, temporary resident) among them, that anyone who kills a person unintentionally may flee there.’

Dt. 31:12: ‘Assemble the people, the men, the women, the children and the stranger who is in your town so that they may hear and learn and fear Yahveh your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this Law.’

Joshua 8:33-35: ‘All Israel, with their Elders, officers and their judges, the stranger as well as the native-born, stood on both sides of the Ark, in front of the Levitical Priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant of Yahveh. Half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the Servant of Yahveh had commanded, that they should bless the people of Israel. And afterward he read all the words of the Law, blessings and curses, according to all that is written in the book of the Law. There
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was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the Assembly of Israel, and the women and the little ones and the strangers who resided among them.’

Ezk. 47:23: ‘“And in the Tribe with which the stranger stays, there you shall give him his inheritance,’ declares the Lord Yahveh.” (This speaks of the Millennial Kingdom of Yeshua: Ezk. 40–48; Rev. 20:1-6f.)

Isaiah 56:6-7: ‘Also the foreigners who join themselves to Yahveh to minister to Him and to love the name of Yahveh, to be His servants; everyone who keeps from profaning the Sabbath and holds fast My Covenant, these I will bring to My holy Mountain and make them joyful in My House of Prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My Altar, for My House shall be called a House of Prayer for all peoples.’

This last cite in Isaiah doesn’t speak of the stranger (ger), but of the ben nay’char (#1 the foreigner). It shows that Yahveh’s compassion would even extend to those who had been formerly excluded from the Mosaic Covenant. Salvation is open to everyone who turns to God through Messiah Yeshua.

Welcome to the Commonwealth of Israel (the Kingdom of God), where the wall of partition has been broken down:’

‘So then, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and are of God’s Household.’ (Eph. 2:19)

‘And it shall be from New Moon to New Moon and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me,’ says Yahveh.” (Isaiah 66:23)

The Blood

Lev. 17:10-14: ‘And any man from the House of Israel or from the strangers who sojourn among them who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people.’

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood and I have given it to you on the Altar to make atonement for your souls. For it is the blood, by reason of the life, that makes atonement. Therefore, I said to the Sons of Israel, ‘No person among you may eat blood, nor may any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.’”

‘So when any man from the Sons of Israel, or from the strangers who sojourn among them, in hunting, catches a beast or a bird, which may be eaten, he must pour out its blood and cover it with earth.’

“‘As for the life of all flesh, its blood is identified with its life. Therefore, I said to the Sons of Israel, ‘You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off.’”

The animal was caught and slaughtered, and the blood drained upon the ground and covered. Hunters know that the blood needs to be drained immediately after the kill. This way the meat will not become

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contaminated with the blood in it. It is only with today’s modern methods of mass slaughtering of cattle and chicken, etc., that most of the time the blood is not properly drained. Welcome to the 21st century.

‘The blood however, you must not eat. You must pour it out on the ground like water.’ (Dt. 12:16)

‘Only be sure that you do not eat the blood. For the blood is the life and you must not eat the life with the meat.’ (Dt. 12:23)

Eating the blood in roast beef is also wrong. It, too, is a sin (Lev. 7:26; 19:26; 2nd Sam. 14:32-34; Ezek. 33:25), but not the sin of idolatry.

The Harlot

Lev. 17:7: ‘They must no longer sacrifice their sacrifices to the goat demons, with which they play the cult harlot. This shall be a permanent statute to them throughout their generations.’

Lev. 20:6: ‘As for the person who turns to mediums and to spiritists, to play the harlot after them, I will also set My face against that person and will cut him off from among his people.’

Dt. 22:21: ‘Then they shall bring out the girl to the doorway of her father’s house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel by playing the harlot in her father’s house. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.’

Dt. 23:18: ‘You must not bring the hire of a cult harlot, or the wages of a dog (a homosexual male cult harlot), into the House of Yahveh your God for any votive offering, for both of these are an abomination to Yahveh your God!’

Dt. 31:16: “Yahveh said to Moses, ‘Behold, you are about to lie down with your Fathers, and this people will arise and play the cult harlot with the strange gods of the land into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My Covenant, which I have made with them.’”

