

# The Early Assembly's Activities

## Loosing and Binding

### In Acts 15

The success of the jubilant Apostles in converting many Gentiles to the Messiah was not popular with everyone in the Jewish community. Some felt Gentiles who had converted to the Messiah were not being taught in the ways of Judaism. The problem comes to light in this fifteenth chapter of Acts. Simply stated it was that Gentiles became followers of the Savior and were baptized without having the background of Judaism. More than that, the Gentiles were not circumcised!

Note that it was not the leaders of Judea who questioned the activities of the Apostles, but common people. "*And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, [and said], Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.*" (Acts 15:1) These "certain men" had troubled a number of assemblies, verse 24. "Certain men" even today contend all males are to be physically circumcised even though baptized. We understand men need not be circumcised, but infant children should. Baptism is circumcision made without hands.

It is interesting that the problems of the true believer are brought about by some self-righteous people who have set their own standards of righteousness, and go about striving to get followers after their way. But that is another topic.

Peter had been teaching since Pentecost that calling on Yahweh's Name was the important lesson to be learned from that momentous day when the Holy Spirit was given. Peter had taught in Acts 2:21, "*Whoever calls upon the name of Yahweh shall be saved,*" (quoting from Joel 2:32). Nothing said about being an initiate of Judaism. Paul taught in Romans, Galatians and Ephesians the equality of the Jews and Gentiles before Yahweh without observance of the Talmud and the customs of Moses.

It was almost 20 years since Yahshua had gone to the heavens and a certain group of Jewish converts insisted that the growing number of Gentile converts be circumcised and keep Moses' law. The missionaries of the Assembly at Antioch had accepted uncircumcised Gentile believers into their ranks. Paul and Barnabas along with some others were sent by the Assembly to Jerusalem to see what should be required of the Gentiles being taken into the Assembly.

Paul had gone to the Jerusalem Conference and presented the message he preached to the Gentiles. The Assembly leaders gave their approval to his message and Paul's protégé, Titus, was not required to be circumcised.

#### **THE JERUSALEM ASSEMBLY'S INFLUENCE**

In Acts 8:14, the Jerusalem apostles had sent Peter and John to lay hands on the newly baptized brethren in Samaria. A later Jerusalem meeting recorded in Acts 21:18 was to clear suspicions of Paul. Jerusalem was looked upon as spiritual leader of the scattered assemblies. James, the Savior's brother, was evidently the leader and a strong influence for the truth. Now they were to recommend what be done with Gentile converts. Peter found no requirement for circumcision, neither in the Old Testament nor in Yahshua's teachings in the New to qualify for immersion into Yahshua's saving name.

Peter then arose and reminded the brethren that he was given the "Keys to the Kingdom," meaning that he would be the one to welcome the three groups into the Assembly, the Body of Messiah. This is often misunderstood, for the "Keys to the Kingdom" is to be baptized into Yahshua's saving name. The Roman church alleges that Peter here was given the "Office of the keys," as the first "**Pope!**" This is a misunderstanding.

While the Savior was still on earth, He asked the question who the disciples thought He was. Peter answered, "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living Elohim!" Notice Yahshua's reply:

*"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Assembly; and the gates of hell [grave] shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."* (Matthew 16:18-19 AV)

Not only was Peter given the "Keys" but was told that the decisions made on earth would be honored by the highest Authority in the heavens. The decision on circumcision now comes into play. Some laws are still binding on Yahweh's people (like the Ten Commandments) some are not. We are loosed from them (like animal sacrifices), which are not required in the Melchisedec priesthood.

Being baptized is to become a part of the body of Messiah, the Assembly! Peter opened the door to Jew, Samaritan, and Gentile. In Acts 2:38 the Jews were told to repent of their past actions and be baptized into the saving name of Yahshua. This was new doctrine, but the "binding" part the Apostles taught was necessary for the forgiveness of sins. "Repent and be baptized in Yahshua's saving name."

In Acts 8:12-17 Peter (along with John) was instrumental in seeing to it the Holy Spirit was given to the Samaritans. It was Peter who, in a three-part vision was told in vision to eat from the sheet full of unclean animals, Acts 10:9-16. Peter objected that he had never eaten unclean animals. He soon understood that obedient Gentiles were bidden into the Assembly when three men came to him, Acts 10:17.

Confirmation of this fact came when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles, Acts 10:45. The Gentiles were then heard speaking in tongues and magnifying Yahweh. Peter commanded that the Gentiles be baptized in the name of Yahshua Messiah because it was evident Yahweh accepted them. Thus, Peter opened the door of the Kingdom to Jews, first, then Samaritans, and then the Gentiles. Note Peter's words:

*"Of a truth I perceive that Elohim is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that fears Him, and works righteousness, is accepted with Him."* (Acts 10:34-35)

It obviously was the experiences Peter underwent that convinced him there was no necessity for circumcision when Yahweh had poured out His Spirit on the Samaritans and Gentiles even before baptism. When one is obedient to Yahweh's word, and seeks a closer walk with Him, that is true repentance. This gave Peter the courage to speak in favor of accepting Gentiles as they were.

