One of the biggest bones of contention in the 1st century among believers, was what constituted “salvation” for Gentiles who wanted to join the Body of Messiah. The confusion arose because you had two kinds of people coming into one body of belief.

The first were the Jews (Yahudim), who came from a culture that included the Torah of YHWH as it had been given through Moses at Mount Sinai.

The other group, made up of Gentiles, was coming, primarily, from a background of Greek paganism and philosophy which had never included the Torah of YHWH.

It must be noted; the first Gentile believers were people who had already been a part of the synagogue system or had prior knowledge of the Torah.

The conversion of those in Samaria by Philip in Acts 8, are from the latter group who had prior knowledge of the Torah having been descended from those put into the land by the Assyrians after the northern house of Yisra’el was sent into exile in 722 BCE (see: 2 Kings 17).

Acts 13 and 14 represent those who had been a part of the synagogue services prior to hearing the good news of Messiah Yahushua.

Paul (Sha’ul), as was his habit, first preached in the synagogues on the Sabbath day and when some of the Yahudim rejected his message, he turned to those Gentiles who were already experienced in the Torah culture.

Peter (Kepha)’s experience with the Gentile man named Cornelius is an example of a Gentile with prior knowledge of the Torah.

 Acts 10:2 says that Cornelius was “a devout man, and one that feared Elohim with all of his house”. This statement is clear evidence that Cornelius had pre-conversion knowledge and adherence to the Torah.

As mentioned, there were two groups of people who were coming to Messiah in the 1st century, the Torah experienced and those with no Torah knowledge.

The Jews, already having the Torah, came to understand that they needed to add belief in Messiah to their lives.

However, many struggled in understanding that the Gentiles could come into the belief even though they had never obeyed the Torah.

A controversy ensued because some Jews were teaching that the Gentiles had to be circumcised according to the Torah **BEFORE** they could be saved. This debate led to the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

**Act 15:1**  And certain men came down from Yehuḏah and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised, according to the practice of Moses, you are unable **to be saved**.”

Some debate that these were believing Jews who were simply in error, while others claim them to be unbelievers. Paul clarifies the issue by calling them “false brothers” (see: Galatians 2:4).

**Act 15:2**  So when Sha’ul and Barnaḇa had no small dissension and dispute with them, they arranged for Sha’ul and Barnaḇa and certain others of them to go up to Yerushalayim, to the emissaries and elders, about this question.

The words “dissension” and “disputation” come from Greek words meaning,” to stand” and “to debate”. So, Paul and Barnaba stood against these “false brothers” in what appears to be a heated discussion. The conclusion of this debate was that a group of brothers be sent to Jerusalem to inquire with the leadership there.

**Act 15:3**  So, being sent on their way by the assembly, they passed through Phoenicia and Shomeron, relating the conversion of the nations. And they were causing great joy to all the brothers.

**Act 15:4**  And having arrived in Yerushalayim, they were received by the assembly and the emissaries and the elders. And they reported all that Elohim had done with them.

**Act 15:5**  And some of the **believers** who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, rose up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Torah of Moses.”

Clearly the Pharisees here are believers and yet the discussion returns to circumcision and keeping the Torah. The question, then, is in what way is the Torah associated to our salvation, or is it at all?

**Act 15:6**  And the emissaries and elders came together to look into this matter.

**Act 15:7**  And when there had been much dispute, Kěpha rose up and said to them, “Men, brothers, you know that a good while ago Elohim chose among us, that by my mouth the nations should hear the word of the Good News and believe.

**Act 15:8**  “And Elohim, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Set-apart Spirit, as also to us,

**ֱAct 15:9**  and made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by belief.

To understand Peter’s statement here, you need to understand his involvement in the conversion of the Gentile named Cornelius. I encourage you to stop now and read that passage (Acts 10).

To summarize Acts 10, Kepha was given a dream which he interpreted to mean, YHWH would accept any “man” who believed in Yahushua, and that these “men” were no longer to be considered common or unclean, as non-believing Gentiles were (See: Acts 10:28).