Judges 2:17: ‘Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the cult harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their Fathers had walked, in obeying the commandments of Yahveh. They did not do as their Fathers.’

2nd Chron. 21:11: ‘Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the cult harlot, and led Judah astray.’

Psalm 106:35-40: ‘But they mingled with the nations and learned their practices and served their idols which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and their daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the Land was polluted with the blood. Thus they became unclean in their practices and played the cult harlot in their deeds. Therefore, the anger of Yahveh was kindled against His people and He abhorred
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His Inheritance.’

Isaiah 1:21: ‘How the faithful City has become a harlot! She, who was full of justice! Righteousness once lodged in her, but now murderers!’

Jer. 2:20: ‘For long ago I broke your yoke and tore off your bonds, but you said, ‘I will not serve!’ For on every high hill and under every green tree you have lain down as a cult harlot.’

Jer. 3:6-10: ‘Then Yahveh said to me in the days of King Josiah, ‘Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree and she was a cult harlot there.’ I thought, ‘After she has done all these things she will return to Me,’ but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it.’

‘And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she went and was a cult harlot, also! Because of the lightness of her cult harlotry she polluted the Land and committed adultery with stones and trees. Yet, in spite of all this, her treacherous sister Judah did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather in deception!’, declares Yahveh.”

Ezk. 16:15-17, 26: ‘But you trusted in your beauty and played the cult harlot because of your fame, and you poured out your harlotries on every passerby who might be willing. You took some of your clothes, made for yourself high places of various colors and played the cult harlot on them, which should never have come about, nor happened. You also took your beautiful jewels, made of My gold and of My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images that you might play the cult harlot with them!...You also played the cult harlot with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, and multiplied your cult harlotry to make Me angry.’

Hosea 4:12-14: ‘My people consult their wooden idol and their diviner’s wand informs them. For a spirit of cult harlotry has led them astray and they have played the cult harlot, departing from their God. They offer sacrifices on the tops of the mountains and burn incense on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth because their shade is pleasant. Therefore, your daughters play the harlot and your brides commit adultery.’

‘I will not punish your daughters when they play the harlot, or your brides when they commit adultery, for the men themselves go apart with cult harlots and offer sacrifices with temple harlots. So the people without understanding are ruined.’

Nahum 3:4: ‘All because of the many cult harlotries of the Harlot, the Charming One, the Mistress of Sorceries, who sells nations by her cult harlotries, and families by her sorceries.’

Rev. 17:1, 15-16: ‘Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and

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This is the Great Cult Harlot of Babylon. Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, p. 304: ‘The first deified woman was no doubt Semiramis, as the first deified man was her husband’ (Nimrod). Semiramis was known in Israel as Astarte and worshiped in other countries under many other names: Diana, Rhea, Venus, and Cybele (Madonna), etc. She was called ‘an incarnation of the one spirit of God, the great Mother of all...the Holy Spirit of God.’ Incredibly enough, these are designations that the Roman Catholic Church places upon its ‘sinless and deified Mary.’ In other words, the attributes of the Mary of the Roman Catholic Church are not that of the Jewish mother of Jesus, but the great mother goddess of the pagans.
spoke with me, saying, ‘Come here! I will show you the judgment of the Great Cult Harlot who sits on many waters’...And he said to me, ‘The waters which you saw where the Cult Harlot sits are peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues, and the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the Cult Harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire.’”

**The Fire of God**

When Yahveh appears in Fire on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 3:1-6; 19:16-20), the identification of God with fire begins (although the Burning Bush precedes this for Moses; Ex. 3:1-2f.). The fire on the Altar of Sacrifice, of the Tabernacle of Moses, was never to go out. It symbolized the fire of the eternal God. It’s a picture of the Fire of God on the heavenly Altar, and it says that our God is a consuming Fire. The Altar fire was seen as a cleansing agent. The sacrifices were consumed by something that pictured the Fire of God (the Holy Spirit). Symbolically, the sinful person was transformed through this living Fire and ascended to God in smoke—totally dedicated and pleasing to Yahveh.

