THE LIFTING
OF THE VEIL

ACTS 15:20-21

AVRAM YEHOSHUA

THE SEED OF ABRAHAM
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Freely I have received this divine understanding from the Lord and so freely I share it with His Body (Matthew 10:8).

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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 is 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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Abbreviations

ALGNT ............Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament
AHCL .............The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon
ARA ................A Rabbinic Anthology
ASV ...............American Standard Version (Bible)
CED ................Collins English Dictionary
DBI ................Dictionary of Biblical Imagery
GELNT ............A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament
GELNTS ............Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Semitic Domains
HALOT .............The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament
IBD ................The Illustrated Bible Dictionary
ISBE ................The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
JNTC ................Jewish New Testament Commentary
KJV ................King James Version (Bible)
NAGL ..............The New Analytical Greek Lexicon
NASB ...............New American Standard Bible
NBDBG .............The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon
NGEINT ............The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament
NIV ................New International Version (Bible)
NKJV ................New King James Version (Bible)
NRSV ................New Revised Standard Version (Bible)
TALGNT ............The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament
TGELNT ............Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament
TDNT .............Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
TDOT .............Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TLOT ..............Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament
TWOT ................Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament
UBD ................Unger’s Bible Dictionary
WBC ................The Wycliffe Bible Commentary
WNCD ..............Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary
Acknowledgements

I am indebted to my wife, Ruti Yehoshua, for her proofreading of the original manuscript and her keen insights, but also for ‘showing me the Way’ when my carnal nature led me in the other way.

I also want to thank Yakov Snyder for bringing a number of my typographical errors to my attention, and for being a gift to His Body and to me. Yakov’s ability ‘to see’ what most Christians refuse to see, and to make them his own, continually astounds me. His gift is unique, in realizing the anti-Mosaic Law theological position is not of Messiah Yeshua, and that walking out his faith in Yeshua through all the rules of Mosaic Law is what His Lord wants. He is not only able to see this, but his insights and understanding build upon it. He is a teacher of God’s Word.

This fourth revision of the third edition is online and has been fully revised and re-arranged for better comprehension. It’s also formatted to standard letter size paper so that anyone can print it. Please feel free to read and/or download and/or print out this book. It is a Gift from Above to the Body of Messiah Yeshua.

May the Lord Yeshua bless you as you read, The Lifting of the Veil—Acts 15:20-21,

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Flagstaff, Arizona USA

This fourth revision was finished on Sunday, November 15, 2020.
INTRODUCTION

Alexander Hislop, in his Christian classic, *The Two Babylons*, acknowledges his indebtedness to Lord John Scott, who had died three years earlier, saying,

‘His religion was no sentimental religion; his fear of God was not taught by the commandment of men. *His faith was drawn directly from the inspired fountain of divine truth.* From the time that the claims of God to…his heart had laid hold on him, the Word of God became his grand study, and few men have I ever known who held with a more firm and tenacious grasp the great truth that the Word of God, and *that Word alone, is the light and rule for the guidance of Christians, and that every departure from that Word, alike on the part of Churches and individuals, implies, as he himself expressed it, ‘going off the rails,’ and consequently, danger of the highest kind.’

How true that is! *The Word of God truly is the Light and rule for guiding Christians and every departure from it entails ‘going off the rails.’* Obviously, some departures may not be as significant as others, but *The Lifting of the Veil* reveals that the Church—Born Again Christians, have been derailed for 1,900 years as to how to walk out their faith in Jesus of Nazareth. This satanic deception, and I do not use that adjective lightly, that Christians walk in makes the ancient Pharisees, who confronted and argued with Jesus over Scripture interpretation, pale in significance—so great is departure from God’s Word. Make no mistake about it. The Pharisees thought they understood Scripture better than the Lord of Scripture, and most Christians today think the very same thing.

*The Lifting of the Veil* reveals the Lord’s alternative to the Church’s convoluted and heretical interpretation of Acts 15:20-21. These two verses of New Testament Scripture form the biblical foundation that reveals God’s will for how every Christian is to walk out their faith in Jesus. This perspective goes against the massive theological superstructure of Church tradition concerning Mosaic Law and totally dismantles it, revealing the sinking sand upon which it was built. The arrogance, ignorance and darkness that our Lord faced when the Pharisees confronted Him over His understanding of Scripture has its parallel in how Christians try and justify their position on illicit SEx, which is an acronym for Sunday, Easter and Xmas that also entails the eating of unclean animals and a self-righteous contempt for Mosaic Law, whose rules Jesus not only lived by, but which was the very standard that judged Him sinless.

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 continued Gentile worship of their gods as Christians. James, the oldest 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*. The concern of James was well founded (cf. 1st Thess. 1:6-10; Rev. 2:14-16, 20).

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 rivals. These four rules were the *first of many Mosaic rules* or laws, and not ‘the only rules’ that the Gentiles were expected to observe, as the Church teaches. 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 15:1-5f.). Acts 15:20 forms the New Testament’s theological foundation, 18 years after the resurrection (48 AD), that reveals that Mosaic Law was valid for all Christians because James speaks of the Gentiles, *on the Sabbath day learning Mosaic Law* (i.e. ‘Moses’).

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THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

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

Church theology teaches that at the crucifixion of Jesus, the 7th day Sabbath changed to ‘any day being your Sabbath,’ although everyone centers on Sunday, and Mosaic Law ‘was canceled,’ but James, speaking of the Sabbath and ‘Moses,’ disputes that. Christians do not have authority from God (His New Testament Word) to keep Sunday, Easter (or the more fashionable ‘Resurrection Sunday’) nor Xmas, nor do they have God’s blessing to eat unclean foods such as ham, bacon, shrimp, catfish or lobster. If they did, Scripture would simply declare that Sunday replaced the 7th day Sabbath, and one can eat the meat of formerly unclean animals, but look as you may you’ll never find that. Yes, there are proof texts that Christians use to justify the eating of unclean animals (e.g. Acts 10), but they evaporate into thin air when the Word of God is properly understood. The Pharisees had their teachings that nullified God’s Word (Mt. 15:1-9), and they, too, had Scripture proof texts to support their heresies. As King Solomon once penned, ‘There is nothing new under the sun’ (Eccl. 1:9c). What the Pharisees had done to God’s Word in the time of Jesus, the Church has not only emulated, but greatly superseded.

The Book of Acts is the only divinely inspired history of the early Church (30-64 AD). It forms a bridge between the Gospels and the Letters of Peter and Paul, etc. Without Acts we wouldn’t know 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 Yeshua (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 Yeshua plus nothing else. There’s no law or good deed that anyone can do ‘to save him.’ Only the sacrificial blood of Yeshua can transform one’s nature into His nature. It’s called being Born Again (John 3:3, 5). The keeping of Mosaic Law could never give anyone eternal life nor was it designed to. Justification by faith is the incredibly gracious work of the Father through His Son and the Holy Spirit 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 of the five 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 writes, Christianity is a ‘law-free gospel.’

Acts 15 is used by the Church to prove that theology. James struck down the Pharisaic Christian position (Acts 15:1, 5, 13f.) that Gentile Christians needed to be physically (covenantally) circumcised and keep the Law, along with their faith in Yeshua, in order to be saved.

The Church supports its teaching of a ‘law-free Gospel’ based on its misinterpretation of Peter’s yoke (Acts 15:10), and the four rules of James that follow his decision (Acts 15:20). Theologians teach that the

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2 For other places where the Sabbath is seen after the resurrection, see Acts 13:42, 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 bigger brother, The Feasts of Israel as Time Markers After the Resurrection.


rules apply to table fellowship and that these are the only rules or laws for Christians, other than the moral laws of Mosaic Law. Their anti-Law theology\(^5\) blinds them to the biblical interpretation of Acts 15:20. 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...for the Gentile.

F. F. Bruce describes Acts 15 as ‘epoch-making,’\(^6\) and I. Howard Marshall agrees with him. Marshall believes Acts 15 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.’\(^7\)

Bruce and Marshall are right about the tremendous importance of Acts 15, but they fail to understand its proper meaning and implication. The words of James in Acts 15:20-21 are nothing less than the fulcrum point declaring Mosaic Law for every Christian, and 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 days and pagan ways ‘in the Name of Jesus,’ which neither Yeshua nor Paul ever intended.

Almost two thousand years ago, in 48 AD, all the Jewish Christian Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem assembled to discuss the matter of Gentile salvation in Jesus (Acts 15:1-6). They needed to know exactly what constituted salvation (justification) for the Gentile. Paul, Barnabas and others from the congregation in Antioch were also there that day. The Jewish Christian leadership in Antioch had requested a ruling:\(^8\)

“Some men came down from Judah and began teaching the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses 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.”\(^9\)

Those Pharisaic Christians from Judah wanted the Gentiles to be physically covenantantly circumcised, which was seen at that time as a way of becoming part of saved Israel (to become a Jew),\(^10\) but more to

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\(^5\) Church theology on the Law has been superficially challenged in the last 45 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), but this has not led Christians to keep it.


\(^8\) Antioch (on the Orontes River) was 300 miles (482 kilometers) north of Jerusalem. It had a population of 500,000 of which 70,000 were Jews. Josephus ranked it as ‘the third greatest (largest in population) city of the Roman Empire, behind Rome and Alexandria’ (Josephus, Jewish Wars, 3.29).

\(^9\) 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 Hebraic 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, and the Temple, etc.) and also, the Name of the God of Israel (Yahveh) is written as such, instead of the generic term, ‘the LORD.’

\(^10\) Becoming a proselyte meant that the Gentile was ‘now a Jew,’ but it’s an unbiblical and false concept of Rabbinic Judaism. Nowhere in the Old Testament does God ever say that a Gentile becomes a Jew. The Gentile who ‘came alongside’ Israel was certainly part of Israel and one with Her, so much so that God speaks of there being ‘one law for the stranger and the native born’ (the Hebrew Israeli). This ‘stranger’ is specifically called a *גֶּר* ֢ו.
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the point, it meant keeping Mosaic Law for eternal life (symbolized in physical covenantal circumcision; Gen. 17:10-14; cf. Acts 15:5), which was how the Jewish people thought they got to Heaven before Jesus came. It was a Pharisaic teaching, and it was wrong. God never gave Mosaic Law for eternal life.

In the aftermath of the decision by James in which he struck down the false teaching that eternal life hinged upon Law keeping, symbolized in physical biblical circumcision, four rules were issued (v. 20). Biblical understanding of them is critical in understanding what James meant and what the Council ratified, and therefore, what God through them intended for the Gentile Christians after they had entered into the Kingdom of Messiah Yeshua.

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 require? What was pleasing and right in His eyes? Has God’s Standard changed or been nullified by the sacrificial death of His Son, as the Church teaches?

God didn’t set Israel free to do her own thing, willing to accept whatever any Hebrew thought was ‘right in his heart.’ He gave Israel His holy and spiritual 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 spiritual 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 neighbor.’ 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 definition of love to God and our neighbor (Mt. 22:35-40).

Some say, ‘We don’t need the Law. We have the Holy Spirit to guide us in God’s will,’ yet the Corinthians, who ‘came behind no one’ in terms of the Spirit (1st Cor. 1:3-7), were continually being rebuked and remonstrated by Paul because they needed to be taught the Way (Word) of God. We wouldn’t have most of the letters of Paul if we ‘only needed 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; 10:16). If the Law is truly written on a Christian’s heart, wouldn’t he want to

in Scripture and is very different from other ‘strangers’ (Gentiles). See the differences in the Appendix, The Stranger and the Native-Born, beginning on page 206.

11 The male Gentile believer must not be physically covenantally circumcised in order ‘to keep Passover,’ or Mosaic Law, as many in the so-called Hebrew Roots Movement teach. It’s a heresy of the highest order. See Gentile Circumcision?

12 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 Jesus. 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 of God.

13 The personal name of the God of Israel is יהוה Yahveh. It’s found 6,823 times in the Old Testament. Using ‘the Lord’ covers over and negates the personal name of the God of Israel, which He wants His people to know.
Introduction

keep God’s Passover and His 7th day Sabbath holy just as Jesus did? Isn’t Jesus our Example in all matters of faith and practice? Where does Jesus, Peter or Paul tell us to observe Sunday, Easter or Xmas?

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). It wasn’t Church vs Israel; it was Church within Israel as the Israel of God. The Gentile Christian learned Mosaic Law by going to either the unbelieving synagogue or the Christian synagogue (cf. Jam. 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 Holy Spirit, just as all the Apostles and Jewish Christians 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 as it grows up? Does it matter if the child obeys his father? Or should the will of the child overrule the father’s will and change the family values? Knowing the will of our 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.’ (cf. 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 Christian today. Once saved, once ‘in’ the Kingdom of Yeshua, Mosaic Law becomes the divine guideline or Standard for how each Christian is to walk out their faith in Christ. Mosaic Law reveals what is sin and what is right in God’s eyes (cf. Rom. 3:20).

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 its 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, for this is what they have been taught. Those same facial expressions were also seen on the Pharisees, who boasted of their own (false) interpretations of God’s Word (Lk. 18:9-14; Mt. 15:1-20), while rejecting the understanding of the Word of God who stood right before them.

On the other hand, some extremists in the Law Camp say that Christians 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 in the Light that he has (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 Christian walking in those sins is not what Jesus wants for him. Committing those sins has its negative effect upon the Christian, as well as on others. Walking like Jesus walked should be a divine goal for every Christian.

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

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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 text/s, and false theology leads to perverse and sinful lifestyles. This distorts the picture of the true Jesus that godly Christians want to emulate and present to others.

This false picture also offends the Jewish people who understand, and rightly so, that their Messiah would never do away with Mosaic Law, and isn’t that exactly what Jesus says in Mt. 5:17?! Jews know that the only true God is the God of Israel and that He gave His laws and statutes 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 a Paul) who has done away with the Law’ becomes a salvation issue for the entire Jewish community. Placing this stumbling block in their way is nothing less than diabolical (cf. Acts 20:27-31).

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

In the New Covenant, whenever salvation is pitted against the Law (or physical circumcision, which implies that the Gentile was to become a Jew15 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 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.”16

*All* the Jewish Christians 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 Gentile Christians ‘to follow him as he followed Christ,’17 shouldn’t Christians be keeping the laws of Moses (that pertain to them)?18 How can it be that the ancient Apostolic faith community loved Mosaic Law, but the modern faith community condemns it? Are there two different faith communities in the one

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


18 1st Cor. 4:14-17; 11:1; Phil. 3:15-17; 4:9; 1st Thess. 1:6-7; 2nd Thess. 3:7, 9.

19 Not all the commandments and rules 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 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. There are four Pillars of Mosaic Law that apply to everyone: the 7th day Sabbath, the Feasts of Israel, tithing and the Mosaic dietary laws.
Introduction

Flock of Jesus Christ (Jn. 10:16)? The Church is adamant, though, that the Law doesn’t pertain to them. 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, or 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 the same as that of the Church.19 The keeping of the 7th day Sabbath and Passover, etc., is only a facade, ‘window dressing’ meant to impress the unbelieving Jewish person that Messianic Jews are ‘still Jewish.’ They’re more concerned with bagels, lox and cream cheese and ‘looking Jewish’ before the Jews who aren’t saved than with walking biblically before their Jewish Savior. They, too, are deceived.

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.20 They also teach, by word and example, that the eating of unclean animals is acceptable to God. Theologically, they are no different from their predecessors, the Jewish Christians of the 19th century, except for the wearing of their tallits and kipas. They don’t understand that Torah (Mosaic Law) is holy and valid for every Christian—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 and to express their ‘Jewishness.’ Their false theology 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 Mosaic Law. Why would a Gentile, raised and nurtured in the anti-Law Church, want to keep Mosaic Law? Because the Holy Spirit has led them into God’s Truth on how to walk out their faith in Jesus.

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 what Christian will walk where Jesus is leading him, even if it goes against what they’ve been taught. 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 confronted 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 Christians tell them that the path is forbidden and dangerous. As someone who grew up in the Church told me; “If anyone even mentioned to keep the Law they could lose their salvation.” This concept is paralleled in the Jewish community with the Rabbis saying to their Jewish Flock: “If you read the New Testament you will go to Hell.” Satan is not a respecter of Jew nor Gentile. He uses the same tactic of fear in both communities.

Millions of Christians 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 Christian to walk out their faith in His Son through Mosaic Law, as interpreted by Yeshua, not the Rabbis (who have been known to pervert and twist God’s Word). Once this is realized, the Veil will be removed from the eyes of the Lord’s Bride so She will be able to see Her Bridegroom clearer than ever before, and walk out of the darkness of sin into the Light of His marvelous Glory.

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19 See Law and Grace. Also, see Goodbye Messianic Judaism! for why Messianic Judaism has failed to live up to its potential.

20 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.
THE FOUR RULES OF ACTS 15:20

The Church correctly understands Acts 15 to be a place where God declared that the Gentile Christian didn’t have to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved (justified), but the Church doesn’t realize that this prohibition against Mosaic Law only pertained to salvation. Theologians point to the four rules of Acts 15:20 and erroneously say that these are the only Old Testament rules for the Gentile (other than loving God and neighbor).22

The Church explains the four rules as ‘an expression of Christian charity’ toward ‘the weaker brother’ (the Jewish Christian).23 Theologians teach that the Jewish Christians hadn’t yet realized that they had been set free from the bondage of the Law, but seriously, could all the Jewish Apostles have been blind to this for the entire period that the Book of Acts covers (30-64 AD)? Interesting to note is that Yeshua never spoke of the Law’s demise in His 40 days with His 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 (as a lifestyle) for Christians.

Scholars recognize that all the Jewish believers, including Peter and Paul, continued to ‘live by the Jewish law.’24 Were all the Jewish Christians wrong? According to the Church they were, and so, as not to offend Jewish Christian sensibilities in this area of Mosaic Law, the Gentiles were asked to walk in these four rules.25 This way, theologians say, there would be ‘a basis for fellowship’ with the Jews,26 since the Jews were ‘in every city’ (15:21) in the Roman Empire.

F. F. Bruce, like most others, 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 the Jewish and the Gentile Christian.28 In other words, they were given by James so that the Gentile

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21 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.’

22 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 (non-moral) rules for the Gentile Christian (aside from love of God and neighbor).


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

27 Marshall, Acts, p. 253: ‘Gentiles should abstain from certain things which were repulsive to Jews.’

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

29 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
The Four Rules of Acts 15:20

Christians would be able to eat at the same table and fellowship with the Jewish Christians (who still kept Mosaic Law, specifically in relation to the dietary laws; Lev. 11, etc.). The four rules of Acts 15:20 tell 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, ‘the pollution of idols,’ deals with eating meat sacrificed to an idol.  

‘Things strangled’ (#3) is interpreted to mean the Gentile shouldn’t eat meat from a strangled animal (i.e. that 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 fully drained and/or adequately cooked (the Law prohibits the eating of blood; Lev. 3:17; cf. 1st Sam. 14:31-34). The Church, interpreting these rules, says that out of consideration for Jewish sensibilities the Gentile Christians wouldn’t break them so table fellowship could be established.

Rule #2, ‘sexual immorality,’ in many Bibles (e.g. the ASV, KJV, NASB and the NRSV) is listed as ‘fornication.’ It’s generally understood as any kind of unlawful sex, such as pre-marital sex, adultery, homosexuality or incest, etc. Marshall sees it as,

‘illicit sexual intercourse or as breaches of the Jewish marriage law (which forbade marriage between close relatives, Lev. 18:6-18).’

*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* isn’t 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.’

Without realizing it, Wycliffe has hit upon the key to unlocking the biblical interpretation of Acts 15:20—religious prostitution. The first rule, meat sacrificed to idols, obviously falls under sacrificial idolatry. The second rule, ‘sexual immorality,’ should also have been seen as part of sacrificial idolatry, simply from, as

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29 Marshall, *Acts*, p. 253. *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.’ Paul will address this issue for the Corinthians (1st Cor. 10:25-30) and the Romans (14:1-6f.) a few years later (52 and 54 AD respectively). For why Romans 14 does not authorize a Christian to take ‘any day’ as ‘his Sabbath’ (vv. 5-6), and what Paul is speaking about, see Romans 14 and the Dietary Laws.

30 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.’

31 Ibid.

32 Pfeiffer, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1152.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

Wycliff brought out, how rampant it was among the 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 the concept of sacrificial-sexual idolatry and so does *things strangled*. It wouldn’t be until this book was written that all four rules were seen to pertain to sacrificial-sexual idolatry and only this, so great has been the Veil over the eyes of Christians concerning this.

As to where James got the four rules from and what they meant to the Gentiles, R. J. Knowling writes that some thought the rules came from the seven laws of Noah, but he questions it ‘coming from Noah’ because even though,

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

In other words, if James took the four rules ‘from Noah’ why didn’t he give the Gentiles all seven rules of Noah? A very good question. 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 Christians 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.’ An excellent insight.

Knowling states that others consider ‘fornication’ as coming from Leviticus 17–18 (e.g. prohibited marriages), but this too is awkward as it makes the ‘written law…the source of the Jewish’ (i.e. James’) ‘prohibitions.’ Attempts have been made to present the four 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 distinction 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 Church’s Paul, and so it’s a valid point for those who hold to a ‘no-Law’ Gospel. Doubting the event, some say the decree was ‘formulated after Paul’s departure…But this view cannot be maintained,’ Knowling writes, 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 De-

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34 The seven rules of Noah are presented and discussed in the chapter, *Noah and Acts 15:20* on p. 181f.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., p. 336.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
cree 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 maimed 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 is not valid for the Gentile Christian. Yet, theologian David Williams writes that,

‘those who argue that Paul could not have endorsed the decrees as they appear in the accepted 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 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 the Gentile religious mindset that adding another god (i.e. Jesus), to their pantheon of gods wasn’t considered wrong, and they would continue to honor their other gods and goddesses through sacrificial-sexual idolatry. This would nullify their salvation.

The four rules weren’t made so that the Gentile Christian could fellowship and eat with his Jewish counterpart, as important as that is, but so that the Gentile could retain his salvation. The Gentile needed to know the boundaries and prohibitions (i.e. the rules or way of life) of the Covenant he had entered into. He had to realize what was required of him, 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 common 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 unacceptable and irresponsible because it not only hides the true meaning of the second rule, it also allows for the Decree to be totally distorted.

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 animal sacrifice. The third rule, strangled, speaks of a pagan sacrifice in which the neck of the victim was strangled (usually a bird), and the fourth rule forbids the drinking of the sacrificial animal’s fresh, raw blood, which is the pagan/satanic counterpart of drinking the Lord’s sacrificial blood from the Third Passover Cup. The four rules of James specifically deal with sacrificial-sexual idolatry, something Gentiles in the ancient world fully understood and practiced.

The four rules have 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 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 and god-

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40 Ibid., p. 337.
41 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.”
42 See Passover for the meaning of the Third Cup and why Yeshua chose this Cup to represent His blood.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

desses as they wanted. Their very souls were permeated with this understanding. ‘Adding Jesus’ to their pantheon wouldn’t be seen as blasphemous or wrong by them. Of course, this would be an abomination to God. 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.’

The four rules are 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. Once it’s understood that the four rules deal with sacrificial-sexual idolatry, the theological door swings wide open to realize that the four rules aren’t the ‘only ones’ for the Gentile, but the first of many that God has given to them. Now the Gentile Christian can learn to walk in Mosaic Law (Acts 15:21), just as his Jewish Christian counterpart does.

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 sacrificial-sexual idolatry, one is able to assume that the four rules are just random selections on the part of James that have little relevance for us today.

The Church doesn’t understand this ‘unit of cultic idolatry’ because of its vilification of Mosaic Law. It 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 at Mt. Sinai a malicious ogre. Did Yahweh set the Hebrews free from Egyptian slavery only to shuffle them ‘to the accursed Law’? No wonder why many Christians think that ‘the God of the Old Testament’ is so 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 understands as sin and what He requires of every Christian. The one who is cursed is the one not observing Mosaic Law. What this means today

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43 It is the height of ignorance and pride to present the new Gentile believers as stronger in the Faith than the Jewish Apostles. All the Apostles had been walking for many years with the Holy Spirit, and as is attested, would keep Mosaic Law all their lives, including Paul (Acts 21:20-24, 26; 22:12; 24:14; 25:8). The Church says the Apostles (except for Paul) were wrong. Could it be that the Church is wrong?

44 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’ (today), ‘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 seriously flawed, and not only because the rules have nothing to do with food laws. Contrary to what he writes, there are many Jewish (and Gentile) Christians today who are offended by Gentile Christians eating unclean animals in front of them. The only condition that has changed since James gave the ruling is that now there are more Gentile believers than Jewish believers, but as the Apostle 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 or a Messianic Jew to tell the Jew that he can eat pork, shrimp and catfish, etc., when the Jew knows that God forbids such things (Lev. 11:7; Dt. 12:8)? And doesn’t Jesus confirm this? (Mt. 5:17-19). Does God change?

45 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.
for Christians who don’t observe the Sabbath and who eat pig, etc., is that at these specific Mosaic rules they are sinning against God. 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.46

Today Christians have Bibles and the Holy Spirit to teach them the Way and the Truth, both of which not only symbolize Jesus, but also Mosaic Law.47 The problem is that most Christians have been blinded by the tradition of the Church that 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 of walking out one’s faith in Christ (Mt. 15:3, 7, 9; Rom. 3:20, 31).

All God’s commandments and statutes, etc., are for our blessing, protection and wisdom and they reveal to us how much He loves us and how we should love Him and our neighbor (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 who suffer. That’s why it’s so important to properly understand what God is saying about Mosaic Law in Acts 15:20-21, and of course, in the rest of the New Testament. Acts 15:20-21 is not an isolated account, and once understood it becomes the divine Fountainhead for understanding God’s position on Mosaic Law for every Christian.

Being ‘free in Christ’ is not a license to sin (Rom. 6:1f.). True freedom is walking in His will. By realizing that all four rules center around sacrificial-sexual idolatry, James was giving the Gentiles what God had given Israel when Israel was about to enter into the Promised Land. Yahveh 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 said,

‘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, Yahveh 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 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 James, the head of the Assembly. God didn’t expect the Gentiles to learn all Mosaic Law in

46 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!’”

47 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 Law in ignorance it’s still a sin and it has its consequences.)

48 The Way is a synonym for Mosaic Law in Ex. 13:21; 18:20; 23:20; 32:8; Dt. 9:12, 16: 11:28; 13:5; 31:29; Ps. 25:8; 32:8; 119:1, 14, 27, 30, 32-33, 35 (path i.e. ‘way’), 104-105; 139:24; Prov. 2:20; 15:10; 23:19; 29:27; Jer. 6:16; Mal. 2:8-9. The Truth is a synonym for Mosaic Law in Ps. 119:43, 142, 151, 160; Mal. 2:6, and also, The Life is a synonym for Mosaic Law in Dt. 30:15, 19-20; 32:47; Ps. 16:11; Prov. 3:1-3, 13-18; 6:23; 10:17; 12:28, etc. Yeshua was aligning Himself with Mosaic Law when He said in John 14:6 that He was the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the Living Word, which the words in Mosaic Law point to. As the Way, the Truth and the Life He was not obliterating Mosaic Law because they reflect Him and who He is.
one day, but the Gentiles were to be made immediately aware of the most important ones—not to continue in sacrificial-sexual idolatry⁴⁹ because it would sever their covenant with the God of Israel.

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, and walk them out—not as the Rabbis, nor the Sadducees, nor the Pharisees nor the Church knew them, but as their Lord Yeshua understood them. There is freedom in Christ when we actually follow Him and His Ways.

This view of Acts 15:20, that James 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).⁵⁰ 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 adultery, or even common prostitution, the Church’s teaching of ‘fellowship’ disintegrates and with it the Church’s theological position against Mosaic Law. Acts 15:20 is that important and that profound. The Law’s proper place in the life of every Christian will then be re-established and Yeshua will be glorified.

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

Acts 15:20 is the divine admonition of James 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 Yeshua. James then added verse 21, knowing that for the last nine years or so (from Cornelius, Family and Friends in Acts 10), Gentile Christians had been learning Mosaic Law at the synagogues, which term is used for both the traditional “non-believing in Jesus” synagogue and also a place like the ‘church’ at Antioch.⁵¹ These Gentile Christians were learning to walk out their faith in the Jewish Messiah 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 table fellowship for Acts 15:20. Theologians and pastors are no longer able to use Acts 15 to place a thick, 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 our Lord did.

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⁴⁹ Idolatry is not isolated to pagan altars. Astrology, Horoscopes and Tarot Cards, etc., are also idolatrous and exclude Christians from the Kingdom if they continue to practice those things (Gal. 5:19-21), but James is specifically addressing pagan sacrificial rites.

⁵⁰ 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.

⁵¹ See James 2:2, where the Greek word for ‘assembly’ is συναγωγή (su’nagogay), which is our English word synagogue (cf. ASV, which has synagogue for James 2:2).
THE FIRST RULE—SACRIFICIAL MEAT

In Acts 15:20 James presents four rules to the Gentile Christians, all of which are part of sacrificial-sexual idolatry. He says to them to keep away from,

1. ‘the pollutions of idols,
2. and the sexual immorality,
3. and the thing strangled,\(^5\)
4. and the blood.\(^6\)

The Greek phrase for the first rule (pollution of idols) is εἰδωλοματων των εἰδολον (aliskaymatone tone aydolone). Wesley Perschbacher says the word for pollution (aliskaymatone) means ‘pollution, defilement, Acts 15:20.’\(^5\) Bauer says it means to ‘make ceremonially impure’ and that the plural, pollutions (which is written in v. 20) ‘denotes separate acts.’\(^5\) Literally, it’s ‘the pollutions of idols.’ Timothy Friberg agrees.\(^6\) It’s something that defiles every time it’s done, for it can be done repeatedly.

Perschbacher states that the word for idols εἰδολον (aydolone) means,

‘a form, shape, figure; image or statue; hence, an idol, image of a god, Acts 7:41, et al.;
meton,\(^5\) a heathen god, 1st Cor. 8:4, 7.'\(^5\)

Friberg says it’s ‘an object resembling a person or animal and worshiped as a god idol, image.’\(^5\) Bauer concurs, adding that it’s a ‘false god.’\(^6\)

After James initially declares the rules in 15:20 they are mentioned twice more (Acts 15:29; 21:25) and this serves to further clarify what he meant for the first rule. Luke uses a very specific Greek word for idols in the latter two cites: εἰδολοθυτων (eadolo’thutone).\(^6\) Perschbacher says that it’s an animal,

\(^{5}\) The literal Greek rendering of this phrase is, ‘and the strangled.’ ‘Thing’ is not in the text, but it’s understood as ‘the thing(s) strangled,’ or ‘the strangled thing/s.’

\(^{5}\) Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort, Translators; J. D. Douglas, Editor; The New Greek–English Interlinear New Testament (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1990), p. 472. Taken from the English of the Interlinear. The definite article the is written in Greek before each of the four rules.


\(^{5}\) 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.’

\(^{5}\) Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, pp. 118-119.


\(^{5}\) Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 221.

THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

‘sacrificed to an idol…the remains of victims sacrificed to idols, reserved for eating; Acts 15:29; 21:25.’  
Friberg writes basically the same thing, 63 and David Williams states it was an animal ‘sacrificed to idols.’ 64

Bruce surmises that the Gentiles were ‘directed to avoid food which had idolatrous associations.’ 65 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 some time much 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. 66

David Stern, echoing Bruce, is also vague on when the meat was eaten. He says the rule meant to stay away from ‘food sacrificed to false gods.’ 67 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.’ 68

Bauer writes 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,’ 69 for what pagan Gentile would call his god an idol? Going on, he states,

‘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,’ 70 if there was anything left over.

Ben Witherington III, though, says it specifically means ‘something given, dedicated, even sacrificed to idols…in a temple.’ 71 He rightly realizes that the theme of the four rules is only properly understood when the first rule of Acts 15:20, the ‘pollutions of idols,’ is seen to be a sacrifice ‘eaten in the presence of the idol.’ 72 Witherington says it’s extremely crucial to realize that what James ruled on was ‘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 meat sold in the market? The four rules center around sacrificial-sexual idolatry, not the possible eating of ‘leftover’ sacrificial meat brought to the market and

64 Williams, Acts, p. 267.
66 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.’ Here Bruce exhibits such a biased rift between Mosaic Law and the New Testament.
70 Ibid.
72 Ibid., pp. 462-463.
The First Rule—Sacrificial Meat

then sold. The Apostle Paul addresses this issue of meat sold in the market and allows pagan sacrificial meat to be consumed by Christians when taken from the market or eaten at another’s dinner table (as long as it wasn’t made known to the Christian that it was meat sacrificed to an idol, for the pagan’s sake). 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 wasn’t any disagreement between James and Paul. The Apostle to the Gentiles upholds the rules of James (Acts 16:4-5) and helps to further clarify rule number one.

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

This brings ‘the pollutions of idols’ into sharper focus. The first rule falls squarely under sacrificial idolatry and sets the theme for the other three rules. The Church’s 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 Zeus?

No Christian today would 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 Christians were doing in two of the seven assemblies, in the name of Jesus! In Revelation 2:14 and 2:20 the Lord actually speaks of the first two rules of James, rebuking those Christians for eating animals sacrificed to idols at the time of the sacrifice and for participating in cult harlotry, thinking those two things were acceptable as Christians! The first two rules of James were necessary for the Gentile Christians because they carried a lot of pagan ‘baggage’ when they came to Jesus, and many of them wouldn’t think they had to give it up as a Christian.

James 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 Gentile Christians participating in the eating of animals sacrificed to an idol at the time of the sacrifice, not once, but as a lifestyle. This understanding sets up the conceptual theme of sacrificial idolatry for the four rules, and begins to dismantle the superficial concept of ‘table fellowship.’

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73 See Romans 14 and the Dietary Laws.
THE SECOND RULE—CULT PROSTITUTION

The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament uses the term ‘sexual immorality’ to translate the Greek word πορνεία (pornay’ah), the second rule of James in Acts 15:20. The New Revised Standard Version Bible translates the word as ‘fornication.’ This is not unusual as various English words can be used to convey the meaning of a Greek or a Hebrew word, but what is sexual immorality and what is fornication? Are they interchangeable and do either of them represent what James 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 (to prostitute one’s self) is then figuratively expanded in a number of ways (e.g. to criticize Israel for making treaties with other nations, and not relying on Yahveh, or of one who practices magic, selling himself to it instead of Yahveh, etc.). It’s also used as a derogatory epithet for an adulteress, as God’s unfaithful wife when she deserts Him for another god.

James, the half brother of Jesus, was a Jew, and at the Council of Acts 15 in Jerusalem he spoke Hebrew, not Greek. Therefore, even though Luke wrote the Book of Acts in Greek, the Greek words that Luke

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74 Brown, The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament, 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.

75 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; a Jewish remnant returned to Israel beginning around 520 BC). There’s also the witness of the early Church Father, Papias (70-163 AD), Bishop of Hierapolis in western Turkey, who wrote, ‘Matthew put down the words of the Lord in the Hebrew language’ (ibid., pp. 23-24).

In the 1950s the three Synoptic Gospels were translated from the Greek text into Hebrew for Israelis. 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).

Also interesting to note is that Rabbinic literature of that time was all written in Hebrew (ibid., p. 43), and 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 also 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).

The Second Rule—Cult Prostitution

places in the mouth of James are rooted in their Hebrew concepts. The Hebrew word that he spoke that day was זנות (zinute), which means prostitution (or harlotry or whoredom).

Francis Brown, in his classic Hebrew lexicon, categorizes biblical prostitution into three areas: ‘sexual,’ ‘international’ and ‘religious.’ Except for one cite, though, where Brown speaks of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God (Num. 14:33), all the cites he lists specifically speak of cult prostitution.77

Cult prostitution was the ‘high point’ of an idolatrous sacrificial event and what attracted the Gentiles to worship the gods—sexual idolatry. Satan knows how to lure man to himself—just equate worship with sex. The symbolic meaning of this act was union with the god or goddess through sex with the temple priestesses (cult harlots) or cult priests (homosexuality).

The Hebrew noun stems from the verb זנות (zanah) and means to prostitute one’s self, and its use in the Hebrew Scriptures also points directly to cult harlotry. The Hebrew word used to describe a person who is a prostitute or a harlot is זונה (zonah). It’s never used of an adulterer or a sexually immoral person, and its primary meaning in the Old Testament is that of a cult harlot.78 Of the 138 English words associated with harlotry in the KJV Old Testament,

1. 110 times (79.7%) specifically speaks of cult harlotry,
2. while 21 times (15.2%) the word refers to both cult and common harlotry.

This means that an astounding 131 times out of 138 times (94.9%) these words refer to cult harlotry.

The harlotry or prostitution that God repeatedly comes against in the Old Testament is overwhelmingly cultic, not common, and nowhere do any of the three Hebrew words speak of literal adultery.79 As we’ll see, there is no difference in meaning and usage in the Greek New Testament between the Greek word for harlotry (pornay’ah) and its Hebrew counterpart, yet no English Bible has even ‘prostitution’ for Acts 15:20, let alone cult prostitution.

This one-two punch of James, of not eating animal meat sacrificed at the time and place of the pagan sacrifice, and the prohibition against sex with cult harlots presents the theme of sacrificial-sexual idolatry for the next two rules also. None of the four rules have anything to do with table fellowship, but with warning the new Gentile Christians to sever themselves from this brazen form of idolatry, for the sake of their own

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76 Scroll (1947f.), “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, James spoke Hebrew at the Council of Acts 15, which means that we have to look ‘in back of the Greek words’ to the Hebrew words of James in order to more fully understand what he said and meant.