The sign that confirmed YHWH’s acceptance of Cornelius was the Set-Apart (Holy) Spirit that came upon him and his household.

It was this experience that confirmed to Peter that YHWH had accepted Gentiles into the assembly when they believed, no longer considering the Gentile a foreigner but a son, just like the native-born son (Compare Leviticus 19:33-34).

It is important to see here that Cornelius’ belief had already been proven by his previous obedience; however, he was still considered an outsider by the religious Jews.

YHWH’s point in this passage is to express that Cornelius’ belief had made him right and that having been cleansed through belief he could no longer be considered an outsider.

**Act 15:10**  “Now then, why do you try Elohim by putting a yoke on the neck of the taught ones which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

This verse is misunderstood by most teachers today because they believe the “yoke” that was on the fathers and their descendants was the Torah, but that is not the case at all.

The yoke that they couldn’t bear, was the additional religious dogma (Oral Law, later to be codified in the Talmud) that required works (Torah observance) **as a means of acceptance** before YHWH. Their pseudo-obedience to the Torah, through their man-made religious dogma, lacked the element of belief.

**Heb 4:2**  For indeed the Good News was brought to us **as well as to them**, but the word which they heard did not profit them, **not having been mixed with belief** in those who heard it.

They had made the Torah a religious rite of acceptance when it was never meant to be such. The Torah was given to those who were already following YHWH, so that they would know how to please Him by how they lived.

Did not YHWH deliver Yisra’el from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb **BEFORE** He gave them the Torah to live by?

Yes, He did! He saved them from the death Angel through the blood, delivered them out of Pharaoh’s power by the death of the firstborn, baptized them in the Red Sea and gave them the “Living Waters” at the rock of Horeb, all **BEFORE** He gave them the Torah.

This same pattern happens in our salvation today. We are saved by the blood of Yahushua, the Passover Lamb, delivered from the power sin and Satan through the death of YHWH’s “only begotten Son”, we are then baptized in the waters for the remission of sin and receive the “Living Waters” of His set apart Spirit, all **BEFORE** we are required to obey the Torah.

What is the promise of the “New Covenant?”

**Jer 31:31**  “See, the days are coming,” declares יהוה, “when I shall make a renewed covenant with the house of Yisra’ěl and with the house of Yehudah,

**Jer 31:32**  not like the covenant I made with their fathers in the day when I strengthened their hand to bring them out of the land of Mitsrayim, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them,” declares יהוה.

**Jer 31:33**  “For this is the covenant I shall make with the house of Yisra’ěl after those days, declares יהוה: I shall put My **Torah** in their inward parts, and write it on their hearts. And I shall be their Elohim, and they shall be My people.

**Jer 31:34**  “And no longer shall they teach, each one his neighbour, and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know יהוה,’ for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares יהוה. “For I shall forgive their crookedness, and remember their sin no more.”

The “New Covenant” is, firstly, to the house of Yisra’el and the house of Yahudah, no Gentiles mentioned here. Secondly, it is the Torah that is place within our inward part (spiritual man) and which shall be written on our fleshly (pliable and compliant) heart.

**Eze 36:22**  “Therefore say to the house of Yisra’ěl, ‘Thus said the Master יהוה, “I do not do this for your sake, O house of Yisra’ěl, but for My set-apart Name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went.

**Eze 36:23** “And I shall set apart My great Name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. And the nations shall know that I am יהוה,” declares the Master יהוה, “when I am set-apart in you before their eyes.

**Eze 36:24**  “And I shall take you from among the nations, and I shall gather you out of all lands, and I shall bring you into your own land.

**Eze 36:25**  “**And I shall sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean** – from all your filthiness and from all your idols I cleanse you.