*Fire* is the closest thing ‘in the natural’ that we have for describing Yahveh’s spiritual substance:

Ex. 19:16-18: ‘So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick Cloud upon the Mountain, and a very loud Shofar’ (Ram’s horn) ‘so that all the people who were in the Camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the Camp to meet God and they stood at the foot of the Mountain. Now Mount Sinai was all in Smoke because Yahveh descended upon it in Fire, and its Smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole Mountain quaked violently.’

Ex. 24:17: ‘And to the eyes of the Sons of Israel, the appearance of the Glory of Yahveh was like a consuming Fire on the mountain top.’

When the Tabernacle of Moses was first inaugurated, after Aaron and his sons were consecrated, Yahveh sent Fire from the Heavens to light the Altar of Sacrifice. It was a picture of the Holy Spirit in us:

Lev. 9:23-24: ‘Moses and Aaron went into the Tent of Meeting. When they came out and blessed the people the Glory of Yahveh appeared to all the people. Then Fire came out from before Yahveh and consumed the burnt sacrifice and the portions of fat on the Altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.’

2nd Chron. 7:3 (Solomon’s Temple): “All the Sons of Israel, seeing the Fire come down, and the Glory of Yahveh upon the Temple, bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground and they worshiped and gave praise to Yahveh, saying, ‘Truly He is good! Truly His faithful, forgiving loving-kindness is everlasting!’”

When the Holy Spirit was given to Israel in Acts 2, we see that same Fire upon the Apostles:

Acts 2:3: ‘And there appeared to them tongues as of Fire distributing themselves, and

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795 Lev. 6:13: ‘Fire shall burn continually on the Altar. It’s not to go out.’

796 Dt. 4:24; Heb. 12:29; also Ex. 19:16f.; Lev. 9:23-24; Lk. 12:49; Rev. 4:5.
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they rested on each one of them.’

This Fire purges us on our journey to the New Jerusalem, tests our faith in Yeshua, and transforms us into His Image:

1st Cor. 3:13: ‘each man’s work will become evident, for the Day will show it, because it is to be revealed with Fire and the Fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work.’

2nd Cor. 3:17-18: ‘…where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty, and all of us, with unveiled faces beholding, as in a mirror, the Glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same Image, from Glory to Glory.’

1st Peter 1:7: ‘so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold, which is perishable, even though tested by Fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Yeshua the Messiah.’

The Book of Revelation reveals that this divine Fire is seen in the Holy Spirit, and on the heavenly Altar, and in the eyes of the Son of Man:

Rev. 4:5: ‘Out from the Throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven Lamps of Fire burning before the Throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.’

Rev. 8:5: ‘Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the Fire of the Altar and threw it to the Earth, and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.’

Rev. 19:12: ‘His eyes are a flame of Fire and on His head are many crowns, and He has a Name written on Him, which no one knows except Himself.’

The Fire of Paganism

Dt. 12:31: ‘You must not behave thus, toward Yahveh your God, for every abominable act which Yahveh hates, they have done for their gods. For they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.’ (See also Dt. 18:9-10 where, to ‘pass through the fire,’ is prohibited.)

2nd Kings 16:3: ‘But he’ (Ahaz, King of Judah) ‘walked in the way of the Kings of Israel and even made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations, whom Yahveh had driven out from before the Sons of Israel.’ (To ‘pass through the fire’ means that the infant died in the fire as a sacrifice, and was eaten by the pagan priest, and possibly by his father and mother, also; cf. 2nd Kings 21:6; 23:10.)

2nd Kings 17:17: ‘Then they’ (the Sons of Israel in the northern kingdom) ‘made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire and practiced divination and enchantments and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of Yahveh, provoking Him.’

2nd Chron. 33:6: ‘He’ (Manasseh, King of Judah) ‘made his sons pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and he practiced witchcraft, used divination, practiced sorcery and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of Yahveh,
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provoking Him to anger.’ (See also Psalm 106:34-39)

Isaiah 57:5: “Inflaming yourselves with gods under every green tree, and sacrificing the children in the valleys under the clefts of the rocks?”

