

Summary of Acts 15: Gentiles, Torah & Early Church

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Acts 15: Gentiles, Torah & Early Church

Main Topic: Understanding Acts 15 and Gentile Obligations

- **Overview:** The session revisits Acts 15, clarifying misunderstandings about whether Gentiles in the New Covenant are obligated to keep the Torah (Law of Moses).
- **Historical Context:**
 - Acts 15 occurs years after the resurrection, after some of Paul's letters (e.g., Galatians) were written.
 - The early church faced debate over what requirements should be placed on Gentile believers.
 - There were multiple sects of Judaism in the first century, each with different interpretations and extra-biblical laws regarding Torah observance.
- **Yeshua (Jesus) and the Law:**
 - Yeshua upheld the Torah and never taught anyone—Jew or Gentile—to violate it.
 - His criticism was directed at how religious authorities applied the law, not the Torah itself.
- **Paul's Role:**
 - Paul, once a top authority in Judaism, understood both biblical and extra-biblical laws.
 - In Galatians, Paul opposes 'works of the law'—a term referring to sectarian, extra-biblical requirements (such as ritual proselyte circumcision), not

Torah observance itself.

- **Acts 15 Council:**

- Some Pharisaic believers argued Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses according to their traditions for salvation.
- The council determined this was an undue burden—a "yoke" neither Jews nor their ancestors could bear (referring to extra-biblical sectarian laws, not the Torah itself).
- Gentiles were to abstain from idolatry, sexual immorality, strangled meat, and blood—practices associated with pagan worship—before being integrated into the community.
- The expectation was that Gentiles would attend synagogue and learn the Torah (Law of Moses) over time.

Supporting Topics & Key Points

- **'Works of the Law' Explained:**

- The term refers to specific sectarian requirements used as entrance criteria into Jewish communities (supported by Dead Sea Scrolls references).
- Paul's criticism was of these boundary markers, not general Torah observance.

- **Synagogue Instruction:**

- The Law of Moses was read and taught in synagogues every Sabbath, which was the ongoing source of instruction for Gentile believers.

- **Extra-Biblical Laws vs. Torah:**

- The speaker distinguishes between God's law (Torah) and man-made traditions or "club rules" of various Jewish sects.
- Yeshua and Paul both opposed imposing these extra requirements as a means of entry into God's covenant community.

- **Inclusiveness of the Covenant:**

- The Sinai covenant intended to be a light to the nations, not exclusive to ethnic Israel.

- There is "one law for the native and the foreigner."

Decisions & Conclusions

- The council in Acts 15 decided not to impose ritual proselyte circumcision or extra-biblical requirements on Gentile believers as a condition for salvation.
- Gentiles must abstain from pagan practices as an initial requirement; further instruction would come through continued learning of the Torah.
- The Law of Moses remains the instructional foundation for both Jews and Gentiles in the early community.

Action Plans

- Continue teaching Gentiles the Law of Moses and the prophets as the basis for holy living, empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- Encourage Gentile believers to abandon pagan practices and participate in the community's ongoing instruction.

Questions Raised/Addressed

- Should Gentiles keep the Torah? — Yes, but not through extra-biblical or sectarian requirements.
- What is the "yoke" referred to in Acts 15? — The added burdens of man-made traditions, not the Torah itself.
- Are the four requirements in Acts 15 exhaustive? — No; they are initial essentials to separate from paganism.
- Where should believers look for instruction? — The Torah and the Prophets, as read in synagogues and later, the writings of the apostles.

Additional Notes

- Modern parallels are drawn between denominational requirements and the first-century "club rules" of various Jewish sects.
- The teaching emphasizes that faith in Yeshua is the entry point, followed by walking in the ways of the Torah as empowered by the Spirit.