77 See p. 21f. for a detailed explanation of why zinute means cult prostitution.

78 The schematic chart that reveals the number of times the English words for harlot and fornication, etc., are used in a cultic or non-cultic sense begins on p. 29.

79 KJV: Proverbs 6:26 whore; 7:10 whorish woman; 23:27 whore and 29:23 harlots. See page 29f., for a chart that reveals the words and where their Scripture cites are.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

salvation. After all, the Council of Acts 15 was called to determine what a Gentile had to do in order to be saved, and James not only declared how that was to be (by faith in Messiah only; Acts 15:11f.), but also what a Gentile needed to do to retain his salvation (the four rules of Acts 15:20). With Gentiles having many gods and goddesses, “adding Jesus” to them would not have seemed wrong to many of them.

Cult harlotry is the biblical meaning of the Hebrew word for the second rule in Acts 15:20, and so it’s clear that James was prohibiting the new Gentile Christians from continuing to practice sacrificial-sexual idolatry. This theme of sacrificial-sexual idolatry is supported by the use of the word in the Old Testament, Israel’s history and her practice of cult prostitution, and also its practice among the Gentiles in the ancient world in the time of James.

This theological understanding begins to create a divine seismic paradigm shift for Christians who live under the illusion of a ‘Law-Free Gospel,’ because the Church’s reason for the rules (table fellowship) is untenable, not realizing what the first two rules mean, and it goes directly against God’s New Testament Scripture.\(^8^0\) Three of the four rules come directly from Mosaic Law, with the fourth being adduced from it and being given as a special rule specifically pertaining to the Gentiles.

Mosaic Law was supposed to have been nullified for Christians at the death of Jesus. The Council of Acts 15 took place in 48 AD, and Luke wrote the Book of Acts in 64 AD. Luke never mentions that the decision of James was wrong (or that the Gentiles didn’t have to follow it), and as Acts 15:21 will bring out, these four rules weren’t ‘the only (Mosaic) laws for the Gentiles,’ as the Church teaches, but the first of many Mosaic laws for them.

If Jesus lived His entire life keeping all the laws and rules of Moses that applied to Him, and Mosaic Law was the Standard that judged Him sinless, how can it be that Christians, who are commanded to imitate or follow Jesus in all things, don’t keep the 7th day Sabbath, the Feasts of Israel, and eat animals and fish that would have been sin for Jesus? The Church says a Christian need only follow the moral law in the Law, but nowhere does it say that in the New Testament.\(^8^1\)

The next three sections will reveal the Hebrew words for prostitution, to prostitute and a prostitute so we can see that these words have nothing to do with things like adultery or the general term, sexual immorality. This in turn means that the second rule cannot be anything but harlotry and a harlotry that is cultic

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\(^{80}\) For two one page articles that reveal Mosaic Law as God’s holy Standard for how a Christian should walk out their faith in Jesus, see The Feasts of Israel and the Church and The Two Triangles of the NT.

\(^{81}\) See Law 102 and Take the Quiz! Five Quick Questions about the New Testament.
The Hebrew Noun Zinute (Prostitution)

Zinute (זְנוּת) is the Hebrew noun that is the second rule in Acts 15:20. It’s important to understand what the Hebrew lexicons (Bible language dictionaries that define biblical words) say about the word he uses for the second rule. Does it mean cult prostitution, sexual immorality, adultery or something else? Francis Brown, in his classic Hebrew lexicon, states that zinute means ‘fornication.’ He lists three categories with Scripture cites concerning his three different kinds or areas of fornication:

1. ‘sexual,’ Hosea 4:11,
2. ‘international,’ Ezekiel 23:27 and
3. ‘religious,’ Num. 14:33; Jer. 3:2, 9; 13:27; Ezk. 43:7, 9; Hos. 6:10.82

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. All of Brown’s cites speak of literal cult harlotry, except for Numbers 14:33.

First, Brown’s ‘sexual’ for Hosea 4:11 speaks of harlotry. The very 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 cemented 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 alone!’ For Brown ‘fornication’ that he describes as only ‘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.’

Second, for ‘international’ Brown lists Ezk. 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. 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 whoredom. 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.’83 It’s the placing of two synonymous phrases or sentences side by side84 (or one after the other). The biblical phrase in Ezekiel, ‘gone a whoring,’ parallels ‘their idols.’ The ‘whoring’ must be cultic. Brown’s ‘international fornication’ specifically refers to cult prostitution, not common prostitution nor adultery nor anything else.

Third, 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 faithlessness 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

83 Bivin, Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus, p. 89.
84 Ibid.
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’ doesn’t mean literal adultery, but the worship of pagan gods and the use of cult harlots by the people of Israel. The phrase ‘on the hills’ is a reference to where the men of Judah would go to engage in cult harlotry and worship Baal or other gods and goddesses.

Judah was in covenant with Yahweh, 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 not only animals to them, but also their own children, and then commit cult harlotry. Only in this figurative 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 between a man and a woman.

In Brown’s category on religious, ‘figurative’ is used (Num. 14:33) to describe Israel’s unfaithfulness and rebellion to Yahweh. Alongside that is ‘cult prostitution’ (in Jeremiah). Brown lists two other passages in 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 (except for Num. 14:33) are Israel whoring after pagan gods—cult prostitution.

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 words are not against common harlotry. It’s against the northern kingdom of Israel steeped in sacrificial-sexual idolatry. The verse, therefore, speaks of 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 lists 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 abomination happens ‘in the Name of Jesus’). TDOT states for Hosea 9:1 that, ‘Israel’s har-

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86 Those Christians were most likely worshiping Jesus through sacrificial-sexual idolatry or worshipping another
The Second Rule in Hebrew—Cult Prostitution

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 God was telling Judah not to become like her northern neighbor Israel, or else she too, would share in Israel’s punishment. 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 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.’

The northern kingdom of Israel was a land and a people defiled with cult prostitution, from its inception under Jeroboam in 922 BC to its utter destruction two centuries later 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 the knowledge of Yahveh and His Law, which revealed what was right and wrong in God’s eyes, and prohibited cult harlotry. Hosea 4:12 states that the ‘people consult their wooden idols’ 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.*’

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 no ‘common harlotry’ here that Hosea is speaking against.

Benjamin Davidson says *zinute* means ‘whoredom.’ He doesn’t list any cites, but says it can also apply to *idolatry,* which would mean cult harlotry. Harris, in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament,* writes that *zinute* means ‘fornication.’ Unfortunately, he doesn’t list any cites either, but both men will flesh out their understanding of ‘whoredom’ and ‘fornication’ when they speak of the Hebrew verb that *zinute* comes from, and also, the personal noun it makes.

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89 Ibid.
90 Ibid., pp. 55-56.
91 Ibid., p. 54. Licentiousness is the throwing off of all sexual restraint.
93 Harris, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament,* vol. 1, p. 246.
The Hebrew term that James used in Acts 15:20 for the second rule, zินע (zinate), which Brown translates as ‘fornication,’ continually refers to cult prostitution (from the cites that he lists). Only one time does he note a figurative sense in Israel’s rebellion against Yahweh (Num. 14:33), which he spoke of as religious.

From its biblical context and usage in the lexicons, the Hebrew word that James spoke in Acts 15:20 means 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 zินע (prostitution) immediately after the first rule on sacrificial idolatry points directly to cult prostitution—not common prostitution or adultery, incest or any other form of unlawful sex. Cult harlotry is the primary meaning of the Hebrew noun 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 seen as such by all the Jewish Christians there, including the Apostle Paul. This, despite the fact that other forms of unlawful sex can be associated with it as a secondary meaning. More on that in the chapter, Schematic on Harlotry in the Old Testament.\(^94\)

**The Hebrew Verb Zanah (to Prostitute)**

Hebrew nouns like zินע are generally derived from Hebrew verbs. In this case the verb is פֶּן (zanah).\(^95\) 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.\(^96\)

Brown’s primary meaning is ‘harlotry’ (‘commit fornication…harlot’) and cult harlotry (‘actual prostitution…especially Israel, Judah and Jerusalem’) and as we’ll see, most of these primarily refer to cult harlotry. His reference for Gen. 38:24 is to harlotry in general, but it should be cult harlotry, as the chapter on Judah and Tamar revealed.\(^97\)

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), but this is not necessarily cult harlotry, but what we might call promiscuity. Her punishment for not being a virgin was death by stoning. The Lord takes sex outside of marriage 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 (Israel) would play the harlot with their (pagan) 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.’

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\(^94\) Schematic on Harlotry in the Old Testament begins on p. 29.

\(^95\) Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, p. 240.


\(^97\) See Judah and Tamar on p. 32f.
Obviously, these harlots are cult harlots (‘gods...eat of his sacrifice,’ etc.), even if they weren’t employed full time in that profession. In *Israel and Baal Peor*98 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 fornication all speak of 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. Then he 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 sin 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!’

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. Animal 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 unfaithfulness, desertion and rebellion to God and the covenant He made with her. In the verse, 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.’99 Davidson, speaking of ‘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).’100 It also states that originally the word referred to ‘unregulated, illicit sexual behavior between man and woman.’101 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 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.’102 It states, ‘To whore away from Yahweh is synonymous with adultery.’103 The term adultery is

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98 See p. 34f.
101 Ibid.
true on a spiritual level because Israel was Yahveh’s unfaithful wife for much of the time after they came into Canaan until God deported the last remnants of them to Babylon, about seven centuries (approximately 1350-586 BC). Literally though, as a people, they were practicing cult harlotry. That doesn’t mean that common harlotry and adultery were unheard of, but their gross and perennial sin was sacrificial-sexual idolatry. 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 confirms that Jeremiah is speaking of cult harlotry when it says that they were harlots upon every high hill:

“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).”

The high hills were the places where the gods were worshipped, being closer to the heavens. TDOT writes that Jeremiah compares this apostasy to adultery (Jer. 3), and says that Judah ‘participates in the syncretistic cult.’ In Jeremiah 3 the adultery of Israel is linked with idols, which can only mean cult harlotry (‘under every high hill’). 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. Because of their covenant marriage to Yahveh (Jer. 3:1, 7-8, 20, etc.), their sacrificial-sexual idolatry was figuratively seen as adultery.

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament states that zanah means, to ‘commit fornication, be a harlot, play the harlot.’ 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, and yet none of them come out and flatly state that the use of the word in the Old Testament primarily means cult harlotry.

Translating zinute (harlotry) in Acts 15:20 as sexual immorality, one would be hard pressed to understand that its primarily use in the Hebrew Old Testament means cult harlotry. This is a severe problem that adversely effects their ability to understand 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

102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
104 Israel came into Canaan under Joshua about 1400 BC, and was true to God in the time of Joshua and the Elders that survived him (Joshua 24:31). It seems that Joshua lived about 30 years after he entered the land (to 110 years old; Joshua 24:29), and giving another 20 years to the Elders that survived him gets us the approximate date of 1350 BC.
105 Jenni, TLOT, Volume 1, p. 389.
106 Botterweck, TDOT, vol. IV, pp. 102-103
107 Ibid., p. 103.
The Second Rule in Hebrew—Cult Prostitution

were noted for their cult harlotry:

‘In a few instances זנה (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 ‘ensnared the peoples with her harlotry and the nations with her magical arts, v. 4.’ It can also be used as a warning ‘against surrender to the alien secular wisdom of Greece.’

William Wilson summarizes zanah and even though he doesn’t specifically mention cult harlotry, his writing of ‘worshipping other gods’ reveals 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;’ 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.’

Zanah (harlotry) has some various secondary meanings, but its usage in the Old Testament is primarily cultic. This is how all the ancient peoples worshiped their gods and goddesses and this is what enticed Israel to spiritual adultery, which is apostasy. TDOT states,

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

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.’

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 numerous 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 134 times. In other words, more than 31% of the occurrences are found in these two chapters where the Prophet is condemning Judah for her cult harlotry—not common harlotry, incest, homosexuality, adultery, or premarital sex, etc.

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11 Ibid., p. 586.
12 Sinclair, Collins English Dictionary, p. 1637. ‘Trop.’ is an abbreviation for trope, which means ‘a word or expression used in a figurative sense.’
15 Ibid., p. 99.
16 Ibid., p. 103.
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 sexual idolatry.

The lexicons reveal that zanah primarily refers to cult harlotry. Both the Hebrew noun and verb reveal that James’ word primarily refers to cult harlotry which, placed after James’ first rule on the prohibition of eating sacrificial meat at the pagan shrine, sets in motion the conceptual framework for the last two rules to also belong in 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 the general English definition of illicit sex cannot possibly be what James meant for his second rule to all the Gentile Christians in Acts 15:20.

**The Hebrew Participle Zonah (Prostitute)**

The Hebrew word used to describe a person who commits zinute (noun: harlotry; common or cultic) and who practices zanah (verb: to commit harlotry; common or cultic) is זָנָה (zonah). In English the meaning of zonah revolves around three synonymous words: prostitute, whore and harlot, and only these. In other words, a zonah is not an adulteress.

Brown and Davidson 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.’

As is evident, there’s no mention of an adulteress or a homosexual, etc. Zonah is confined to meaning only a prostitute. As to which kind the Old Testament speaks of most of the time, the next chapter will reveal that cult harlotry overwhelmingly has this distinction.

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119 Ibid., p. 104.
122 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.


**The Second Rule in Hebrew—Cult Prostitution**

**Schematic on Harlotry in the Old Testament**

Of the 138 times that the various English terms for *harlotry* are used in the KJV Old Testament, 110 times specifically mean cult harlotry. 21 times it can be either cultic or common, and only four times does it refer to only common, which is very telling in relation to James’ use of the word. The following are the 10 English words and times of usage (‘Ocurs’) taken from the King James Version of the 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>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fornications</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</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>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Whore</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</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>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>138</strong></td>
<td><strong>110</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. The 5 times that *fornication* \(^{123}\) and its plural \(^{124}\) are used speak of cult harlotry.

B. 30 of the 37 times that *harlot* appears specifically speaks of Israel and Judah, etc., practicing cult harlotry. \(^{122}\) The other 7 times pertain to either a cult or a common harlot, meaning that it applies to both.

C. *Harlots* and *harlot’s* appear 6 times, with 4 times being a cult harlot, and one of those times specifically being the word for cult harlotry (*תַּנְכָּה*; *kiday’sha*), \(^{126}\) while once it refers to both, and once it refers to common harlots.

D. Three of the 11 times that *whore* is used speak specifically of a cult whore, while five times it can be

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\(^{124}\) Ibid., *Fornications*: Ezek. 16:15.

\(^{125}\) Ibid., Three times the word for ‘harlot’ is *kiday’sha* (literally *cult* harlot; Gen. 38:21 (twice), 22. The rest are *זָנוָה* (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 *זנוּה* (harlot), which means they practiced cult harlotry: Is. 1:21; 23:15-16; Jer. 2:20; 3:1, 6, 8; Ezek. 16:15-16, 28, 31, 35, 41; 23:5, 19, 44; Nahum 3:4; Micah 1:7 (3 times). The next 7 cites of *זנוּה* can refer to 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.

\(^{126}\) Ibid., *Harlots*: 1st Kgs. 3:16 (the cite isn’t necessarily a cult harlot, but can be); Prov. 29:3 common harlots; Jer. 5:7; Hos. 4:14 (*kiday’sha*, the specific term for a cult harlot). *Harlot’s*: Josh. 2:1; 6:22.
either cult or common, meaning it refers to both, and twice it speaks of a common whore.\textsuperscript{127}

E. 20 of 22 times that \textit{whoredom} is seen refer to cult harlotry, with the other two times being either,\textsuperscript{128} and 31 of the 32 times that \textit{whoredoms} is written specifically refer to cult harlotry, while only one time doesn’t refer to actual whoredom.\textsuperscript{129}

F. Of the 3 times that \textit{whores} or \textit{whore’s} are used, twice they refer to a cult harlot and once can be either a cult or a common harlot.\textsuperscript{130}

G. 13 of the 19 times that \textit{whoring} is seen specifically mean cult harlotry,\textsuperscript{131} while five times it can mean either, with once not referring to either. Two of the three times that \textit{whorish} is used specifically speak of cult prostitution, while one time it speaks of common harlotry.\textsuperscript{132}

Of the 138 English words\textsuperscript{133} associated with harlotry, 110 times (79.7\%) specifically speak of \textit{cult} harlotry, while 21 times (15.2\%) refers to cult and common harlotry. This means that 131 times out of 138 times (94.9\%) these words refer to \textit{cult} harlotry. The \textit{harlotry} that God repeatedly comes against in the Old Testament is overwhelmingly cultic, not common, and none speak of literal adultery.

This presentation takes the foundation out from under those who translate James’ word as ‘sexual immorality’ or adultery, etc. With that, their interpretation of the four rules speaking of table fellowship is shattered. If only used by itself, the Hebrew word that James used that day (\textit{zinate}—harlotry) directly points to \textit{cult} harlotry, but coming immediately after the first rule on sacrificial idolatry it definitely means that James spoke of \textit{cult} harlotry, not common harlotry, and certainly not adultery, nor the vague term ‘sexual immorality.’ It’s easy to see that the other two rules of James, \textit{blood} and \textit{things strangled}, fall right into place as components of sacrificial-sexual idolatry. All four rules together form James’ conceptual unit against sacrificial-sexual idolatry. The teaching of the Church, that Acts 15:20 speaks of table fellowship, is totally unwarranted and outlandish. The four rules were not given because the ‘weaker Jewish

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\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., \textit{Whore} as cult harlot: Dt. 23:17-18 (v. 17 kiday’sha); Ezk. 16:28.

\textit{Whore} as either a cult or a common harlot: Lev. 19:29; 21:7, 9; Dt. 22:21; Judg. 19:2; Is. 57:3.

A common whore: Prov. 6:26; 23:27.

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., \textit{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. \textit{Whoredom} as either: Gen. 38:24; Lev. 19:29.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., \textit{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).

\textit{Whoredoms} as unfaithfulness (Num. 14:33). This is figurative prostitution.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., \textit{Whores} as cult harlots: Ezk. 16:33; Hos. 4:14; as either cultic or common: Jer. 3:3.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., \textit{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. \textit{Whoring} as either cult and/or common prostitution: Num. 15:39; Ps. 73:27. \textit{Whoring} as sacrificial idolatry, which includes cult harlotry: Lev. 17:7; 20:5. \textit{Whoring} as idolatry, which is cult prostitution: Judges 8:27. \textit{Whoring} as witchcraft, which speaks of figurative harlotry: Lev. 20:6.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., \textit{Whorish} as cult harlotry: Ezk. 6:9; 16:30; as either: Prov. 6:26.

\textsuperscript{133} Jenni, \textit{Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament}, vol. 1 p. 388, states there are 134 occurrences of \textit{zanah} and its root. The difference between the KJV and the \textit{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 \textit{.Padding.kiday’sha,} the specific word for a cult harlot, which isn’t from \textit{Padding.zanah} (to commit harlotry). So, the KJV count, without \textit{Kiday’sha}, is 132, which is two less than \textit{TLOT}. It’s possible that the KJV uses another term for the two, not listed in the 10 above, or that the count of \textit{TLOT} is off by two, most likely the former.
brethren’ clung to the ‘outdated’ Law of Moses and the new Gentile Christians wanted to appease them in their heresy.

The Council of Acts 15 was called to decide what constituted salvation for the Gentile. Acts 15:20, with its four rules, underscores that issue. The rules were the litmus test for the Gentile Christians that determined if their 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 are not ‘the only rules’ for the Gentiles, as the next verse reveals (Acts 15:21). The four rules are the first of many Mosaic rules so the Gentile Christians could begin to order their lives around their new and unique God and His way of living out their faith in His Son (cf. Rom. 3:20, 31; 7:12, 14; 1st Cor. 11:1; Hebrews 13:8; 1st John 2:6).

How Christian scholars and theologians can teach that all the Jewish Apostles somehow missed the Lord Jesus on His understanding of Mosaic-Law so many years after the resurrection is beyond comprehensible. Acts 15 took place 18 years after the resurrection in 48 AD (cf. Mt. 13:10-11; Acts 1:1-3; 21:20). The Jewish Christians were certainly not ‘weaker’ in their faith because they kept Mosaic Law, but were following in the footsteps of their Savior. On the other hand, the Church has been deceived through the Pope (Daniel 7:25), with its Catholic paradigm of a ‘Law-free Gospel,’ and Acts 15:20 reveals that.

The next three sections will reveal Yakov’s ‘Family History’ and present paganism’s worship of the gods, and confirm the reason why James gave these four Mosaic rules on sacrificial-sexual idolatry to the Gentile Christians first. Then it’ll become clear why James gave the four rules, and why the second rule specifically speaks of cult harlotry; not common harlotry, and certainly not adultery, fornication or the nebulous phrase sexual immorality.
JUDAH AND TAMAR

The story of Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38) reveals that the general term zonah (female prostitute; common or cultic) is synonymous with the specific Hebrew word for a female cult prostitute קדשה (kiday'sha). Genesis 38 uses these two different Hebrew words for Tamar, but at first it’s impossible to know if Judah thought she was a common or a cult harlot because the text around the first times zonah is used isn’t descriptive enough to determine what kind of harlot she was. Further on in the story, though, Judah’s understanding about her clearly comes out when his friend Hirah (Gen. 38:12, 20) uses קדשה (kiday’sha; female cult harlot) to describe the 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 (לְזוֹנָה lih’zonah, 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 whomredom (KJV; zanah, 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 Judah’s friend Hirah tries to locate the harlot, to bring her wages to her, he specifically speaks of her being a kiday’sha (female 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).

Benjamin 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 confirms that zonah can specifically refer to kiday’sha, a female cult prostitute, and that it’s identical with it. IBD states,

‘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.’

“I will not punish your daughters when they act promiscuously or your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, for the men themselves go off with prostitutes and make sacrifices with cult prostitutes. People without discernment are doomed.” (Hos. 4:14 HCSB)

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Judah and Tamar

The Hebrew word for a prostitute (zonah) is conceptually the same as the specific term for a female cult harlot (kiday'sha). This means when we see ‘prostitute’ (harlot; whore) in English Bibles it can be speaking of a cult prostitute, and as we’ve seen, it does. The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament also realizes this and writes of temple prostitutes, saying that ‘the usage may be extended to refer to prostitution in general.’

The use of zonah for a cult prostitute is at least 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 Jewish Council would know that he meant cult harlotry. The use of the Greek word for a harlot will also equate her with cult harlotry, and in the New Testament it’ll be seen that ‘harlot’ speaks of cult harlotry most of the time.

We’ve seen that the primary emphasis in Hebrew authoritative lexicons 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 James 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 involve union with another god or goddess, which would mean the loss of salvation. The chapter on Jesus and Divorce (p. 77f.) will further reveal this difference and what the biblical ground for divorce actually is between two Christians.

We’ll see that the four rules of Acts 15:20 are a conceptual unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry. James was warning the new Gentile Christians that sacrificial-sexual idolatry would cancel their salvation, and so it needed to be stopped immediately. 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 confirm this.

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**ISRAEL AND BAAL PEOR**

Even before the Sons of Israel had entered the Land that God had promised to them, Israel disgraced herself by playing the (cult) harlot. *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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139 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 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 entire Camp of Israel, so great was their offense (Num. 25:11). This is biblical fornication and expressly what James didn’t want Christian Gentiles doing in their pagan temples, 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. 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.’ 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.’ 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. 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 זָנָה (zanah) is used. It means, ‘to commit whoredom, play the harlot; frequently’ involving ‘idolatry.’ 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. 77f.).

One could say that cult prostitution falls under the general term ‘sexual immorality,’ but how would anyone know that cult harlotry was what James meant if the English translation of the second rule is sexual immorality? It’s not possible because sexual immorality can be seen as adultery or promiscuity, 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 engaged in—sexual idolatry. This revealed Israel’s faithless and perverse heart. This is apostasy and Israel

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143 This kind of pagan ‘worship’ was going on all over the world in the day of James. 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).
144 Hislop, The Two Babylons, pp. 230-231.
145 Ibid., p. 226.
146 Ibid., pp. 231-232.
147 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.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

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 צָנָה (tzah‘mahd). It means, ‘to be bound to, joined to.’ The noun speaks of a ‘pair, couple, yoke (of oxen, mules, horsemen).’ The verb also means, ‘specif. 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...צָנָה (zanah harlotry) ‘construed with זָרָה (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. צָנָה (tzah‘mahd) ‘in the Niphal, to bind one’s self to a person. Baal-Peor is the Beal 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 Hebrews 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 Hebrews weren’t worshiping the one true God and Him only (cf. Jer. 16:10f.). This is biblical fornication 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 כַּלְלָה (kahl‘lah). It means, ‘to complete, finish, end…to waste, ruin, destroy’ and ‘to cause to vanish.’ Yahveh was very angry with Israel because of their whoring hearts. She was God’s

149 Ibid., p. 646.
150 Ibid.
151 Brown, NDB, p. 855.
152 Sinclair, Collins English Dictionary, p. 1226. Priapus: ‘(in classical antiquity) the god of the male procreative power and of gardens and vineyards.’
154 See Ex. 22:20; 34:12-16; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8; Rev. 18:4-5.
Israel and Baal Peor

wife and the Lord was ready to annihilate her. 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 licentiousness’ 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. 46f.) Yahveh prohibited it for His people Israel and so would James 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 Joshua’s death (c. 1370 BC), until the captivity in Babylon (586 BC), almost 800 years, Scripture abounds with Yahveh grieving and being angry with His people because of their adulterous hearts. 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 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

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158 Jer. 2:20; 3:1; Ezek. 16:1-31, etc.
160 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.
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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 Israel 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 Israeli, along with his family and friends, sat down with the priest and ate some of the meat of the sacrifice (Lev. 3:1-17). 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 God wouldn’t share that view with them. The danger that James envisioned for the Gentile Christians 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 in Acts 15:20 as ‘sexual immorality’ or ‘unchastity,’ etc., do a grave injustice to the Word of God and a tremendous 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? Jesus 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 Hebrew words and from Genesis 38, and now from Israel’s apostasy at Baal Peor, the understanding of word has consistently meant cult prostitution. With the first rule of James speaking against sacrificial idolatry, and his second rule prohibiting cult harlotry, two strong pillars are established toward the concept that the four rules are 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 sacrificial-sexual worship of other gods. Cult prostitution was devastating to ancient Israel, and it’s the reason why James gave his four rules to the Gentiles first.

161 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 James, and every other Jew at the Council, knew about their own Family History and how devastating cult harlotry had been to Israel. It will confirm why the 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 nebulous term ‘sexual immorality,’ which totally distorts the rule/s of James.

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 קדש (kadaysh, the specific term for a male temple prostitute ‘priest’), “23:17. Profits derived” (from cult harlotry) “are not to be used on behalf of 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).”*163

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.”*164

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.”*165

Male cult prostitutes are designated by the specific word קדש (kadaysh), while the term for the female cult prostitute is קדשה (kiday’sha, the feminine form of the word for the male). This is what Tamar made

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*165 Woolf, 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.’

*166 Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 949.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

herself out to be (Gen. 38:21-22). Some might ask, ‘If the second rule spoke of cult prostitution, why didn’t he use the specific words for cult prostitutes?’ James used zinute, which as we’ve seen was more than enough 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. Witherington states this, saying “all four items in the decree were shorthand for things that took place in pagan temples.”

Tim Hegg adds that the rules were 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 James meant by the four rules, especially rule two.

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, with few exceptions. 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 any Hebrews who 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 and sin were 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)

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169 2nd Kgs. 17:1-23; Jer. 26:5; 35:15.
171 Ibid.
mother, he ‘perpetuated the worst features of Solomon’s idolatry (1st Kings 14:22-24).’ The ‘worst features’ of idolatry means that he indulged in cult harlotry, and most likely 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 (Mosaic Law) or literally, the Instruction (Teaching) 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 Yahweh and opened them up to their enemies. Sacrificial-sexual idolatry was brazen disloyalty and unfaithfulness on the part of Israel. It was apostasy, yet God 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 Yahweh 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, Yahweh 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 Yahweh. 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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172 Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary., p. 514.

173 The Hebrew word for Mosaic Law, Torah, means, to teach, instruct or direct, and therefore, the Law’s primary purpose 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.’

174 Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary., p. 514.

175 There were righteous kings before Hezekiah, like Asa (904-864 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).

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 demonstrates 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 πορνεῖαι’” (Greek *pornay’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 uncompromising rejection of the practice of *sacral 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 be-

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181 Dt. 28:49-68; 31:16.
182 See Jer. 16:14-16; 33:6-26; Hosea 1:10-11; Joel 2:18-19; Zephaniah 3:8-20; Rom. 9–11, etc.
Cult Prostitution in Ancient Israel

trayed 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 and pain for her can also be felt:

16:4 “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 “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. 8 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 “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 “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 “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 “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 “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 ungratuefulness, 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 their lust for flesh—sensual 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 sacrificial-sexual idolatry. 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 James 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 (e.g. 1st Cor. 10:21).

James’ use of zinite (prostitution) means ‘cult prostitution.’ The context, usage, 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 James 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 zinite (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 will fall into the same category of sacrificial idolatry, which takes the rules out of the realm of table fellowship and places it squarely into the sphere of sacrificial-sexual 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

183 Ezek. 16:15-16, 18-22, 24-25; cf. 2nd Kings 16:3; 23:10.

184 See Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10.
happen among ‘former pagan’ Gentile Christians who had never known a God like Yahveh, nor His commandments, which were His way of living out their lives.

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 with ‘what the Gentiles must do to be saved’ (cf. Acts 15:1). On the other hand, it had everything to do with their salvation. 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 further yield understanding and insight concerning the vast extent of sacrificial idolatry in the Gentile world. It will also help explain why James 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 that 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 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.*’\(^\text{185}\)

Semiramis of Nineveh, known as both the Queen of Heaven and *Ishtar* (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.’\(^\text{186}\)

Hammurabi (1810-1750 BC), noted for his Code of laws,\(^\text{187}\) was King of Babylon in the time of Father Abraham.\(^\text{188}\) 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.’\(^\text{189}\)

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

‘was a national custom in…which even daughters of prominent families followed and to which no shame attached.’\(^\text{190}\)

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

“We find from Herodotus that the peculiar and abominable institution of Babylon in pros-

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\(^*\text{185}\) Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, p. 5. Read *The Two Babylons—The Full Hislop*.


\(^*\text{187}\) 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

tituting 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.191

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

‘the Assyrian Venus…the great goddess of Babylon, and the Cyprian Venus were one and the same.’192

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.’193

Mylitta, whom Herodotus speaks of, was just another name for Venus, the prototype of whom was the Babylonian Queen Semiramis, deified.194

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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191 Hislop, The Two Babylons, p. 157. In ancient Israel Vulcan was known as Molech, the god who devoured infants, being burned alive in sacrifice to him. That’s why Yahweh was so adamant against Israel worshiping him (Lev. 18:21; 20:1-5; cf. 1st Kgs. 11:7; 2nd Kgs. 23:10; Jer. 32:35 and p. 181f., in The Two Babylons—The Full Hislop.

192 Ibid.

193 Ibid.

194 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 of Terra, was the same (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.’
other than, ‘The woman that made towers or encompassing walls’ (i.e. Semiramis). 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.

“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.’

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.’

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.’

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 Corinthis was especially noted for it:

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

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 and 10). Of course Aphrodite was

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195 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.

196 Ibid., pp. 74-75.


198 Ibid., p. 77.


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

The thousand cult harlots is noted by Strabo, who wrote of Corinth before Rome destroyed it in 146 BC. Rome recolonized it in 44 BC, and by Paul’s day the city was the fourth largest in the Roman Empire. See p. 95, note 394 for why there was most likely at least a thousand cult harlots for Aphrodite’s temple in Paul’s day.


202 These chapters will be discussed in the section, Cult Prostitution In The Corinthian Assembly, on p. 86f.
Cult Prostitution in the Ancient World

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 fertility, closely parallel those of Demeter, who also seems to have controlled agricultural cycles.’\(^{203}\) Demeter was the mother goddess.\(^{204}\)

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.’\(^{205}\)

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.’\(^{206}\)

This is only a tiny 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.\(^{207}\) 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.’\(^{208}\)

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 glorified. 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 qdsm’ (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.’\(^{209}\)

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.\(^{210}\) The end of God’s long-suffering with the Canaanites would end when Joshua came into the land and conquered it. UBD states that, ‘Fertility cults


\(^{204}\) Ibid.


\(^{210}\) Gen. 15:16; see also Lev. 18:6-25, esp. vv. 24-25.
nowhere controlled people more completely than in Canaan.\textsuperscript{211} The people of Canaan were totally degenerate and given over to wickedness (see Lot; Gen. 19:1ff.). This is why Joshua and Israel weren’t to take any captives (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.’\textsuperscript{212}

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.’\textsuperscript{213} Also, ‘Apostasy from Yahweh was frequently connected with participation in the Canaanite fertility cult with its sacral prostitution.’\textsuperscript{214}

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 (plural: kedishoth; 1st Kings 14:23-24; 2nd Kings 23:7).’\textsuperscript{215}

‘the worship of the major Canaanite goddesses, Ashera, Astarte and Anath, involved sacred prostitution.’\textsuperscript{216}

Canaan was saturated with this form of worship. The pagan 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.’\textsuperscript{217}

‘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.’\textsuperscript{218}

\textsuperscript{211} Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 512.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., p. 100.
\textsuperscript{215} Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 413. (Baal is another name for Molech.)
\textsuperscript{216} Douglas, The Illustrated Bible Dictionary, part 3, p. 1289.
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., p. 334.


*Cult Prostitution in the Ancient World*

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

‘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 Yahveh’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 was dryly noted by the Roman satirist Juvenal, when he wrote that, ‘the sewage of the Syrian Orontes (the river that Antioch was on) 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 goddesses. 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.

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221 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.’
224 Ibid.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

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 goddesses’...but also as symbols of eroticism (see Prov. 5:19).’225

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.226 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 ‘wholesale 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.227

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 Gentle 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

227 Ibid., pp. 212-213.
now better appreciate, was quite radical, and as Demetrius attests, quite repulsive to the Gentiles. The entire ‘civilized’ world was enmeshed in sacrificial-sexual idolatry—all the Gentile peoples. The four prohibitions of Acts 15:20 put the Gentile Christians on notice that their former ways of worship were not acceptable. Many of the Gentile believers in the days of the Apostles would not have considered cult prostitution a sinful act. James 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’ (pornographic Hollywood movies, TV, ‘common’ harlots, whether paid or consensual, pornographic magazines, books and demonic ‘games,’ homosexuality, 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 also confirm that the 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 complete, 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 full knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20)\(^{228}\)

“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)

\(^{228}\) Most English translations only have, “for by the Law is the knowledge of sin,” but the Greek word for ‘knowledge’ in Romans 3:20 is ἐπίγνωσις (epignosis), which is the full or complete knowledge of sin.” Thayer speaks of it as the “precise and correct knowledge.” In other words, without knowledge of Mosaic Law Christians sin against Jesus in ignorance, not knowing even the basic rules of Mosaic Law, like keeping the Sabbath day holy and celebrating the Passover, and not eating unclean animals/food (bacon, pork chops, ham, shrimp, lobster and catfish, to name a few).
THE GREEK PERSPECTIVE ON THE SECOND RULE

James spoke Hebrew at the Council of Acts 15, which took place in 48 AD, but 16 years later in 64 AD, Luke wrote the Book of Acts in Greek. The Greek word that Luke used for the second rule in Acts 15:20 is πορνευω (pornay’ah). It, as well as two Greek words associated with it, are conceptually identical to their Hebrew counterparts.

The Greek noun pornay’ah (prostitution) is linked to the verb πορνευω (pornu’oh) ‘to prostitute,’ and to the term for one who is a prostitute, πόρνη (pornay). The basic meaning of the three Greek words revolves around prostitution, and in the New Testament they primarily speak of cult prostitution. Context in the New Testament and the ancient pagan culture will affirm that cult prostitution is the second rule’s primary meaning in the New Testament. At the very least the second rule of James should be translated into English as prostitution, and as the first, third and fourth rules relate to sacrificial idolatry, the only proper translation for rule two is cult prostitution, yet no English Bible uses prostitution, let alone cult prostitution.

The second rule is translated in most English Bibles as either sexual immorality or fornication, yet the first word in Walter Bauer’s classic Greek-English lexicon defines pornay’ah as prostitution. Placing ‘fornication,’ ‘sexual immorality,’ ‘unchastity,’ ‘unlawful sexual intercourse’ or ‘adultery’ as the second rule of Acts 15:20 totally obscures what James meant, and of course, obliterates his theme of sacrificial-ssexual idolatry.

Just like its Hebrew counterpart, when the Greek lexicons speak of pornay (prostitute) there’s only one type of person they list—a prostitute. There is no reference to an adulteress or to someone promiscuous, etc., but only a prostitute. In other words, there’s no biblical reason to speak of ‘sexual immorality,’ but how about fornication?

The Companion Bible: The Authorized Version of 1611 uses fornication for Acts 15:20, and this, as we’ll see, indicates cult prostitution, although today, this isn’t a good word for it because of its popular definition as promiscuity or shacking up. Be that as it may, fornication at one time seems to have referred to cult harlotry. The Companion Bible’s comment for the second rule states, “In many cases the rites of heathenism involved uncleanness as an act of worship. Compare Num. 25:1-15.”