Jeremiah 7:31: ‘They’ (the people of Judah) ‘have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire which I did not command. It never entered My mind.’

Jeremiah 19:5: ‘and have built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons in the fire as burnt sacrifices to Baal, a thing which I never commanded, or spoke of, nor did it ever enter My mind.’ (Also, Jer. 32:17-18, 25)

Jeremiah 32:35: ‘They built the high places of Baal that are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I had not commanded them nor had it entered My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.’

Ezekiel 16:20-21: “Moreover, you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your acts of harlotry a small matter, that you have slain My children and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through the fire?”

Ezekiel 20:26: “and I pronounced them unclean because of their ritual gifts, in that they caused all their firstborn to pass through the fire, that I might make them desolate and that they might know that I am Yahveh!”

Ezekiel 20:31: “‘When you offer your gifts, when you cause your sons to pass through the fire, you are defiling yourselves with all your idols to this day! Shall I be inquired of by you, Oh House of Israel?! As I live!’ declares the Lord Yahveh, ‘I will not be inquired of by you!’”

Ezekiel 23:37: ‘For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. Thus they have committed adultery with their idols and even caused their sons, whom they bore to Me, to pass through the fire to them as food.’

Paganism

Everything in God’s Kingdom has its perverted counterfeit in paganism. Sacrifice is the outward expression of surrender to God (or a god), with heart-felt submission to His will being the inner reality. Pagans offered to their gods their best and their dearest as a sacrifice for sin, making even their infants ‘pass through the fire.’ The prophet Micah (742-687 BC) speaks of this when he rhetorically asks, ‘Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts? The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’ (Micah 6:7b)

Gentile (and Jewish) babies were burned alive, screaming, as their drunken parents and other ‘worshipers’ shouted, sang and wildly danced; drums and other instruments pounding away. They would eat the child as part of their worship to gods like Molech, Baal and Dagon. Those gods demanded child sacrifice—a

797 See also p. 33, note 134.
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perversion of the Mosaic sacrificial system. In Leviticus 20:1-8 Yahveh speaks against this depraved and warped idolatrous practice:

“Then Yahveh spoke to Moses saying, ‘You shall also say to the Sons of Israel, ‘Any man from the Sons of Israel or from the strangers sojourning in Israel, who gives any of his sons to Molech, must surely be put to death! The people of the Land shall stone him with stones. I will also set My face against that man and will cut him off from among his people because he has given some of his children to Molech, so as to defile My Sanctuary and to profane My Holy Name. If the people of the Land, however, should ever disregard that man, when he gives any of his sons to Molech, so as not to put him to death, then I Myself will set My face against that man and against his family and I will cut off from among their people, both him and all those who play the harlot after him, by playing the cult prostitute after Molech. As for the person who turns to mediums and to spiritists, to play the harlot after them, I will also set My face against that person and will cut him off from among his people. You must consecrate yourselves and be holy!,’ for I am Yahveh your God! You must keep My statutes and practice them. I am Yahveh, who makes you holy!’”

Not all pagan worship required human sacrifice, but collectively they form a degenerate picture of Gentile worship. Pagans sought to reside in the ‘safety and blessings’ of their gods and goddesses, to the destruction of their souls and their very own children.

Paganism and cult prostitution went hand in hand. There were also other satanic things that attached themselves to this ‘worship,’ like murder. UBD speaks of this and says of the goddess Asherah,

“who is found in the Ras Shamra epic religious texts discovered at Ugarit in northern Syria (1927-37) as Asherat, ‘Lady of the Sea’ and consort of El. She was chief goddess of Tyre with the appellation Kudshu ‘holiness’ and she appears as a goddess by the side of Baal, whose consort she came to be, among the Canaanites of the south. Her worship was utterly detestable to faithful worshipers’ of Yahveh ‘(1st Kg. 15:13).”

‘Asherah was only one manifestation of a chief goddess of western Asia regarded as both wife and sister of the principal Canaanite god El. Other names of the deity were Ash-toreth (Astarte) and Anath. Frequently’ she was ‘represented as a nude woman bestride a lion.”

