**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 2-11-2024  
Jesus and the Jewish Calendar; An Introduction**

In our Thursday morning Bible study here at Chestnut Grove, we have been journeying through the Book of Acts for a number of weeks now. I just love the Book of Acts. It helps us so much in bridging the gospels with the letters that we have in the New Testament. And this book gives us a great picture of many things that were happening as the church was birthed at Pentecost and grew far and wide so quickly. It is truly amazing.

Structurally, the very centerpiece of the Book of Acts is Acts chapter 15. Does anyone remember what happens in this chapter? The Jerusalem Council took place. This council was a special gathering that took place to discuss and discern how to handle Gentiles who were choosing to follow Jesus.

As much as the earliest followers of Jesus truly loved the Lord and loved one another, it is shocking to practically all of them that God would accept non-Jewish people to be part of His church without them being Jewish. The clearest example of this is perhaps the story of Cornelius. Cornelius was a Roman centurion. He would be considered a God-fearer. This meant that he loved and worshipped the God of Israel, but he did not become Jewish. He did not become circumcised, nor did he choose to follow the laws given by God to Moses, such as eating a kosher diet.

And yet, Cornelius becomes a believer in Jesus. The Holy Spirit clearly leads Peter to meet with him and as Cornelius hears Peter preaching the gospel, suddenly Cornelius becomes noticeably touched by God. The Spirit of God came upon him in the same way that the Holy Spirit came on the followers of Jesus at Pentecost. And he and his household would then be baptized in water.

But when this news comes that Peter entered the house of Cornelius, other Christians were upset at Peter. It reminds me of the *I Love Lucy* show. I picture Rickie saying to Lucy, “Lucy, you got some splaining to do!” Peter had to explain his actions. Why did he enter the house of an unclean gentile? And not only that, why would he eat with him? What has gotten into you, Peter?

Peter explained that it was God who was all over this process from beginning to end. It was He who had clearly led Peter to Cornelius’ house and the Holy Spirit clearly marked Cornelius as a true Christian in the same way that that the Spirit has come upon the group on Pentecost that we read about in Acts chapter 2. After this, the Jewish Christians praised God and celebrated that the gospel of Jesus was even for the Gentiles too.

But it wasn’t only Cornelius that was a Gentile and now a follower of Jesus, in Acts 13 and 14, we find numerous formally idol-worship pagans who are now turning to faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. While this was amazing and wonderful, there was a faction within the church that said that all of these Gentile followers of Jesus needed to become fully Jewish as well if they were to be considered Christians.

And so we come again to Acts 15. We are not going to read the account of the Council at this time, but to summarize what took place at this council, it began with Christians that happened to be Pharisees say that these gentiles needed to be required to keep the law of Moses and be circumcised.

But then Peter got up and spoke about his God and made a choice that the Gentiles might hear the gospel from his lips. This was certainly not referring to Cornelius and perhaps other stories that are not included in the Book of Acts.

And then Paul and Barnabas shared story after story from their missionary trip and how God powerfully demonstrated through signs and wonders that these new believers in Jesus were acceptable in God’s sight through faith in Jesus.

And finally, James, the brother of Jesus Christ, who would have been considered the main leader in the church at Jerusalem, made the judgment that Gentiles should not be required to obey the law of Moses. Faith in Christ is what saves, not obeying or not obeying the Law of Moses. This verdict was a big deal and this was clearly God’s will, as we read of the many events that the Holy Spirit is clearly orchestrating in these chapters of Acts.

Now, did the church always do well in living out this instruction? Unfortunately, no. One example of a failure is described in the Book of Galatians. In Galatians 2:11-16 we read the following:

**11When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. 13The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.**

**14When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?**

**15“We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles 16know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.**

A couple of observations here. Cephas is Peter. Cephas is the Aramaic equivalent of Peter. It is the same word, just a different language. It is just another way of saying the same.

Paul is saying that he had to confront Peter because of his hypocrisy. Peter was eating with the Gentiles, but then when some Christians arrived that believed Gentile Christians should be circumcised, he withdrew from eating with the Gentiles.