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229 Yeshua, the Apostles, and all the Jewish people in Judah and Galilee spoke Hebrew as their native language (see p. 18, note 75). 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.”

James 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 affirming the meaning of the word for the second rule of Acts 15:20 as cult prostitution.

230 See, The Greek Noun Pornay’ah (Prostitution), The Greek Verb Pornu’oh (to Prostitute), and The Greek Noun Pornay (Prostitute) beginning on p. 58f., for a detailed account of why the primary meaning of the three words center around cult harlotry in the New Testament, and therefore, why the second rule should be cult harlotry.

231 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

Heathenism implies 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, is sexual idolatry. In the note on Num. 25:3, *The Companion* states that the Israelis *prostituted* themselves to the pagan god. ‘Fornication,’ for *The Companion*, specifically for Acts 15:20, is *cult prostitution*.\(^{234}\) It links *pornay’ah* (fornication) in Acts 15:20 to (cult) whoredom in Num. 25.

The KJV New Testament’s use of *fornication* and words associated with it reveals that its primary meaning in the New Testament is cultic:

1. Of the 51 times the words are used, 30 times (58.8% of the time) it specifically means *cult* harlotry.
2. Adding 19 times (37.3%) that other words used pertain to cult and/or common harlotry makes it 49 out of 51 times (96.1% of the time) that the New Testament speaks of *cult* harlotry when words associated with *pornay’ah* (harlotry) are seen.

This is slightly more than the percentage that was seen in the Old Testament (94.9%),\(^ {235}\) which is astounding considering that the New Testament proclaims the life of Jesus Christ and covers a time period of less than 70 years while the Old Testament spans more than 14 centuries. If the New Testament had the same number of pages as the Old, the New would speak of *cult* harlotry 182 times to the Old’s 138 times, or more than 22% of the time that the Old does. This reveals that there was a lot of cult idolatry that the Apostles were dealing with among the Gentile Christians, which supports and reinforces the four rules that James gave to them concerning their salvation.

There are five basic categories of sexual practices that are forbidden in Mosaic Law under penalty of 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. Sex outside of marriage—death by stoning (Dt. 22:13-21).\(^ {236}\)
5. Prostitution (common or cultic)—death by fire for a daughter of a priest (Lev. 21:9), and death by stoning for a woman other than a daughter of a priest (Dt. 22:13-21).

Translators and theologians don’t realize the theological dilemma they place themselves in by declaring *pornayah* (*pornay’ah*) to be *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\(^ {237}\) (as unfortunately it is today in ‘civilized’ countries like the USA). What standard


\(^{234}\) In *Israel and Baal Peor* (p. 34f.), this prostitution was specifically seen as cultic, centering around the worship of Baal (Num. 25).

\(^{235}\) See page 30f.

\(^{236}\) 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).

Also, the punishment for a Hebrew 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.

\(^{237}\) Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. VI, p. 593 states, ‘In the shameful vices of *unnatural*...
would be used to define ‘lawful and moral’ for the ancient Greek ‘Christian’ homosexual? If we leave it up to each country or person there’s going to be a wide range of definitions for what constitutes ‘lawful and moral,’ much of which God calls sin. The same hold true for sexual idolatry, which was also seen as lawful and moral, and hence, the rules of James.

The criteria that establishes what is ‘lawful and moral’ 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 and weakest possible definition for *pornayah* for Acts 15:20 place themselves in a tremendous theological bind. If Mosaic Law is not valid for Christians, as they teach, there’s no moral standard or law to condemn homosexuality. Someone might say, “but the Apostle Paul writes that it’s wrong in Romans 1:18-32.” 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 Gentile Christians to whom he was writing to that it was wrong?

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 established it in Mosaic Law and it’s written of in the New Testament *because of Gentile sins*. Jesus never rebuked or chided His Jewish people for cult prostitution. If Gentiles weren’t sinning in homosexuality and cult prostitution these things would not have appeared in the New Testament, and then someone would say, ‘It’s alright to be a Christian homosexual because it’s not seen as a sin in the New Testament.’ The same would hold true for cult prostitution. You might think, “How absurd! No one would commit those things today!” Yet, in the days of the Apostles many Gentile Christians were doing just that.

If a commandment, like the Sabbath, isn’t specifically re-commanded in the New Testament *after* the resurrection, as most Christians have been taught that anything before that, including the words of Jesus in the Gospels, “doesn’t count” because it all changed at His death, it doesn’t mean that God abolished it. Jesus says that He is Lord of the Sabbath (Mk. 2:28). When did He, or anyone else, change that? If it was changed wouldn’t there be something in the New Testament, *after* the resurrection, that spoke of the change? There isn’t and it means that Jesus is still Lord of the (7th day) Sabbath, so why do Christians not keep the Lord’s Sabbath?

Paul’s moral compass for what constituted *sin* was Mosaic Law. Paul also used Mosaic Law to justify a number of points he made. If Mosaic Law had been done away with, and that by him, as the Church teaches, he would not 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

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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).

238 See Acts 25:8; Rom. 3:20, 31; 7:7, 12, 14; 1st Cor. 7:19.

239 See p. 86, note 347 for cites in 1st Corinthians where the Apostle to the Gentiles confirms the points he’s making by citing Mosaic Law.
The Greek Perspective on the Second Rule

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 God’s punishment for breaking the Sabbath is death (cf. Ex. 31:12-17), but the thief who steals, which all consider a breaking of the moral law, can restore his theft and get right with God (Ex. 22:1, 4; Lev. 6:1-7), it’s apparent that God considers the breaking of the Sabbath of greater morality than stealing.

If Christians are ‘free and under Grace’ then there’s no standard that proclaims sin except what they think is written in the New Testament.\(^{240}\) For things that the New Testament doesn’t seem to command, like the 7th day Sabbath, Passover, and the Mosaic dietary laws,\(^{241}\) the Church has made its own laws (Sunday, Easter, Xmas and ham, etc.) which go directly against God’s laws. If morality is defined as obedience to God and His Word, then it’s certainly immoral, and therefore sin, to keep Church laws that nullify God’s laws, especially when they aren’t even seen in the New Testament, let alone commanded to be kept (e.g. Easter and Xmas). Also, man-made standards vary within each denomination. Pentecostals and Baptists condemn the mere drinking of wine as sin, while others, such as Lutherans and Episcopalians uphold it. Who sets the standard? God’s New Testament Word or the Church?\(^{242}\)

All sins can be forgiven today ‘in Messiah’ except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and apostasy, which cult harlotry falls into because it severs the Christian from Yeshua.\(^{243}\) All other sexual sins (e.g. adultery) 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 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 God by this sexually idolatrous act. She has chosen to worship and join herself to another god. It would be the same for the Gentile Christian in James and Paul’s day, and the reason why James issued the four rules of Acts 15:20.

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\(^{240}\) What I mean by saying, ‘what they think is written in the New Testament’ pertains to things like the dietary laws, which Christians, misinterpreting NT Scripture, such as Peter’s Vision in Acts 10, use to justify eating unclean animals like the pig. Their understanding is totally unbiblical (see Law 102).

\(^{241}\) An accurate reading of the New Testament will confirm that the Sabbath, Passover and Mosaic dietary laws, to name three of the five major Pillars 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:

1. Christmas—Its Origin
2. Grace, Holiness and the Pharisaic Church
3. Hebrews and the Change of the Law
4. Law and Grace
5. No Longer Under the Law?
6. Sunday—The Catholic Sabbath
7. Take the Quiz! Five Quick Questions about the New Testament
8. The Feasts of Israel as Time Markers After the Resurrection

\(^{242}\) 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. 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 Mosaic Law the Church has made up her own laws for sin, many of which contradict and nullify God’s Word, and so are sin themselves. 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)

\(^{243}\) 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 of God in purity, holiness and righteousness.
The Greek Noun Pornay’ah (Prostitution)

The Greek word for the second rule in Acts 15:20 is πορναία (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.’

Pornay’ah in Acts 15:20 is translated in most English Bibles as ‘fornication,’ or ‘sexual immorality,’ but never ‘prostitution,’ yet, the first word Bauer uses to define pornayah is prostitution.

Bauer writes that pornayah 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 impossible to know.

Another word Bauer uses to describe pornayah 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.’

Uncastity, 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.’ Pornayah is now being used in a general sense to describe, in a figurative way, one who sins beyond the biblical sexual boundaries. The Hebrew word also had these for its secondary meanings, but it primarily spoke of prostitution, and in its biblical context it overwhelmingly meant cult harlotry. It could also be used in a derogatory sense 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 doesn’t reveal what James meant, for just in and of itself, no one would be able to understand that he was speaking specifically of cult harlotry. Therefore, unchastity is a false and misleading word to place as the English translation for the second rule. This is also true for ‘sexual immorality.’

Another serious theological problem arises when Bauer states that pornayah 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 is. What Bauer defines as adultery for both biblical cites (pornayah, Mt. 5:32; 19:9) doesn’t mean adultery at all, but as we’ll see in Jesus and Divorce (p. 77f.), ‘cult harlotry.’ Bauer falls into the deep pit that most theologians find themselves in when they think Jesus declared that, “only for adultery” can a biblical divorce take place. This isn’t what our Lord said nor meant.

In his initial definition Bauer gave no indication that the word could mean cult prostitution. He only

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

Sexual Immorality: for example; ESVS, HCSB, NET, NIV and NKJV.


247 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, pornayah (prostitution).
The Second Rule in Greek—Cult Prostitution

presents ‘prostitution.’ However, in a veiled comment further on in the lexicon he speaks of ‘idolatry …pagan cults’ and ‘sexual debauchery,’ basing the Greek definition figuratively on the Old Testament usage of the word, so cult harlotry may be part of his definition for ‘fornication’ (pornayah):

‘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 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).’

The Greek word pornayah conceptually lines up with its Hebraic counterpart for 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. 34f.) and Cult Prostitution in Ancient Israel (p. 39f.). James wanted the Gentile Christians 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 Torah/the Old Testament was written for their instruction. 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.’

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;’

6a. ‘Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. 7Neither 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. 8Neither 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 was a world-wide problem among the Gentile Christians because of their pagan culture, and James and the Apostles knew it.

Other Greek lexicons confirm ‘harlotry’ as the basic conceptual meaning of pornayah, which biblically and contextually becomes ‘cult harlotry’ for most Scripture cites in the New Testament. Wesley Perschbacher writes that pornayah 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.’

Perschbacher notes that the second rule for Acts 15:20 is fornication or whoredom. It’s unfortunate that

250 See p. 98, note 400 for why Paul says 23,000, and not 24,000, as is written in Num. 25:9.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

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 suggests that it’s similar, but not necessarily cultic. It also may just be a general reference for illicit sex and sexual immorality.

Perschbacher writes of idolatry in Revelation being symbolic, and as we’ll see it is also actual sacrificial-sexual idolatry in two of the seven churches. 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 primary 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 *pornayah* as ‘adultery’ in Matthew. There isn’t one cite in the New Testament to validate the use of *pornayah* (harlotry) as adultery.

Timothy Friberg, in his lexicon, expands *pornayah* to include everything sexual, stating,

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

For Friberg, as with others, the word can mean any number of different things, with ‘prostitution’ coming at the end (of his first sentence). *Pornayah* can be used to describe things other than prostitution, 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 also 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 Christians, but Friberg only mentions it in a metaphorical or figurative sense, as Perschbacher did, yet, in Rev. 2, Jesus came against cult harlotry among Christians in two of the seven churches 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 *pornayah*, stating 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 Chris-

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253 See *Cult Prostitution in Revelation*, p. 107f.


256 See *Cult Prostitution in Revelation*, p. 107f.
The Second Rule in Greek—Cult Prostitution

tians, 15:28. Among these is the prohibition of fornication.\(^{257}\)

‘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”).\(^{258}\)

‘The surprising combination of \(\pi\sigma\nu\varepsilon\iota\alpha\) (pornayah, fornication: Acts 15:20) ‘with dietary regulations is due to the fact that the four prohibitions are based on Lv. 17 and 18. \(\pi\sigma\nu\varepsilon\iota\alpha\) (pornayah) ‘here is marrying within the prohibited degrees, which acc. to the Rabbis was forbidden ‘on account of fornication,’ Lv. 18:6-18.’\(^{259}\)

\(\text{T}D\text{NT}\) 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, \(\text{T}D\text{NT}\) 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 Mosaic Law (Lev. 18:6-18).

Witherington rightly rejects any connection to these prohibited marriages in Leviticus because the term pornayah ‘is not used to describe these sexual sins’ in the Septuagint.\(^{260}\) \(\text{T}D\text{NT}\) doesn’t have a biblical basis for linking pornayah in Acts 15:20 with the forbidden relationships of Leviticus 18; only a poor rabinic 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 Mosaic Law (see Jesus and Divorce; specifically p. 79 and note 327).

\(\text{T}D\text{NT}\) 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. \(\text{T}D\text{NT}\) also states that the four rules speak of the three chief sins of idolatry, murder and fornication, but murder cannot possibly be what James meant by blood (rule #4).\(^{261}\)

\(\text{T}D\text{NT}\) also wrote 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. It 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 it couldn’t be determined if cultic was part of it. Although prostitution and whoredom aren’t cult prostitution, they’re better than what English Bibles have now. Friberg muddied the waters so that all sexual sins were on equal footing. He spoke of prostitution, but it was an ‘add on.’ None of them presented cult prostitution as the New Testament’s primary meaning of pornayah, yet as we’ll see, it certainly is the overwhelming meaning for the word.\(^{262}\)

\(\text{T}D\text{NT}\) tried to link pornayah (prostitution) with the forbidden marriages of Lev. 18, but if that was correct James would have mentioned some specifics relating to prohibited marriage partners. At the very least he might have mentioned that a Christian should marry only a Christian (Mt. 19:7-9; 1st Cor. 7:39). Further-


\(^{258}\) Ibid., p. 593.

\(^{259}\) Ibid.


\(^{261}\) See The Fourth Rule—Blood, p. 116f.

more, as Witherington pointed out, pornayah was never used in speaking of the forbidden marriages in the Septuagint. ‘Incestuous relationships,’ as sinful as they are, wasn’t what James meant for the second rule. *TDNT*’s theology of table fellowship and ‘dietary regulations,’ along with its understanding that blood relates to murder, isn’t what James 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 even though they only spoke of it as whoredom.  

The definitions in the Greek lexicons narrow considerably when they speak of the person (porn; i.e. a prostitute) who practices pornayah. It won’t primarily have anything to do with adultery, incest, homosexuality or promiscuity. This, in turn, allows 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 Messiah Yeshua and the Holy Spirit. Christians who become, or use, cult harlots sever themselves from the covenant they have with the Father through Yeshua. This is apostasy, and why James gave the four rules to the Gentiles first.

**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 its biblical meanings. With him having ‘fornication or whoredom,’ and referring to 1st Cor. 6:18 and 10:8, it seems to mean sexual idolatry. It’s unfortunate that he didn’t specify it and 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 and worshiped Baal through 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).’

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263 See *The Greek Perspective on the Second Rule*, p. 54f.
266 See Israel and Baal Peor on p. 34f.
Friberg again presents a broad and watered-down 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’ encompasses anything sexually wrong, and his use of metaphorically reveals 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 New Testament person who is a biblical fornicator.

**The Greek Noun Pornay (Prostitute)**

The Greek noun that is associated with James’ 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 who might be 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 (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, but as for a person, it’s only a prostitute, as she is the same person as a harlot or whore.

Perschbacher agrees with Bauer, adding ‘whore,’ but then writes, ‘an unchaste female.’ This clouds the issue. When his cite is looked up this ‘unchaste female’ is none other than a harlot. 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, etc., bring out. ‘Unchaste’ describes their immoral character, but it certainly doesn’t describe who they are.

Perschbacher does recognize, however, that ‘from the Hebrew’ (the Old Testament) the woman can be an idolatress, although in Yeshua’s time this would hardly be the case after for the Jews, since the Return

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from Babylon (about 500 BC). In other words, Jewish women could be common harlots, but not cult harlots. Perschbacher speaks of sexual idolatry (harlotry plus idolatry), which is cult harlotry and confirms what we saw for the Hebrew word zonah. His ‘idolatress’ is also linked to the Harlot or Whore of Babylon (Rev. 17:1, 5), which is certainly a reference to cult harlotry, among other things.

It’s wrong to include an adulteress or an unchaste female in the noun’s definition. 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 adulteress by her lack of discrimination in partner choice.’

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, having ‘an affair’ or ‘in love’ with the man. 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, but even if she has two lovers she is usually secretive about it.

An adulteress shouldn’t be labeled a whore or a 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).’

Friberg reveals that his definition for ‘sexual immorality’ can contain 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 inspection it’s actually cult harlotry that Paul writes of. The Greek lexicons, once their cites had been searched out, present the primary meaning of πόρνης (pornayah), and two Greek derivatives as prostitution (cultic or common), and those who practice it as prostitutes. An adulteress can be classified under pornayah, but only in a derogatory way.

From a number of authoritative Greek sources James’ second rule, at the very least, is prostitution. Being found immediately after sacrificial idolatry it should have easily been seen by Christian scholars as cult prostitution. This is further supported by rules three and four belonging to sacrificial idolatry, and also what the Hebrew and Greek words for harlotry in Scripture overwhelmingly speak of—cult harlotry.

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272 See Cult Prostitution in Corinth; p. 90f.
CULT PROSTITUTION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

All the places in the King James Version New Testament where the words fornication/s and fornicator/s will be chronologically listed in order to get a sense of how and where the words are used. The word fornication is mentioned 32 times in the KJV New Testament and all these speak of cult harlotry or include it. Five of those 32 times it’s found in lists with other sins, and with no context given it certainly includes cultic and quite possibly also common 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 Christians, as He’s speaking about His Kingdom. Also, if this harlotry were common it could be forgiven, and hence, no need for a divorce.273

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 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, both Hebrew and Greek word definitions, and its listing in v. 20 immediately after the prohibition of eating the meat of a pagan sacrifice at the time of the sacrifice, confirm this. The next two passages (#5-6) list the same four rules 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 (51 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 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.’

273 For why fornication here isn’t adultery, but cult harlotry, see Jesus and Divorce, p. 77f.
The next fornication amazed Paul because it was incestuous cult harlotry:

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.’

The next two verses also 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 com-mitteth 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 could 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.’

The 12th point 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.’

In this next verse Paul continues to address cult harlotry to his Corinthian Christians who hadn’t taken to heart what he had written 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 for-nication and lasciviousness which they have committed.’

In point 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), and this homosexuality is primarily cultic.

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, which was certainly a major part of the perverse sexual appetites that plagued the people of Sodom (cf. 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.277 Canaan was a land that outdid all the other ancient lands in its perversions and it was especially noted for its homosexual cult harlotry.278 It’s easy to see that Jude was speaking of cult homosexuality when he wrote of, ‘fornication and going after strange flesh.’

274 For why this cult harlotry is incestuous, see Incest in Corinth, p. 88f.
275 For why this fornication is cult harlotry, see Cult Prostitution in Corinth, p. 97f.
276 For why this speaks of cult harlotry, see Israel and Baal Peor, p. 34f.
277 See Cult Prostitution in Ancient Israel, p. 39f.
278 See Cult Prostitution in the Ancient World, p. 49f.
Cult Prostitution in the New Testament

The problem of cult harlotry among Christians wasn’t easily remedied. The next three cites (#15-17) specifically speak of cult harlotry, and the following texts after them (#18-23) would certainly mean cult harlotry, and common harlotry can also be part of their meaning. All these cites are from Revelation:

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 fornication (pornayah) in lists and don’t lend themselves to a specific form of harlotry (cultic or common), due to a lack of context. As we’ve seen, though, cult harlotry should be given primary consideration whenever pornayah 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 they had to address. If they were addressing something other than harlotry 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 (pornayah):

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.’

These five cites most likely speak of cult harlotry, although common harlotry would not be excluded.

In the KJV New Testament the term fornication is used 32 times (in the 28 verses 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 pornayah in Acts 15:20 as sexual immorality, adultery, or unchastity is a grave theological error, and a very serious injustice to those who desire to know what God is saying to them through 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 not only is adultery a different Greek word, it’s also 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 the plural of ‘murders’ and ‘adulteries,’ etc.

Next we’ll see that the noun fornicator appears twice in the KJV New Testament. The first instance speaks of incestuous cult harlotry, when the Corinthian Christian 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, but with our knowledge of how fornication is used in the New Testament, the first nod has to go to cult prostitution that Hebrews 12:16 is writing about.

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 primarily speaks of one using a cult harlot, but doesn’t exclude a common harlot.
Fornicators

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 (keep) 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 unbelievers and Christians who use temple prostitutes because it was Corinth, and Corinth was well noted for its religious fervor in worshipping the goddess Aphrodite and others.

The second reference has to do with temple prostitution, as Paul has just commanded the man’s removal from the assembly for incestuous temple prostitution (1st Cor. 5:4-5).

The third reference also speaks of those in the congregation who use temple prostitutes because it immediately follows chapter five, and only three verses later, in 6:12-20, Paul speaks of temple prostitutes and the temple of the living God.

The KJV New Testament where *fornication*, etc., is used, *fornication* speaks first and foremost of temple prostitution. From just this biblical perspective of *pornayah* (prostitution), etc., 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*. James meant this, and nothing else, when he issued the second rule. It doesn’t speak of sexual immorality nor adultery nor prohibited marriages nor homosexuality nor even common harlotry.

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279 See Incest in Corinth on p. 88f.
280 See Cult Prostitution in Corinth on p. 90f.
Schematic on Harlotry in the New Testament

There are 13 English words associated with zanah (harlotry, harlot) 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 a little more a quarter of the number of pages of the Old (about 28%), and which centers around the proclamation of life in Yeshua the Messiah, the noun pornayah (harlotry) and its derivatives occur a surprising 51 times.

In other words, if the New Testament had the same number of pages as the Old, the New would speak of harlotry 182 times to the Old’s 138 times, 44 times more than the Old or more than 22% of the time that the Old does. The four rules of James were very necessary.

In the New, as in the Old, the words primarily speak of cult harlotry. The following are the terms and times of use in English from the King James Version New Testament, which reflect the Greek terms for common and cult harlot and those men (Christian and non-Christian) who practice such things.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Occurs</th>
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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 clearly refer 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 referring 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

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281 See Schematic on Harlotry in the Old Testament, p. 29f.
282 From 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 cultic 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.

283 Ibid. Fornications as either cult or common harlotry: Mt. 15:19; Mk. 7:21.
284 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.


*Cult Prostitution in the New Testament*

is used 3 times and reflects the situation of cult harlotry in Corinth.\(^{285}\)

The 4 times that the KJV New Testament speaks of a harlot (*pornay*) all refer to a cult harlot.\(^{286}\) Of the 4 times that it speaks of *harlots*, 2 are common harlots (Mt. 21:31-32), one can be either (Lk. 15:30), and the fourth is certainly cultic as it speaks of *religious* Babylon the Great, the ‘Mother of Harlots.’\(^{287}\)

The reason I assign *common* harlotry to the 2 times that Yeshua mentions it in Mt. 21:31-32 is because cult harlotry among the Jewish people in Messiah’s day was basically non-existent, God having purged it out of the Jewish people through the Babylonian captivity. The harlots that Yeshua refers to were common Jewish harlots, as many of them would repent and walk into the Kingdom before the Pharisees.

The 4 times that *whore* is mentioned are all in Revelation and speak of the ‘Great Whore.’ She is certainly *the* cult harlot.\(^{288}\)

This overview of the KJV New Testament’s use of *fornication* (Greek *pornayah*, 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 means *cult* harlotry. Adding the 19 times (37.3%) that the words can be either cult or common harlotry makes it 49 out of 51 times or 96.1% of the time the New Testament speaks of cult harlotry when the words associated with *pornayah* (harlotry) are seen. This is higher than the percentage that was seen in the Old (94.9%).\(^{289}\)

The New Testament’s use and primary meaning of the words for fornicator, harlot and harlotry, etc., follow the Old Testament’s 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 prostitution had upon both Jew and Gentile.

James’ second rule, in Hebrew or Greek, has the same biblical meaning. When the Greek New Testament speaks of *pornayah* (KJV fornication) in Acts 15:20 there can be no doubt that James meant *cult* harlotry, especially coming after his first rule on the eating of idolatrous sacrificial meat at the time of the sacrifice. These first two rules set up the biblical foundation for the next two rules if James to also pertain to sacrificial-sexual idolatry—the satanic scourge of both Old Testament Jew and New Testament Gentile.

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\(^{285}\) Ibid. *Fornicators* as users of cult prostitutes: 1st Cor. 5:9-10; 6:9.

\(^{286}\) Ibid. *Harlot* as cult harlot: 1st Cor. 6:15-16; Heb. 11:31; James 2:25.

\(^{287}\) Ibid. *Harlots* as cult harlots: Rev. 17:5.

*Harlots* as either cultic or common: Lk. 15:30.

*Harlots* as common harlots: Mt. 21:31-32.

\(^{288}\) Ibid. *Whore* as *the* Cult Harlot: Rev. 17:1, 15-16; 19:2.

\(^{289}\) See p. 30.
SCHOLARSHIP AND THE SECOND RULE

The understanding of the four rules being a unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry hinges upon the second rule being cult harlotry. Four scholars see the rule as such (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 Mosaic Law. 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 then tries to explain how the Gentiles could be commanded to walk in Mosaic Law by saying that they kept the rules, not because they had to, but voluntarily for table fellowship, however, this ‘sleight of hand’ theology is totally 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.’

The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament presented the same understanding for the second rule as Marshall, but Witherington perceptively dismissed their interpretation by noting that the Septuagint never refers to the prohibited marriages as pornayah. Knowling saw the theological conundrum that taking rules from Mosaic Law entailed—the Gentile would not be on equal footing with the Jews who kept the Law. He also negated the rules coming from the Noahide laws, as four of the seven laws of Noah aren’t even mentioned 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, stating,

‘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 of them as to what James meant. With fornication being ‘everything’ it effectively ceases to be the rule that pulls all the rules together to form the conceptual unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry. Stern says the second rule is,

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292 Kittel, TDNT, vol. VI, p. 592, and also, p. 60 above.
295 Williams, Acts, p. 266.
Scholarship and the Second Rule

‘any form of sexual immorality…sexual unions outside of marriage…along with homosexual behavior, temple prostitution and other improper practices.’

Wycliffe sees cult prostitution as a possibility for the second rule in Acts 15:20 and says that it was 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.’

Some scholars recognize that James could have been speaking about cult prostitution, but Knowling, who wrote his 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.’

‘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 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 general sense as it is employed elsewhere in the NT…from the way in which women might be called upon to serve impurely in a heathen temple…to which 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 specific enjoinder against the sin of fornication.’

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 religious obligation dictated ‘a specific enjoinder against the sin of fornication.’ This religious obligation was cult harlotry, as opposed to common (secular) prostitution.

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

‘cult prostitutes…‘Unchastity’ is a poor translation. The Hebrew equivalent of the Greek noun primarily has to do with prostitution.’

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

‘the term πορνήα (pornay’ah) ‘in its most basic meaning refers to prostitution, including so-called sacred prostitution.’

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297 Pfeiffer, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1152.
299 Ibid.
300 Bivin, Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus, p. 109 and note *.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

Witherington also writes that if James had meant adultery he would have used the Greek word for adultery: μοιχεία (moikay’ah).\(^{302}\) Hegg also believes that pornay’ah refers to cult prostitution.\(^{303}\)

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 pathetic that over the last 1,800 years less than a handful have seen the second rule as cult harlotry, 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, and Hegg attaches dietary restrictions to 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 New Testament 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 Mosaic Law was thrown out for Christians and so they have come up with the only option or explanation possible—the four rules were for ‘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, Bivin and Witherington fall into this category.

It’s understandable, though, because Church teaching on the Law creates a thick veil over the eyes of Christian theologians. These scholars are experts in their field, and yet, they are blind to the heresy they believe and propagate. The power of heretical teaching is deception that leads to false practice. Nowhere is this more seen than in Acts 15:20. This is why Messiah Yeshua came against Pharisaic 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 how Christians are to walk out their faith in Jesus. Only Hegg correctly understands that the Law isn’t done away with by the decision of James and the four rules, yet Hegg, too, attaches a dietary interpretation to both ‘strangled’ and ‘blood,’ something that we’ll see is a perverse and inconceivable theological interpretation of Acts 15:20. (Much worse than that, though, is that Hegg teaches Gentile circumcision, which is not only a major heresy, because it takes the Gentile Christian out of the New Covenant and places him back under the Old Covenant, but it also negates the very decision of the Council of Acts 15.)\(^{304}\)

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 also scholars, it primarily speaks of cult prostitution. The term fornication seems to have meant cult harlotry a hundred years ago, but unfortunately, the popular definitions of

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\(^{302}\) Ibid.


\(^{304}\) For why it’s biblically wrong for a male Gentile Christian to be physically circumcised ‘for religious reasons’ (i.e. to keep Passover and/or Mosaic Law) see *Gentile Circumcision?* Covenantal physical circumcision, which is the only physical circumcision in the Bible, is a circumcision that is done in order to enter into the Covenant of Father Abraham (Gen. 17:10-14) and to keep Passover (Ex. 12:43f.). Also, this physical biblical circumcision is totally different conceptually from medical circumcision even though the two may look identical.
fornication present the wrong understanding, and so, the word fornication should not be used today for the second rule of Acts 15:20.

**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 much more so for common sources like dictionaries. For instance, *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, for there’s no mention of sexual idolatry as the basis or core of biblical 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 biblical 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 states that only for fornication (KJV Mt. 5:32; 19:9) can a biblical divorce (between two Christians) take place. Obviously, the fornicator can be married.

Unfortunately for *Unger* there’s no mention of prostitution. 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 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.’

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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 intercourse.’ They further state that fornication is ‘sexual immorality in general, esp. adultery.’

The Internet encyclopedia Wikipedia says that the term fornication comes from the Latin word fornicatio-, which means, ‘an archway or vault,’ because in Rome, harlots ‘could be solicited there,’ and so, the word became a ‘euphemism for prostitution.’ Despite this 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.’

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, the Church’s definition of 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 Christians trying to understand what James meant in their English Bibles that use fornication for the second rule in Acts 15:20, such as the ASV, KJV, NASB or NRSV. Of course, it becomes totally obtuse for Christians whose Bibles have sexual immorality, etc.

All English Bibles should use the precise term of cult prostitution or cult harlotry) for the second rule of James.

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308 Ibid.
309 Wikipedia at Fornication.
310 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 pornayah as adultery in Matthew 5:32. However, Jesus said that whosoever,

‘shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication’ (πορνείας pornayah’s)\(^{311}\)
‘causeth her to commit adultery’ (μοιχασθαι to commit adultery)\(^{312}\) ‘and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery’\(^{313}\) (moikatai, to commit adultery; KJV).

R. T. France states that the cause of divorce, pornayah (KJV fornication; NASB unchastity; NKJV sexual immorality), ‘means adultery.’\(^{314}\) Robert Mounce agrees with France saying it ‘undoubtedly refers in this context to an adulterous liaison.’\(^{315}\) The Wycliffe Bible Commentary says that adultery is ‘the one cause for divorce allowed by Christ,’\(^{316}\) and David Stern also sees pornayah as adultery, stating that a marriage, ‘must not be dissolved for anything less than the most direct insult to its one-flesh integrity, adultery.’\(^{317}\)

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?’\(^{318}\) Pornayah (cult prostitution) is Yeshua’s reason for divorce, not adultery.

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 pornayah. It’s 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).\(^{319}\) The Greek word, though, is πορνεία (pornayah, prostitution), not μοιχεύω (moiku’oh, adultery). Are scholars really that blind? It seems so.

TDNT states that the Greek word for adultery specifically means adultery, unlike the word pornayah, which can have other meanings: “μοιχεύω” (moiku’oh, adultery) “is narrower than πορνεία” (pornayah, πορνείας).

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\(^{311}\) Pornayah’s has the exact meaning as pornayah; it’s just in the Greek genitive form.

\(^{312}\) The NU text has μοιχασθησαν, to commit adultery.

\(^{313}\) The NU text has μοιχασθαι, to commit adultery.


\(^{316}\) 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 where the couple weren’t intimate until the wedding ceremony. In the Law (Dt. 22:23-27) if the woman was found to have had sex with another man during this betrothal period, it would have been seen as adultery because betrothal was officially the beginning of a marriage, and she would have been stoned to death. If a couple wanted to break the betrothal, a divorce would have been necessary (cf. Mt. 1:18-25).


\(^{318}\) See Heb. 13:4 where the writer speaks of both fornication and adultery, which means they aren’t the same.

\(^{319}\) Also interesting to note is what Yeshua says of a woman who is divorced for anything less than pornayah (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 pornayah, which also included apostasy.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

prostitution) “and refers solely to adultery.” Bauer, too, says that *pornayah* is to be, ‘Distinguished from *μοιχευω*’ (*moiku’oh*) ‘commit adultery.’ If *moiku’oh* refers solely to adultery, why would the text have *pornayah* (cult prostitution) if Yeshua wanted to convey that only for adultery could a divorce take place?

The Septuagint reveals that the Hebrew and Greek understanding for the words *prostitution* and *adultery* remained constant. The Septuagint was written about 250 BC. *TDNT* states,

‘In the LXX’ (Septuagint) ‘the group *πορνευω*’ (*pornu’oh*) ‘to play the harlot…is normally used for the root *ןנה*’ (*zanah;* to prostitute), ‘while with equal consistency *μοιχευω*’ (*moiku’oh*) ‘is used for *זנה*’ (*na’ahf, adultery*). 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 adultery be imposed upon the second rule for the Gentiles in Acts 15:20).

*ISBE* 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.’

*ISBE* affirms 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 Matthew 5:32.

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

‘Examples show that *ץנה*’ (*zanah, to prostitute*), ‘can be used of the married woman who is unfaithful to her husband (Hos. 1–2; Ezek. 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*’ (*moiku’oh, adultery*).’

*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 worshipping (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 total

Jesus and Divorce

destruction of Judah and captivity in Babylon for the few surviving 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 pictured Israel’s unfaithfulness to Yahveh. Her whoring spirit symbolized 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 wasn’t an adulteress; she was playing the harlot.

Gomer is a symbol of Israel in its cult harlotry because Israel would not repent, even given many chances by God. Judah, in Ezek. 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 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 the one whom he had sex with was a cult harlot, he had no way of knowing how Tamar had gotten pregnant; through cult harlotry, 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 harlot or a cult harlot. Also, she was a product of Canaan, a land steeped in cult harlotry, and yet, she would prove more righteous than Judah (Gen. 28:26).

In the days of Yeshua the word זָנָה (zanah) (to play the harlot, to prostitute oneself) had come to encompass a number of other sins in the eyes of the Pharisees and 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.’

Even though these sins fell under the heading of harlotry in Rabbinic Judaism, it didn’t mean that the adulteress 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 biblical fornication involved ‘especially the sin of paganism’ (i.e. cult harlotry).

Rabbinic Judaism’s primary meaning for זָנָה (zanah) was cult prostitution (and that, over common prostitution). The Jewish hearers of Yeshua that day (Mt. 5:32) fully understood that He was referring to cult prostitution as only grounds and basis for a biblical divorce. It would be the same for those who heard James give the second rule, especially after the first rule on sacrificial idolatry.

Bauer and Perschbacher weren’t accurate in linking adultery with Pornayah (prostitution) for Mt. 5:32

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325 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 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.

326 See Judah and Tamar; p. 32f.


328 Ibid., p. 588.
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(and 19:9), and France, Mounce, Wycliffe and Stern didn’t pick up on the obvious difference in words between pornay’ah (harlotry) and moikuat (adultery) as the reason for divorce. Pornayah in these cites (Mt. 5:32 and 19:9)329 cannot be defined as adultery. It defies common sense that Yeshua would use adultery to describe the person, and yet, use an entirely different word meaning cult 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, etc., upon pornayah (cult prostitution) totally distorts Yeshua’s teaching and has resulted in many marriages being dissolved due to Church ineptitude, contrary to what Yeshua said, “So then, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Matthew 19:6)

Also, a major theological problem arises if adultery is seen as the grounds for divorce among Christians. 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 Christians in the Kingdom of Messiah Yeshua (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, as well as in the area of illicit SEX (2nd Tim. 2:15).

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

On the other hand, cult harlotry (the worship of another god through sexual intercourse) severs the Christian 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 cult harlotry to declare that His idea of marriage between two Christians330 can only be severed by cult harlotry. If a Christian divorces his believing wife for adultery or ‘irreconcilable differences,’ he is committing adultery if he marries another, and also causing her to be adulterous if she marries another.

Robert Mounce saw the superficiality of the Church interpreting pornayah as adultery, and 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.’331 Excellent! Traditional Jewish thinking believes that when Messiah comes He will teach and explain Mo-

329 In Matt. 19:9, Jesus says, ‘And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, (pornayah) 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, the same verb used in Mt. 5:32 for adultery. The argument used for Mt. 5:32 applies to Mt. 19:9 as well.

330 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 because of their being new creatures in Him (2nd Cor. 5:17).

331 Mounce, Matthew, pp. 46-47.
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saic Law 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 Mosaic Law (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 very shallow.