Her “male prostitutes consecrated to the cult of the Kudshu and prostituting themselves to her honor were styled Kedishim, ‘sodomites’ (Dt. 23:8; 1st Kings 14:24).”

‘At Byblos (biblical Gebal), on the Mediterranean, north of Sidon, a center dedicated to this goddess has been excavated. She and her colleagues specialized in sex.”

It’s also noted that ‘lust and murder were glamorized in Canaanite religion...’

For

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798 Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 412.
799 Ibid.
800 Ibid.
801 Ibid.
802 Ibid.
some unknown reason she fiendishly butchers mankind, young as well as old, in a most horrible and wholesale fashion, wading ecstatically in human gore up to her knees—yea, up to her throat, all the while exulting sadistically.803

This is a glimpse, not only into paganism, but also into the very essence of Satan and his plan for man: murder for the sheer glee of brutally extinguishing human life, with sex aligned as ‘worship’ to entice pagan men and women. This was ancient and modern paganism and the so-called ‘New Age’ religions:

Astarte was a Canaanite goddess ‘of sensual love.’804  Licentious worship was conducted in honor of her,805 and even ‘Solomon succumbed to her voluptuous worship (1st Kings 11:5; 2nd Kings 23:13).806

The Ras Shamra Tablets tell us that Baal ‘was the son of El, the father of the gods and the head of the Canaanite pantheon.’807  He is also ‘the son of Dagon.’808  The ‘inhabitants of Canaan were addicted to Baal worship, which was conducted by priests in their temples.’809

‘The cult included animal sacrifice, ritualistic meals and licentious dances’810 that would end in sexual orgies. ‘High places had chambers for sacred prostitution by male prostitutes (kedishim) and sacred harlots (kedishoth) (1st Kings 14:23-24; 2nd Kings 23:7).’811

UBD reports that the northern kingdom of Israel was infested with Baal worship:

‘Ahab, who married’ (Jezebel) ‘a Zidonian priestess’ (cult harlot), ‘at her instigation, built a temple and altar to Baal, and revived all the abominations of the Amorites (1st Kings 21:25-26). Henceforth, Baal worship became so completely identified with the northern kingdom that it is described as walking in the way or statutes of the Kings of Israel (2nd Kings 16:3; 17:8).’812

Yahveh would put an end to these idolatrous practices by sending Assyria to destroy the northern kingdom in 721 BC. Idolatry and cult harlotry in Judah were just as rampant. Yahveh states in Jer. 17:1:

‘The sin of Judah is written down with an iron stylus. With a diamond point it’s engraved upon the tablet of their heart, and upon the horns of their altars.’

The Ras Shamra texts speak of cult harlotry being associated with the sun goddess Shaphash. This is unusual, as most deities of the sun were male. It reveals the high status and honor that this female goddess exerted over pagan men. Of course, in the worship of the various deities, ‘prostitution was glorified.’813
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These women were ‘professionals.’ UBD states:

A “class of women existed among the Phoenicians, Armenians, Lydians and Babylonians’ (Epistle of Jer. v. 43). They are distinguished from the public prostitutes… and associated with the performances of sacred rites."⁸¹⁴

This was the religious infrastructure in the ancient world. The names of the various gods and goddesses throughout the pagan world would change to suit each country and culture, but their rites and rituals were basically the same. What began at the Tower in Babel (Babylon) spread all over the Earth. The characteristics and rites of the gods and goddesses of Babylon are found throughout all ancient pagan peoples. The only major difference is their different names.

The god Vulcan is an example of how the gods and goddesses evolve from one country to the next. Interestingly enough, the name Vulcan was popularized on the TV show Star Trek, but the mythical god was a murderer and devourer of infants sacrificed to him. Vulcan is also known as Hephaistos (the Devil in Tarot), which means, ‘to break in pieces or scatter abroad.’ Vulcan’s other aliases included, but weren’t limited to, Janus, Bel (the Confounder), Chaos, Baal and Merodach (the great rebel). They all stemmed from the human prototype, Nimrod. Because of his great apostasy, Nimrod caused the people of the Earth to be scattered after the destruction of the Tower of Babel.