**Eze 36:26**  “And **I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you**. And I shall take the heart of stone out of your flesh, and I shall give you a heart of flesh,

**Eze 36:27**  and put **MY SPIRIT WITHIN YOU. AND I SHALL CAUSE YOU TO WALK IN MY LAWS AND GUARD MY RIGHT RULINGS AND SHALL DO THEM.**

Do you see that the “New Covenant” in Messiah’s blood was to give us a new heart, and that this new heart was not going to be stony (stubborn and rebellious) but a heart of flesh (humble and submissive)? Upon this heart of flesh, He was going to write His Torah so that we would **desire** to obey Him.

He was going to give us a new spirit, into which He was going to put His Torah, so we would know Him. Then He was going to put His Spirit in us to cause (lead) us **into obeying His Torah** (the Truth – Ps 119:142).

However, the new covenant needed to be established in the blood of His Son Yahushua, because all of us, Jew and Gentile, had already been convicted as sinners by the Word (Romans 3:23) and condemned to death for our disobedience.

So, we needed to take on the Messiah’s blood by belief, to be justified (made right-acquitted) from that condemnation, **BEFORE** any of this work could be accomplished in us. Belief first, Torah second!

The yoke Peter is referring to in acts 15:10 is the yoke of legalism (Torah observance **TO BE SAVED**), which is a religious doctrine of men and not spiritual truth!

**Now back to Acts 15**,

**Act 15:11**  “But through the favour of the Master יהושע Messiah we trust to be saved, in the same way as they.”

Here Peter brings the discussion full circle. First, he had stated that the Gentiles are to be accepted because they believe, as Cornelius had, and that despite having the Torah, they, the Jews, also had to believe in Yahushua to be saved. **THE TORAH SAVES NO ONE!**

The Torah was not given to save anyone! The Torah did not save Yisra'el from Egypt, it was given to them AFTER they were saved from Egypt! Here, the Council will determine the same conclusion for the Gentiles.

**Act 15:12**  And all the crowd was silent and were listening to Barnaḇa and Sha’ul declaring how many miracles and wonders Elohim did among the nations, through them.

**Act 15:13**  And after they were silent, Ya‛aqoḇ answered, saying, “Men, brothers, listen to me:

**Act 15:14**  “Shim‛on has declared how Elohim first visited the nations to take out of them a people for His Name.

**Act 15:15**  “And the words of the prophets agree with this, as it has been written:

**Act 15:16**  ‘After this I shall return and rebuild the Booth of Dawiḏ which has fallen down. And I shall rebuild its ruins, and I shall set it up,

**Act 15:17**  so that the remnant of mankind shall seek יהוה, even all the nations on whom My Name has been called, says יהוה who is doing all this,’

**Act 15:18**  who has made this known from of old.

James (Ya’aqob) is quoting from Amos 9:11-12 to show the Gentile inclusion was always in YHWH’s plan.

**Act 15:19**  “Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the nations who are turning to Elohim,

The context here is Torah obedience, specifically circumcision “**TO BE SAVED**”. Works as a pre-salvation requirement, which is something James is saying they should **not** demand of the Gentiles.

No work, whether circumcision or other Torah commandment, is a **prerequisite** for acceptance into the body of Messiah Yahushua. We are saved by belief and not by works, yet that does not eliminate the requirement of works **AFTER** we are saved.

**Act 15:20**  but that we write to them to abstain from the defilements of idols,a and from whoring,b and from what is strangled,c and from blood.d

**NOTE**: a. Exo 22:20; Lev 17:7; Deu 32:17;

Deu 32:21; 1Co 10:14; 1Co10:20-21.

b. Num 25:1-3; Lev 17:7.

c. Gen 9:4; Eze 33:25 (Strangled - One way of eating meat with blood); Pro 21:25.

d. Lev 17:10-14.

Today, many teachers say these four commands are the only commandments the Gentiles must obey. They take up a Rabbinical Jewish Tradition that says the Gentiles are only subject to the “Noahide Laws” (laws given to Noah).

However, this doctrine is not founded in the Scripture but is, as I’ve said, part of the Rabbinical Tradition. The Scripture says that there is only one Torah for both the native born Yisra’eli and the stranger (Gentile) who sojourns with them.