Indeed, Yeshua intensified His generation’s understanding of the Law, as only the Messiah could do. Mosaic Law, with all its statutes, judgments, commandments and rules, is the love of God in written form. In other words, it’s God’s definition of love (see Mt. 22:35-40) The Law also reflects God’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 a blessed life in Canaan.

Yeshua is the Word of God (Jn. 1:1-3; Rev. 19:13) and as such, He is the living Mosaic Law, because Mosaic Law is the words of God written down. There is no deviation between God and His words or The Word, especially when we realize that Yeshua came forth from the Father on Day One through the Father’s literal first words recorded in Scripture.332

Now the Father extends through His Son a greater promise than good life in Canaan—eternal life in the New Jerusalem and glorification, and because Yeshua is the living Word, He was able to reveal, during His days in Israel, the depth of the words of God in the Law in a way that no one else could. In His Teaching on the Mountain, Yeshua revealed the essence of Mosaic Law: ‘Love your enemies,’ and ‘turn the other cheek.’333 This is such a radical understanding that many Christians theologians have said, ‘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 the New Jerusalem? What enemies will you have there to love? Yeshua’s words must apply to His followers today, as He Himself graphically demonstrated in His sacrificial death for us. His words, though, are far from the accepted norm—so against our carnal nature that many don’t even consider living that way. Mounce correctly questions that 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 holy, righteous and intensified standard?

All those who say pournayah 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,334 as this could make the wife unclean in his eyes.335 The point is that

332 See Yeshua—God the Son.
334 In this area Hillel was right, not that a burnt toast was cause for divorce, but regarding the attitude behind it. The reason is obvious that Shammai was wrong and Hillel right. 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 deed which was not in line with holiness and respect for her husband. 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 because they hadn’t yet 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 or the obstinient (rebellious) Christian wife to repent.
335 Stern, JNTC, p. 59; from the Mishna: Gitin 9:10.
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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 and lining up with Shammai.

Yeshua, though, was stating something much more radical than Shammai (and the false interpretation the Church has given it), and more in line with His other foundational concepts of Torah. This radical understanding is 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 (pornayah) and shall marry another, committheth 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)

Yeshua declared that except for cult harlotry 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. Did Yeshua change Torah? No. He amplified it. Divorce now hinged on ‘this’ uncleanness.

The Apostles didn’t think that was 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 Adamic 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 simple, and yet radical and divinely profound explanation for what pornayah means in Mt. 5:32; 19:9. It reveals Yeshua’s holy concept of marriage and divorce. It’s also consistent with what Yeshua requires of people in His Kingdom, known as Israel—sacrificial love, death to self, forgiveness, long-suffering and reconciliation.

Some might question the specific use of cult harlotry over common harlotry, as pornayah 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 Christian is a cult harlot, or if a man or woman lays with one, will she/he be cut off from the covenant with God (apostasy), and consequently, their relationship with their earthly Christian spouse is severed. It’s not as though God couldn’t forgive the person, but when a Christian reaches this state, God knows that he/she will never repent—they’ve gone over a red line. The official act of divorcing him/her serves to confirm and ratify that which has already happened—high-handed rebellion against the Living God and the tearing apart of the one flesh marriage (Gen. 2:24).

This kind of sin stands in a class all by itself and falls under the category of apostasy. The Christian has willfully bound herself/himself to another god. The union with Yahveh and His people has been severed. This is why the plague in Numbers 25 took 24,000 sons of Israel. When one has a Christian partner that is part of cult harlotry, divorce is not only justified, it’s absolutely necessary.336

336 This also 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 Christian is not observing pagan sexual practices, which would corrupt and defile the Christian, and isn’t fighting the believer as she walks in the things of the Lord.
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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 oneself to, another god. All sexual sins for a Christian 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 Christian 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 pornayah. TDNT writes, the question,

‘of πορνεύω’ (pornayah) ‘is seldom dealt with in the preaching of Jesus and the primitive community; it arises more frequently in Paul. As compared with the different judgment of the Greek world and ancient syncretism, the concrete directions of Paul bring to the attention of Gentile Christians the incompatibility of πορνεύω’ (pornayah, cult prostitution) ‘and the kingdom of God.’

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 present 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.’ Yeshua establishes the criteria for divorce in His Kingdom. 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 Christians today if they’re married to a Born Again believer.

Yeshua wasn’t warning His Jewish followers about practicing cult harlotry, for that had been expunged from the Jewish people by the Babylonian captivity 600 years earlier. When Israel came back from Babylon they no longer worshipped other gods through sexual idolatry.

Concerning the ‘primitive community’ of Jewish Christians in Acts, the only reason why pornayah is mentioned (three times) is as a warning to the Gentile Christians. It’s actually the same warning (Acts 15:20) replicated or reiterated twice more (Acts 15:29; 21:25). The Jewish Christians 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 Christians needed to be warned, and this is exactly what Acts 15:20 is all about. James gave notice to the Gentile Christians that they were not to continue in cult harlotry, and then 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 the Gentiles 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 his Gentile Christians—the very reason for the four rules of James, which all deal with sacri-

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ficial-sexual idolatry. Paul rebuked them for doing it,339 saying that ‘those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.’340

Yeshua’s cause for divorce among His followers is cult harlotry, not adultery, and certainly not the vague ‘irreconcilable differences,’ as these four reasons bring out:

1. It doesn’t make any sense. Pornayah means harlotry, not adultery. If Yeshua had meant adultery the Greek word for adultery would have been used. One plus one equals two. In other words, it’s simple. This, coupled with His use of adultery in the 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 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 adulterer and the offended wife 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, adulterer and prostitute can be forgiven. The Christian who is a cult prostitute cannot be restored to fellowship, with God or her spouse. The cult harlot has left the covenant for another god. In this Yeshua is spring-boarding off of Dt. 13:6-11 conceptually: ‘the wife of your bosom…to go serve other gods…you must surely kill her.’

4. The rare use of pornayah in the Gospels and Acts—both Yeshua and the early Jewish Christian community, by their infrequent use of pornayah, as contrasted with Paul, reveal that cult harlotry was not a common practice among the Jewish people at that time, and so its use reveals its radical use of it for Jews, and for divorce. On the other hand, cult harlotry was very common 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 or cause for divorce is infinitely higher. Yeshua wants us to realize our own hard hearts and our need for Him in the midst of our inner 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 (1st John 2:6). After all, doesn’t ‘Christian’ mean ‘little Christ’? (cf. Col. 1:18; 1st John 2:6)

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 Messiah 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.341 Yeshua says that the reason why God gave divorce to Israel through Moses was because of the hardness of their carnal hearts:

“He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart, Moses (i.e. God) 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

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339 1st Cor. 6:13-20; 10:7-8; 2nd Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19-21 KJV.
340 Eph. 5:3-5; Col. 3:5; 1st Thess. 4:3-8 KJV.
341 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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could have been something as serious as a rebellious heart toward her husband or God, or as innocent as an inability to please a sinful husband, but this hardness in Christians, for we all have the Adamic nature, must give way to life in the Spirit, for 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 by her.

One should enter into marriage upon due reflection that the spouse is of God’s will, and that it’s for life, so that in the midst of Adamic troubles and carnal storms and uncleanness’, one has no option for divorce. In other words, marriage among Christians 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 wants us to forgive our spouse, from our heart. Because the servant’s master forgave him much, it would be unthinkable for the servant not to forgive one who owed him 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 so much more. It’s in this life that we must seek the Lord for His heart that is able to forgive, especially our spouse, and even those who might crucify us. That’s why bad things happen to us—so we can see our own hard and vengeful heart, and cry out to Yeshua for the heart that He has promised us.342 We are being transformed from (His) glory to (His) glory (2nd Cor. 3:18) to reflect Him.

The bar, God’s Standard, has been raised to the highest of the Heavens because Christians, filled with the Holy Spirit, are able to do what Israel at Mt. Sinai wasn’t because of their carnal nature. That’s why God didn’t declare this reason for divorce under Moses. Israel had to wait for her Messiah and His Spirit.

This opens up the biblical understanding for what constitutes divorce among Christians.343 “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).344 All other sins are forgivable in the precious and mighty, incredible and unique, name of Yeshua of Nazareth.345

342 Dt. 30:6; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezk. 36:24-27; Mt. 11:28-30.
343 Yeshua’s statements relate to two Christians in His Kingdom. When the Apostle Paul deals with divorce between a Christian who is married to an unbeliever, the criteria for divorce changes (1st Cor. 7:12-16).
344 Apostasy is the falling away from the God of Israel, never to return. It’s not that the person has backslidden or has become a prisoner of Satan, but on the contrary, the person has chosen to work for Satan and against Jesus. It doesn’t mean that the apostate will automatically relinquish the ‘tag’ of ‘Christian.’ Some will keep it to deceive Christians 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 harlotry, yet apostasy of any kind is also biblical grounds for divorce, but the apostate may not be married. An apostate will never return to the Lord because he has totally rejected Jesus, and so, conceptually he is in the same category as a cult harlot, having sold himself to something other than the God of Israel, and despises the salvation that is only found in Yeshua. Of course, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is also unforgivable (Mark 3:28-30).
345 One should physically separate from a Christian partner who is a habitual offender in things like adultery, prostitution, incest, physical and/or emotional abuse. Separate, but don’t divorce (unless the Lord Himself leads you to divorce, for He knows the other person’s heart). 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 (‘sow to the flesh’? Reap death; Gal. 6:8; Rom. 8:6). 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 Christians for sins they were committing. Sometimes the Gentiles weren’t even aware of them (e.g. 1st Cor. 10:21-22) or if they were they didn’t exhibit anything that led them to change (e.g. 1st Cor. 5:1-2). Many of those problems would never have arisen if they had a working knowledge of Mosaic Law. 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 Christian’s understanding and lifestyle. That’s why James gave the initial filter of the four rules first (Acts 15:20) and spoke of Gentile Christians going to the synagogues every Sabbath to learn Mosaic Law as they grew in the grace and knowledge of Messiah 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 pornayah is used in both instances. The third text is chapter ten, where Paul specifically speaks of pornayah in relation to the cult harlotry of Num. 25, but 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 the Apostle 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 church in a city that was 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 the expression, ‘to Corinthicize’ someone, was seen as a ‘euphemism for’ cult ‘whoredom.’ Shrinesto Aphrodite were everywhere in Corinth. Aphrodite was seen as the

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346 Some problems that Paul wrote of in First 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 (5:1-5); 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 completely covered their heads in the assembly, and women who would not (11:4-16); their perverse and inconsiderate 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).

347 There are a number of places in First Corinthians where Paul uses Mosaic Law to establish his point. This would have been meaningless to the Corinthians if Mosaic Law had been done away with and not part of their lives:

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 them being unleavened bread (v. 7; cf. Ex. 12:8-20; Lev. 23:6).

2. The Apostle 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) and,

4. In 16:8 Paul speaks of staying at Ephesus until Pentecost, which is Greek 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, and cite Mosaic Law, unless he still kept the Law and taught it to them? (Cf. Phil. 3:17; 4:9, and see the one page articles: The Feasts of Israel and the Church and The Two Triangles of the NT.)


350 Findlay, St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 734.
Cult Prostitution in the Corinthian Assembly

‘patroness of harlots’ and was known for her ‘great army of prostitutes.’ At her main temple, which ‘crowned the Acrocorinthus,’ 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,’ or for their pagan feasts, common prostitutes were pressed into the service of the goddess to gratify the need for beseeching her favor. At these times common harlots would become cult harlots.

Paul’s Gentile converts, both slave and free, seem to have made up the bulk of the church in Corinth. Most of them would have grown up in the mindset of paganism, and so, were little more than pagan Christians. That’s why Paul had so many problems with the Corinthian church. Findlay notes that many of the Gentile believers were ‘steeped in pagan vice’ and bound up ‘with idolatry,’ which points directly to cult harlotry. After all, why give up the worship of Aphrodite when you could have her and Jesus, too?

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

In presenting these three sections of Paul’s first (preserved) letter to the Corinthians (see 1st Corinthians 5:9-11), it’s good to understand that the Apostle didn’t outline it with chapter and verse numbers, nor did he have a computer ‘to tidy everything up’ nor did he keep everything ‘in order.’ In other words, his rais-
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ing of a concern (e.g. cult prostitution) in one section will continue in a later section as he thinks of further things to support his previous words, and other things that needed to be addressed on the topic.

The problem of cult harlotry 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 James are actually mentioned by Paul, being practiced by Corinthian Gentile Christians:

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 a god or a goddess through cult harlots—all in the Name of Jesus Christ.

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

Most Bible commentators see pornayah 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’), Findlay (the ‘Case of Incest’) and Wycliffe (‘the fornication was incest’).

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 pornayah (fornication; prostitution). Commentators have failed to pick up on its uniqueness. Paul writes:

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

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 “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, and most likely, closer in age to the son than the father. There would be no childhood emotions attached to this woman, as might be found with a stepmother.

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

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360 Morris, 1 Corinthians, p. 83.
361 Findlay, St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 807.
362 Pfeiffer, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1236.
363 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).
364 Rosner, Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, p. 340, quoting Will Deming, The Unity of 1 Corinthians 5-6, p. 294, saying, “Deming refers to Graeco-Roman evidence that step-mothers ‘were often closer in age to the man’s children than to the man himself.’”
it wasn’t found among the Gentiles. It should be obvious that the reason wasn’t because the woman was his stepmother, but because the woman was also a practicing cult harlot. This would account for Paul’s use of pornayah (harlotry) 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 passage on, speaking against cult harlotry in chapters six and ten, which goes far to confirm that the stepmother was a cult harlot. Here is a Christian man 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 father’s wife, even if she wasn’t a cult harlot, is death (Lev. 20:11).365

Paul’s use of the Greek word for harlotry (pornayah), his astonishment at the actual deed, and the punishment he commands the Corinthians to carry out,366 without the hint of possible repentance, all suggest that the woman was a cult harlot and that she had intercourse, many times, at one of the pagan shrines with the son of the man to whom she was married.367 If this is the case, and it appears to be, then the only place in the New Testament where pornayah 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, etc., seems to say that the woman was a cult harlot. Also, whenever pornayah is used in the New Testament it overwhelmingly points to cult harlotry, not common harlotry.368 Therefore, with Paul using pornayah, without qualification, it should be 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 as Christians in the church and many Gentile unbelievers in Corinth, not to mention the cult harlot whom he had intercourse with. This is a conceptual problem with ‘freedom in Christ’ when it’s not coupled with God’s divine boundaries—His Law (Lev. 18:8; 20:11; Dt. 22:30; 27:20). This is why the second rule of James comes against cult harlotry and why he gave the four rules to the Gentiles first.

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365 See A Word About Torah, p. 199f., for why Paul didn’t have the man stoned to death, as Torah prescribes.

366 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 what Mosaic Law states about such a person—that he would be ‘cut off from Israel’ (Ex. 12:15, 19; Lev. 7:27; 17:14; 18:29, etc.).

367 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 and his father’s favorite god or goddess through his wife?

THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

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 Christians 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? It’s God’s Law (cf. Romans 3:30; 1st John 3:4) as lived out by Jesus, not 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, and we’re to think that it had nothing to do with pagan temples and cult harlots? 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 it by presenting clear evidence that Paul was speaking about common harlotry and common harlotry only, but this cannot be done. I am by no means the first to see this passage as speaking of cult prostitution.\(^{369}\)

Morris states that the philosophy behind the average Corinthian was a ‘man who recognized no superior, and no law but his own desires.’\(^{370}\) In other words, he thought he could do whatever he wanted to do. Enter now some who came to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior. Would their thought pattern change in this area? For many Gentiles, no.

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

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. 13 Meats 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. 15 Know 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! 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.’

18 Flee fornication!\(^{372}\) Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that commit-


\(^{370}\) Morris, 1 Corinthians, p. 19.

\(^{371}\) Expedient: a means of attaining an end, especially one that is convenient, but considered improper or immoral.

\(^{372}\) The New American Standard Bible has, ‘Flee immorality.’ This totally distorts the meaning that Paul was writing about (i.e. cult harlotry).
Cult Prostitution in the Corinthian Assembly

teth *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 this very passage, and that, after he’s just spoken against thieves and adulterers, etc. (6:9-11). Therefore, ‘all things are lawful’ cannot mean *every* thing. Paul would never lie, nor eat bacon, nor break the 7th day Sabbath, etc., because that would be sin for him (cf. Romans 3:20, 31).

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 he was *echoing* a Gnostic libertine concept that was ‘in use among a group of Corinthians.’

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.’ They weren’t interested in understanding what was right or wrong if it inhibited their sinful lifestyle. Just how many Christians 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 (cf. 2nd Cor. 12:21).

Paul qualified ‘all things’ (παντα 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, whichbibically is defined by Mosaic Law.

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373 Paul uses the phrase twice 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 aligns the two texts concerning what type of harlotry Paul is addressing here (cult harlotry).

374 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 is speaking of.

375 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 Christians used this philosophical phrase to justify their unrestrained sexual lust, and that, in relation to other gods and goddesses (i.e. cult prostitution).

376 Today, being ‘free in Christ’ means that many Christians walk as the world and don’t even realize it. Too 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 is sin and causes men to stumble (sin). The same is true for how some Christian men dress.

377 Dt. 30:10, 15-16, 19-20; Mt. 5:19; 22:34-40; Rom. 3:20, 31; 6:1-4f.; 7:7, 12, 14; Jam. 2:9, 11; Rev. 12:17; 14:12.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

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

It sounds logical and reasonable, but we know it’s sin because Mosaic Law speaks against having sex outside of marriage, and also against cult harlotry. Without an understanding of Mosaic Law (God’s will) there wasn’t any need for sexual restraint among Gentile Christians who continued to worship other gods. Wasn’t Jesus like their other gods? If it’s good to feed the body with food, a natural function, why would it be wrong 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?’

Paul countered this Gnostic libertine philosophy juxtaposing one’s freedom to do whatever he sexually pleased, with what was profitable for him. He also pointed his readers to Judgment Day, 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 serving another god or goddess.

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 word 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 who 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:

379 Or, ‘Food for the belly and the belly for food’ (meat is the KJV word for food or meal; i.e. grain). It’s quite likely this also spoke of their gluttonous eating or feasting at the pagan shrines where cult harlotry took place.
380 Morris, I Corinthians, p. 96.
381 Pfeiffer, WBC, p. 1238. No ‘restrictions in food’ is an anti-Mosaic Law perception of the Good News. Note well 1st Timothy 4:4-5, where the Word of God and prayer qualify what food can be eaten. In other words, it’s not just prayer that makes food acceptable for a believer to eat, but God’s Word which includes the Old Testament (cf. 2nd Tim. 3:14-17).
382 Morris, I Corinthians, p. 97.
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‘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 seem to point to this.

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. 17But 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 is a cult harlot. There’s nothing in the context to negate it, but on the contrary, many things that point directly to it. Why can’t this be happening in pagan Corinth? Why wouldn’t the Gentile Christians, steeped in pagan harlotry, be doing what the Hebrews had done when they came out of Egypt? The Gentiles hadn’t heard the Voice 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. Harlotry is what Paul was writing about and this is further seen from the noun which comes from pornayah (v. 18). Pornay (vv. 15-16) can only mean a harlot (common or cultic), not an adulteress.

Paul states that their Christian bodies were for the Lord and that the Lord Yeshua owned them (v. 14). Then he adds 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 is speaking of temple prostitution among the Corinthian Christians:

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?’ (KJV)

Paul’s use of the Greek word for temple, ναος (na’ohs, v. 19), is defined as the place where the deity dwelt; in the inner sanctuary as opposed to the outer courtyard.

Paul is saying that the Christian’s body

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383 Ibid., pp. 97-98.
387 Morris, 1 Corinthians, p. 98.
388 Ibid., p. 99.
is the dwelling place of God the Holy Spirit and that Christians shouldn’t be going to another temple where another god dwells and join themselves to that god through cult harlotry.

Cult harlotry is also 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 Paul is speaking of cult harlotry, and this, to the same group of Corinthian Christians:

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)

Paul 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.\(^{389}\) He wouldn’t use Belial if it were just a common prostitute, as no religious significance attaches to common harlotry. Also, the use of the word infidel (v. 15) is only used in a religious context.

In 2nd Cor. 6:16 the Apostle 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 Christians and that they are the temple of God (1st Cor. 6:19; 2nd Cor. 6:16). It’s also seen in his admonition to the Corinthian Christians not to be unequally yoked with non-Christians (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 (god) with their body. The context and the parallel to 2nd Cor. 6:16 speak of cult harlotry. True worship is within the Christian’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 very clear. Everything points directly to temple harlotry, and not common harlotry.

Paul writes many times of the Holy Spirit dwelling in Christians without mentioning that they are the temple of the Holy Spirit.\(^{390}\) Yet here, when speaking of pornayah (1st Cor. 6:13, 18 twice), which is either common or cult harlotry, and having used the word for harlot (pornay) twice (in v. 15, 16), he chooses to employ the concept that Christians are the dwelling place or temple of the living God. This parallels the idea that those who use the harlot are going to the pagan shrine or dwelling place of another god. Paul’s use of pornayah (harlotry) and pornay (harlot) then, in this context, should be seen as referring to cult harlotry and cult harlots.

Brian Rosner also sees that Paul is speaking of cult harlotry in 1st Cor. 6:12-20 and likens the way the Apostle writes as unfaithfulness or disloyalty to God, saying:

“sacred prostitution is condemned throughout the Scriptures as disloyalty to God, in a

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

manner not unlike Paul’s stance in 1 Cor. 6:12-20. Rosner goes on to state, “In” (these) “nine verses θεός” (theos, God) “and κυρίος” (kurios, Lord) “each occur four times (sic: times), “Χριστός” (Christos, Christ) “twice and ἄγιον πνεῦμα” (numa, Holy Spirit) “once. This decidedly theocentric response to πορνεία” (pornayah) “would certainly be a fitting rebuff to sacred prostitution, in which the participant could be conceived of as not only immoral, but guilty of what amounts to apostasy.”

“along with the general thrust of Paul’s instructions, several features of the passage, read in the larger context of 1 Corinthians, suggest that he is opposing sacred prostitution. Paul’s only direct command against prostitution occurs in 6:18: ‘Φεύγετε τήν πορνείαν’” (Flee pornayah!) “Significantly, the only other thing he tells the Corinthians to flee from is idolatry, in 10:14: ‘φεύγετε ἀπὸ εἰδωλολατρίας’” (Flee from idolatry!) “The temple imagery in 6:19-20 is particularly suggestive. Paul could be saying, ‘don’t go to the temple (to use prostitutes), you are the temple!’ The link between idolatry and sexual immorality in 10:7-8, where committing idolatry and indulging in sexual immorality are juxtaposed, takes on new significance if read in the light of the presence of sacred prostitution in Corinth (cf. esp. ‘rose up to play). As Ben Witherington states: ‘1 Cor. 10:7 is a meaningful warning only if Paul had good reason to assume that sexual play was a regular part of some meals in one or more of the pagan temples in Corinth.’

What most scholars say about 1st Cor. 6:12-20, referring to common harlotry is not accurate. The parallels of how Paul writes are strongest and only make sense when the passage is taken as an admonishment against cult harlotry, especially in a city noted for it throughout the entire Roman Empire. The following are six reasons that support the position that in chapter six Paul is speaking about cult harlotry:

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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391 Rosner, Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, p. 343.
392 Ibid., p. 342.
394 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 1,000 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 quite possible, though, that when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, more than a hundred years later (circa 51 AD), that Corinth had the same number of cult harlots for Aphrodite. Corinth was the ‘capital for the Roman province of Achaia’ (ibid., p. 16) and also a chief city of commerce in the Roman world because of its location. Kruse admits there ‘is no doubt that Corinth was regaining its wealth and prestige in Paul’s time’ (ibid.), and it was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire (p. 86). Kruse also writes that Corinth in Paul’s day was immersed in 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 only ‘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
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2. The Greek words for ‘harlot’ and ‘harlotry’ equally mean ‘cult harlot’ and ‘cult harlotry.’ To say that it was only, or even primarily common harlotry that Paul addressed would have meant that Paul was blind to a reality that pervaded the entire city and the hearts of the men there, even Christian men.

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, and is a continuation of his thoughts in chapters five and six.

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 that chapter ten deals with, which is a further teaching against cult harlotry, again, an extension of his teaching against cult harlotry that began in chapters five and six.

5. Paul, in 2nd Cor. 6:14-17, in an almost identical rebuke to these very same Christians, 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 clear.

6. As R. J. Knowling states (and as the chapter on Cult Prostitution in the New Testament, p. 65f., pointed out), the use of pornayah in the New Testament speaks first and foremost of cult prostitution an overwhelming 96% of the time, not common prostitution. For someone to suggest that Paul is speaking about common harlotry instead of cult harlotry they would have to present material supporting their position, but this is not possible.

These six reasons reveal that the prostitution the Apostle Paul 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 Mosaic Law. 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 Corinthian Christians to accountability in the area in which Torah is most adamant about and in which Israel was most lax in, even though Christians are ‘free in Christ’ and ‘under Grace.’ From a textual and a sociological point of

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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 in Paul’s day, having 1,000 temple prostitutes, does not seem unreasonable.

Yet, even if the new Corinth 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, may have had even more than a thousand. Whatever their number, Paul and the Corinthian Christians still 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 Christians 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) notes: “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.” As the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire, and a major port of commerce, many sailors supported the ‘services’ of the cult harlots in Corinth.


view, the Apostle’s stern warning to the Corinthian Christians in chapter six supports the understanding that *pornayah* in Acts 15:20 means *cult* prostitution. Paul’s opposition to it is exactly what James spoke against in his Decree to Gentile Christians. It’s not a coincidence.

**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 across on dry ground and had killed the Egyptian Army. Israel heard Him speak the Ten Commandments from Mt. Sinai and they were fed with Manna *every day for 40 years*, but Israel failed to walk in faith when God tested them (Dt. 8:1-3). Paul cautioned the Corinthians against this attitude of unbelief, 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 Christians. Paul begins by showing them that the Fathers of Israel were their Fathers, too, because they were part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2:11f.; cf. Jn. 10:16):

‘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,*\(^{397}\)* and the Rock was Christ.’

(1st Cor. 10:1-4)

Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand that Israel, too, had been in covenant with God, 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 graciousness upon them, but people in both could sever themselves from that Grace. Morris notes 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.’\(^{398}\)

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\(^{397}\) 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 (huge) 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), but nowhere in Scripture is that stated, either. Jude most likely got it from an apocryphal book of the first century BC called, *The Assumption of Moses*. These are two instances from Paul and Jude (Judah), a half brother of Yeshua, that come into the New Testament as fact, but are only rabbinic fables (cf. 2nd Tim. 3:8). Also, if the rock had followed them for 40 years there would have been no need for water that day when Moses struck it twice (Num. 20:1-11f.).
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Paul goes 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 then brings the Family History lesson to a close, warning the Gentiles that membership in the Body of Messiah is not a guarantee of eternal life—one can fall from Grace. He writes:

5*Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well pleased for they were laid low in the Wilderness. *Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. 7*Do 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.’ *Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did” (KJV: ‘Neither let us commit fornication as some of them committed fornication’). 399 8* and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.” 400 (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 proclaimed as their God (Ex. 32:4-5, 8). ‘To play,’ speaks of sexual misconduct. It’s another way of seeing the Hebrew verb *zanah* (to prostitute—to play the harlot). Israel sacrificed to, and worshiped the calf-god of gold, indulging in idolatrous sex in the Name of Yahveh.

Paul’s second reference is to those who fell in one day (Neither let us commit fornication…23,000 fell in one day, v. 8), and is 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/mmany Corinthian Christians weren’t engaged in cult harlotry. Paul continues:

11*Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. *Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall! 12*No 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. *Therefore, 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 unbelief and complaining about one’s situation, as the fiery serpents sent among Israel spoke of 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), 401 but he

398 Morris, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 139-140.
400 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, and that, from the Apostle to the Gentiles.

401 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
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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 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 its 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 Corinthians to flee from idolatry (10:14), Paul was reinforcing what he wrote in 6:18 (Flee pornayah!).

Paul admonishes the Corinthians—don’t commit this abomination against God! The Greek word in 10:8 for fornication is pornayah. It’s also used in 1st Cor. 5:1 (twice), 6:13 (once), 6:15-16 (twice pornay, prostitute) and 6:18 (twice, fornication). Why would pornayah be cult prostitution in chapter ten, but only common harlotry 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 isn’t the case as he doesn’t mention leaving off from one group to write to the other, but he continually addresses the Corinthians as one body in the midst of their cliques (1st Cor. 1:12-13; 3:1-4, 21; 10:17).

Chapter ten is Paul’s follow-up thoughts and expansion of chapters five and six. He’s dealing with the same problem and the same people. In chapter five he dealt 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 their cult harlotry. In chapter ten Paul wrote of the sordid Family History of Israel in the Wilderness and how the Corinthians were part of Israel and should, therefore, learn from the sins of Israel (‘examples for us,’ v. 6, and ‘for our instruction,’ v. 11).

In chapter seven the Apostle to the Gentiles tells the Corinthians to get married if they can’t abstain from cult harlotry (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 ministry to them, although he wouldn’t use that right, as some might accuse him of being greedy, which could hinder him from preaching the Good 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)? 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 (1st 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 harlotry, 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’
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cult harlotry ‘with Moabite women’ and ‘joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor.’  

Morris 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 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 Paul addresses pornayah (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 pornayah 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’ he ‘refers to meat sacrificed and eaten in the presence of idols.’

Corinth was not 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, the ubiquitous phrase ‘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 realize that it was cult prostitution? No one, and herein lies the fault of the theologians and the translators who don’t realize the specific problem Paul was addressing.

Some people might 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 does appeal to Mosaic Law in chapter ten, relating that ancient Hebrew history was written as an example and instruction to the Gentile Corinthians. 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 for doing something similar. Paul also 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 speak to them then to put forward the four rules of James, which they most likely already knew (Acts 16:4-5), and probably read of in the actual first letter to them that we don’t have (1st Cor. 5:9-11), but hadn’t been obeying. Findlay adds that it wasn’t necessary for Paul to write as a contemporary theologian might:

‘To draw a hard and fast line in such questions and to forbid all participation in idolotry—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.’

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402 Morris, 1 Corinthians, p. 142.
403 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 pornayah (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 commandments of Acts 15:20—sacrificial-sexual idolatry.
404 Ibid., p. 466.
405 Paul also speaks of it in Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3 and Colossians 3:5.
406 See p. 86, note 347 for places in 1st Corinthians where Paul uses the Law to validate his points.
407 Findlay, St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, pp. 731-732.
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Paul was dealing with a people steeped in cult harlotry and diabolical philosophy. Being led by the Holy Spirit he was teaching them, from different perspectives, the reasons for the rules and why they must not be involved in cult harlotry. Knowling saw this and said that just because Paul doesn’t literally mention the Decree of Acts 15, one shouldn’t think that it didn’t happen, or that Paul didn’t recognize it:

‘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 also lived with the Corinthians for a year and a half (Acts 18:11) and most likely told them of the Decree more than once. Mosaic Law was valid for Paul. In First Corinthians he uses a specific commandment in Mosaic Law 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 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 God ordained lawful 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.’

If Mosaic Law was nullified for his Gentile Christians, Paul would not have used it to validate his points. The significant places in First Corinthians where pornayah appears reveal that cult harlotry is specifically what Paul meant when he wrote of pornayah (KJV fornication) in chapters five, six, eight and ten. The concern that James had in Acts 15:20, about cult prostitution among Gentile Christians, was a stark reality that the Apostle faced among his Corinthian believers. That Christians would do this, thinking that it was alright as a Christian to do, reveals their perversive 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 ‘known’ Gentile 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 (cf. Gal. 5:19-21)?

First Corinthians provides biblical and historical support for the use of the word pornayah as cult harlotry,

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408 Knowling, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 336. Gal 2:10 speaks of Paul’s meeting with the heads of the Church in Jerusalem, and them telling him to remember the poor, which he was ‘eager to do.’

409 See Rom. 3:20, 31; 7:12, 14; 1st Cor. 5:6-8; 7:19 and also p. 86, note 347.

410 Morris, 1 Corinthians, p. 132. Italics are those of Morris.

411 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, but primarily cultic because of its overall meaning in the New Testament.

even if it stood alone, without the other three points of sacrificial idolatry to bolster it. Being listed with three other rules on sacrificial idolatry only strengthens the position that James was warning the Gentile Christians to not engage in sacrificial-sexual idolatry. The four rules have absolutely 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.’ The Gentiles were to walk out their faith in the Jewish Messiah through all the rules, ordinances and statutes of Moses that applied to them (cf. Acts 15:21; 18:18; 21:20-24; 24:10-18; 25:8; 1st John 2:6).

In Paul’s day, 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.\textsuperscript{413}

James 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, along with belief in Jesus, 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 they are from Mosaic Law and James speaks of them going to the synagogue on the Sabbath, not Sunday (48 AD) to learn of ‘Moses.’ Torah is for every Christian today. Grace must be undergirded by Law, or people will do what they think is right in their own eyes. Many times, as we see in Corinth, this is sin in God’s eyes.\textsuperscript{414} 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-god. The former was the first prohibition of James and the latter was his fourth commandment to Gentile Christians.

\textit{Fellowship with Devils: 1st Cor. 10:16-22}

In looking at another aspect of pagan worship prohibited in Acts 15:20, the drinking of blood (or a symbolic representation of the blood),\textsuperscript{415} Paul strongly rebukes some of the Corinthian Christians for drinking the cup of demons!\textsuperscript{416} Can this really be? Christians drinking the fresh sacrificial blood to ‘gods’ and thinking it’s alright? Paul speaks of how it makes God feel (jealous!), and what it means to them (they would be severed—cut off from Messiah). Both concepts recall Israel at Baal Peor. Paul writes,

\begin{quote}
Is 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 \textit{sacrificed to idols} is anything or that an idol is anything? No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice \textit{they sacrifice to demons}, and not to God, and I do not want you to become sharers in (partners with)\textsuperscript{417} demons” (KJV: ‘and I would not that ye
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{413} Hislop, \textit{The Two Babylons}, pp. 14, 20, 57, 60, 77, 95, 133, 174, 199, 230, etc.

\textsuperscript{414} Dt. 12:8; Judges 17:6; 21:25; 1st Cor. 5–10

\textsuperscript{415} Hislop, \textit{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. This drink was often used in pagan initiation rites.

\textsuperscript{416} 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 issue the Apostle is addressing. His reference to 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 God had cut off those Hebrews who sacrificed to the Baal Peor idol through his harlots. What God had done to His people Israel, He was capable of doing to His people Israel who were Gentiles (Eph. 2:11f.).

Some Gentile believers were drinking the cup of demons and eating of the sacrificial meat (‘the table of demons’) and didn’t realize it was wrong. Their religious culture permitted them to include the worship of Jesus along 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 Gentile Corinthian Christians drank the fresh blood of the sacrifice and ate of its meat as part of the ritual of sacrificial-sexual idolatry. Findlay speaks of the seriousness of the matter, saying:

‘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.’

The reference to the table of demons is the first prohibition 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, and the eating of sacrificial blood and sacrificial meat). Also, this section is Paul’s closure and final understanding for chapter eight, where some might think he was condoning the eating of meat sacrificed to an idol in the temple (1st Cor. 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 writes:

‘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).’

Schreiner seems baffled that Gentile Christians would do such a thing. This might be because he doesn’t understand the ancient Gentile mentality. Be that as it may, this is exactly why James prohibited pollutions of idols and blood (his first and fourth prohibitions) in Acts 15:20. What’s plain for us to see today, wasn’t that plain for many Gentile Christians in Corinth (and other congregations), because they were raised in the Way of Paganism (i.e. having many gods and goddesses was ‘normal, natural and right’).

The need for the four rules, and consequently Mosaic Law, was very necessary in the Corinthian assembly that did not fall behind any of the other churches in terms of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (1st Cor. 1:4-8).

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418 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 a Christian 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. 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 a brother to 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 Christian 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 Christian is not a participant in the temple sacrifice. This, obviously, 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.” (1st Cor. 23-28)

In chapter six the understanding that all things were lawful for Paul meant that theoretically, he too, as a free man, 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 all Christians, and he had already spoken of keeping the commandments of God (1st Cor. 7:19), which include the dietary laws. 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 to a god). It was for the host’s sake, to come to Christ, that the Christian wouldn’t eat that meat.

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421 See 1st Timothy 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 (cf. 1st Tim. 3:10-16). See *Law 102, Grace, Holiness and the Pharisic Church, Hebrews and the Change of the Law*, and *Romans 14 and the Dietary Laws* for why the Church’s position on Mosaic Law and the eating of unclean meats is heretical.
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From two important passages of Scripture (Acts 15:20; Rev. 2:20), it might seem to some that Paul is contradicting both James and Jesus in allowing Christians to eat meat sacrificed to idols, but James admonished the Gentile Christians not to eat meat that was literally just sacrificed on the altar, as Witherington astutely brought out, specifically referring to it in Acts 15:20 as ‘the pollutions of idols.’ In 1 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; the fourth prohibition of James.)

In Rev. 2:20-21 Messiah Yeshua comes against cult harlotry (fornication; unfortunately translated as sexual immorality in many Bibles) 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 taught by ‘Jezebel’ 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. This is 65 years after the resurrection.