The symbol of Vulcan was the hammer, which came from the club of Janus or Chaos, the god of confusion. The word club in Chaldee literally means ‘to break in pieces or scatter abroad.’⁸¹⁵ In his identification with Nimrod, Vulcan possessed many of the titles and characteristics of Nimrod.⁸¹⁶ Hislop states that, ‘Everything in the history of Vulcan exactly agrees with that of Nimrod.’ Here are some parallels:

“Vulcan was the head and chief of the Cyclops, that is, ‘the kings of flame.’”⁸¹⁷ Nimrod was the head of the fire worshipers.⁸¹⁸

‘Vulcan was the forger of the thunderbolts by which such havoc was made among the enemies of the gods. Ninus, or Nimrod, in his wars with the king of Bactria, seems to have carried on the conflict in a similar way.”⁸¹⁹

‘Vulcan (was) the god of fire of the Romans, and Nimrod, the fire god of Babylon.”⁸²⁰

“Nimrod, as the representative of the devouring fire to which human victims, and especially children, were offered in sacrifice, was regarded as the great child devourer⁸²¹… As the father of the gods, he was…called Kronos; and everyone knows that the classical story of Kronos was just this, that ‘he devoured his sons as soon as they were born.”’⁸²² (see

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⁸¹⁴ Ibid., p. 514.
⁸¹⁶ Ibid., p. 229. Hislop’s cite for this is Heathen Mythology Illustrated, p. 75.
⁸¹⁷ Ibid. “Kuclops, from Khuk, ‘king;’ and Lohb, ‘flame.’ The image of the great god was represented with three eyes—one in the forehead; hence the story of the Cyclops with the one eye in the forehead.”
⁸¹⁸ Ibid.
⁸¹⁹ Ibid.
⁸²⁰ Ibid., p. 230.
⁸²¹ Ibid., p. 231.
⁸²² Ibid. Hislop cites ‘Lempriere, Saturn’ as the source for his information.
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Rev. 12:4b) As “the representative of Moloch or Baal, infants were the most acceptable offerings at his altar.”

“Hence, the priests of Nimrod or Baal were necessarily required to eat of the human sacrifices; and thus it has come to pass that ‘Cahna Bal…the Priest of Baal’ is the established word in our own tongue for a devourer of human flesh” (a cannibal).

Vulcan was a vicious god, but he was only a picture of Nimrod deified, a backdrop of the original rebel, Satan. Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-12) was the model for the chief gods of the world. Nimrod’s ‘deity’ was designed by Satan to lead the people of the Earth away from the one true God and His Son, Yeshua, in whom there is the true salvation and eternal life.

Of course, the pagans had their ‘holy days’ and teachings, but how could the Church ‘baptize’ these things and call them Christian? When the Torah was thrown out, and some words of Paul were falsely interpreted to justify it, the door was opened for Satan to enter (Dan. 7:25).

Christianity is the only religion in the world that does not emulate its Founder. Jesus never ate pork or shrimp and He always kept the Sabbath day holy. How is it that Christians don’t follow Him in these areas (Mt. 5:17-19; 1st Jn. 2:1-6)? Hopefully, The Lifting of the Veil will help many Christians to see the great deception, turn from it, and walk into God’s Truth:

‘Thus says Yahveh! Stand at the crossroads and look! Ask for the Ancient Paths’ (Torah) ‘where the Good Way lies and walk in it! And you will find rest for your souls.’ (Jer. 6:16)

‘Remember the Torah of My servant Moses! The statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold! I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of Yahveh.’ (Mal. 4:4-5)

As Yahveh God called Israel to be a separate and holy people from all the other peoples of the Earth, so too, He has called all believers in Messiah Yeshua to be separate and holy from all the pagan and perverse practices of the world, the Church, Judaism and Messianic Judaism.

The sacrifice of Yeshua didn’t nullify Mosaic Law; it revealed its divine depth. Yeshua’s sacrificial blood made a way for our sins to be forgiven and for us to be transformed into His Image and given His Spirit so that we could walk in Mosaic Law, just as Yeshua had as the perfect, sinless Israeli.