Peter was trying to please everyone rather than standing in the truth of the gospel. And the truth of the gospel is that in the new covenant, eating a kosher diet is not required to be faithful to God. What matters is submission to Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Paul tells Peter in front of everyone, **“You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”**

Paul is saying that Peter’s actions are speaking louder than his words. And his actions were not only misrepresenting the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, but are also influencing other Jews, including the very godly Barnabas. Peter needed to repent and get back on track, which I’m confident that he did.

But this topic of table fellowship relates to the broader understanding of other Jewish customs and practices. This would include the Jewish calendar. Should Gentile Christians be expected to seek the Jewish feast days? Are they to keep the Sabbath? And if not, what are Christians to make of these days? Are they still important?

You can see how this is a loaded and complex question. But thankfully, there is a clear and simple answer. That answer is no. Christians are not required to keep the Jewish calendar. Just as Christians are not required to eat a kosher diet and male Christians are not required to be circumcised, the special days and festivals in the Jewish calendar are not something that Christians are expected to observe.

The gospel is by grace alone, through faith alone, through Christ alone. Jesus saves. Any type of requiring and mandating these things on other Christians is a distortion of the gospel.

When you read Paul’s letter to the Galatians, Paul is really upset that the Christians in Galatia were duped into believing that they needed to put themselves under the Law of Moses in order to be true Christians. Paul says, “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?”

Paul understood more than anybody that trying to perfectly observe the law in order to try to make yourself righteous with God will only lead to a dead end. It has always been about a personal relationship with God and having one’s heart spiritually circumcised that is what God is after.

Now this leads to important questions for Christians? What are Christians to make of these special days in the Jewish calendar? Do they have any relevance? How we answer this question is very important.

To help us answer this question, it is beneficial to hear one of my favorite passages in all of Scripture, 2 Timothy 3:16. Paul writes this, **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”**

This means that every Scripture matters. Every verse is meant to be beneficial to Christians. This means that there is something to be gained by studying and keeping to grasp what God is teaching through every chapter of the Bible.

This means that even though Christians should never be pressured to eat kosher and are no better if we do or do not each kosher, at the same time there is also something to be gained by studying what the kosher laws were meant to do.

For example, I know of at least two really important spiritual truths regarding the kosher laws that Christians are called to learn from. First, the foods that were prohibited for the people of Israel to eat would have been considered scavenger foods. The nobility of the nations around Israel would have not eaten these foods.

This meant that the giving of these food laws was one way of God teaching the people of Israel that they were called to be royalty and nobility. There were set apart by God to be a royal priesthood in this world. And they would be reminded of this daily, through their diet.

As Christians, we are to follow the spirit of these dietary laws by remembering our royal identity as God’s people today. We as Christians are to be a royal people today. We do not need to try to do this by our dietary choices, but through our daily living as a people set apart for God to be a blessing to the nations.

And second, at that time what a covenant or special agreement would be established between people or between nations, a meal would be shared between them.

Israel’s unique diet, however, was meant to be one way that they would not enter into covenant with the pagan nations around them. God knew that doing this would lower Israel down to their level. Unfortunately, Israel did enter into covenants with the pagan nations anyway. And not surprisingly, this helped contribute to their turning away from God.

As Christians, we live out the spirit of this law by choosing to not enter into covenant with unbelievers. We are told in the New Testament to not be unequally yoked. In others words, Christians are strongly advised to not enter into marriage or other binding agreements with those that are not living for Jesus. When those unions do take place, it certainly makes growing in the faith more difficult.

This principle, friends, also applies to the Jewish calendar. As Christians, we are not required to observe any of the Jewish special days. But with that being said, is there still value of studying them? Yes. Is there still value of seeking to view them in light of Jesus? Absolutely.

An amazing truth is that Jesus embodied and fulfilled or will fulfill each of these special days. And so beginning next week we will be taking a journey exploring many of the special days found in the Jewish calendar. I truly believe that as we study them in connection with Jesus Christ, it will strengthen our faith in our Savior and deepen our love for all of God’s Word.

So buckle up. We are going to dive right into it next week with a closer look at the Sabbath. How are we to see it in the light of Jesus?

Let’s pray…

<https://ebible.com/questions/12875-why-was-peter-also-called-cephas>

The Acts of the Apostles by David G. Peterson

[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)