Paul allowed Christians to eat sacrificial meat sold in the marketplace (1st Cor. 10:23-28), but not at the sacrifice to the god. The Corinthians are 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.’ Other animals might be ‘blessed’ by a pagan priest and then slaughtered/sacrificed in the marketplace by the ‘butcher,’ but not literally sacrificed on a 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 Christians even though it hadn’t been part of a sacrificial ceremony. Paul tells them they can eat the meat in the market.

Paul said 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 that we can eat pork chops

422 See Witherington, p. 16.
423 Ex. 9:29; Ps. 24:1; 1st Cor. 10:28.
424 Morris, 1 Corinthians, p. 120.
425 This is what Paul addresses in Romans 14, not clean vs. unclean meats (as some wrongly teach). This practice also happens today in South Africa 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 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 false god. See Romans 14 and the Dietary Laws, Law 102 and Common—Acts 10:14.
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if your host serves them to you. No, Paul is speaking of a non-Christian home, where meat may have been used in a pagan sacrifice, not which meat to eat (biblically clean vs. unclean). In the year and a half that Paul taught the Gentile Christians at Corinth (Acts 18:11), he most likely had a few classes on the Mosaic dietary laws.426

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— ἐπιτοθυτὸν (aipo’thatone) ’(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.”427

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 Jewish people 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 wouldn’t 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 pagan market, which had been sacrificed to an idol. With the God of Israel going out to the Gentiles, to their lands that were steeped in paganism, this problem arose, and Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, dealt with it in a righteous and divine way.428

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 as part of their life of worship. 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.

The four rules of James were certainly needed in the Corinthian congregation. These passages only emphasize the Christian need for Mosaic Law so that they didn’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 ancient laws of righteousness is all too evident.

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 the ancient pagan ways of sacrificial-sexual idolatry.


428 The decision and four rules of James in Acts 15 were also halacha, a Jewish term for how to walk out one’s faith in God. Gentiles, coming to believe in the Jewish Messiah, had no understanding of Torah—God’s holy ways of living. What constitutes sin and what is pleasing to God is found in Torah, and hence, our need to be taught God’s will for how to live out our faith in Messiah Yeshua (cf. Rom. 3:20; 7:7, 12, 14).
CULT PROSTITUTION IN REVELATION

There are many cites in the New Covenant that use πορνεία (pornayah, fornication: cult or common prostitution), but none present as clear a picture of its literal cultic and symbolic use as the Book of Revelation. In Rev. 2:20-21 and 2:14, in both Thyatira and Pergamos, respectively, the risen Savior rebukes Christians for practicing cult harlotry and for eating meat sacrificed to idols at the pagan shrine at the time of the sacrifice. In the first passage it is a so-called Christian prophetess within the congregation who was teaching and authorizing it. Yeshua warned the assembly at Thyatira, saying:

‘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 Thyatira was actually in an area of western Turkey where Paul had once evangelized and taught in. More than 45 years after the four rules of Acts 15 (circa 95 AD), Jesus revealed to the Apostle John that Christians were 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). Those Christians at Thyatira were being taught that cult harlotry was acceptable as a believer in Jesus. More subtle than all the beasts of the field is the Serpent. If those Christians were asked if they ‘believed in Jesus,’ 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 God murdered and wanted to do the same to Elijah.429

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.430

Some might say, ‘Well that’s a lot different from when God killed 24,000 Hebrews.’ That’s true, but Yahveh did that because He was literally in the Camp of Israel for 40 years,431 and the Lord also strove with Israel for many centuries concerning cult harlotry, sending His prophets to warn them.432 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 Gentile believers.

This reality of His presence existed after the resurrection for the body of Jewish believers in Jerusalem.

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432 2nd Kgs. 17:1-23; Jer. 7:25; 35:15.
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All of them 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? Ananias and Sapphira 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 and He was present. The Spirit didn’t do that in Jeremiah’s day nor at Corinth in Paul’s day. The main difference, though, was the actual manifestation of the living 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 (and the Galatians, etc). 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 today? 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 that I was a 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.’ (πορνευσαί; Rev. 2:13-14 KJV)

With the mention of Balaam, the fornication spoken of is clearly cult harlotry, not common harlotry. The Baal Peor disaster is attributed to him via Balak (cf. 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).

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 had only mentioned fornication. 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. Also, with the exact same charges leveled by Yeshua to Thyatira (Rev. 2:20), it’s clear that the fornication which Thyatira was indulging in was cult prostitution.

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.’

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433 2nd Cor. 10:8-11; see also 1:23; 12:20f.
434 Hislop, *The Two Babylonys*, pp. 240-241. The Lord was actually declaring Pergamos to be the place where Satan had established his throne (headquarters on Earth) at that time. Just as Jerusalem is the home of Yahveh (Ps. 48:2; Mt. 23:21), 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 (Rev. 17:9).
Cult Prostitution in Revelation

Explaining *fornication* and *things sacrificed* at Pergamos, Morris states,

‘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, the

the ‘issue here is not eating meat used in pagan rituals, but actually participating in idolatrous feasts and sexual sin, thus violating the mitzvot (Hebrew for commandments) 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 or about 65 years after the resurrection. These Christians 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 nor with some of God’s people. *TDNT* confirms this, stating that for John,

‘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 40 years after James 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 James gave those four rules, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The ancient diabolical scheme of Satan is to beguile the world into worshiping him instead of Yahveh, the true God, even and especially in Israel among His own people. The core of that worship was cult harlotry. This originated out of 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 in one of his many different pagan proxies, and causing God’s people, both Jew and Gentile, if not to worship Satan then to pervert their worship of the Lord Yeshua. The Great Harlot is mentioned in nearly three identical passages speaking about what she has given Mankind to drink—the wine of her (cult) 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.’ (πορνειας, pornay’ahs; KJV)

Rev. 17:2: ‘With whom the kings of the Earth have committed fornication (επορνειας, eh’pornay’ahs), and the inhabitants of the Earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.’ (πορνειας, pornay’ahs; KJV)

437 Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 796. The Hebrew term mitzvat means ‘commandments’ of God (through His authorized agents; e.g. Moses, Yeshua, Paul, Peter and James, etc.).
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Rev. 18:3: ‘For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication (πορνευαζ, pornay’ahs) and the kings of the Earth have committed fornication (επορνευουν, eh’pornu’sahn) with her, and the merchants of the Earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.’ (KJV)  

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, but it should be just as obvious that it also includes sacrificial-sexual ‘worship’ to financial greed, physical lust, political and even satanic power.

New Testament Babylon is the diabolical opposite of the heavenly Jerusalem, where the true God is worshiped. Babylon and the Harlot are the antithesis of Jerusalem and the Bride. TDNT speaks 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, harlotry) ‘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:’  

‘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 even to whoredom in the literal sense. Above all, the capital is called πορνη (pornay, harlot), ‘as the center of paganism with its harlot-like apostasy from the true God.’

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. The Gentiles had no divine Lawgiver who gave them God’s ways of righteousness and sin to 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 that he wanted. It would be very natural for a Gentile Christian to add Jesus to his pantheon. Both First Corinthians and Revelation attest to this, the seriousness of the problem, and how widespread it was among Gentile Christians.

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440 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.  
442 Two Christian classics ‘must read’ that reveal the Roman Catholic Church as being the Harlot of New Testament Babylon are Alexander Hislop’s, *The Two Babylons—The Full Hislop* and Dave Hunt’s, *A Woman Rides the Beast*.  
443 Ibid.
Cult Prostitution in Revelation

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 four rules 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 philosophy of ‘freedom in Christ.’

This is what the Apostle Paul had to deal with at Corinth and this is why James gave the four rules first. The rules have nothing to do with table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles, but with the placing of godly boundaries over the way Christian Gentiles perceived they could continue to worship their gods and goddesses along with faith in Christ.

James not only told the Gentiles what they needed to do in order to be saved, but he also wanted them to know 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 commandments were issued. The Gentile world at the time of the Apostles was neck-deep in satanic quicksand and thought nothing of it, or of adding another god to their collection.

What love the God of Israel has for all peoples, in sacrificing His own Son for the people of this world. His love is infinitely beyond our ability to comprehend, but He does expect us to be faithful to Him and to obey His ways—not the ways of Satan through Rome (e.g. Sunday, Easter, Xmas and the eating of unclean animals, like pig, catfish, shrimp and lobster).

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444 How similar is that to what Christians say today about not having to keep the Lord’s Sabbath nor His Feasts nor His dietary laws; three Pillars of Mosaic Law or God’s Instructions to us. Pride and ignorance walk ‘hand-in-hand’ in the Church today, to the glory of Satan and to the shame of Jesus.

445 The name of Yeshua’s half-brother in Hebrew is Yakov, which always translates into English as Jacob. “James” comes from the Latin Vulgate for Yakov. In other words, all the places where “James” is written in our English Bibles should be translated as Jacob. If “Jacob” is written in Mt. 1:2, 15-16; 8:11; 22:32; Mk. 12:26; Lk. 1:33; 13:28; Jn. 4:5, 12; Acts 3:13; 7:8; Rom. 9:13; 11:26; Heb. 11:9, 20-21, etc., there is no good reason why “James” is in our English Bibles for Yeshua’s half-brother.

Why English Bibles don’t have the name of Jacob speaks volumes to the anti-Semitic spirit of English Bible translators and the pervasive, ‘just under the surface’ anti-Semitic influence of the Roman Catholic Church, the Harlot of NT Babylon (cf. Rev. 17:9), on Christians today.
THE THIRD RULE—THINGS STRANGLED

The third rule in Acts 15:20 is ‘things strangled,’ but some think James never said it. The Interlinear has a footnote to this rule: “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 James 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 James did give 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 thought that blood meant murder and ponayas meant unchastity. In Acs 15:20 ‘blood’ does not mean murder. As noble as this moral lesson appears it wasn’t what James addressed, nor was he presenting ‘food acceptable to Jewish Christian consciences.’

Wesley Perschbacher defines strangled as, “strangled” or “suffocated” and that it’s “the flesh of animals killed by strangulation or suffocation, Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25.” Friberg agrees with him and interprets it as blood not being drained, and “choked; of animals killed by strangling so that the blood is not drained from them.” Bauer writes 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 God didn’t want His people Israel to eat meat with the blood in it (Lev. 19:26; Ezk. 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 James was addressing.

Howard Marshall logically, but erroneously, lumps together the third rule (strangled) with the fourth rule (blood), and says that strangling the animal, ‘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.’ Howard wasn’t alone as

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446 Brown, The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament, p. 473. It states this for every passage where the four rules are mentioned (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). The NRSV has it, but says that ‘some ancient authorities’ lack it.


451 Ibid.

most Christian theologians and pastors think ‘strangled’ and ‘blood’ in Acts 15:20 pertains to the Mosaic dietary laws.

Wycliffe also thinks it pertains to, ‘Meats from which the blood had not been properly removed.’ Bruce adds a twist to this by saying that 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.’

Bruce teaches that the rules came from the ‘Noachian decrees of Gen. 9:4,’ because then the rules won’t be seen as coming from Mosaic Law. He insists that anything from Mosaic Law would place the Gentile back ‘under the Law.’

Stern says it meant ‘meat from animals not slaughtered in a way that allows the blood to flow out.’ Knowling sees 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 on strangling pertains to,

‘beasts…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 James meant.

Although these two rules resemble food regulations, 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 are allegedly for. If James was going to caution the Gentiles against eating animals that had been strangled, and therefore, had blood in the meat, he failed to tell the Gentile Christians 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 dietary regulations even though Christians scholars think it speaks of not eating strangled animals so there can be ‘fellowship’ among the Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Strangled relates to sacrificial idolatry and only Ben Witherington III 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

453 Pfeiffer, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1152.
457 Williams, Acts, p. 266.
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blood remaining within the victim for the general public to eat. The ‘animal’ in this case would most likely 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 and 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 Yahveh (the lamb), but also sacrificing an unclean animal (a dog) to a pagan god, by breaking its neck. 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. It’s not unreasonable to assume that in the days of James the pagans continued this practice of strangling dogs for some of their gods.

Yahveh 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 was broken. Also, 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 ‘before God’ (Dt. 21:1-9). It’s also 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.’ Were their necks broken, though?

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459 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.

460 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 Yahveh 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).


462 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).

463 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.’

464 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.’


466 Ibid., p. 150.
The Third Rule—Things Strangled

Philo (20 BC to 50 AD), a Jewish philosopher born in Alexandria, Egypt who lived during the time of Messiah Yeshua and James, confirms that in his day, ‘pagans were sacrificing animals by means of strangulation.’\(^{467}\) Witherington adds to this saying that there is ‘evidence that the choking of the sacrifice, strangling it…transpired in pagan temples.’\(^{468}\) 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.’\(^{469}\) Both this concept (of the life of the animal entering the idol) 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\(^{470}\) 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 (flowers) of every variety.’\(^{471}\)

With the scant information given in Acts 15:20 for the third rule, if taken by itself, it would be impossible to definitively place it within the category of (only) 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 being part of that concept. Entirely lacking which animals couldn’t or could be eaten, strangled can only point to a pagan sacrificial ritual. James included it among the rules because it was 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 heretical theology that Mosaic Law ‘is done away with.’ If scholars would 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, which set up a theme for strangled to also fit into that category.

Things strangled has nothing to do with Jewish dietary regulations nor table fellowship. It was a prohibition against participating in an idolatrous pagan ceremony that used strangled animals or birds.

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\(^{467}\) Hegg, The Letter Writer, p. 277, note 588: Philo, The Special Laws, iv: xiii, 122. Hegg, following Witherington, presents the four rules as 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 James 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). James 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).


\(^{469}\) 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.

\(^{470}\) Encyclopedia Mythical: Eros is the Greek prototype for the Roman Cupid. Cupid’s arrows speak of him as Nimrod, the ‘mighty hunter’ (Gen. 10:9). See Hislop, The Two Babylon, 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 the fourth rule is ἁρματος (hai’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 writes, 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, as does Bauer, interprets blood in Acts 15:20 as a food regulation—blood within the meat. Wycliffe, following Marshall and Bauer, 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. 14:1ff.; 1st Cor. 8:1ff.).’

It seems strange, though, that James 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 basically 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. Stern realizes that blood can be

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477 Pfeiffer, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1152.
referring to the actual drinking of it from a pagan sacrifice, but he doesn’t understand it as such for Acts 15:20, and hence, he offers three options from which to choose from, like a Chinese menu, without saying which one he thought James meant. At least, though, 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).\(^{479}\) This is the ‘Jewish side’ to the Gentile scribe’s misrepresentation 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 was given for table fellowship for Jewish and Gentile believers.\(^{480}\) Williams says the rule means ‘not to eat any blood itself.’ This means for him that it’s blood in meat because he fails to state that the practice of eating (or rather drinking) blood was part of pagan sacrifices.\(^{481}\)

Knowling also believes it was blood in 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.’\(^{482}\)

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 that is 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\(^{483}\) with πνεύμα (nik’too, strangled) being ‘against any such interpretation.’\(^{484}\) 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 James didn’t tell the Gentiles which animals were acceptable to eat if properly slaughtered and cooked.

Witherington says that Gentiles drank (and tasted) blood at their pagan temples.\(^{485}\) but he errs in thinking

\(^{479}\) Ibid., p. 278.

\(^{480}\) 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.”

\(^{481}\) Williams, Acts, p. 266.


\(^{483}\) Sinclair, Collins English Dictionary, p. 316. Collocation means, ‘a grouping together of things in a certain order, as of the words in a sentence.’

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.\footnote{Witherington, \textit{The Acts of the Apostles}, p. 464.}

The fourth rule is blood. Christian scholarship thinks it means not to eat meat with 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, but each added a second meaning to it that isn’t correct. 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.\footnote{Lev. 3:17; 7:26-27; 17:10 19:26; 1st Sam. 14:31-34; Ezk. 33:25.} Although both of these, murder, and the eating of blood within the meat, are considered sin by God, there’s absolutely no support for either of them being what James meant when he spoke of blood in Acts 15:20. What the Lord’s half-brother meant cannot be determined from the word itself, as the different authorities reveal in their struggle to interpret it. 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 perfectly fine to do in their new faith, but were sin in God’s eyes.

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 at the fellowship table, he certainly failed to tell the Gentile Christians which animals weren’t to be eaten (e.g. pig, horse, lizards, rabbit, shrimp and catfish, etc.), and which could be eaten.

One can slaughter a pig properly so that the blood is removed and the pig roasted until it is ‘well done,’ but sitting down with a Jewish believer and offering him some hot pork chops would definitely offend him because pig is forbidden by God to be eaten (Lev. 11:7; Dt. 14:8). This destroys the Christian interpretation of the rules dealing with ‘table fellowship toward the weaker brother.’ James, in not indicating which animals weren’t to be eaten, renders the Christian interpretation of table fellowship as heretical and foolish. Scholars should have known that the eating of bacon, even ‘well done’ with no blood, next to a Jewish Christian, would certainly offend him, because all the Jewish Christians continued to keep not only the Mosaic dietary laws, but all the laws and rules of Moses that applied to them.\footnote{See Acts 21:20-24; 22:12; 24:14; 25:8; Rom. 3:31; 7:12, 14; 1st Jn. 2:6; 5:1-3; Rev. 14:12, etc.}

On the other hand, the need to prohibit the Gentile from not drinking the blood from animals 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, as Knowling pointed out, gave them the life of the victim. \textit{ISBE} states 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.’\footnote{Bromiley, \textit{ISBE}, vol. one, p. 526. See also Psalm 16:4.}
The Fourth Rule—Blood

The custom to which ISBE refers 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).\(^{490}\) Obviously, the prohibition against drinking blood at a pagan sacrifice was very necessary for Gentile converts to the Messiah 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.’\(^{491}\) This is what motivated the pagans to drink the blood because they desired the power or essence of the creature whose life was in the blood they were drinking, especially when many of the creatures represented the god or goddess they were worshiping. That’s why the psychological power derived from the sacrifice took on such 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.’\(^{492}\)

The Hindoos that Freeman describes were not the ancient temple worshipers of Zeus, Molech or Aphrodite in Greece or Canaan. They did, however, present the fact that the drinking of blood in Freeman’s day (1870) was still part of paganism. Alexander Hislop says the religion of the Hindoos originally came from Babylon.\(^{493}\) 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.’\(^{494}\)

In ancient Egypt the gods drank the blood of the sacrificial animals.\(^{495}\) Would the priests and the people be far behind? As King Solomon once said, ‘There’s nothing new under the sun’ (Eccl. 1:9c). 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 under ‘a baptism of blood.’\(^{496}\) ISBE 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 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,’\(^{497}\) and washed in blood.

\(^{490}\) Most likely, the Jewish believers at Corinth weren’t involved in drinking blood. They were raised in Mosaic Law and knew how offensive it was to God. Their coming into the Kingdom of Yeshua would only heighten that understanding.


\(^{493}\) 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.


\(^{495}\) Ibid., vol. three, pp. 237-238. In the days of King David he knew that pagans drank the blood from the sacrifice (Psalm 16:4).

\(^{496}\) Ibid., p. 237.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

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,

“sent young men of the Sons of Israel and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to Yahveh. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people and they said, ‘All that Yahveh has spoken we will do and we will obey!’ So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said, ‘Behold! The blood of the Covenant which Yahveh has made with you in accordance with all these words!’”

There’s something extremely powerful about blood in the spiritual realm. The reality behind the Mosaic sacrificial system was the sacrifice of Yeshua. This ultimately gave divine power and authority to blood. 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 Yeshua’s flesh is in His blood and I have given it to you upon the Altar to make atonement for your souls. For it’s Yeshua’s blood, by reason of His Life, that makes atonement’ (for you).

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.498 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.499

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.500

Many times God warned Israel not to eat or drink blood.501 That’s why most of the Jewish followers left Yeshua that day in Capernaum 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 written, ‘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 eat-

497 Ibid., vol. two, p. 681. From an online dictionary: ‘Mithraism—the cult of the god Mithras, which became popular among Roman soldiers…was the main rival to Christianity in the first three centuries AD.’

498 For where Mosaic Law pictures Messiah as a human sacrifice, see Human Sacrifice and Yeshua.


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The Fourth Rule—Blood

ing 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 applying it to us.

It’s evident that the rule on blood doesn’t mean ‘blood within the meat’ because James never spoke of which meats would be considered unclean by the God. 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 rightfully so because it’s God’s world and He makes the rules for us to live by. How could Christian scholars have failed to recognize this?

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 unprofessional reason why strangled was tampered with and removed from Acts 15:20 by some Gentile scribes in order to present their moral catechism of idolatry, unchastity and murder (for ‘blood’). Of course, it also doesn’t speak of the three sins that a Jew would allegedly die for, either, in resisting idolatry, fornication and murder.

The rule on blood centers around what James perceived the Gentile need to be, directly in relation to the issue of his salvation, not table fellowship. 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. James ruled that the drinking of sacrificial blood was forbidden for the Gentile Christians. This rule obviously falls under the category of sacrificial idolatry and cements the four rules of Acts 15:20 as a divinely inspired conceptual unit on Gentile sacrificial-sexual idolatry. Now the way is paved for Acts 15:21 to be properly understood and implemented, but first—Acts 15: Some Concerns.
ACTS 15—SOME CONCERNS

There are six points that need to be addressed concerning Acts 15 before the section on The Concern of James (p. 168ff.). Five come from Acts 15:10, 19, 21 (two) 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 they are recorded (Acts 15:29; 21:25). Most theologians and pastors interpret three of the cites (Acts 15:10, 19; 21:25) as proof that Christians shouldn’t keep Mosaic Law, but as we’ve seen with their interpretations or ‘sexual immorality,’ ‘strangled’ and ‘blood,’ their teaching falls flat and sets up their heretical doctrine against Mosaic Law:

1. Acts 15:10—The first point has Peter speaking of a yoke that neither he nor his Fathers could bear.
2. Acts 15:19—The second point is James’ statement about ‘not troubling the Gentiles.’
3. Acts 15:21—The third point has James saying, Moses is ‘read in the synagogues every Sabbath.’
5. Acts 15:25—The fifth point deals with James’ admonition that the Gentiles ‘observe no such thing.’
6. Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25—The sixth point looks at the rules not being written in the same order and why James and/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 Mosaic 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 a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, 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 thinks of it. Here’s a sample of David thoughts:

‘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 forever. The judgments of Yahveh are true, they are righteous altogether. They are more

502 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 Torah…It would seem therefore that…Peter uses an almost technical word’ for the Law of Moses. See Mosaic Law and the Ten for why 93.6% of the time the term Law/law in the Old and New Testaments means Mosaic Law.


504 Ibid.

505 David is called πατρι’arku (patri’arku; Patriarch, Father) in Acts 2:20 (see also Mark 11:10 and Acts 7:8-9).
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; cf. Ps. 119)

David clearly extols Mosaic Law as something godly and beneficial. That David is speaking of Mosaic Law, and not just the Ten Commandments, is seen in that David writes of God’s precepts and judgments, etc., which are synonyms for Mosaic Law. David sings the praise of Yahveh’s Torah because he knew the divine wisdom and godly understanding inherent within it. It’s a shame that it’s been withheld from Christians by their own leaders who have been blinded and deceived by the Roman Catholic Church.

If the laws of God were holy and wise for Moses, David, Isaiah and Jesus, why wouldn’t they continue to be holy and wise after the resurrection for Christians? Why would they be any less holy and wise for a Gentile believer who has been grafted into Israel? Yeshua kept Mosaic Law all His life, as did all the Gentile Christians many years after the resurrection. The Apostles didn’t understand ‘the yoke’ as Bruce presents it. Bruce errs greatly because of his ‘law-free gospel’ paradigm.

In making Mosaic Law the burden, Bruce, and all those who espouse this heretical and satanic 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 Passover lamb (God’s grace), only to be enslaved by God to His enslaving Law? Williams strikes out, too, stating that ‘any attempt to revert to a religion of law was to try to test God.’ Stern fails as well, but rightly comes against the verse being used to disparage Mosaic Law:

“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.’”

Stern writes that if a person thinks something is pleasant then one can’t project onto him that it’s not. This point, though, cannot be used in defense of Mosaic Law because it’s subjective. Most Christians see the Law as a burden, and if subjectivity is the criteria for judging, then Mosaic Law, according to Christianity, is very oppressive and something that Jesus freed them from. The criteria, though, is not how we think or feel about the Law, but what God says about it, especially in the New Testament. Stern says that the

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506 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 meaning Torah see Psalms 78:5; 119:88; 132:12; Is. 8:20. For testimonies see Dt. 4:45; 6:17, 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 see 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. Also, see Mosaic Law and the Ten to understand that 93.6% of the time in Scripture (Old and New), ‘law’ means Mosaic Law.

507 Psalm 1:2; 37:31; 40:8; 119:1, 77, etc.

508 Dt. 4:5-8; 30:15, 19, 20; 32:47.

509 John 10:14-16; Rom. 11:13-12:5; Eph. 2:1-22; Gal. 6:16.

510 Acts 21:20, 24; 24:18; 25:8; Rev. 12:17. See also these one page handouts, A Snapshot of Church History and Mosaic Law, Have You Ever Wondered?, and The Feasts of Israel and the Church.


512 Williams, Acts, p. 264.


514 Dt. 4:1-8; 12:8; 29:29.

515 Mt. 5:17-19; 22:35-40; Rom. 3:31; 7:12, 14, etc. Also, see Seven Reasons Why The Church is Wrong, The 123
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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: Mosaic 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 said something unbearable.

Stern flops stating Peter’s yoke was legalism—the ‘detailed mechanical rule-keeping, regardless of heart attitude, that some’ Pharisees had. He says it was this yoke of legalism that was ‘unbearable.’ As true as the saying is, 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. Rom. 3:20), even if done from the heart. One cannot be justified by doing holy deeds, and that’s Paul’s point. Peter’s yoke wasn’t legalism nor ‘mechanical rule keeping,’ but trying to keep the Law for eternal life.

Witherington also fails, saying that the yoke was the Law. He states that Peter was ‘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), and it would have meant the loss of income to support his family. As logical and practical as that is 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 Peter a fisherman and ultimately provided for him and his family. Every Jew knew this, but Witherington, in failing to understand the holiness and ‘righteousness’ of Mosaic Law, and the joy of celebrating the Feasts in Jerusalem, stumbles into a deep pit and takes all his followers with him. He also says that the Gentile was being required to become a proselyte to Judaism. This was true, for the Pharisaic believers, but rather secondary, for neither Peter nor his Fathers were proselytes, so that wasn’t Peter’s yoke.

Hegg, too, sees the yoke as the Gentile becoming a proselyte, with the traditional (Pharisaic) interpretations of Torah and the cumbersome man-made rules they had attached to God’s commandments. The Gentile would have to be circumcised, become a proselyte and comply with the Pharisaic traditions 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, along with faith in Christ. 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.”

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517 Ibid.
519 Ibid., pp. 453-454. He also writes 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).
520 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 must be circumcised. He sees Timothy as a Gentile who was circumcised (ibid., pp. 113-114, 285) and builds upon this false position.
ACTS 15:10—The Yoke

The Pharisaic believers who wanted the Gentiles circumcised (Acts 15:1, 5) were looking for them to become proselytes and keep the Law to be saved because ‘before Yeshua’ they thought it was the keeping of the Law that gave them eternal life. They still thought that in Acts 15 until James struck it down.

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 in this area Christianity and Messianic Judaism don’t realize it. 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 anywhere in Scripture. 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 ba-

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522 Ibid., p. 1014.

bies 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’), and especially not a so-called ‘spiritual Jew.’ The Gentile believer is part of 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’ (Jn. 10:16), but the Gentile remains a Gentile.

An illustration from the natural realm will help to further explain what it means for a Gentile to be part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2:1-12) and how Israel’s laws (Mosaic) effect the Gentile. Canada is part of the British Commonwealth, and consequently, all Canadians are part of the British Commonwealth, but a Canadian is not an Englishman nor 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.

Now for its spiritual parallel. Any Gentile, like Ruth, who became part of the Covenant that God gave to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their Seed, remained a Gentile and became part of the covenant people (i.e. the Commonwealth) of Israel. Ruth, after she said that she was ‘one with Naomi, Naomi’s people and Naomi’s God’ (Ruth 1:16-18) became part of Israel (without rabbinic conversion or approval, as the Pharisees and Rabbis didn’t exist back then, and it reveals that it wasn’t needed; cf. Ex 12:43-49). Ruth remained a Moabite all her life, and all Mosaic Law that applied to Jewish women also applied to her.

Ittai is another example. He was a Gentile general who served King David. His story reveals that he 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 and their gods. When David fled from his wicked and rebellious son Absalom, who wanted to murder his father and assume kingship over Israel, David and his entourage hurriedly left Jerusalem. In stopping to reconnoiter who was with him, David saw Ittai and Ittai’s (Gentile Philistine) 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

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524 The term Israelite is an archaic term from the Greek New Testament, and hence, my use of Israeli. For an article on how the term Israel also includes the term Jew, ask for the PDF Jews, Israel and the Jews Today.

525 Romans 2:28-29 isn’t speaking of a Gentile being a ‘spiritual Jew.’ See Is the Gentile Now a Jew?

526 The ASV, KJV, NASB, NKJV and the NRSV have Commonwealth, while the HCSB, NET and the NIV have citizenship. They both mean the same thing; that the Gentile is part of Israel (cf. Rom 11:1ff.).

527 Ruth 1:22; 2:2, 6, 21; 4:5, 10.

528 David doesn’t literally mean that Ittai had come ‘only yesterday,’ but that he hadn’t been with him for a long time. David 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 and his God, and oneness with Israel.
Acts 15:10—The Yoke

with you. Ittai answered the King (similar to how Ruth did to Naomi) and said,’

‘As Yahweh lives!, and as my Lord the King lives! Surely in whatever place my
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. Ittai served the King of Israel and his God, but he remained a Philistine all
the days of his life (2nd Sam. 15:2), as this passage brings out when David says to him, ‘you are a for-
eigner,’ 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 Com-
monwealth of Israel and would receive benefits, both temporal and eternal, because of his love for King
David and David’s God. Ittai is yet another 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 wrongly thinks it can make a racial 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 citizen-
ship they could say they were Israelis, but they weren’t an Israeli nor a Hebrew nor a Jew by race, anymore
than a Russian man living in Greece, and possessing Greek citizenship becomes 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), 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. God cements this concept in the New Covenant by saying that the (male) Gentile believers
weren’t to be physically covenantally circumcised like the Jews (Acts 15:1f.; 1st Cor. 7:17-19, etc.). The
Pharisees who believed in Yeshua wanted the Gentiles to (artificially) become Jews via physical, covenan-
tal 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.

529 Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, J. J. Stamm (authors), M. E. J. Richardson, (editor, translator), The He-
(Giti)...of גת (Gath) הגרים (haGitim) from Gath; Jos. 13:3 2S 6:10f; 15:19-22; 18:2; 21:19; 1C 13:13; 20:5; pl.
וזער(יה)י (haGitiyim) 2S 15:18.”

530 See also Uriah the Hittite, one of King David’s champions, 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).

531 Gentiles who mistakenly convert to Judaism via the Rabbis are called proselytes and even though the Rabbis say
‘they are now Jews,’ they are not. According to the Word of God they remain Gentiles.

532 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), etc.
If a Gentile wanted to be part of Israel before Messiah he could do that by being physically, covenantally circumcised (Ex. 12:43-49), but he still remained a Gentile. In Hebrew he would be called a גֵּר (ger), a stranger. Proselytism artificially makes a Gentile into a Jew. It’s a Pharisaic/rabbinic invention that goes against the Word of God.

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 the Pharisaic ‘man-made rules’ (Mt. 15:2 by inference). Proselytism wasn’t the burden that he spoke of. The yoke that neither Peter nor his Fathers could bear was the keeping of Mosaic Law for eternal life (salvation: justification before God). This is what circumcision (and proselytism) implied and this is what Acts 15 struck down—the false Pharisaic teaching that the Law was a vehicle for salvation. The yoke has nothing to do with ‘legalism,’ as Bruce, Stern and Witherington speak of, nor the keeping of ‘intricate halachah’ (Hegg) nor ‘mechanically’ keeping it (Stern). Most of Christianity misses it. Marshall, however, rightly perceives that Peter’s yoke is 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. Probably 200 years before Yeshua was born, the keeping of the Law, for eternal life, was how the Pharisees taught the Jewish people that ‘Heaven’ was earned, contrary to 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 rabbinic thinking, believing that the Jew wasn’t concerned about salvation because he was part of the Chosen People, which guaranteed him salvation, and 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 and speaks of eternal life in the Prophets and Psalms, but the method of attaining it (faith in Messiah Yeshua and being Born Again) is never explained. The Pharisees took those hints and came up with their way for eternal life (keep the Law, symbolized in circumcision).

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 her to live out her faith in Him. It has nothing to do with eternal life. 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.’

533 For how a ger differed from other Gentiles living in Israel, see Two Different Kingdoms? The Native and the Stranger Born, p. 206f.
534 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.’
535 Ibid.
536 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.
537 McKnight.
Dunn and Sanders seriously err if they think that the Jewish people didn’t look to the commandments to earn God’s favor. The Law clearly states that obedience equals blessing, 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 Abraham and 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 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 Pharisees/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.’ 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 that he, ‘seemed to hold that the future life is a privilege to be gained through positive upright 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.’

Akiva realized that being part of the Chosen People wasn’t a guarantee of Heaven. He 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 very false Jewish concept.

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.’ 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.’ 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). Contrary to their 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 Feast of Tabernacles, etc.?) and all the good, moral works that stem from the doing of Mosaic Law. It is equally Sabbath observance as well as taking care of the poor, the widow and the orphan (compassion, habe.

Acts 15:10—The Yoke

538 Wright; The Paul Page. His teaching was given on Oct. 25th, 2004.
540 Just the Gold Calf incident should be enough to prove that being part of Israel was not a guarantee of Heaven.
542 Ibid., p. 664, note 13.
543 McKnight.
545 Ibid.
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justice and love of neighbor), and the mighty works or miracles that Yeshua did (Mt. 11:2; Jn. 5:36; 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 nature and 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 (and Jesus is still Jewish; 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 the Father—Who He is, what He’s done for Israel, what He will do for Israel, and His will for Israel. The Father has magnified and glorified His Law through Yeshua (Is. 42:21: ‘Yahveh was pleased for the sake of His righteousness to magnify His Law and make it glorious.’).

How did Yahveh magnify His Law? Yeshua was like a living prism through which Mosaic Law was magnified and seen (1st Jn. 1:1f.) He is the living Torah, the Word of God (Rev. 19:13). Jesus and the Father’s words are inseparable. Torah comes from the very nature of God, and Yeshua walked out Mosaic Law the way God intended it to be walked out because Yeshua was one with it. The teachings and 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 out our faith in Yeshua. The Holy Spirit is able to empower believers so that they can do the works of the Law, as Yeshua did, through the power and fruit of the Holy 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, and seeks to write the Law upon 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 says,

‘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 Mosaic Law, through the works or doing 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).’

546 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.
547 Exodus 23:4-5; Lev. 25:8-10; Is. 61:1-2; Lk. 4:18-19.
549 Matthew 11:4-6; 23:23; John 5:36; 9:3-4, etc.
550 Mt. 5:16; Jn. 14:12; Acts 4:8; 8:6-7; Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14; 1st Pet. 2:12, etc.
552 Ibid., p. xxxvi. Italics are Montefiore’s.
553 Ibid., p. xxxv.
554 Ibid.
‘At the judgment in the world to come, paradise or hell, is given according to the majority of good deeds or evil.’

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, in this area, 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 200 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 is 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 of 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 don’t believe in an afterlife, the man born blind whom, Yeshua gave 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 Jewish 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 authority, the Sanhedrin was

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555 Ibid., p. 596.

556 Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, p. 322. Writing of John 5:39, 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.’
supposed to know ‘where a man was from,’ meaning, was Jesus from God or Satan?\textsuperscript{557}

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 Jews, some of whom Yahveh had personally destroyed, and many of whom Scripture calls evil.\textsuperscript{558} The Rabbis knew this side of Israel, too, and believed that obedience to Mosaic Law was the key to eternal life, as Yeshua spoke of 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 \textit{symbolized} in physical, covenantal circumcision.

A rabbinic story reveals the problem the Rabbis faced with their teaching of works righteousness. 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, and he said,

‘I am soon going to be before the Holy One and I \textbf{don’t know if I will be accepted.}’ They said, ‘But you are a great rabbi! You have taught us how to walk in \textit{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; the keeping of the Sabbath and love of neighbor, etc.) 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 \textit{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 \textbf{just as he himself had been}: ‘But we believe that they’ (i.e. the Gentiles) \textit{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 wrongly imputed to God’s holy Law.’

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557 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 \textit{born} blind (by asking his parents; Jn. 9:18-23). There was a legend at that time that the spittle of a righteous man could open the eyes of a blind man, but \textit{only the spittle of the Messiah} could open the eyes of one \textit{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, Joseph of Arimathea and others) 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).

558 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, which is the sin of the entire Camp (except for a few) in believing the evil 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 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

The Council of Acts 15 met because some believing Pharisees wanted to make Jews of the Gentiles (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; Rom. 2:29) 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 (cf. Gal. 5:4).

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; Num. 15:16, 29), but this was the New Covenant and a new way of entering into Israel (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 points to (Dt. 30:6).

Only after much debate in Jerusalem did the outcome that we read of prevail (Acts 15:7f.). 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), and Peter, too (Acts 10:28, 34-35), but it certainly wasn’t ‘a given.’