**Num 15:15**  **One law** is for you of the assembly and for the stranger who sojourns with you – **a law forever throughout your generations**. As you are, so is the stranger before יהוה.

**Num 15:16**  **One Torah** and one right-ruling is for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you.’ ”

In verse 15 an interesting statement is made, that says, “as you are so is the stranger before YHWH”. What do you think this means? The answer is in Leviticus 19.

**Lev 19:33**  ‘And when a stranger sojourns with you in your land, do not oppress him.

**Lev 19:34**  ‘Let the stranger who dwells among you **be to you as the native among you**, and you shall love him as yourself. For you were strangers in the land of Mitsrayim (Egypt). I am יהוה your Elohim.

The phrase “stranger that sojourns with you” is referring to a Gentile who has joined with Yisra’el in covenant with YHWH. These Gentiles are to be considered the same as a native born Yisra’eli, a co-heir with Yisra’el of the promises and covenants.

Paul refers to the Gentiles as those who have been “grafted in” to Yisra’el through belief in Yahushua (Romans 11) and that we are both (native born and stranger) one in Messiah (Ephesians 2:11-19; Galatians 3: 28).

This “both, one” doctrine is NOT a “New Testament” doctrine but is in fact, a Torah commandment! It has always been YHWH’s intention to have one people for Himself from every nation and tribe and tongue, and that they would all keep one law, one Torah!

These four rules mentioned in acts 15:20 are not for the “Gentile Church” as some teach, for there is no such thing.

These four commands are in fact, all associated to pagan idol worship. The pagan priest would strangle the sacrifice to get the blood into all the animal’s muscles and then they would cut its throat and drain its blood into a chalice from which adherents would drink. Then, they would eat the meat that was full of blood and top their celebration off with an orgy or temple prostitutes.

**NOTE**: All four of these rules are Torah commands: Genesis 9:4; Exodus 22:20; Leviticus: 3:17; 17:7, 10-12, 26; Numbers 25:1-3; Deuteronomy 12:23-24; 32:17, 21; Ezekiel 33:25; Acts 21:25; 1 Corinthians 10:14, 20-21.

Verse 20 of acts 15 is not given to the Gentiles as “pre-salvation” rules, nor are they given as the only rules for a so-called “Gentile Church”.

These four rules were given so the new Gentile believers would no longer participate in pagan idolatry, which would allow them to participate in this Shabbat services in the local synagogues where they could then learn from the Torah.

**Act 15:21**  “For from ancient generations Moses has, in every city, those proclaiming him – being read in the congregations every Sabbath.”

The entire context of the debate is about pre-salvation requirements, which all the apostles, including Paul, agreed were not valid. There are no works of Torah that could give salvation because it was the Torah that condemned us to death for sin when we disobeyed.

This passage is NOT, however, teaching that the works of the Torah are done away with or that they don’t apply to the Gentiles.

This passage is a contextual argument about what we are saved by. According to the totality of Scripture, especially in the Messianic Writings, salvation comes by belief in the Good News of Yahushua the Messiah and not by any works of any kind, whatsoever. There is no such thing as pre-requisite works to receive the justification of belief.

Torah works are a **post salvation** requirement to prove or perfect our belief (James 2:17-26; Deuteronomy 8:1-3). Torah obedience is a heart matter to prove our sonship and has nothing to do with our justification (salvation) from the death penalty for past sin.

The death, burial and resurrection of Yahushua, the Son of YHWH, as the Lamb of Elohim, saves us from the death penalty for sin, through His blood, and delivers us from the power of Satan and the bondage to sin.

Just as the Passover Lamb’s blood saved Yisra’el from the death Angel and the death of the firstborn delivered them from the power of Pharaoh and their bondage to slavery in Egypt.

The Torah came **after** their salvation and deliverance from Egypt, just as Torah observance comes **after** our salvation and deliverance.

“There is nothing new under the sun”, according to the wisest man that may have ever lived, King Solomon, and all the stories, yea every jot and tittle, in the Tanak are relevant to our salvation today, in words and pictures, patterns and Truth.