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823 Ibid.
824 Ibid., p. 232. The “word Cahna is the emphatic form of Cahn. Cahn is ‘a priest;’ Cahna is ‘the priest.’”
825 Ibid. “From the historian Castor (an Armenian translation of Eusebius, pars. i., p. 81) we learn that it was under Bel, or Belus, that is Baal, that the Cyclops lived, and the Scholiast of Æschylus…states that these Cyclops were the brethren of Kronos, who was also Bel, or Bal…The eye in their forehead shows that originally this name was a name of the great god, for that eye, in India and Greece, is…the characteristic of the supreme divinity. The Cyclops then, had been representatives of that God, in other words, priests of Bel or Bal. Now, we find that the Cyclops were well known as cannibals, Referre ritus Cyclopum, ‘to bring back the rites of the Cyclops,’ meaning to revive the practice of eating human flesh (Ovid, Metamorphoses, xv. 93, vol. ii. p. 132).”
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   1. 1:02 The Abrahamic Call to the Wilderness
   2. 1:09 The Feasts of Israel as Time Markers
   3. 1:15 The Sabbath—A Picture of Yeshua (also Sacrifice)
   4. 1:27 The Dietary Laws and the Church
   5. 1:18 Mosaic Law—God’s Holy Standard
   6. 1:38 The Church at Mt. Sinai?

7. COMMENTS
   1. 2002
   2. 2003
   3. 2004
   4. 2005
   5. 2006
   6. 2007
   7. 2008
   8. 2009
   9. 2010
   10. 2011
   11. 2012
   12. 2013
   13. 2014
   14. 2015
   15. 2016
   16. 2017
   17. 2018
Books to Read

1. Avram Yehoshua, [SAM the Rock Thrower](#) and Other Times of Witnessing in Israel.
3. Samuele Bacchiocchi, [From Sabbath To Sunday](#). This is the definitive work on the issue of God’s Sabbath vs. Rome’s Sunday.
5. Alexander Hislop, [The Two Babylons—The Full Hislop](#).
20. Dave Roberson, [The Walk of the Spirit](#).
22. Bodie and Brock Thoene: [The Zion Chronicles](#) (Bethany House Publishers, 1988). You can get the five paperback series for about $15-20 on ebay. (You might want to look for other books listed here on ebay, also.)
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34. Tommy Welchel, *Azusa Street: They Told Me Their Stories* (USA: Dare 2 Dream Books, 2010).
35. F. F. Bosworth, *Christ the Healer*.

**DVDs**

1. *The Rabbi From Tarsus* excellently played by Phil Goble. An incredible performance of the last day in the life of the Apostle Paul in the dungeon of Nero. Even though it speaks of Paul being a rabbi, which Scripture never does, along with a few other mistakes, it’s a beautiful rendition of what might have been, informative and humorous, and a faith builder.
2. Fiddler on the Roof. A classic ‘must see.’ The story of Tevyeh the Jewish milkman, his family and his Jewish community in anti-Semitic czarist Russia in the early 1900s.
3. The Chosen. Starring Rod Steiger as a Hasidic rabbi and the struggle he has to direct his son (Robby Benson), in the right path. Also starring Maximillian Schnell. An excellent film.
4. Jesus of Nazareth. Absolutely the best ‘Jesus’ movie. Starring Olivia Hussey as Mary, this epic film includes Ernest Borgnine, James Farentino, James Earl Jones, Stacy Keach, James Mason, Sir Laurence Olivier, Christopher Plummer, Anthony Quinn, Rod Steiger, Peter Ustinov (who does an incredible job as King Herod), and Michael York as John the Baptist (a super performance). Robert Powell portrays Jesus, the most believable ‘Jesus’ on film. Get the unedited version if you can. Made in 1977, it runs 382 minutes (6 hours and 32 minutes), on two DVDs. See Avram’s re-view of the movie.
5. Louie Giglio’s *Stars in the Galaxy*. An excellent presentation of the God who designed the universe and our relation to the stars and Him.
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The Seed of Abraham