Torah had 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 point that Peter made was that the Law, symbolized in physical covenantal circumcision, must not be attached to Jesus for justification. 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 our faith in Yeshua.559 Once in the Kingdom does it matter if one sins against the King or not? Here is where Mosaic Law comes to the forefront. It declares what is right and what is sin, according to the King, for both Jew and Gentile (Rom. 3:20; 7:7, 12, 14).

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 in Romans 3:31, where he writes of a Christian’s faith in Christ 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. Christian tradition blinds people into thinking that this false doctrine is of God. When we look at the Pharisees, locked in mortal combat with God the Son, we see how the false ‘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.

THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

Paul fought this false teaching on salvation in his letter to the Galatians. His conclusion of the matter, on 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 blessed people (Dt. 4:6-8). 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 a perverse use of the Law, which is rightly called works righteousness. Christians say that the Law itself is legalism, but the Law or Instruction from God is certainly not legalism. The Law is God’s holy spoken Word to Israel written down; a pure reflection of His character (Lev. 18:5; Dt. 4:5-8; Rom. 7:12), and it’s also the written reflection of God the Son, who became flesh and embodies all the Instruction, Truth, Way and Life of God (i.e the ‘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 Yahveh and with their fellow Hebrews after they had been saved (set free) from Egyptian slavery by the blood of the lamb. Once we are justified in Messiah and set free from Satan’s Kingdom of sin, sickness 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. The yoke that neither Peter nor his Fathers could bear was the keeping of the Law for salvation, symbolized in physical covenantal circumcision. This was the burden of the ‘great rabbi’ who was dying.

Acts 15:10 cannot biblically be used to prove that Mosaic Law, in and of itself, is the yoke that Peter spoke of, and therefore, support the Church’s teaching that the Law is ‘not for the Gentiles.’ It is a verse that reveals the bankruptcy of trying to keep the Law for justification (Rom. 9:30-32). Peter wasn’t doing away with the Law, but the keeping of the Law for salvation. This was the yoke that neither he nor Israel’s Fathers could bear—for Peter had found the True Yoke (Mt. 11:28-30).

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Acts 15:19—Don’t Trouble Them!

In Acts 15:19 James says not to ‘trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles.’ Many Christians take this phrase to mean that the Jews shouldn’t trouble the Gentiles with Mosaic Law. David Williams states, ‘nothing more than faith should be asked of them as necessary for salvation.’ This is true because salvation isn’t based on doing the Law, but as Williams rightly points out, ‘once in the kingdom certain things could fairly be asked of them.’ It’s unfortunate that his ‘certain things’ are only the four rules of James in relation to his false understanding of table fellowship.

Bruce and Witherington see the troubling that James spoke of was aimed at those who wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised. Wycliffe seems to read their thoughts and expressly adds,

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), which to them was just as authoritative as Mosaic Law, 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 the Gentiles needed to know in order to secure their justification or 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 and/or (2) eating of the sacrifice, which would include both the eating of the sacrificial meat and the (3) drinking of the animal’s blood. The fourth rule, strangling, of say a bird, with no blood drunk or flesh eaten, would obviously be prohibited as a sacrifice to a pagan god; Ex. 34:15.

In the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:5) God forbids Israel to worship (which is synonymous with sacrifice; Ex. 10:25-26) of 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 literally played the harlot with the pagan women. Within just these cites, three of James’ four rules are literally 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 harlots. A prohibition against strangling is not literally written in Torah (although birds were strangled in sacrifice to Yahveh), but the point is that the Gentiles were given three laws from Mosaic Law, revealing that Torah was valid for Gentile believers. James commanded yet another rule to those ‘under Grace.’ By including strangling, James legislated, actually amending a commandment, declaring that even a bloodless sacrifice to a god was not acceptable. Yeshua gave this authority to His Body, 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)

561 Williams, Acts, p. 266.
562 Ibid.
564 Pfeiffer, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1152.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

‘The Keys of the Kingdom’ spoke of the authority that God gave to the Aaronic Priests to forgive sin (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31; 6:7), teach 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 by extension, to James.

James 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 Pharisaic believers in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1, 5, 24). They told the Gentiles that they needed to be circumcised and 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, heretical theology.

James 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 James was the ‘president’ of the meeting and that this was even known in the days of Chrysostom (347-407 AD). That James was the authority is also evident from his use of the emphatic ‘I’ (εγω, eh’go) in ‘I judge.’ Witherington says the Greek construction for ‘I judge,’

“This way of putting it is equivalent to the familiar Latin phrase ego censeo used by Roman rulers and judges.”

Bruce, though, thinks the Council voted on the Decree, but Witherington negates Bruce’s understanding and gives the decision to James, saying that 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.”

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566 Forgiveness of sin was given in John 20:23. The Apostles taught Scripture, and Messiah raised from the dead (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; James gave the four rules and determined what the Gentiles needed to do in order to be justified. 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 him (the Samaritans were considered half-breeds/half-Jews, and the Ethiopian eunuch was a Jewish man reading Isaiah; Acts 8:27; after all, he had charge of all her treasury). The ability to judge is also seen when Paul speaks of the Corinthians judging their own Flock (1st Cor. 6:1-6; see also Lk. 22:28-30), and of Paul himself judging the man who slept with his father’s wife (1st Cor. 5:1-6).

567 See Witherington and Hegg, p. 40.


569 Acts 15:19: “I judge that we should no longer...” The KJV has ‘my sentence’ and the NASB has ‘my judgment.’


571 Ibid., note 437.

572 Ibid., p. 467.
Acts 15:19—Don’t Trouble Them!

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 consent’

…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.”

The authority of James 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. James, 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.”

James 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 James 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. James 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 justification. James’ ruling assured the Gentile full partnership with the Jewish believer without his having to be circumcised. This is seen from what Peter and James 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 21 confirming this.

Verse 20 laid down the litmus test. James gave his four divinely authoritative rules for the Gentiles. With the Holy Spirit directing him, and Scripture declares such (Acts 15:28), these four rules can rightly be called commandments from Jesus Christ to all the Gentile believers through the Prince of the ‘Mother Church’ in Jerusalem. The four rules were the filter though which every Gentile had to pass in order for his faith in Yeshua to be seen as biblically genuine. Then James said something to the Gentile Christians that bewilders theologians 2,000 years later—Go to the Synagogue.

574 Ibid.
575 Ibid., see Acts 12:17; 21:18, and also 1st Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12.
577 Yeshua had four younger brothers (Mt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3) and two of them, James (or rather Jacob in English) and Yehuda (Jude or rather Judah in English) wrote letters that are authoritative (i.e. Scripture). As James 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 speaks of James as Yeshua’s brother, yet he doesn’t mention the other brothers, again revealing James’ preeminence; Gal. 1:19).
578 See Acts 12:17; 21:18; 1st Cor. 15:7; Gal. 2:9; also Jude 1:1.
579 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’).
580 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’ 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.’

What does ‘Moses’ (i.e. Mosaic Law) “being read in the synagogues every Sabbath” have to do with his decision to the Gentiles on Gentile salvation? Why did James end with that? Marshall, who should have stopped while he was ahead, 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.’

Respect for 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 thought about a crucified Jewish man. If Marshall meant the believing Jews, James 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, even though Church teaching says that Gentiles were keeping Sunday by now. Jewish believers would also be offended by a Gentile Christian eating pork, a Mosaic dietary rule not mentioned by James. Respect for Jewish believers cannot possibly be the reason for this verse. Why send them to the synagogue on Sabbath?

In another stab at an explanation, Marshall says something extremely 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 (Christian Jews included), were still following a way of life that held absolutely no relevance for the Gentile Christian.

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 hand, is very strange thinking. It does reveal, though, the utter futility of a world-class Christian scholar in his attempt to give the verse meaning devoid of the Law being valid.

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582 Ibid.
583 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, including Jewish Christians).
Acts 15:21—Go to the Synagogue?!

Marshall realizes that ‘Jewish Christians…continued to live by the Jewish law,’ and that according ‘to 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 wrongly nullifies Mosaic Law for Christians (cf. Mt. 5:18-19; 1st Jn. 2:6).

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 ‘Christian truth;’ not even Paul.

Samuele Bacchiocchi wrote a brilliant work on why the 7th day Sabbath is still holy and valid for Christians today, but he also failed to understand the full implication of verse 21. 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 sprung 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 Christians followed Mosaic Law and that Jerusalem was ‘the Mother Church,’ and therefore, the ideal model of one’s faith-walk, but he fails to realize that if it was right for all of them, if they could believe in Jesus and walk out their faith in Him through 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 Christians, or their spiritual descendants, ever renouncing the Law as wrong or ‘gone.’ Just the opposite is true, as Bacchiocchi himself reveals, but doesn’t understand. 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 AD. Epiphanius, bishop-historian of Salamis and Metropolitan of Cyprus, brands them as heretics. Their 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 (non-Christian) 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

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585 Ibid., p. 243.
587 Ibid., p. 251.
588 Acts 21:20-24; 24:14-17; 25:8; 26:22-23; 28:17-24; see also Rom. 3:31; 7:7. See Acts 1:3 where the resurrected Jesus teaches His Apostles about His Kingdom. Did Jesus fail to tell them that the Law was done away with?
589 Bacchiocchi, From Sabbath To Sunday, pp. 149-150.
circumcision, the Sabbath and others.\textsuperscript{591}

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 Christians). He writes,

‘The…Nazarenes represent the survival of both the ethnic and theological legacy of’ the apostolic community of Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{592}

The Nazarenes were following in the theological footsteps of all the Apostles and Jewish Christians before them. If the Law of Moses was 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 Jewish and Gentile Christians today?

Many, not understanding why the Apostles continued to walk in the Law so long \textit{after} the resurrection, have the audacity to say that the Apostles didn’t have the full understanding of what Yeshua’s atoning death meant. \textit{Is that possible}? Jesus didn’t tell His \textit{Apostles} this monumental shift in theology that affected everyone’s life? It’s not in Acts 15 nor Acts 21:20, 24, but didn’t Paul differ from the other Apostles? They can’t prove that from Paul in Acts,\textsuperscript{593} 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.

\textit{ISBE}, though, says that Paul’s Gospel was \textit{essentially the same} as Peter’s (Gal. 2:9), and there’s no hint in Acts 21:20 of a different Gospel for Gentiles. Paul’s anathema on those who preached a different Gospel (Gal. 1:8f.) is never pronounced upon any Apostle.\textsuperscript{594} Peter (64 AD) affirms Paul as ‘a beloved brother’ whose letters are Scripture, and “in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.”\textsuperscript{595}

The Church takes its heretical position on the Law from only \textit{some} of Paul’s words. Please note that it’s only to the Apostle Paul that the Church goes for this false doctrine. It’s \textit{not to any of the other eight writers} of the New Testament, and it’s \textit{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 upon proper biblical interpretation, just as their interpretations of Acts 15:20 crumbled.

F. F. Bruce thinks that James spoke v. 21 to \textit{appease those Pharisees} who ‘lost out’ on circumcising the Gentiles. He says that James \textit{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.’\textsuperscript{596}


\textsuperscript{592} 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 Christians even after the destruction of the city in 70 AD. Neither the Apostles nor the New Testament changed Sabbath to Sunday. The Bishop of Rome did, in 120 AD.


\textsuperscript{594} Bromiley, \textit{ISBE}, vol. three, pp. 699-700.

\textsuperscript{595} 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. Bruce’s understanding doesn’t fit well with the historical holy character of James, nor with an honest reading of the text. Note well how plain and self-evident the verse is, which is why Bruce initially back-peddles, teaching that James really didn’t mean what he said; that Gentiles were to go to the synagogue to learn about Moses (Mosaic Law). Besides, how would this ‘bone’ satisfy the Pharisaic believers? If the Gentiles weren’t ‘coming to Moses,’ how would that appease the Pharisees?

Second, Bruce pits 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? When did Jesus cast aspersions on Mosaic Law? Jesus, in a very real sense, was the greatest ‘disciple’ that Moses ever had. Aren’t Christians supposed to follow Jesus? To be like Him? Or is that just a ‘spiritual thing’? The Apostle John says that if one wants to be like Jesus he must keep himself from sin. What is the New Testament’s definition of sin? The Apostle Paul point blank tells us that, “…by the law is the (full) knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20b NKJV). In other words, without Mosaic Law Christians are quite handicapped, not realizing that God wants them to keep Sabbath and Passover, etc. Mosaic Law reveals what sin is (cf. Mt. 5:19). Without ‘Moses’ the Church fails to see many basic rules that Jesus wants His Bride to keep, or not to keep. John says, ‘Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness…sin is lawlessness.’ (1st John 3:2-4; see also 2:1-6)

Christians sin against their Lord by breaking His Sabbath day, by not keeping Passover holy, and by eating animals, etc., that God calls abominable (Lev. 11:10, 12-13). Without ‘Moses’ the Church cannot discern what is of Jesus and what is of Satan. The Lord 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 (Acts 13:42, 44; Heb. 4:9), Passover (1st Cor. 5:6-8) and the Feasts of Israel (Acts 20:6; 27:9, etc.) are still in effect in the New Testament after the resurrection then the Law of Moses must be as well (Acts 21:20-24), for they are part of the Law.

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 accept them if the Law was gone? Also, what of the vast majority of Gentiles who hadn’t gone 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

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(1st John 3:2-4; see also 2:1-6)

[597] The Greek word for knowledge is ἐπίγνωσις epignosis, which means, ‘the full knowledge of sin.’

THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

not a threat—it’s a divine warning that the worship of another god, along with Yeshua, would sever them 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 Gentiles were 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 up in the old, and done-away-with Law?

Stern acknowledges that 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’s ‘hard to choose between’ the four. His first possibility was seen 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) at the synagogues.

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 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, and most Gentile Christians hadn’t been in a synagogue ‘before Christ.’ Also, 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

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599 Williams, Acts, p. 266.
600 See Bruce, p. 3 above.
603 Ibid.
604 Ibid.
605 Ibid.
Acts 15:21—Go to the Synagogue?!

first century, as ‘Gentile Christians have long ceased to visit the synagogue in significant numbers.’

So, 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, and also, no one writes that the Decree of James 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 remain with Yeshua’s followers, as He said, until Heaven and Earth no longer exist (Mt. 5:18-19; cf. 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.’ As Stern points out, this view is contradicted in the New Testament. His sixth point 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 a concern that Knowling also raised.

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. How this can be read into the verse is hard to fathom. Also, how 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 (most likely 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.”

The problem with Witherington equating the Ten with ‘Moses’ is that nowhere in Scripture nor in Judaism is Moses ever (only) equated with (just) the Ten, but with all the rules of Mosaic Law. Also, the Jewish Sages expressly did not read the Ten every week, as Witherington speaks of, but only twice a year, as it came up in the yearly Old Testament cycle of reading 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 (really) required of them. Witherington is wrong—the Ten are not regularly heard in the synagogues, either back then or today.

Others, seeing how shaky 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

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606 Ibid.
607 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). This reveals the greater value of the Sabbath in God’s eyes.
610 Ibid., p. 96.
611 See Mosaic Law and the Ten.
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telling everyone where he got the rules of v. 20 from (i.e. the Law). This teaching centers around the Greek word that links v. 20 and v. 21. Their interpretation is 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 Torah for every Christian. My, how the Pharisees would have loved these Christians. The Greek word that links Acts 15:20 to v. 21 is ὑποκείμενον (gar), which means ‘for’ or ‘because.’ Friberg defines gar 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.’

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.’

Wright sums up the meaning of gar by saying that it’s always that which explains ‘something that has just gone before’ it. The proponents of gar would have us believe that James 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.’ James didn’t just mention Moses (as to where the rules came from), he was extremely specific about Mosaic Law being in every city since ancient times and heard on the Sabbath, etc. Verse 21 is not a passing reference as to where James allegedly got the four rules from.

1. James tells everyone that Moses was preached ‘from ancient generations.’ If he had only been telling the Jewish assembly the source of the four rules, there would have been absolutely no need for him to tell the assembly of Jewish believers that Moses had those who preached him ‘from ancient generations.’ Every Jew knew that.

2. If James 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.’ Every Jew knew that, too. Why the need to mention where Moses was preached if James was only mentioning Moses as the source from where he had gotten his rules from?

3. 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

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613 Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, pp. 151-152. Also, a ‘conjunction used to express cause, inference, continuation, or to explain.’
614 N. T. Wright: Paul in Different Perspectives: Jan. 3rd, 2005. The ‘function of gar always being to explain something that has just gone before.’
615 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 effect 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.
he, more than any other, was the symbol of the Law, which the Gentiles ‘didn’t need to keep’!

4. If James 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 ‘only’ 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 knew and walked in Torah including Paul (Acts 21:20; 25:8).

A. James 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 expressly 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.

5. If James 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 Jew knew that. Moses ‘being read in the synagogues’ meant that James knew that the Gentiles would learn Torah 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?

6. 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 ‘and preach.’ 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 new God he had come to believe in, and be instructed in how he was to live? At this time (Acts 15; 48-49 AD), only the Gospel of Matthew had been written (44 AD). James will write his canonical letter about 49 AD and Paul will write his first letter (Thessalonians) about 51 AD. The ‘Old Testament’ was all the Christian synagogues had when Acts 15 took place, and Mosaic Law was its center and essence.

7. If James 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.’ Every Jew 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 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 (one) Jewish God and His way of living.

A. James’ mention of the Sabbath also reveals that the issue of Sabbath vs. Sunday hadn’t begun yet. In other words, all Christians, both Jewish and Gentile, were keeping the 7th day Sabbath holy until 120 AD, when the Bishop of Rome brought in Sunday to replace the Lord’s Sabbath.616 If the Christian Gentiles weren’t already coming and worshiping in the synagogues and learning 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? James could have said,

‘I’ve taken three of the four rules from Moses and added a self-evident one. The Gentiles

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616 Bacchiocchi, From Sabbath to Sunday, pp. 165-212f. See also, Why Sunday?, A Snapshot of Church History and Mosaic Law and The Feasts of Israel as Time Markers After the Resurrection.
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 interpret the verse, but to pervert and suppress the divine meaning of God’s New Testament Word, in favor of their man-made tradition that nullifies His Word concerning Mosaic Law for Christians.

The definition of 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 to 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. The statement of James in v. 21 truly explains why he gave only four rules in v. 20, as the rest of Mosaic Law would be learned every Sabbath as the Gentiles came to the synagogues. Putting the three verses together presents an overview of the text, which is 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)

James gave the much needed four rules because he knew that Gentile Christians 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, which is also brought out in v. 24 in the letter written to Antioch. Yet, the Gentile Christians did need to be immediately warned against sacrificial-sexual idolatry, and hence, the four rules prohibiting those deadly sins. James 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 Mosaic Law. This way they’ll grow in the knowledge of Messiah Yeshua and walk in His Way of Life, alongside their Jewish believing brethren.’

The Gentile Christians were already learning the commandments at the synagogues and James had every reason to believe that the Gentiles would continue to go to the synagogues to learn Mosaic Law. Continue to go to the synagogue? Verse 21 has James speaking to the Jewish Christians what they, and he, had already seen in this area of Gentile salvation and Mosaic Law for the last eight years (since Cornelius). James assumed the practice would continue and this is where gar comes to the forefront as it truly explains why he gave only four rules instead of many others (e.g. Sabbath and dietary laws, etc.). The Gentile Christians were already learning Torah in the synagogues.

James had observed for the last eight to ten years, from Cornelius in Acts 10 to his Decree in Acts 15, that the traditional synagogues continued to be a place of assembly and learning for both Jewish and Gentile believers. Cornelius, his family and friends, most likely kept going to the same traditional Jewish syn-

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617 Acts 10 took place about 39-40 AD. Acts 15 was about eight to ten years later, in 48-49 AD.


Acts 15:21—Go to the Synagogue?!

agogue after they came to faith in the Jewish Messiah. Most likely, there were 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.618

The Gentile believers who attended the church in Antioch had also been learning Torah. The assembly originally consisted of only Jewish believers (Acts 11:19) and was similar to a traditional synagogue. Gentiles joined them later. 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 46 AD, in what is today Cyprus and south-central Turkey.619 His experience of having to leave some synagogues wasn't the norm (Acts 9:31). The congregations that Paul established, which many today 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 churches' (Acts 11:19; Rom. 1:13, 15; Gal. 1:22; Ephesus 1:15; 3:1-4, etc.).

The English word synagogue comes from the Greek and by definition can mean 'a Christian assembly.'620 James uses it in referring to Christian assemblies (James 2:2; see also Acts 9:1-2; 15:21; 26:11). It would be used for the assembly of Jewish and Gentile believers at Antioch, other Christian assemblies, and also, traditional Jewish congregations. In other words, both a synagogue of Jews who didn't believe in Jesus, as well as an assembly like Antioch, made up of (only) believers (Jewish and Gentile), were equally called a synagogue. This adds to our understanding of what James said in Acts 15:21, about Moses 'being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.'

Actually, the word 'church,' as a distinct entity separate from the Jewish people, wasn’t in James’ or the

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618 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 Christians, who by this time were considered heretics. In 132 AD the disastrous bar Kochba rebellion against Rome began. Jewish Christians fought alongside their non-believing Jewish brethren, but 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 direct 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 bitter feelings arose on both sides, which 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 Jewish people 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).


620 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.'
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Apostles’ vocabulary. He assumed they would continue to go to the synagogues to learn the Law on the Sabbath day, and they did for more than half a century, until Satan came in through the Roman bishop and altered it. James 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 Gentile Cornelius, Witherington states 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,

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61 The Greek ἐκκλησία (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 the populace to vote on civic matters. The New Testament’s spiritual use of the word relates to Christians being ‘called out of Darkness into His marvelous Light’ (1st Pet. 2:9), and is one reason why Paul chose to use this word instead of newer term, synagogue. Christians are the ‘Called Out Ones,’ the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew, ‘Chosen People.’ Where it says, ‘to the church at Corinth,’ it actually is, ‘to the assembly (or congregation) at Corinth’ and can also be said to be, ‘to the called out ones of Corinth.’

Ekklaysia 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; ASV and KJV). 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 Paul or Yeshua’s (Mt. 16:18) 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; the Feast of Weeks; Ex. 34:22). Jewish believers were filled with the promised Holy Spirit on that day (Ezk. 36:27; Joel 2:28; 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 could 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 specifically mentioned in two of his letters (Rom. 16:5; Col. 4:15). Ekklaysia refers to these assemblies. The assemblies in Rome and Colosse were most likely begun by Jews from those cities who had been in Jerusalem for that historic Shavu’ot (Acts 2:1-10f.). They came to believe in Yeshua in Jerusalem and returned to Rome, Ephesus and Colosse, etc., to share the Great News with their Jewish brethren.

63 Ibid., p. 340, note 46.
64 Ibid., p. 341, note 51.
65 Ibid., p. 344.
Acts 15:21—Go to the Synagogue?!

and/or Theophilus, had been a ‘God-fearer’ before” coming to Yeshua.626 James held up a paradigm that he knew all the Jews at the Council would be able to follow. Moses was proclaimed and taught in all the synagogues in every city on every Sabbath day, and the Gentile Christians had been going, and would continue to go, to the synagogues to learn all the laws and rules of Moses that applied to them.627

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.628 He then poignantly asks, where else could the Gentile go to learn about the one true God? 629 Where else indeed?! 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). Verse 21 confirms that Gentile Christians had already been going, and the decree of James cemented it.

Acts 15:21 presents Mosaic Law as God’s lifestyle of righteousness and sanctification for the Gentile (and of course, the Jewish) Christian.630 Torah was part of every Gentile Christian’s life back then because its God’s holy Standard (Rom. 7:12, 14), and as such, 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 James gave only four rules. The Gentiles would learn the rest of the rules 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 justification 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 man and woman, just as every law didn’t apply to Yeshua nor the Jewish Christian man and woman. 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,631 and so, while He was in Israel He wasn’t a priest, and so never performed any priestly functions such as sacrifice or the burning of incense in the Temple. Yeshua, though, kept all the commandments, statutes, judgments and rules of Moses that applied to Him, and if Christians want to be like Him, they should find out what rules apply to them and keep them, too.

Praise God that James didn’t stop at verse 20, but went on to speak of Moses being taught in the synagogues on the Sabbath day. Because of v. 21 we know that there are more than four rules that God wants Gentile Christians to walk in. This verse authoritatively establishes that.

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626 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).’
627 “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.)
628 Hegg, The Letter Writer, pp. 73, 17-22.
629 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.
630 See Acts 21:20-24; 25:8; 28:17, and also Rom. 3:31; 7:7, 12, 14; 1st Cor. 7:19.
631 Mt. 1:1-17; Lk. 1:27; 2:4; 3:23-28; Acts 13:22-23; Rom. 1:3; 2nd Tim. 2:8; Heb. 7:13-14; Rev. 5:5; 22:16. See also The Davidic Lineage of Messiah Yeshua.
Acts 15:21—The Preachers of Moses

Some theologians 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 the previous chapter revealed). 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 Jesus plus circumcision, which symbolized the keeping of Mosaic Law for eternal life.’ James wasn’t contrasting ‘Christian preaching’ about Jesus with ‘Jewish preaching’ on Mosaic Law. Even with those believing Pharisees who ‘wanted Moses,’ it wasn’t just Moses, but Mosaic Law 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 conference on what the Gentiles needed to do in order to be saved (Acts 15:1f.). It wasn’t a pastors’ meeting 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 Greek word for ‘preach.’ It has little to do with what we 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 James 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 day of the new moon and the Feasts of Israel, and also proclaim synagogue news and events. In Hebrew the man was known as a shamash (servant, and also called a gabbai). He wasn’t a rabbi. He’s the model and prototype for the Christian office of deacon.

Luke used the word κηρύσσοντας (karyus’sontas), which is translated into English as one who announces or proclaims the things of Moses (when the Sabbath and Feasts are, and community news, etc.) in the Jewish neighborhood. He doesn’t preach Moses. He is the servant of the synagogue doing a community service. The shamash proclaimed his message on the streets. James is not speaking of those who preach Moses,’ in counter-distinction to preaching Jesus in the assembly. The Church is wrong again.

Walter Bauer defines the verb κηρύσσω (karyuso), 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

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633 Ibid.
634 The offices of the Church are based upon those of the Synagogue. See Synagogue and Church Officials.
Friberg states that a proclamation of the Christian message in the widest sense—preach, proclaim someth. Mt. 10:27. 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 καρυσο 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.'

The verb καρυσο 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 or proclaimer in Greek, is κηρυσζειν (karyus), which stems from the verb κηρυσζω (karyus) to proclaim.

The ancient pagan, Christian and Jewish meaning of καρυς 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; Yeshua the King being the authority who sent him to proclaim the Great News). This man 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 states that a καρυς 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).’

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Joseph Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Accordance Bible Software; Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software, 2011), n.p., κηρυσζω; ‘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).

637 The ASV, KJV, NASB and NKJV use preach, while the HCSB, NET and NRSV correctly use proclaim for the Greek κηρυσζειν (karyus), which Luke uses in Acts 15:21.


THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

Thayer confirms that kayruks 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 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.’639 (Homer lived about the 10th century BC)

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.’640

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 apostle and evangelist.641 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:

‘For the true preacher is God or Christ Himself…hence there is little place for the herald.’642

It seems that even though Paul acts like an evangelist on the street corner, proclaiming the risen Savior, as he did in Athens (Acts 17:15f.), and as Peter did in the Temple (Acts 3:1-12f.), it’s the Holy Spirit that proclaims Yeshua. Be that as it may, James’ herald or proclaimer wasn’t a rabbi giving a sermon on the Sabbath day, but a shamash who would announce synagogue times and when the holy days would be, etc. to the Jewish community. What James is saving in Acts 15:21 is that any Gentile believer in any city would be able to find out where the synagogue was and when it would meet (so he could learn Torah).

The word is used twice by Paul, speaking of himself as a proclaimer of Christ (1st Tim. 2:7; 2nd Tim. 1:11), 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 other time it’s seen is when King Nebuchadnezzar had a gold statue of himself made. He commanded

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641 Ibid., p. 696.
642 Ibid.
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‘the preachers’ to tell everyone to bow down and worship the statue when the his favorite melody was played:

“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 James used the word preacher was to alert us to the fact that this 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, James 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 also might comment on it):643

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

The preacher of Moses was like the town criers of old, who went through European neighborhoods proclaiming news.644 This preacher is not a Christian preacher nor 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 קָרָא (karuz; which is phonetically like the Greek karyuks). It means, ‘crier,’ and appropriately enough, he is spoken of as a rooster, ‘who summons the faithful to wakefulness in the morning’645 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’646 by his proclaiming or crying out loud, just like a rooster.

Karuz is directly linked to the Hebrew verb קָרָא kara, and Davidson says it means, ‘to cry, call out, shout…proclaim…invite.’647 The definition conceptually lines up with the 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...

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643 The reading of Moses (the Law) in the synagogue was 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).


645 Ibid., 3a.

646 Ibid., 3b.


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contact...The verb...has various nuances...i.e., to call to, to call out, to commission, to 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 Israel would be, etc. Interesting to note is that Yahve specifically commands that His feasts are to be proclaimed to Israel, and this is exactly what the shamash does:

“These are the Feasts of Yahveh, 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 Feat 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 to the poor and needy, and he 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.

Just as the town criers of England, 400 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 James. 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 read.’ 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. James 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 of Jesus vs. Jewish preaching of Moses,’ and also, from just mentioning Moses, as the source of James’ rules. It reveals that James 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.


649 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. The origin for the Christian deacon is the shamash. For more on Christian assemblies and church officials being a reflection of the synagogue, see *Synagogue and Church Officials*.
Acts 15:21 reveals what James and the believing Jewish community had seen over the past eight years concerning the Gentiles. The Gentile Christians 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 James assumed that this would continue into the future, which it did (until after the death of the Apostles). This means that Gentile believers kept all Mosaic Law that applied to them, until it would gradually be taken away from them by the Roman Catholic Church beginning in 120 AD. Today, though, the Holy Spirit is leading Christians to realize that Sunday and Easter, etc., aren’t of Jesus, but that Sabbath and Passover, etc. are, for Torah is the Lord’s way of life and wisdom for all His people Israel.651

Should the Gentile go to the traditional Jewish synagogue to learn Moses today?652 Perhaps, but one reason why James 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.

James’ ruling concerned the Gentile. Not being raised in the Law the Gentile literally didn’t know Abraham from King David, 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). James wanted the Gentiles to come to maturity in Messiah. They could not 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 letters653 and although it’s believed by some scholars today that Matthew wrote his Gospel in 44 AD,654 he wrote it for the Jews—the other three Gospels for the Gentiles wouldn’t be written for about 15 years after Acts 15.

The Gentile Christian had to go to the synagogue to learn God’s Word (the Old Testament) and what it

650 The fact that these Jewish preachers spoke in the streets about where Moses was read (i.e. the synagogue) is further 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 in the street, but calling the people to the synagogue to learn Mosaic Law, just as James spoke of when he used the word ‘preachers’ of Moses in Acts 15:21.

651 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.

652 With 19 centuries of Christian anti-Semitism and also Jewish apologetics against Messiah Yeshua, the synagogue today can be extremely hostile to a Christian because Judaism is anti-Jesus. Also, Judaism has taken into itself spirits of witchcraft in the form of Kabbalah and New Age, etc. The important thing to ascertain from the admonition of James to the Gentiles, about going to the synagogue to learn Torah, is to learn the way Yeshua lived. There can be a vast difference between learning about the Mosaic commandments from a traditional Jewish rabbi, and learning and living Torah with Yeshua’s Spirit, as He Himself spoke of (Mt. 16:5-12). One is a very deep and dangerous pit, while the other is a divine treasure chest.

653 There is a possibility that the letter of James had already been written, as both Acts 15 and James’ letter are dated at 48-49 AD.

654 Eusebius states that Matthew wrote his Gospel ‘about 12 years after the death of Christ. Some scholars believe …as early as AD 40-45.’
said of his new God and His ways for all of Israel, both Jew and Gentile who loved Messiah Yeshua. 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 in America finds in his English Tanach.\footnote{Jewish translators of the Hebrew Tanach into English steer around prophecies of the Messiah that point directly to Yeshua. At these places they 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, which has profound significance) is found in Psalm 22:16, which speaks of Messiah’s hands and feet being pierced (his crucifixion), but the English Tanach 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 change, the vast majority of the texts, for Jews and Christians, are similar, if not identical. This deliberate mistranslation also happens with Christian translations of Greek New Testament texts that point to the validity of Mosaic Law for Christians. One such blatant place is Hebrews 4:9. Both the Textus Receptus and the NU text have the same Greek word for the verse, but the KJV and NKJV speak only of a ‘rest’ that ‘remains for the people of God,’ while the ASV, ESV, HCSB, NASB, NET, NIV and NRSV correctly translate the Greek word as ‘a Sabbath rest’ remaining for the people of God. The Greek word sabbatismos, a technical term found in ancient literature for Sabbath observance. Samuele Bacchiocchi, in his article, The New Testament Sabbath (The Sabbath Sentinel (Gillette, WY: 1987) states that the author 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 Haereses 30, 2, 2 (and) Apostolic Constitutions 2, 36, 7.’ Andrew Lincoln, a prominent Sunday theologian, 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 sabbatico (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 entering into the eternal Sabbath (that is Messiah Yeshua) rest today (a Sabbath rest remains for us to enter into), and with it ‘matter of factly’ speaking of the Sabbath, not trying to defend it against ‘Sunday keeping,’ it reveals that literal Sabbath observance and celebration among Christians had not been ‘done away with,’ 37 years after the resurrection. The Sabbath was still being kept, and Sunday hadn’t come into the Christian community, yet. The Book of Hebrews was written around 67 AD.\footnote{Two major heretical teachings that many so-called ‘Hebrew Roots’ assemblies espouse are the denial of the past eternal deity of Messiah Yeshua as God the Son, and that the male Gentile needs to be physically covenantly circumcised in order to keep Passover and/or Torah (this latter teaching is also a major heresy of the One Law movement). There is only one physical circumcision in Mosaic Law and it is a covenantal circumcision (see Gen. 17:1f.). For why this teaching is not only wrong, but the male Gentile who does it loses his salvation (Gal. 5:1-4), see Gentile Circumcision? The teaching that Yeshua was not always deity is also false. Their ‘Yahshua’ as many of them ignorantly call the Messiah, has no power to save them than the Jesus of the Jehovah Witnesses or the Mormons. For why their Jesus is a false Jesus, see Yeshua—God the Son.}

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\footnote{Hebrews 4:9 speaks of entering into the eternal Sabbath (that is Messiah Yeshua) rest today (a Sabbath rest remains for us to enter into), and with it ‘matter of factly’ speaking of the Sabbath, not trying to defend it against ‘Sunday keeping,’ it reveals that literal Sabbath observance and celebration among Christians had not been ‘done away with,’ 37 years after the resurrection. The Sabbath was still being kept, and Sunday hadn’t come into the Christian community, yet. The Book of Hebrews was written around 67 AD. Two major heretical teachings that many so-called ‘Hebrew Roots’ assemblies espouse are the denial of the past eternal deity of Messiah Yeshua as God the Son, and that the male Gentile needs to be physically covenantly circumcised in order to keep Passover and/or Torah (this latter teaching is also a major heresy of the One Law movement). There is only one physical circumcision in Mosaic Law and it is a covenantal circumcision (see Gen. 17:1f.). For why this teaching is not only wrong, but the male Gentile who does it loses his salvation (Gal. 5:1-4), see Gentile Circumcision? The teaching that Yeshua was not always deity is also false. Their ‘Yahshua’ as many of them ignorantly call the Messiah, has no power to save them than the Jesus of the Jehovah Witnesses or the Mormons. For why their Jesus is a false Jesus, 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,’ which some use to justify ‘no Mosaic Law’ for Christians. There are two possible Hebraic interpretations for what James meant, neither of which negates Mosaic 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 covenantantly 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 getting into the discussion 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 English translation of the text seems to point against the Law. These two Bibles reflect the differences in the two Greek textual traditions. The meaningful differences of the KJV are placed in italics.657

Acts 21:25 NASB: ‘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.’

Acts 21:25 KJV: ‘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:

Acts 21:25 NRSV: ‘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 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 for the Gentile Christian.

With the KJV’s, ‘observe no such thing, save only,’ the term save only seems to say that the four rules are the only rules that a Gentile has to keep.658 The problem with this is the translation of the Greek phrase εἰ μὴ (ae may) as save only. Bauer says it means except, if not, or but.659 If we place if not into the sentence it doesn’t make any sense: ‘that they should observe no such thing, if not that they keep themselves from

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657 The foundation for the New American Standard Bible and the New Revised Standard Version is the 1881 Westcott–Hort Greek New Testament. This was revised and updated as the NU text; the Nestle–Aland Greek New Testament–United Bible Societies third corrected edition, 1983; Brown, NGEINT, p. iv (page number iv, not printed).

658 The KJV, and to a great extent the NKJV, are based on the Textus Receptus, which may 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.

659 Be that as it may, how many Christians know anything about the four rules, let alone keep them, even as the Church interprets them?

659 Bauer, GELNT, p. 220; also Perschbacher, NAGL, p. 119.
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things offered to idols…’. Placing except in the verse makes it readable and understandable:

‘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, and the New King James Version use except in their translation of v. 25. Using except makes the verse compatible with what was written to the Gentiles (in Acts 15:23f.), and changes the tone of the verse from ‘these are the only commandments a Gentile needs to do’ (i.e. save only; the four rules) to, “even though the Gentile can’t observe this (whatever ‘observe no such thing,’ means; v. 25), they can and should do the four rules.” That’s a shift from the Gentiles having only four rules to observe, to the Gentiles being able to do the 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 except or 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.