*"And Elohim which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as He did unto us, and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith."* (Acts 15:8-9)

Peter emphasizes that Yahweh gave the Holy Spirit to both Samaritans and Romans, that every one is saved by the grace of Yahshua. Circumcision was required for any man to enter the Temple under the Levitical Priesthood. However, Yahshua is now our High Priest and we are not required to offer animal sacrifices in the Temple. We can now approach Yahweh directly anywhere, any time, when we accept Yahshua, as He explained to the woman at the well:

*"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. Yahweh is Spirit: and they that worship him must worship [him] in spirit and in truth."* (John 4:23-24)

Weighing the matter of circumcision among the Gentiles, both Paul and Barnabas recalled their experiences of miracles and wonderful things which had taken place among the Gentiles who gladly accepted their message.

James, the brother of Yahshua then summarized the decision of the Apostles:

*"Simeon (Peter) hath declared how Yahweh at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written."* (Acts 15:14-15)

Peter's experience with the Gentiles being given the Holy Spirit before baptism convinced James that circumcision was not required by Gentiles in order to be baptized. It was Peter who opened the door for Gentiles to be in the Kingdom, and baptized them with no prior circumcision. In so doing, he "loosed the law of circumcision" and did not require such for those to be baptized. Baptism was **binding**; circumcision was **loosed**.

James goes into some lengths to show that Yahweh's purpose is to reveal Himself to the Gentiles, to take from them a group of people for His Name. He is not trying to save the world now, but to take out a nucleus of people from both Israel and the Gentiles; these will become the kings and priests to rule under Yahshua in the Kingdom, Rev. 1:6. The salvation of the world comes later, Rev. 20:6. James calls attention to Amos 9:11-12 which had prophesied of the rebuilding of the Tabernacle for the residue of mankind:

*"After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after Yahweh, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my Name is called, saith Yahweh, who doeth all these things."* (Acts 15:16-17)

James emphasizes that Yahweh is now calling out a special people, a remnant, to serve Yahweh. The called out ones today are of the Melchisedec priesthood under Messiah. Animal sacrifices and circumcision are not required of us, for this "residue of men" will be baptized into Yahshua's name, and called by His name. Circumcision has a deeper spiritual meaning already explained in the Old Testament as being humble and of a willing heart:

*"Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked."* (Deuteronomy 10:16)

Upon being baptized, one stands before Yahweh as if he or she had never sinned. Their sins are washed away, and they are justified in Yahweh's eyes, washed clean of past sins. Henceforth they can go directly to Yahweh in prayer through Yahshua to have sins forgiven. They are now a new creature, a son or daughter of the Most High Elohim. Baptism is a cleansing, and is referred to as "the circumcision made without hands."

*"In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Messiah."* (Colossians 2:11)

James then goes on to caution the brethren not to make things difficult for the new Gentile converts by expecting them to keep the sacrificial laws and be circumcised. When one is converted to Yahweh's truth and follows it, then he is circumcised in heart and mind. That is what Yahweh wants!

James' next suggestion was that the Apostles write a letter to all Gentiles with the following message:

*"But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day."* (Acts 15:20-21)

In this letter to the Gentiles four special proscriptions were mentioned: 1) have nothing to do with idols, 2) no fornication, 3) eat no strangled animal, 4) drink no blood.

These customs of the Gentiles were part of their worship. They had before worshiped idols and dealt with temple prostitutes. They often ate strangled animals to ingest the life-blood and strength of that animal. They also drank the animal's blood, assuming the strength was in the blood and they were now receiving the power and life of the bull, or goat.

The Gentiles should avoid these four things which were their customs and habits. It is imperative that verse 21 be included to complete their instructions:

*"For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day."* (Acts 15:21)

The Gentiles are to gather each Sabbath in the synagogues where they will learn Yahweh's truth. When they assemble with fellow believers, the laws of Moses will be preached and explained to them. Thus, they will learn of Yahweh and His laws and commandments each week as they continue to grow in grace and knowledge.

James' summary of the proposed action pleased the apostles and elders along with the entire assembly. They decided to send their selected men to Gentiles in Antioch with the following letter:

*"The apostles and elders, your brother, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings, We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. So we all agree to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—men who have risked their lives for the name of our Sovereign Yahshua Messiah. Therefore, we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell."* (NIV Acts 15:23-29)

## **BINDING AND LOOSING**

This 15th chapter of Acts clarifies that the Gentiles were accepted into the assembly without having to offer animal sacrifices or be circumcised. The Levitical priesthood is set aside as we are now under Yahshua in the Melchisedec order. To enter into the Kingdom we are to be baptized into Yahshua's saving name. Baptism is **binding** or commanded for the forgiveness of sins. Now we apply the laws spiritually as we realize Yahshua magnified the law and made it honorable.

Thus, Peter was the one who opened the door to the Kingdom. The law of circumcision was **loosed** and honored in the heavens. But we are still bound by the Ten Commandments. This was the main theme carried about the area throughout the book of Acts:

*"And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the assemblies established in the faith, and increased in number daily."* (Acts 16:4-5)

Paul also acceded to the decision that circumcision was not required of the Gentiles before or after baptism. Note:

*"Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of Yahweh." (1 Corinthians 7:19 AV)*

Paul reminds us that we are to keep Yahweh's Commandments, as does John in the last book of the Bible, and then adds we are to keep the same faith as Yahshua has:

*"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of Yahweh and the faith of Yahshua." (Revelation 14:12 AV)*

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