For the longer phrase, that they observe no such thing, Bruce uses this to come against the Law:

‘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.’

Bruce is certain that no other legal requirements from Mosaic Law were necessary for the Gentile. All ‘that was required of them’ was that they keep the four rules. Marshall takes a similar position, stating,

‘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.’

Paul’s ‘behavior’ meant that he was entering into the Mosaic Law’s Nazarite Vow (NV), and Marshall is wanting us to know that this Vow wasn’t to be placed upon any Gentile. Bruce, though, insists that Paul couldn’t have taken the Nazarite Vow because it lasted for at least 30 days. Bruce thinks the vow of the

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Acts 21:25—Observe No Such Thing!

four men was going to be complete in seven days,663 suggesting that the four men had contracted some ‘ritual uncleanness during their vow’ and that Paul was going to pay for their expenses, but Marshall doesn’t agree with Bruce, adroitly saying,

‘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.’664

Excellent 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 better for Paul to tell the truth to James, and all the Jewish believers, 

663 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, begun 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 Vow.

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 sacrifices that he would have been offered for himself 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 there 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 Paul and the four men, 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, Paul, kept Mosaic Law (Acts 21:24) as a Christian—25 years after the resurrection!

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 Mosaic 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 about associating with the Gentiles (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 taught 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 is 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 Mosaic Law. Are there two totally different sets of rules in Christ’s “one Flock” Kingdom? (John 10:16)

Be that as it may, many scholars disagree with “Luke’s Paul” presented in Acts 21, saying that their Paul would never have 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. Acts 21 took place anytime from 55-58 AD.

After centuries of the Church teaching against Mosaic Law, many Christians are shocked to learn that Paul took a Nazarite Vow. The observance of the NV 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 NV animal sacrifices for them and for himself (Acts 21:23-24), at the conclusion of the Nazarite Vow.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary 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. Wycliffe states that the four rules in Acts 21 were meant to emphasize that. 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.

Knowing, though, true to his integrity, cuts to the heart of the problem by saying that the Gentiles were

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666 Cf. Gal. 2:4-5.
668 Pfeiffer, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1165.
669 Williams, Acts, p. 366.
670 Ibid.
‘on a different footing’ from the ‘Jews who became Christians’ 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.’

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 the lie. 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 states that he had done nothing to offend the Jewish people nor the Customs (i.e. Law) of the Fathers (28:17).

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). 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 Paul is 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. James (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 passages 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 alone in the ‘No Law!’ Gospel Boat” for the Gentile.

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. Good point. Just like a sequel to a book or a movie, the New Testament doesn’t have to list every law of the Old in order for them to be considered valid in the New. Of course, many Christians believe otherwise, saying that if it isn’t listed in the New Testament, they don’t have to do it, but this is a superficial, spurious and pathetic position that comes from their being blinded to Mosaic Law in the “No Law!” Gospel Boat. Christians think that the New is, ‘completely different from the Old,’ specifically concerning Mosaic Law, but being grafted into Israel (Rom. 11:11f.), at the least means that the Gentile was to learn about his new

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672 Ibid., p. 451.
674 Ibid.
675 Rom. 3:31; 7:7, 12, 14; 1st Cor. 7:17-19; 2nd Tim. 3:16-17. See Gentile Circumcision? for why the Jew continues to circumcise his sons while the Gentile is forbidden. This is their only difference.
677 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.
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Family History and his Family's way of living (Torah, Prophets, Writings and New Covenant). Also, the New Covenant wasn’t made or promised to the Gentiles, but only to the House of Israel and the House of Judah (Jer. 31:31-34). The Gentiles are invited to become part of Israel (Is. 49:6; Jn. 10:16; Rom. 11:11ff.; Eph. 2:11ff.) and their allegiance should be to the God of Israel (Gal. 6:16) and His ways of living, as exemplified in Messiah Yeshua, who kept all the rules of Mosaic Law that applied to Him.

Stern believes that Paul’s keeping of Mosaic Law was affirmed in Acts 21:24, with Paul’s subsequent obedience to James’ suggestion of taking the Vow (v. 26).678 Those who don’t want to see Paul like this, tacitly proclaim Luke to be a liar, but as there’s no indication that Luke was a liar, Acts clearly reveals that the Apostle Paul kept Mosaic Law as a Christian.

Stern writes that Mishnah Nazir (Nazarite) says that the time of the Nazarite Vow was from ‘one to three months in length,’ generally walked out as 30, 60 or 100 days. 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.’679

As patron and participant680 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).681 Hegg rightly discerns that there were ‘no competing values between the death of Yeshua and the offering of sacrifices in the Temple.’682 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 an extremely 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 NV was seen to hold God’s Law in the highest esteem. This is the reason

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679 Ibid. Stern writes of Paul being ritually purified, which speaks of the seven days of purification before Paul could begin the Nazarite Vow.

680 Paul was a participant in the Nazarite 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, ‘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. Neither Luke nor Paul nor anyone else writes that it was wrong for Paul to take the Nazarite Vow.

Williams, Acts, p. 366, also believes that Paul was under the Nazarite Vow. Knowing, The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 449-450, states that the Greek word, ‘certainly seems to demand that’ Paul ‘place himself on a level with the four men and take upon himself the Nazarite vow’ (see also Acts 24:18).

681 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, too (Acts, pp. 321-322), says it was based on a Nazarite Vow. Stern (JNTC, pp. 290-291), though, doesn’t think Paul’s vow of Cenchrea was a stricter 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. In other words, Paul began a NV ‘in Cenchrea.’

why James directed Paul to take the Vow—to prove to all the Jewish Christians (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).

The phrase observe no such thing for the Gentile doesn’t refer to the nullification of Mosaic Law, but theoretically to the NV 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 NV and animal sacrifice, if the Jewish believers did? Biblically they could have. The Gentile Christians should have been able to keep the NV 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 Gentile Christians 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 sacrifices to be done at the Temple.

Upon completion of the NV 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 24 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 NV, and Gentiles weren’t able to observe it at that time, but in Yeshua’s Kingdom of 1,000 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. 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 presented 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, and the letter written, point 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, reveals that Gentile circumcision is the subject of what the Gentile wasn’t able to do. The KJV also speaks of the letter with its ‘written:’

‘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 James wrote to the church at Antioch, which was also circulated in other believing assemblies by Paul (Acts 16:4-5). The letter put to rest the question

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685 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.

Unger, 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.
of Mosaic Law, symbolized in *Gentile circumcision*, being attached to or needed for salvation. The phrase, *we have written and concluded*, as well as his reiteration of the four rules, and also, the slander against Paul teaching Jews not to circumcise their sons, all point directly to James’ decision of Acts 15, six to eight years earlier, that Gentiles weren’t to be physically covenantally circumcised.686

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; 5:6-8; 7:19; 11:1), was valid and that he believed that physical covenantal 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 was out of place that James repeated the four rules in speaking with Paul,687 *but 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 physical covenantal circumcision for Jewish male boys was still intact, and that Paul kept Mosaic Law, James immediately declares that physical covenantal circumcision does not apply for the Gentiles, but they do have to implement the four rules. *It was extremely* appropriate for James to repeat 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.688 Circumcision was given to the Jews as the *sign* of God’s covenantal relationship that He had with them 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.689 *It’s* by *the circumcision made without hands* that we all enter in (Phil. 3:3; Col 2:11). The *sign* has changed. *That’s* why Peter and Paul could say that biblical, physical covenantal circumcision wasn’t necessary for the Gentile, but that everyone must keep all the (other) rules of Moses that apply to them.690

Would non-circumcision make the Gentile less valuable than the Jew? Of course not.691 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.692 *This* makes the Gentile (and the Jew) acceptable to God or justified. 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 Abra-

686 Concerning the so-called Hebrew Roots and One Law movements, *nothing* is ever given in New Testament for the Gentile to be physically covenantally circumcised ‘at a later time,’ for any reason.


688 *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 teaching that has no basis in Scripture, and actually goes against it. For more on this see, *Is the Gentile Now a Jew?* and *Gentile Circumcision?* Also, see *The Stranger and the Native Born*, on p. 206f.

689 Acts 15:7-11; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:1-5; 6:15.

690 Acts 15:1, 7-11; Rom. 3:20, 31; 1st Cor. 7:19.


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hamic covenant, but the Jew is, and the Gentile doesn’t come into the Kingdom of Heaven through Abra-
ham, but Yeshua.

Yeshua said that He had another Flock and that the two would become one Flock (Jn. 10:16). Here’s a
hint of a ‘marriage union,’ with the Gentile taking the place of the (uncircumcised) wife in order to woo
the unsaved relatives of her husband (unsaved Jews) to Messiah by her prayers and holy conduct. Gentile
prayers and love for the unsaved Jew is happening today.693

Also, a by-product of not circumcising the male Gentile means that the racial Seed of Abraham, Isaac and
James is preserved for God’s end-time purpose—to display His unwavering faithfulness and forgiving
loving-kindness to Israel after the flesh.694

Observe no such thing doesn’t refer to the Nazarite Vow and still less to the Law—it refers to James’ deci-
sion 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, James speaking about what had already written, and also, his
repeating of the four rules, which he had given to the Gentiles (Acts 15:22-29; 21:25).

The emphasizing of the four rules reveals exactly what James was referring to. In other words, if the four
rules hadn’t been stated, scholars could say that there were other things ‘written and concluded’ that Luke
didn’t mention. It would open up endless speculation and perverse interpretations against Mosaic Law.
Thank God that James restated the four rules!

I focused first on the Nazarite Vow as an interpretation for Acts 21:25 to point out that animal sacrifice
was obviously still in effect for all the Apostles at the Temple in Jerusalem 25 years after the resurrec-
tion, and theoretically, for the Gentile Christian as well.695

Observe no such thing cannot be used to teach that James’ four rules to the Gentiles were the only rules
for them and that they didn’t have to keep the Law. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit, through James, was
making sure that everyone knew that Paul still kept the Law, and by extension, that everyone else should,
too. James reemphasized the four rules of Acts 15 to make sure that the Gentiles knew what they should
implement in relation to what they shouldn’t—physical covenantal circumcision.

693 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 relatives of her Jewish husband, further refutes Hegg’s position of Gentile circumcision ‘for the
right reason’ (see p. 124, note 520). James declares that the Gentile wasn’t to be circumcised—period! (Acts
21:25) Nothing is ever mentioned about it being possible later ‘for the right reason’ (i.e. after a Gentile had come
to realize that he wasn’t doing it as part of his justification), in Acts or anywhere else in the New Testament.

Acts through Revelation covers approximately 70 years (30-100 AD). During this time Gentile believers had
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 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), and in 1st Cor. 7:19 he speaks of keeping Mo-
saic Law as the thing that really matters, all without the Gentile being physically covenantally circumcised.

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, which nullifies one’s justification (Gal. 5:4). For more on this see Gentile Circumcision?

694 Is. 62:1-12; Jer. 23:5-8; Rom. 11:25-32.


A look at 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,696 and enigmatic in that the order of the four rules changes after initially being spoken of by James in Acts 15:20. Rule two, *cult prostitution*, and rule four, *blood*, trade places with each other after James 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” (which is what pollutions of idols means)
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*,697

1. the meat *offered* to idols
2. **and blood**
3. and strangled (things)
4. **and cult prostitution.**698

The Greek word in Acts 15:20 for rule numer one (αἵλογημάτων *alisgematone*—*pollutions of idols*) changes to a different Greek word in the letter of 15:29 and is reiterated in 21:25 (εἰδωλοθύτων *aedo-lothotone*—*meat offered to idols, i.e. sacrificed*). The change emphasizes that it’s an *animal* sacrifice; not just *any* food sacrificed to an idol.699

Other foods, such as grain, vegetables and fruit, etc., could be given to a pagan priest as the idol’s repre-

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696 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; Gen. 9:4; Lev. 3:17; 7:26-27; 17:10-14; 19:26; Dt. 12:16, 23; 15:23).
697 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.
698 Brown, *NGEINT*, pp. 472-473, 499. I’ve used ‘cult prostitution’ for the three passages because that is what the Greek word *pornayah* means here, instead of the nebulous ‘sexual immorality’ found in *NGEINT*.
699 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 where this prohibition could come from is the rule on *blood* in Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25.
sentative, or sacrificed to an idol. The Greek word for the first rule in 15:20 could theoretically encompass these non-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.\textsuperscript{700} James spoke of an animal sacrifice, 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) switch places in the letter of Acts 15:29 and in James speaking to Paul in Acts 21:25. This most likely happens because it's a more natural or chronological order for a pagan ceremony in which they are actually enacted. It's the order of a pagan ceremony. The blood that is drunk at a pagan sacrifice happens immediately after the sacrifice of the animal to the pagan god; there is feasting and sex in the name of the god or goddess:

1. sacrifice the animal,
2. drink its fresh blood, and later, after it's roasted,
3. eat the meat of the sacrifice, and after this,
4. ‘worship’ the god or goddess through cult prostitution.

The Greek word for both in Acts 21:25 is το (toe). It means ‘both,’\textsuperscript{701} in the sense that it ‘connects… clauses, thereby indicating a close relationship betw. them.’\textsuperscript{702} James (or Luke?) saw the close relationship or order of events between the animal being sacrificed and its blood being drunk, and wrote the letter (Acts 15:23-29), and later reiterated it (Acts 21:25), accordingly. James said, to ‘avoid both’ the sacrificial meat and its blood. The term blood is now intimately associated with rule one on sacrificial animal idolatry and speaks of the idolater drinking the blood immediately after the animal was sacrificed. This excludes blood from referring to murder or blood in rare roast beef (the Church’s false teaching on ‘table fellowship’).

The rearranging of the two rules could further be displaying the idolatrous nature of the Decree by encapsulating the two minor points (blood and strangled) within the two primary rules on sacrificial-sexual idolatry (animals sacrificed to idols and cult prostitution), enabling them to standout as ‘bookends.’ This re-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 James 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 realize that the rules dealt with sacrificial-sexual idolatry. Also, with the Greek word for both, the sacrificial blood that would be drunk is grammatically tied to the animal that had just been sacrificed to the pagan god for its blood. How could Christian scholars have missed all this? Because their paradigm of “No Law!” for them blinds them to properly understanding the New Testament when it speaks of Mosaic Law. The Pharisees weren’t the only blind religious leaders.

\textsuperscript{700} 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. 15f., and p. 106f.).

\textsuperscript{701} Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, p. 403.

THE CONCERN OF JAMES

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). A few 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 the actual concern of James 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.’ How could this be, for the Gentile ‘not under the Law,’ is justified by saying it was to assuage the Jewish Christians who still walked in the “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 eaten only at the cult sacrifice.

2. The Second Rule: Pornayah
   1. Sexual immorality.
   2. Unchastity.
   3. Adultery.
   4. Fornication.
   5. The prohibited marriages of Lev. 18:6-18.
   6. Cult prostitution.

703 Williams, Acts, p. 266. The Decree touches ‘on both the ethical and ceremonial aspects of the law.’
704 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.’
710 KJV. Brown, NGEINT, p. 472; the NRSV margin translation has fornication.
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.\textsuperscript{713}
   2. Prohibition against eating flesh with the blood still in it (based on the ‘Noachian decree of Gen. 9:4’).\textsuperscript{714}
   3. A pagan sacrifice that was strangled.\textsuperscript{715}

4. The Fourth Rule: Blood
   1. Murder.\textsuperscript{716}
   2. The eating of meat with blood in it.\textsuperscript{717}
   3. The drinking of fresh, raw blood from a pagan sacrifice.\textsuperscript{718}

Every scholar correctly understands the first rule, although most don’t distinguish that James only meant sacrificial meat at the time of the sacrifice. Rule two, pornayah isn’t seen by the Church as cult harlotry, which would have opened up the possibility that the rules were a coherent unit on idolatry, and so, rules three and four are artificially assigned to food regulations.\textsuperscript{719} The interpretation of the rules this way allows theologians to present them as table fellowship, and to continue to teach that Mosaic Law isn’t valid for Christians; that this was just an asterisk to appease the ‘slow to learn what the atonement meant’ Jews.

If blood (#4) related to table fellowship (the prohibition against eating blood in meat), James 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, horse, camel, squirrel or rabbit would certainly offend every Jew at the picnic table.

In other words, if James 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’ (no blood, #4), but can you imagine the Gentile sitting down with his Jewish friend and offering him a hot slab of ham and 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 Jewish Christian at the table. What if the Gentile were to offer him shrimp? It doesn’t


\textsuperscript{714} Bruce, The Book of the Acts, p. 296.


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have any blood, nor need to be slaughtered properly, yet God forbids this creature along with catfish, squid, crab and shark, etc., etc., etc. (see Lev. 11; Dt. 14).

James never addresses this food issue in Acts 15, Acts 21 nor any other place. No unclean animals are ever mentioned that might offend a Jew. This is why blood cannot relate to a dietary regulation 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 Jewish Christians 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.”'\(^{720}\)

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 and the prohibited animals. 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 of Moses 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 does not relate to the dietary laws.

As for blood equalling 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 pornayah means, not to marry within the prohibited relations of Lev. 18:6-18,\(^{721}\) but pornayah cannot be interpreted as pertaining to ‘prohibited marriages’ because in both the Old and New Testaments it overwhelmingly refers to (cult) prostitution.

Witherington insightfully saw that the regulations found in Lev. 18 for ‘prohibited unions between close relations,’ were never written of in the Septuagint as pornayah.\(^{722}\) This is another reason why the rule doesn’t pertain to ‘prohibited marriages.’

Other Christian theologians see pornayah as sexual immorality, unchastity or fornication (popularly de-

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fined as sex before marriage), but these water down the Greek word and hide the biblical definition of the word and its historical environment. *Sexual immorality* can be made to mean anything sexual, and consequently, it means nothing specifically. ‘Unchastity’ is also light years away from revealing what *pornayah* means, and fornication, today, is just another word for sexual immorality.

From both its Hebrew and Greek usage the meaning of James’ second rule is cult harlotry. The history of ancient Israel and the world at large confirmed this, as well as Yeshua’s use of *pornayah* as the only biblical grounds for divorce between two Christians (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 should have been recognized centuries ago. Ben Witherington III (1998) seems to have been the first major theologians to present the four rules as a unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry, but even he didn’t realize the theological impact for Mosaic Law. The Church’s anti-Mosaic Law bias has blinded its scholars. That’s why *pornayah, blood and strangled* weren’t properly understood. Seeing Mosaic Law as annulled for Christians, scholars are handicapped and fall into a major heresy. Their distorted understanding blinds them to God’s Word and adversely affects millions of Christians today in their walk with Jesus.

With most theologians and Christians thinking they are, ‘free from the Law,’ it’s hard to imagine how they can present any rules as coming from the Law. Knowling was quick to point this out—if the Law had been done away with by Christ for Christians, how could James present his four rules, and more importantly, how could Paul allow it?! If the Law wasn’t for Christians, 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 teaches, the Jews, and especially the Jewish Apostles, would certainly have been offended when they found out about this hypocrisy.

There are other theological and practical problems with interpreting the four 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 theoretically 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 Gentile Christian is to live his life—the Church or God?

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 7th day Sabbath to the first day of Sunday, and also, do away with Mosaic 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’ (their perverse interpretation of Col. 2:14), but this creates a larger problem than it seems to solve. How could all the Jewish believers think that Mosaic Law was still valid? Were they all, including the Apostles, who had been specifically taught by Yeshua about His 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? Were they so enslaved to the Law that they openly defied
and rebelled against their King’s express wishes about Mosaic Law being nullified for by His death? Or did Jesus forget to say anything to them about it in Acts One, or the entire Book of Acts?

What of Paul, the Church’s “‘No Law!’ champion”? He 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 any of the other Apostles, ever say that the Law is not for Christians (cf. Rom. 3:31). 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 believing 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 what constitutes sin, and therefore, lifestyle.

It also makes the God of Israel out to be the one erecting this ‘middle wall of partition.’ There’s nothing in Rom. 11:17-21, 24-27, where the Gentile is grafted into the cultivated olive tree (Israel), or Eph. 2:12-22; 3:6, where the Gentile is part of the Household and Commonwealth of Israel, and made into ‘one new Man’ with the Jewish believer, to support a totally different theological lifestyle for Gentile Christians.

Table fellowship is not why James gave the four rules. Nowhere is table fellowship mentioned in Acts 15 and nowhere is it the reason for the Council, and nowhere in the Word of God is it said to be the reason for giving the four authoritative and divine rules. The four commandments of James were given in relation to what a Gentile had to do in order for his faith in Jesus to be seen as biblically genuine. If Paul’s

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724 See p. 206ff., Two Different Kingdoms? The Stranger and the Native-Born, for Scripture cites and a greater understanding of who this stranger is.

725 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; Josh. 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.

726 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.’

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writings are to be taken as Scripture, and they are, shouldn’t James’ writings be seen that way, too?727

The Book of Acts tells us ‘what happened.’ It’s very hard to argue 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 scholars 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 had been done away with, and that, by Paul?! Others teach that Paul was only being, ‘a Jew to the Jews.’728 He was just observing the Nazarite Vow so as not to offend

727 The biblical reality of the four rules of Acts 15:20 is that they are commandments from Yeshua. James didn’t make these up on his own, and they’re certainly 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 James. 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; cf. 1st Tim. 6:14; 2nd Pet. 3:2, 14-18).

728 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 writes 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, and how bad that would look). Bruce also writes that Paul “cannot be fairly charged with compromising his own gospel principles.”

On the contrary, Paul most certainly can be charged with unethical behavior if his reasons are as Bruce states. 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? 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, Easter and Christmas in Rome? What is the “way of the Gentiles”? Peter writes, “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries” (1st Peter 4:3). God said to Israel, “What you have in your mind shall never be, when you say, “We will be like the Gentiles, like the families in other countries, serving wood and stone” (Ezekiel 20:32; cf. Eph. 4:17-24).

Being “among the Gentiles” also presupposes there were no Jews among them, but wherever there were Gentile converts to Yeshua there were also Jews who believed in Him, too (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 is a deceiver of the highest order, because the taking of the Nazarite Vow means that Paul highly 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 Feast of Weeks, also known as Pentecost; 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 and speak to them about the Gospel in words they could understand. (Acts 10:1; 28, 34-35) This is 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 in Antioch, 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 many wrongly teach, as there’s no food mentioned in Galatians 2). Paul would relate to Gentiles on their own terms, bringing the Gospel to those who were idolaters and who didn’t know Torah (see Acts 17:15-30f., where Paul doesn’t voice his thoughts about their idolatry, but speaks of Christ to them in a way that they could understand. It doesn’t mean that Paul would sin against God by breaking the Sabbath, eating pig,
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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 believ-
ers. *This*, they say, was the reason why the Apostle Paul did something that he never would have done, 
had he not been coerced into it, but this makes Paul out to be a very weak and unprincipled man, some-
thing that Scripture does not bear out.729 It also makes James, and the other Apostles, more like ‘the James 
Gang’730 than living examples of Yeshua, His love and His way of life (cf. John 14:6).

Other scholars simply say it didn’t happen! It was just *fanciful writing* on Luke’s part! He made it up! 
(Talk about *hutzpah!* 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 (Acts 25:8; Rom. 3:20, 31; 7:7, 12, 14).

With a few of the words of Paul, scholars 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). Here in Acts, the only scholarly recourse some have is to declare Luke a liar!

Marshall, in relation to Luke writing of 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 pro-
posal. A. Hausrath put the objection most vividly by saying that it would be more credi-
bile that the dying Calvin would have bequeathed a golden dress to the mother of God’ 
(Roman Catholicism’s 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 v. 24b.’731

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 Mosaic 
Law. We know that Yeshua kept all Mosaic Law that applied to Him, for that is what judged Him sinless 
(Rom. 3:20; 7:7; John 8:46; 2nd Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1st Pet. 2:22). In other words, if Jesus had broken any Mos-
ic law that He should have kept, He would have sinned and not have been a sinless sacrifice. God intended, 
with the New Covenant, to write Mosaic Law upon our hearts and minds. In other words, to make Mosaic Law 
our character, just as it is Messiah’s character, for Mosaic Law is a reflection of His character. *The words of Mo-
saic Law reflect the divine nature and personality of Messiah, expressing Who He is.* Jeremiah 31:31-34 is the 
only place in the Old Covenant where the phrase, *New Covenant*, is written. In verse 33 God reveals that Mosaic 
Law is to be the Christians’s new character. He says, ‘“But *this is the covenant* that I will make with the House 
of Israel after those days,” says Yahveh: *“I will put My Law (Hebrew: Torah) in their minds and write it on 
their hearts,* and I will be their God, and they shall be My people”’ (Jer. 31:33; cf. Heb. 8:10; 10:16, which af-
firms God’s desire). Some think the term, ‘Law,’ in Jer. 31:33, means (only) the Ten Commandments, but the He-
brew word is Torah, which means Mosaic Law.

Paul told everyone in Corinth to *imitate* him as he *followed Messiah* (1st Cor. 4:16; 11:1). It’s scripturally certain 
that Paul’s being ‘under law toward Christ’ and God the Father, is Mosaic Law (note well: it’s ‘law,’ not com-
mandments, which could be taken to mean only the Ten). *Mosaic Law is who Yeshua is* (cf. Ps. 40:6-8; Torah is 
in Yeshua’s heart or nature, for it reflects Him), and it’s God’s definition of love (Mt. 22:35-40). Scripture says 
that Jesus is the *same*; yesterday, *today* and forever (Heb. 13:8). What was sin for Jesus ‘back then,’ is sin for 


730 The James Gang were notorious outlaws in the Old West, who lived in the 1870s, and were led by Jesse James.

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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!\(^{732}\) Whatever possessed the good doctor to do such a monstrous thing?! In other words, what was Gentile Luke’s motivation for saying that Paul kept Mosaic Law?

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.\(^{733}\)

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 ‘there is nothing in all his writings to suggest that he disapproved of them.’\(^{734}\) 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.).’\(^{735}\)

‘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.’\(^{736}\)

According to Williams, Mosaic Law is the ‘authoritative guide to Christian living.’ That’s what God intended it to be (Dt. 4:5-8; Rom. 3:20; 3:31; 7:12, 14), but if Paul didn’t nullify the Law, who did? The nullification of Mosaic Law is the heretical teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, not the New Testament. Unfortunately, when the Reformers left Rome they didn’t realize this, and so they took Rome’s anti-Mosaic Law theology with them. After all, it was more than a 1,400 years old in their time.

The Roman Catholic Church, about 120 AD,\(^{737}\) threw out God’s holy Sabbath and castigated the Law ‘as Jewish,’ and with that, the Jews began to be ‘Christ killers,’ which 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’ (i.e. the Pope) ‘shall speak blasphemous words against the Most High God and will oppress the saints’ (Christians) ‘of the Most High God and think to change times and laws’ (Sabbath, Feasts and Mosaic Law). ‘Then the saints’ (Christians) ‘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 who has oppressed the saints (true

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\(^{733}\) Rom. 3:20, 31; 7:7, 12, 14; 1st Cor. 5:6-8; 7:19; 9:8; 11:1; 14:34.

\(^{734}\) Williams, Acts, p. 260.

\(^{735}\) Ibid., p. 261.

\(^{736}\) Ibid.

\(^{737}\) Bacchiocchi, From Sabbath To Sunday, pp. 152-157, 159-207, 211-212.
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Christians) with its persecutions of millions of Christians. Also, to fill the vacuum created by its jettisoning of Mosaic Law, Rome brought in pagan doctrines and pagan ceremonies (Sunday, Easter and Xmas). It’s unfortunate that the Reformers continued to follow these heresies of the 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 nor stroke shall pass from the Law until all is fulfilled.’ (Mt. 5:17-18)

Scholars explain that the meaning of fulfill is that Jesus kept all the laws, and so did away with them by His sacrifice. He 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 laws 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 Old Testament:

“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), as did Habakkuk who wrote: ‘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 its 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 Gentile came to 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 his builder’s measuring rod. When the Gentile appeared before Hillel, he 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’ the Law then, in Mt. 5:17, be biblically interpreted to mean that He was doing away with the Law so Christians wouldn’t have to keep

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739 Ibid., p. 33. From the Talmud, Shabat 31a.

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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 are given His nature. In His death we are given 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. 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 on Judgment Day because then we will become like He is now and the Law will truly be written on our hearts (Jer. 31:33). A final point that further dismantles the position of the Church on Mosaic Law, and also cements the proper understanding of this entire passage, is presented by Yeshua in the 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, 50 days 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. This understanding, of the validity of Mosaic Law for Christians today, is from our Lord Himself.

The Church’s interpretation of Matthew 5:17-19 is is based on its heretical 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. In Mt. 5:17 Yeshua speaks of fulfilling not only the Law, but also the Prophets. What He primarily meant is that both the Law and the Prophets speak of a coming Messiah. Yeshua, standing there that day, was pointing to Himself as the fulfillment of what both the Law and Prophets declared about the Savior who would come (e.g. Dt. 18:18-19).

   A. After His resurrection Yeshua specifically spoke of this understanding of fulfillment in Luke 24:44 when He said, ‘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.’

   1) 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, redeeming 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).

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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.

D. 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 spoke of and pointed to—the Messiah of Israel (Gen. 3:15; 49:10; Dt. 18:18-19) and His redemptive Work for Israel, which includes Gentiles being invited into, and becoming part of Israel (Is. 49:1-6f.; John 10:16; 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.

A. Yeshua fulfilled what the Passover lamb pointed to—Him and His sacrifice. The First Passover in Egypt paved the way for Yeshua to be the Passover Lamb of the Second Passover (Jn. 1:29, 36). The Second Passover parallels the first—freedom from Egyptian slavery parallels freedom from slavery to Satan and his Kingdom of Darkness (Col. 1:13-14; 1st Pet. 2:9).

B. Yeshua’s fulfillment of the Passover doesn’t 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 of the Passover, and the glory given to God for it, 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.741

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 dedication and 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)

A. 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. Law does not mean legalism.

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 through His servants, Moses, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, etc.

A. 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,742 just as Yeshua did. How, then, could Jesus do away with Mosaic Law? It’s the very opposite for one of the reasons that God gave the New Covenant to Israel (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezk. 36:24-27).743

B. 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. 7:12, 14), just as Yeshua walked.744

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742 Dt. 30:6; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezk. 36:24-26; Joel 2:28-29.
743 The Hebrew word for Law in Jeremiah 31:33 is יָדַע (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.
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5. **Fulfill** also speaks of Yeshua’s sacrificial death making a way for Gentiles to come into the New Covenant (Is. 42:6; 49:6; Rom 11:11f.; Eph. 2:11f.). 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 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, or as Hillel said, commentary (on how to love). The two great commandments of Torah are seen by Yeshua as the two branches of the divine tree from which all the other rules have their reason for being. They hang from the two branches fruit. 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 explaining how to love of God and Man, according to Messiah Yeshua.

The Law also reveals to 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. 19:18c). God the Son loved His creation as a man, and now, the Apostles were to love one another as they had been loved by Yeshua: “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12; cf. Jn. 13:34) This ‘new commandment’ does not do away with Mosaic Law anymore than Moses telling Israel to love God and one another (Dt. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18c) nullifies all the other rules of Mosaic Law. Yeshua amplified the commandment to love our neighbor; He didn’t do away with it.

Witherington saw the four rules as a unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry, but failed to grasp the 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 doesn’t negate sacrificing to other gods and laying with cult harlots, as Paul speaks of (1st Cor. 10; 2nd Cor. 6). Witherington also states that the rules were for table ‘fellowship’ (it was ‘important to James,’ as a witness to non-believing Jews that the Gentiles were not practicing sacrificial-sexual idolatry anymore). How much of a witness it was to non-believing Jews is debatable, but table fellowship can’t be the reason for the rules, as Witherington seems to state. Also, because of his anti-Law theology he, too, inadvertently confuses 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. On the other hand, the Judaizers wanted the Gentiles to (artificially) become Jews and keep the Law (symbolized in circumcision) for salvation. This is what James rules against.

Hegg, following Witherington, sees the rules as a ‘prohibition of idol worship in the pagan temple.’

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746 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.’
747 Ibid., p. 463.
748 Ibid., p. 465. See also p. 170f., above.
749 Ibid., pp. 647-648.
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wrongly thinks, though, that the rules were for table fellowship between the two groups and for the prevention of ‘accusations of idolatry’ in the Jewish community (taken from Witherington). 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). 751 Clearly, however, James didn’t give the rules for table fellowship, nor non-believing Jewish approval nor as food regulations. Hegg does, though, correctly state that the Gentile was to learn and keep Mosaic Law. 752

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 he would know if his faith in Jesus was biblically genuine or not. Traditional Christian scholarship, interpreting Acts 15:20 as table fellowship, exposes its flawed theological presupposition and bias against Mosaic Law. Devoid of Torah, and actually anti-Torah, Christian scholars, commentators, translators and pastors ingeniously invent their own seemingly biblical explanations for passages in the New Testament that speak against 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.

The Church assigns the four rules to table fellowship and says that these were the only rules that a Gentile had to keep, 753 but this places the Gentile outside the Torah-observant believing Jewish community. The theological nightmare this presents is seen at the picnic table. The interpretation of ‘table fellowship’ separates the Gentile from the Jewish believer (and the traditional Jew) 754 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 James had in mind when he gave the four rules, as important a concept as table fellowship is. Paul prophesied about 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)

750 Hegg, The Letter Writer, p. 269.
751 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, see p. 277, for Hegg speaking of not eating strangled meat with blood in it.
752 Ibid., pp. 73, 83, 288-290.
754 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; 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 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. Jewish 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…while the perpetrators sang to Jesus. Is it any wonder that the name of Jesus is a curse word in the Jewish community? The history of the Church against the Jewish people has been diabolically 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 thinks that the four rules of James in v. 20 came from the Noahide laws. This interpretation seeks to circumvent the fact that the rules have their basis in Mosaic Law, but interesting questions and problems arise from this teaching. First, though, the Rabbis who created “Noah’s laws” for the Gentiles, say they should 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.” (Added to this last rule, at a later date, Gentiles were “also not to drink blood taken from a live animal.”)

All four rules of James could 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 the rules of James as pertaining to idolatry. Also, no law of Noah specifically speaks of any of the rules of James.

If James’ first rule on not eating sacrificial meat was placed under idolatry (#3), and pornayah was seen as adultery (#4), and blood was seen as murder (#5), there’s still no place for strangled. In this scenario only three of Noah’s seven laws have been touched, but this is how Bruce and other theologians align James’ rules with Noah. Of course, James’ rule on blood cannot be equated with murder, and so this negates it from being Noah’s ‘murder’ (#5), and James’ rule on pornayah 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) doesn’t refer to drinking it at a pagan sacrifice nor to eating blood in half-cooked meat, but of eating the blood of 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.

Isn’t it strange that James 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 James never mentions justice (#1), blasphemy (#2), or robbery (#6). If the four rules were taken from the Noahide laws, why didn’t James just give the Gentiles all the Noahide laws? Also problematic for those who think the rules came from Noah is the fact that the name of Moses is literally mentioned in Acts 15:21, not Noah’s name.

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757 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 an idolatrous sacrifice.
758 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. One has to really stretch James’ four rules into being taken from the Noahide laws with this interpretation.

Unfortunately, it’s not possible to give Scripture cites where God gave these 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, and Noah was a Gentile!

What is the theological purpose of F. F. Bruce and all those who espouse James’ rules as coming from the so-called Noahide laws? Those who place the four rules of James 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 Christians the only rules 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 is just another ingenious and insidious attempt at explaining Acts 15:20 so Gentiles don’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 keeps the Law), and one for the Gentile (who doesn’t keep the Law).

Also, ‘law is still law.’ If the Gentile is under Grace and free from Mosaic Law, how can Bruce & Friends 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, both Witherington and Hegg believe it didn’t exist in the days of the Apostles. The latter understanding would place a

759 Gentiles who follow the Noahide laws are deceived into believing that it’s all a Gentile needs to do for eternal life. Its Judaism’s version of salvation for the Gentile. Of course, these Gentiles don’t believe in Yeshua as their Savior, and so they’re totally deceived. 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 Christians.

The Rabbis teach that it’s blasphemous and idolatrous to believe in Jesus as God the Son, and so no Christian should even consider becoming a ‘Son of Noah’ because it places them under the authority of the Rabbis. To understand how Jesus is God the Son see Yeshua—God the Son, and also, Messiah’s Deity and Micah 5:2, What Word Became Flesh? John 1:14 and Yeshua—His Deity and Sonship.

760 Gen. 7:2, 8; 8:20.

761 Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah, p. 1014.

762 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 to 200 AD).
The Concern of James—Noah and Acts 15:20

Noahide interpretation of Acts 15:20 outside the realm of possibility. Some might say that James gave it to the Gentile believers first, and then the Rabbis thought of giving it to the Gentiles, but it’s hard to believe that the Rabbis would follow James, the Jewish-Christian, in this. Witherington says there is no Jewish background or ‘parallel to the enumerating of James’ four items together.’ Also, neither James in his letter with his name (i.e. “James”), nor Paul, ever speak of Noah, let alone any Noahide laws for the Gentiles, which goes far in confirming that the four rules of James didn’t originate from the Noahide laws, whether they were known at that time or not.

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’ Mosaic Law 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 Christians, it still wouldn’t deal with the problem of James speaking of ‘Moses’ and the ‘Sabbath.’

Also a problem with the Noahide position is that Noah’s laws are still law (even though they are moral laws). This would place the Gentile in an unequal category with his Jewish counterpart and make the Gentile ‘a second class citizen,’ which is something God never intended.

The four rules of Acts 15:20 were the most important rules that the Gentile needed to know immediately 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 being ‘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 Sabbath keeping, Passover observing and bacon rejecting Savior and He wants His Body to follow Him, not the ways of the Pope who gave Christianity illicit SEX, which is an acronym for Sunday, Easter and Xmas, which also includes the eating of unclean animals and anti-Mosaic Law theology.

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 His one Flock (Jn. 10:16). The Apostle Paul clearly issue of faith in Yeshua and Mosaic Law working together in a point-blank rhetorical question and answer, saying:

‘Do we then make void the Law through faith?! Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the Law!’ (Rom. 3:31 NKJV)

Does it get any clearer than that? Romans is Paul’s greatest theological letter. Mosaic Law is not abolished or nullified by a Christian’s faith in Jesus, but ‘on the contrary,’ it’s established with a Christian’s faith in Christ, at least according to Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13).

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764 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, but with a proper biblical interpretation of vv. 20-21, the Law of Moses is divinely 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. James 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 salvation for the Gentile (Acts 15:1-4), and of course, for the Jewish Christian also.

The Apostles and other Jewish Christians assembled and listened to the arguments presented. After ‘much dispute’ or heated Jewish arguing (Acts 15:7), which is how we Jews debate, Peter stood up and told his story about how the first Gentile, Cornelius, had been saved (Acts 10:1-11:18)—no need for circumcision. Cornelius and Friends had received salvation in the same way Peter had: ‘through the grace of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah’ (15:11), and nothing had changed for Cornelius in more than eight years. He hadn’t needed to be circumcised in all that time. 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 never intended for it to be used as a vehicle for eternal life (Acts 15:10; Rom. 3:31; 8:3-4).

Then James, a 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 laid in ruins for more than 600 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, James decreed the decision (Acts 15:19) and issued four rules (v. 20). Why 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?

James was concerned that Gentile Christians would think they could continue to practice sacrificial-sexual 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 worship services. James ruled and warned the Gentiles about something that would jeopardize their very salvation. His concern was valid. The Apostle Paul had to deal with sacrificial-sexual idolatry among some of his Gentile Christians 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, as part of Christianity (Rev. 2:14, 20).

Gentile continuance in sacrificial-sexual idolatry was the reason James issued the four commandments. 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 worshipping 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 harlotry 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 James addressed with his four

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766 See p. 172, note 723 for the time frame.
767 Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1st Thess. 4:3.
The Concern of James—Sacrificial-Sexual Idolatry

rules of Acts 15:20. In a very real sense, the ruling of James took care of ‘the two pluses.’ He said,

Jesus plus the Law couldn’t earn salvation, and

Jesus plus Zeus wouldn’t be tolerated.

The first three rules of the Ten Commandments address idolatry. Other commandments reveal it’s punishment. Unger’s says:

‘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).’ {768}

Sacrificial-sexual idolatry was the concern of James when he issued the four rules to the Gentiles. God addressed ancient Israel in a similar manner when He took her out of the darkness of Egypt. The eating of unclean animals, 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.’ {769} Peter spoke of the mere association with Gentiles as being off-limits. This was not 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 Christian Gentiles if they practiced it, even if they said 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.” {770}

The four rules were to be observed immediately by the Gentiles, in grateful response to salvation. 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. James, in Acts 15:21, assumes that the Gentile Christians was to live a lifestyle of Torah so that he could truly be one with the House of Israel {771} and not offend his Jewish Christian 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 the concern of James and why he gave the rules. In the Ten Commandments it’s written, ‘You must have no other gods

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{768} Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 515.

{769} 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.).


{771} The Gentile Christian is grafted into Israel (Rom. 11:13-31) and becomes part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-22; see also p. 147, notes 620-621.)

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beside Me!’ (Dt. 5:7; see also Ex. 20:3; 22:20) 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 animal), the three other rules can be placed right alongside them (the eating of the animal sacrificed to the god at the altar, the strangling of a sacrifice and cult prostitution). All four prohibitions were acted out around a pagan altar.772

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 James. This is seen even to the extent in how Yahveh closes Deut. 12 and how James 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 eyes of Yahveh your God.’

In his letter to the Gentiles, James 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! 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 James 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 contained 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.773 This is the reason why James gave his ruling. The Gentiles were known for having many gods and goddesses in their pantheons, and the inclusion of Jesus would have posed no problem for most of them. This was seen at Corinth, Pergamos and Thyatira, and Thessalonica. 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 James, the Gentiles would understand that their faith must be in Jesus and in Him alone. ISBE writes of the pagan mindset of the Gentile Christian:

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.”774

772 See p. 135f., where the three major rules are seen before Deuteronomy, and also, Ex. 34:11-16.
773 There’s mention of breaking down altars (Dt. 7:5), an admonition not to forget God 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, judgments and ordinances, preparing Israel to receive His Instruction again (this second time, 40 years after Mt. Sinai, but He doesn’t fully explain what His commandments and statutes, etc., 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. 12f., it’s fully addressed.
The Concern of James—Sacrificial-Sexual Idolatry

James knew the pagan mindset and that Yeshua would 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. 3:20; 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 and worship ‘because of the resurrection,’ etc.).

Without a standard from God in these areas the way is open for pagan days and pagan ways to be ‘baptized in the Name of Jesus,’ with everyone doing what appears to be right and ‘biblical’ 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 very 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 eyes 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 pagan gods and goddesses and incorporated them into the worship of Jesus Christ, 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 Christians it’s usually rationalized away — ‘Oh, we don’t worship Nimrod or Adonis. We worship the birth of Christ.’ Sounds good until you know the mind of God who says not to worship him with the same ceremonies that the pagans worship their gods with. What does a fir tree in one’s house have to do with the birth of the Jewish Savior in a stable in Bethlehem?

God has not relinquished His authority to the Church to sanctify pagan holy days ‘for Jesus.’ The Church sins greatly because it has thrown out God’s holy Standard—the Law of Moses, and it has led its people into the playground of Satan. Sure it’s fun to receive presents at Xmas and eat chocolate covered Easter bunnies, and that’s how Satan traps his prey—with ‘fun’ things, whether as I’ve just described or in equating sex with worship. After all, who wants to give up their bacon cheeseburgers when the Church teaches that you can have them because Christ did away with the Law. God says, “My people perish for lack of knowledge…” (Hosea 4:6). Spiritual discernment concerning Mosaic Law, how to biblically live out one’s faith in Yeshua, has been blinded by Man’s traditions.

The need to know what comprised salvation for the Gentile caused the Assembly in Jerusalem to convene. It was ruled that the Gentile was saved in the same way that the Jew was. James declared the four rules and then uttered one verse of Scripture that reveals that believing Gentiles were already learning and

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775 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).
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keeping Torah. James didn’t command the Gentiles to go to the synagogue because he knew that for more than eight years that Gentile Christians were learning Torah in the Jewish congregations and house churches in which they attended.776 These congregations were also called synagogues. The Assembly in Antioch, where the term ‘Christian’ is first mentioned (Acts 11:26), was an assembly of Jewish and Gentile Christians 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,777 along with their believing Jewish brethren. The Gentile Christians were already going to synagogues and learning the Law before Acts 15, and James realized that, so there was no need to compel them to go. This is first century Christianity.

All these assemblies met on the Sabbath day and celebrated Passover.778 Church History confirms that. Sunday and Easter, ham and ‘no Law,’ didn’t enter the Body of Messiah for more than 50 years after Paul’s death. No Gentile Christian was assembling on Sunday or keeping Easter in Paul’s day. None. That wouldn’t begin until about 120 AD,779 when all the Apostles were dead, and could not write letters, warning of this demonis heresy. These ancient Christian traditions are easily seen to be unbiblical in that there are no Scriptures stating that Christians should observe any of the days that the Church keeps today. Of course, pagans kept them, in honor of ‘their Christ,’ more than a thousand years before Yeshua was born in Bethlehem.

776 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, etc., kept the Passover. This angered Bishop (Pope) Victor of Rome. 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. 198-199f. If Gentile Christians weren’t learning Torah in the days of Acts 15:21, why would all those congregations be keeping Passover a hundred and fifty years later?

777 Acts 20:20; Rom. 16:5; 1st Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Phillem. 1:2 (see also p. 147, notes 620-621).

778 Rom. 3:31; 7:7, 12, 14; 1st Cor. 5:6-8; 7:19.

779 Bacchiocchi, From Sabbath To Sunday, pp. 165-198.
Conclusion

The second rule in Acts 15:20 was seen in Hebrew and Greek to mean *prostitution*, with the biblical emphasis being 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 the second rule (*zinute; prostitution*), and its derivatives in the Old Testament, overwhelmingly speaks of cult prostitution. *Judah and Tamar* revealed cult harlotry being practiced in Canaan in the days of the sons of Israel, and the Baal Peor affair at the time of Moses recorded 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. James 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 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. In the survey of the Greek word *pornayah* (harlotry) and its derivatives in the New Testament, its use is also 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 James were seen as his conceptual unit on sacrificial-sexual idolatry they were intended to be. The 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 Instructions for living known as Mosaic Law (Acts 15:21).

Today there aren’t many Christians going about thinking that eating sacrificial animals and drinking its blood to idols, or laying 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 heresy of a ‘Law-free Gospel.’

God’s desire for Christians is to understand the Hebrew Bible (Genesis through Revelation) from The Hebraic Perspective in order to fully emulate Yeshua:

1. God chose Abraham, not Socrates.
2. He bound Himself (in covenant) to Israel, not Greece.
3. He revealed Himself in power (the Passover and Exodus; Yeshua crucified and resurrected, etc.,) to Israel, not Rome.
4. His reality and character are reflected in His *words* in the Hebrew Bible; not the Koran nor the Book of Mormon.
5. He revealed and interwove *His* ways in Mosaic Law, the Prophets, the Writings and the New Testa-

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781 The Hebraic Perspective centers around Yeshua and the place of Mosaic Law 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 Talmud, etc., 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). See *The Hebraic Perspective*. 189
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

ment—not in the anti-Mosaic Law teachings and attitude of Christendom. *IBD* describes language as a reflection of a nation’s cumulative experiences, and that’s 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.’

*Only Israel encountered* the God of Creation. Only Israel was freed from Egyptian slavery, walked 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 had the true Messiah promised to them (Jer. 31:31-34; Micah 5:2), and no other people was given the New Covenant. The Hebrew Scriptures, especially the New Testament when it comes to Mosaic Law, needs to be understood for what it is saying to Christians, 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 Christian. God said to ancient Israel:

‘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)

The language and psyche of Israel is different than any other peoples on the face of the Earth because of what God did for her in the days of Moses, which included the giving of His ways. Yahveh gave His will to Israel when He gave her His Law. Keil says that 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.”

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The Concern of James—Conclusion

In the Beginning, both Jewish and Gentile Christians learned Mosaic Law until the door was closed in their face by what would become the Roman Catholic Church, but in the End, in these last days, the Spirit of Messiah is opening that door and no church can shut it! Christians are learning Torah again! Praise Yeshua!

With the proper Hebraic understanding of Acts 15:20-21, Church theology on Mosaic Law is completely shattered. Walking in Torah is a radical departure from Church theology, but it’s God’s time for Christians to enter into the fulness of His Wisdom for their lives. Many Gentiles have seen this and are walking in their ancient Hebraic heritage as part of the Commonwealth of Israel. Theologians can theologize Acts 15:20-21 away, but it’s a losing battle 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, and not sin against Him and receive of Rome’s plagues.\(^784\)

> “And I heard another Voice from Heaven saying, ‘Come out of her, My people! Lest you share in her sins and receive of her plagues!’” (Revelation 18:4)

A Christian who walks in Rome’s ways of illicit SEX is an honorary Roman Catholic. It doesn’t matter the name of the church he may go to. He is sinning against his Lord and he will receive of Rome’s punishment unless he makes a 180º about-face and begins walking out his faith in Christ the way Jesus did.

Thank God for The Concern of James! Because of it Christians are beginning to walk in the freedom of God’s perfect Law of Liberty. True freedom is in following Yeshua—not Rome:

> “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?!” (Rom. 6:1)

> “Therefore, by the deeds of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the Law is the (full) knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20)\(^785\)

> ‘I would not have come to know sin except through the Law.’ (Rom. 7:7c)

> “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” (1st John 3:4)

> “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 Ways of our risen Savior. He hasn’t changed:

> “Yeshua said to him, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”” (John 14:6)

> “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

We should imitate Yeshua—the Pope. There’s divine treasure in the Hebrew Scriptures, both Old and New, to learn of our God and King.\(^786\)

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\(^785\) The Greek word that is translated only as ‘knowledge’ is ἐπίγνωσις (epi’gnosis), which means, ‘full knowledge.’ Without Mosaic Law Christians are handicapped in their understanding of what constitutes sin, in God’s eyes.

\(^786\) 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 part of the New Testament and inspired by the Holy Spirit, one would assume that it’s accurate, but some Christian theologians disagree. They say it’s a poor historical account and not to be trusted, especially when it speaks about the Law. That, as we’ll see, is a smoke screen for those who don’t want to believe what Luke says about Paul and Mosaic Law, and what James says about going to the synagogue on the Sabbath day to learn Mosaic Law. As I bring out in my article, Paul & Acts, it’s clear that the Apostle to the Gentiles is a Jewish man who kept Torah all his life. That’s quite a jolt to those who think that Paul did away with the Law, but that’s why they say Acts ‘can’t be trusted.’ Those who attack both Luke and his Book of Acts use the unscrupulous, unscholarly and ungodly tactic of character assassination. Acts, though, is an extremely trustworthy document and Luke has faithfully recorded the essence of the speeches in Acts, including Paul upholding Torah. Both F. F. Bruce and I. Howard Marshall affirm this. Neither uphold Mosaic Law for Christians today, and so no one can accuse them of furthering their own theological agenda when they speak of the accuracy and reliability of Acts, and specifically of “Luke’s Paul.” 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. 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.’

Bruce praises Luke for what he wrote in Acts and he is grateful because it is the only divine, historical account of the early Church. He states that without Acts we would be at the behest of those who denigrate the Jews and the God of Israel (and Mosaic Law). 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.

787 See Paul and Acts.

788 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 theological position on Mosaic Law.

789 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{790}

Unfortunately, just like Marcion, the Church has misunderstood Paul. 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 and they are not the continuation of what God began at Mt. Sinai, but the eradication of it, except for what they think are the moral laws. 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 keystone in the arch of the Christian canon was confirmed.’\textsuperscript{791}

Bruce adds 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{792}

‘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{793}

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-observant. 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 the speeches made by Paul in his own defense in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome.’\textsuperscript{794} In

\textsuperscript{790} Ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{791} Ibid., pp. 4-5.
\textsuperscript{792} Ibid., p. 14.
\textsuperscript{793} Ibid.
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

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.795

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?796 Marshall, too, believes the Book of Acts is reliable, but first he states that Luke has taken a lot of ungodly criticism (i.e. 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.’797

Marshall refutes Haenchen’s claim from a number of authoritative sources. He 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.’798

Marshall then cites the work of 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.’799

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.’800

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796 1st Cor. 4:14-17; 11:1; 2nd Cor. 12:18; Phil. 3:15-17; 4:9; 1st Thess. 1:6-7; 2nd Thess. 3:7, 9.
797 Marshall, Acts, p. 35. It’s very telling, though, that no one questions Luke’s integrity or accuracy in his Gospel.
798 Ibid., p. 36. Italics are Marshall’s.
799 Ibid., pp. 36-37.
Is Acts Reliable?

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 states:

'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 true, and Church scholarship has heretically misunderstood Paul’s letters concerning Mosaic Law and a Christian’s biblical lifestyle. What Luke writes about Paul’s Torah observance is an historical fact. It’s also an extremely powerful refutation to all who claim 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 Jesus’? 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 Apostles Paul leading the way!

Some scholars, 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 saying 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…we find the apostles continuing to worship at the Temple of Jerusalem (Acts 2:46; 3:1ff.; 5:12, 20ff.; 42; cf. Lk. 24:52). It appears that the Hellenistic-Jewish party represented by Stephen was the first to discover that belief in Jesus as Messiah meant the abrogation of the order symbolized by the Jerusalem Temple (Acts 6:1ff.).’

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804 Ibid., p. 43.
805 Ibid.
806 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 the Apostles who walked with Yeshua never had. Marcion would have been proud of McKelvey. Here is a Christian scholar interpreting the Book of Acts to suit his ‘No Law!’ theology, but 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 ‘divine revelation’ that Temple sacrifice and Torah keeping weren’t right. Could it be that the Holy Spirit forgot to mention those monumental points to the Apostles?809 Or perhaps Jesus (cf. Acts 1:1-3)? According to many Church scholars like McKelvey the answer is ‘Yes.’

As for McKelvey’s understanding that Stephen and his ‘Hellenistic-Jewish party’ knew the Law was ‘no more,’ Witherington, in his own analysis of Acts Seven, writes that Stephen is not coming against either the Law or the Temple. Stephen 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’ (i.e. the religious leaders) ‘have failed to keep it, including the prophetic portions which foretold (of) 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.’810

Witherington sees that Stephen didn’t think 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 they believed in God and His Law. Witherington reveals that McKelvey’s understanding of the passage is not that of Stephen’s. Witherington is not alone in this.811

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809 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 in the days of the Apostles. 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 author, 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 Yeshua and truly have the Law written ‘on their hearts’ (Jer. 31:31-34). Until then, as Yeshua Himself said, Mosaic Law will remain valid for all Christians as God’s holy lifestyle (Mt. 5:17-19; Lk. 16:16; Rev. 12:17; 14:12).


811 Richard N. Longnecker, Author; Frank E. Gaebelein, General Editor; J. D. Douglas, associate ed., The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 9, The Acts of the Apostles (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan, 1990; Accordance Bible Software), paragraph 51.623. Longnecker states, “Stephen’s address begins with the fraternal greeting ‘Men, brothers and fathers’ (Andres adelphoi kai pateres, v. 2). It affirms throughout his deep respect for such distinctly Jewish phenomena as the Abrahamic covenant (vv. 3-8), circumcision (v. 8), and the tabernacle (vv. 44-46). Stephen repeatedly refers to ‘our father Abraham’ and ‘our fathers’ in such a way as to stress his ready acceptance of his Israelite heritage (vv. 2, 11-12, 15, 19, 39, 44-45). Yet his repeated use of the second person plural pronoun in vv. 51-53 shows his desire to dissociate himself from the nation in its recurrent refusal of God throughout its history. Therefore, taking the offensive, Stephen drives home his point: ‘Your’ fathers always resisted the Holy Spirit...Your fathers persecuted the prophets...You received the law put into effect through angels, but you have not obeyed it.’ Perhaps he jabbed with a finger at his accusers—though even a blind man would have felt his verbal blows.”

Is Acts Reliable?

Bruce and Marshall don’t keep nor are even sympathetic to Christians keeping Mosaic Law. On the contrary, they believe the Law to have been done away with, and so their scholarly view of Acts affirms both Torah and the authenticity of Acts for all Christians by two of the most significant scholars of the 20th century—who don’t follow it. They have shown that even Paul, and of course, all the other Apostles and Christians, kept Mosaic Law throughout the time frame of Acts (30-64 AD). Luke does us an enormous service in reporting Paul’s Torah lifestyle after the resurrection. 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—Mosaic Law theology. Those who say that theology cannot be taken from the Book of Acts, may not realize it, but they’re honorary members, ‘in good standing,’ in the Church of Marcion.

ceived the law in a most heavenly way but did not guard or observe it. All this frightful crime would be bad enough if they had never had or heard of this law of God, but God had made them his chosen people and had given them his glorious law, and they treated it in this manner. The tables are thus completely turned. Stephen stood accused of speaking against the law, but the Sanhedrin itself is convicted of utterly breaking and abandoning the law.”

Conrad Gempf, Acts, New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition; ed. D. A Carson. et al. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994; Accordance Bible Software), pp. 1076-1077. Gempf says, “It was rather Stephen’s audience who were against the prophets, the Holy Spirit who spoke through them and the Messiah, whose coming they predicted. Stephen closed with this fierce attack: it was his audience who should be on trial for violating the spirit of Judaism, not him.”

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, stating, ‘Because it’ (food) ‘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 by Acts 10, which takes place at least 8 years after the resurrection.

Marshall, Acts, pp. 180-181, 198, also misinterprets Peter’s Vision and says that Peter would ‘no longer distinguish between ritually clean and unclean foods.’ For Acts 15:19-20 (p. 253) he states, ‘the old rules of the Jewish religion no longer apply.’ For why Bruce and Marshall’s understanding of the dietary laws and Mosaic Law are wrong, and why the KJV is the accurate text among English Bibles today, see Law 102 (Jesus and the Pig, and Peter and the Pig), beginning on p. 6.

Another major indication that Mosaic Law hadn’t been abrogated is Luke’s use of the Feasts of Israel as time markers in Acts. Three examples of this are:

1. Acts 20:6, where Paul and his friends spend the days of Unleavened Bread (Passover week) at Philippi.
2. Acts 20:16, where Paul is hurrying to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost (the Old Testament’s, Feast of Weeks; Lev. 23:15-21; Dt. 16:16).
3. Acts 27:9, where Luke speaks of inadvisable sailing weather because ‘the Fast’ (Jewish for, the Day of Atonement; Lev. 16:1-34; 23:26-32) had already passed. How could Luke, a Gentile, use the ‘done away with’ Old Testament Feasts as time markers for his Gentile audience unless Mosaic Law was still valid?

Paul goes further then Luke. He exhorts the Corinthians in 1st Cor. 5:6-8 to keep Passover/the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and to make themselves ‘unleavened,’ as they are meant to be. First Corinthians was written about 52 AD, 22 years after the resurrection, by the man the Church teaches, did away with the ‘Jewish Feasts’ and the Law. 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 their ignorance eat pig, assemble on Sunday (and don’t keep Sabbath holy), but 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 luxuries. 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. The Holy Spirit is wanting the Bride to get ready for Messiah Yeshua. Ruti Yehoshua 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,814 and not the other way around.’815

Many say they don’t have to keep the Mosaic commandments, but they don’t realize that the commandments are God’s blessings, safety and 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 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).816

Many a Gentile finds himself as the ‘only one’ who sees the significance of Torah. Spouse, friends and church haven’t been touched by this. It’s a very lonely Journey, 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 and learning more about our God.

Christians need to repent of their 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 and should

814 Rom. 11:15-29.
815 Quote from Avram’s wife, Ruti Yehoshua (Jerusalem, Israel, December 16, 1996).
816 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

be thrown out and replaced with God’s holy days 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 and Eastern religions are 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 and pyramids, as well as Islam, Zen and Buddhism, etc., are all part of the lure of the satanic Fisherman. Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah) is also of Satan.817 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. God was the authority. 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). The Jewish people 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 Christian Gentile in Corinth had speared the Christian 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 in killing Zimri and Cozbi (Num. 25:1-15).818

Paul gave the Christian 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). Not repenting of it would have meant eternity in Hell for him. This is an 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 ‘behind them’ and do these instead of the commandments themselves).819

817 See Kabbalah, which is Babylonian witchcraft in Jewish clothes.
818 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).
819 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,
THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL—ACTS 15:20-21

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. He unveiled the commandment not to murder by revealing that hate was its essence—but the commandment not to murder still stands, and so does the Sabbath and Feast days. Yeshua revealed the divine essence of the commandments for us in His Kingdom. Paul says that the Law of Moses is spiritual and holy. The commandments are God’s spiritual pillars of righteousness or right way of living.

The Holy Spirit is preparing the Bride of Messiah by taking the veil away from her eyes so she can see the divine beauty of God’s holy Torah, His way of living, 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 is the foundation for bringing 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 for our day.

An Insight

The next set of quotes are excerpts from a letter of Ruti Yehoshua 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 New Testament? 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-mitzvah oriented belief system, which is a poor substitute for the Blood of Assurance and the Ruach 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, Thanksgiving and Christmas are all pagan, as well as the symbols of the cross, the fish, the Star of

not which day one can keep for his ‘Sabbath.’ (See Romans 14 and the Dietary Laws)

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.

Romans 7:12, 14.

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.

See Thanksgiving Day—Pagan?

Hislop, The Two Babylon, pp. 197-205.

The word for fish in Greek is ψαρς (ick’thus). It’s used as an acronym in Christianity, with each Greek letter made to represent a phrase meaning: Jesus Christ God’s Son Savior. In Hebrew the word for the fish god is Dagon דגו (dah’goan). Half fish and half man (its head and arms), 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 also known as Ichthys (the fish god), many centuries before Jesus was born. Hislop, The Two Babylon, p. 247 and note * (p. 194, n. 941 in The Full Hislop), states that it was, “From about AD 360 to the time of the Emperor Jus-
David, 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, the Ruach haKodesh

tinian, about 550…that our Lord Jesus Christ began to be popularly called Ichthys, that is, ‘the Fish,’ manifestly to identify him with Dagon’ (so that many Dagon worshipers would flock to the Roman Catholic Church).

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 Ichthys, 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 ‘Bacchus,’ p. 179); Hislop, The Two Babylons, p. 114, note * (The Full Hislop, p. 88, note 439).

There are some who contend that the Philistine Dagon wasn’t a fish god, but a god of grain, as the Hebrew word for grain דָּגָן (dah'gahn) and ‘fish’ דֹּגִּים (dah'gim) 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 and were dependent upon it for their food supply, had Dagon as their fish god (as did others).

Brown, NBDBG, p. 186: In 1st Sam. 5:4, when Dagon fell 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 fish gods and worshiped as such. The name Ichthys only began to be identified with Jesus, in the mid sixth century AD, 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 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 Christian classic is a ‘must read’ for every Christian because it overwhelmingly proves
will lead us to leave both perverted Camps. This doesn’t mean that those Camps are devoid of 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 like this? The Standard is holy Scriptures, correctly understood.

The ancient pagans worshipped their gods their way, and the Roman Catholic Church took those days and ways and ‘baptized’ them for their people. When the Protestants came along they blindly followed many of Rome’s practices and theologies. This is the problem when one throws out God’s Standard—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 not of God—it’s Satan’s counterfeits to God’s days and ways.

The Roman Catholic Church filled the vacuum with those satanic ‘holy days’ and ways, and today, most Christians believe that these pagan days and ways are of God, or that it’s alright with God. When Christians hear about this, tradition is so strong and so blinding that they don’t believe it. They cannot discern what is of God and what is anti-God in this vital area. The Veil remains over their eyes even when God’s Truth is revealed (and many Christians speak of the blindness of the Jews concerning Jesus!).

If people would read prayerfully Mosaic Law Jesus would reveal 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 Jesus. 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 interpreted by Yeshua and His Spirit, not the anti-Torah Church.

The God of Israel is not pleased with what the Church teaches about Mosaic Law. 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 every Christian will have a fuller walk with Yeshua and be a greater Light to both the Jew and the Gentile who need to come to Messiah Yeshua.

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that the Roman Catholic Church is not a true Christian church, but the largest Christian cult in the world. Read The Two Babylons—The Full Hislop.

See The Star of David for an understanding of why believers should not wear it, and read Jesus the Fish God? for why Christians shouldn’t wear the fish symbol, either. (These two articles also negate the so-called ‘Messianic Seal,’ which does not go back to the time of the Apostles, but is most likely, a Gentile Christian invention.)

Excerpt from a letter of Ruti Yehoshua (Jerusalem, Israel, December 19, 1996).
Some Advice

Our carnal hearts continually wander from the attitude of sacrificial service and ‘washing the feet’ of our 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 of Mosaic Law that applies to us is for us. In keeping His commandments and divine 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; Rom. 6:1-12f.). 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 your weekly readings. The Lord will lead you into observing the commandments at a godly pace. Trying to do them all ‘yesterday’ will only overwhelm you and 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 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. Mosaic 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 grace, 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 knows 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 Way, 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.

Our understanding is faulty. That’s why (His) love covers a multitudes of sins. We should be excited with

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828 John 13:14-17, 34-35.
829 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.
830 For a divine, yearly Scripture reading plan, see the Scripture Reading Schedule.
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 Papa 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). 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 catastrophe. 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! (cf. Acts Two; 1st Cor. 13, 14) 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 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 they eat, nor the dairy, is unclean.

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831 For some articles on the idolatrous and perverted things of Judaism see Jewish Idolatry, God—The Missing ‘o’, Talmud and Authority, The Kipa and Kosher—Biblical vs Jewish.

832 See p. 231 for my contact information.

833 See Kosher—Biblical vs Jewish for why the Rabbis are wrong about the separation of meat and dairy foods and dishes, and what the difference is between biblical and Jewish ‘kosher keeping.’

834 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, but this isn’t dealt with. 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 misunderstand Ex. 23:19. It has nothing to do with the separation of meat and dairy, but with an ancient pagan fertility rite that God prohibited for His people Israel. 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), and was aimed at stopping Israel from imitating 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. 1, 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.’”

835 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 manner.

Most Christians today don’t fully understand how pervasive pagan worship was in the day of James. *All the world was deeply involved in it.* From Chile to China and from Ireland to India, the world was enslaved to pagan gods and goddesses and their sexual and cruel practices. The names of the gods and goddesses would change in each country, but what revealed their origin was their similar personalities, 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 isconceptually mimicked by the Catholic Church with its (sprinkling) baptism of an infant. 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 nor of eternal life, as Rome teaches.

Water baptism is a picture 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. 1:2-3. 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!’ 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. It was a re-enactment of Gen. 1:2-3.

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 Yeshua comes to rule for a thousand 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 Christians 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 receive of her plagues!’”

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836 See **BOOKS AND CDS** for my Hebrew course and audio teachings on holiness, etc.

837 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.

838 See **Sam the Rock Thrower** for how to witness to a Jewish person, and also, p. 205, note 837.

839 Read and/or download The Two Babylons for free at The Two Babylons—The Full Hislop.

840 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 James gave the four rules as a divine filter against sacrificial-sexual idolatry and that Mosaic Law is for every Christian. There are five 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. The five Hebrew words are all found in the chapter on Passover, 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’har)………No……Ex. 12:43
2. hired worker …………………(sah’here)………No……Ex. 12:45
3. temporary resident ………….toe’shav)………No……Ex. 12:45
4. slave …………………………..(eh’ved)………Yes …Ex. 12:44
5. stranger; resident alien ……(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 Israel and her God, as 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.’ TWOT says it speaks of ‘a foreign god…Dt. 32:12,’ and ‘everything foreign (Neh. 13:30).’ This person worships other gods and wants to be alienated from Israel, her God and His Torah, all of which appear ‘foreign’ to him.

2. The hired worker could not eat of the Passover (Ex. 12:45). The noun means, a ‘hired laborer, hireling.’ 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.’ 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).’

4. The slave would eat of the Passover after his Hebrew master had him circumcised (Ex. 12:44). The

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841 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.

842 Davidson, The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon, p. 549. Another word that is associated with ben nay’har is zar (זר) and is translated into English as ‘stranger’ or ‘enemy,’ and 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.


845 Ibid., p. 352.

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slave served his master, doing his will\(^847\) and was ‘one’ with his master (Genesis 17:9-13, 23-27).

5. The stranger or resident alien \textit{would eat} the Passover once he and all the males in his house were circumcised (Ex. 12:48). The verb means to ‘dwell for a time.’\(^848\) Once circumcised, he kept the Sabbath laws (Ex. 20:10; 23:12) and was as loyal to God as the Hebrew native-born (Lev. 20:2).\(^849\)

\textbf{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).

\textbf{b.} Death was the punishment to the \textit{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).

\textbf{c.} It’s written that Yahveh loves \textit{this} Gentile, giving him his food and clothing (Dt. 10:18). He wasn’t to be oppressed by the Hebrew and he enjoyed the same rights as the native-born Hebrew (Ex. 22:21; Lev. 19:3; Jer. 7:6).\(^850\) 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 especially for him, the widow and the orphan (Dt. 24:20-21).

This Gentile was equal to the native-born Hebrew, but was called a \textit{stranger} or resident alien, or more properly, a \textit{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, \textit{how much more} under the New Testament, where the Gentile has been circumcised in the heart by God? (Col. 2:11)

The Gentiles now 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 \textit{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 \textit{ger} (#5, stranger/resident alien):

Ex. 12:19: ‘Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your homes, for whoever eats what is leavened, that person must be cut off from the Congregation of Israel, whether he is a \textit{stranger} or a native of the Land.’ (The seven days pertain 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 \textit{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 \textit{stranger} (#5, \textit{ger}) 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. \textit{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)

\(^{847}\) Davidson, \textit{The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon}, p. 583.

\(^{848}\) Ibid., p. 134.

\(^{849}\) Harris, \textit{Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament}, vol. 1, p. 156.

\(^{850}\) Ibid. Although the stranger (#5, \textit{ger}) is in a separate category from other non-Hebrews, there are times when the word is also used as a general designation for anyone not of Israel (e.g. Dt. 10:19; 28:43). It’s also possible that a #1 could become a #5 (cf. Is. 56:3, 6-7).
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 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
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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.’

The last cite in Isaiah doesn’t speak of the stranger (ger), but of the ben nay’har (#1, the foreigner). It reveals that Yahveh’s compassion extends to even those who had been formerly excluded from Israel. Salvation is open to everyone who turns to the one true God through Messiah Yeshua.

Welcome to the Commonwealth of Israel (the Kingdom of God), where the wall of partition has been broken down:851

‘So then, you are no longer strangers and foreigners (#1 and #2 most likely), 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. 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 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)

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‘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 rare roast beef is wrong. It’s also a sin (Lev. 7:26; 19:26; 2nd Sam. 14:32-34; Ezk. 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 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
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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.852

Rev. 17:1, 15-16: “Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and 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.’”

852 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 that of the great mother goddess of the pagans.

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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. The fire on the Altar of Sacrifice, of the Tabernacle of Moses, was never to go out.\(^{853}\) It symbolized the eternal fire that is the God of Israel. It’s a picture of the Fire of God on the heavenly Altar. Scripture states that our God is a consuming Fire.\(^{854}\)

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 nature or 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 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.’

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\(^{853}\) Lev. 6:13: ‘Fire shall burn continually on the Altar. It’s not to go out.’

\(^{854}\) Dt. 4:24; Heb. 12:29; also Ex. 19:16f.; Lev. 9:23-24; Lk. 12:49; Rev. 4:5.
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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, 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
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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 danced wildly with drums and other instruments pounding away. They would eat the sacrificed child as part of their worship to gods like Molech, Baal and Dagon. Those gods demanded child sacrifice—a 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 peo-

855 See also p. 35, note 147.
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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’...On a fragment of the Baal Epic, Anath appears in an incredibly bloody orgy of destruction. For 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.”

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 joy of brutally extinguishing human life, with sex aligned as ‘worship’ to entice pa-

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856 Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 412.
857 Ibid.
858 Ibid.
859 Ibid.
860 Ibid.
861 Ibid.
gan men and women. This was ancient and modern paganism and the so-called ‘New Age’ religions:

Astarte was a Canaanite goddess ‘of sensual love.’\(^{862}\) Licentious worship was conducted in honor of her,\(^{863}\) and even ‘Solomon succumbed to her voluptuous worship (1st Kings 11:5; 2nd Kings 23:13).’\(^{864}\)

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.’\(^{865}\) He is also ‘the son of Dagon.’\(^{866}\) The ‘inhabitants of Canaan were addicted to Baal worship, which was conducted by priests in their temples.’\(^{867}\)

‘The cult included animal sacrifice, ritualistic meals and licentious dances’\(^{868}\) 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).’\(^{869}\)

_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).’\(^{870}\)

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.’\(^{871}\)

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.’\(^{872}\)
Appendix

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 difference is their different names.

The god Vulcan is an example of how the gods and goddesses ‘reappear’ 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 brutal murderer and devourer of infants sacrificed to him. Vulcan is also known as Hephaistos (the Devil in Tarot cards), 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.’ In his identification with Nimrod, Vulcan possessed many of the titles and characteristics of Nimrod. 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.’*875 *Nimrod was the head of the fire worshipers.*876

‘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.’*877

‘Vulcan (was) the god of fire of the Romans, and Nimrod, the fire god of Babylon.’*878

“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 devourer*879 …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.’***880 (see Rev. 12:4b) As “the representative of Moloch or Baal, infants were the most acceptable offerings at his altar.”*881

“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 estab-

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*874 Ibid., p. 229. Hislop’s cite for this is Heathen Mythology Illustrated, p. 75.
*875 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.”
*876 Ibid.
*877 Ibid.
*878 Ibid., p. 230.
*879 Ibid., p. 231.
*880 Ibid. Hislop cites ‘Lempiere, Saturn’ as the source for his information.
*881 Ibid.
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lished word in our own tongue for a devourer of human flesh” (cannibal). 883

Vulcan was a vicious god, but he was only a picture of who Nimrod was, 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 Mosaic Law was thrown out, and some words of Paul were falsely interpreted to justify it, the door swung wide open 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 did as the perfect, sinless Israeli.

882 Ibid., p. 232. The “word Cahnah is the emphatic form of Cahn. Cahn is ‘a priest’; Cahnah is ‘the priest.’”

883 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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