

† Engaging God's Word- the essential lens of *context*.

- **TODAY return to Journey through book of ACTS. PART 8: REVOLUTION, COUNTER-REVOLUTION, & RESOLUTION**
- **By word count, almost exactly in the Center of Luke's history of early church. SO, good time to ask a VERY basic question. WHY ARE WE DOING THIS? WHY take what is going to be close to 2 years of Sundays to work our way through this ancient text?**
- **BECAUSE this is BIBLE. As people of Faith in Christ, we believe scripture is not just an ancient text, but God's revelation of himself, his truth, to humanity.**
- **THEREFORE, what we believe this book to SAY is of utmost importance. For the last 1900 years, give or take, people have been wrestling with NOT just what this book SAYS, but what it means.**
- **To get at this- to ENGAGE GODS WORD- appropriately, and intelligently, we bring different tools to the table- tools, principles, INTERPRETATIONAL LENS's through which we seek to understand and apply Scripture today**
- **MANY SUCH LENS, one most important is CONTEXT.**
- **THE MOST basic contextual lens is the separation of scripture into TWO ERA's. The BEFORE, and the AFTER, at the center of which stands JESUS CHRIST. Speaking, of course, of the OT and NT.**
- **SIMPLIST form- OT is story creation, the fall, and God's work to bring people back to him through the nation of ISRAEL**
- **NT is story of God revealing himself and fulfilling his purpose of redemption through JESUS CHRIST.**
- **QUESTION THEN- do we read, and interpret, these two contexts DIFFERENTLY? Is there an interpretational PRINCIPLE by which we read the NT that is different from how we read, interpret, and most importantly APPLY the OT?**
- **The answer is a resounding YES**
- **This principle is at the very heart of New Testament understanding of who God is, what He has done through Jesus Christ, the nature of faith itself, and how we relate to God once we enter into faith.**
- **AND WE SEE THIS PRINCIPLE (essential lens which differentiates how we see the OT and NT) worked out in REAL TIME in the historic event found in the 15th chapter of ACTS. An event we call the JERUSALEM COUNCIL, which may be one of the most important and least taught stories in the entire NT.**
- **BEFORE CONTINUE- today is FIRST of 4 messages need to hear ALL FOUR... Today is the backstory. TODAY IS SUNDAY JULY 11th- PE, TO, thanks..**

† Revolution/ Counter-Revolution

- **Acts 15 is the clarifying event of a revolution- a revolution that began with the birth of Jesus Christ, came to fulfillment through his DBR, and continues on to this very day. AND LIKE ALMOST EVERY revolution in history, this one was still in its infancy when it faced a counter-revolution: PUSHBACK!**

- **This counter-revolution was not external. There were many enemies that sought to destroy the early church- but the true threat of counter-revolution came from inside the church, led by believers rooted in a desire to return to the OLD WAY.**
- **The revolution Jesus began may best be summed up in Romans 3... listen for KEY STATEMENTS...**

Romans 3:20-25 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. ²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.

- **Now- it may be that you fully understand what that means- maybe could explain it to someone. But in the first generation of the church, as the gospel was spreading and the full teaching of God's Grace was just becoming known through Paul... THIS WAS UNPRECEDENTED. THIS WAS BRAND NEW. And because it was COMPLETELY NEW, it DID AWAY WITH- it nullified, what was OLD. THAT is a key statement**

✠ The old and the new

- **A central theme in the New Testament is the concept of the OLD and the NEW- specifically, how the OLD is gone, and what has NEW has come.**
- **See this in reference to US, as individual believers. 2 Corinthians 5:17.... "If anyone is in Christ..."**
- **But what is NEW also refers to the entire means/operating system by which we RELATE TO GOD- from initial belief to being part of the church to everyday life, until the day we die.**

It is this **New Way** of being in relationship with God that the New Testament calls the NEW COVENANT.

- **SO, if there is a NEW COVENANT that has come, that means there is an OLD Covenant that has gone... NEED TO unpack that statement. FIRST need to grasp that God, of his very nature, is a ...**

✠ The covenantal God

Genesis 12:1-3

- **A covenant is a solemn and binding agreement. God, at different points in the history of the OT, placed himself in a binding agreement with humanity, and the nation of Israel.**
- **God makes multiple covenants in the OT, but two are the most important (at least for discussion now)**
- **FIRST IS ABRAHAMIC COVENANT. God comes to Abraham, and in Genesis 12, we see this:**

The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Key! The Abrahamic Covenant was UNCONDITIONAL

- **God’s covenant with Abraham, from which He would build the nation of Israel as His chosen people, was ONE SIDED. God said- Abe, from you I’m going to build the nation of Israel as my chosen people, and I’m going to do this, no matter what you do- this covenant is unconditional and everlasting”**

† The Mosaic Covenant

Exodus 19:3-8

- **The other great covenant is the MOSAIC COVENANT, wherein God gives to Israel, through Moses, THE LAW. This happens in EXODUS, and Israel’s attempts- and failure- to keep the Mosaic Law dominates the rest of the OT narrative.**
- **In Exodus 19, God has delivered the Nation of Israel from Egyptians, they have arrived at Mount Sinai. Moses goes up on the mountain, and we see THIS:**

*Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ⁴ ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now **if** you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” ⁷ So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak. ⁸ The people all responded together, “We will do everything the LORD has said.”*

Three key things about the Mosaic Covenant:

- First, the LAW was the framework through which Israel would know, obey, and experience the presence of God.
- Second, the Mosaic Covenant was an act of God’s GRACE. Through the Law, God gave Israel a means to know Him, to be with Him, and to experience His presence and provision.
- **THE LAW was the means by which Israel would be God’s CHOSEN PEOPLE.**
- Third, the Mosaic Covenant was CONDITIONAL
- **God said “IF YOU OBEY ME AND KEEP MY COVENANT”... “THEN you will be my treasured possession” THEN you will know my presence, provision, and blessing.**
- **And the people said “WE AGREE! WE WILL DO IT!”**
- **EXCEPT WHAT HAPPENED? They DIDN’T do it!**
- **How long did it take the people of Israel to violate their new Law? LIKE FIVE MINUTES! Which of the 10 commandments, which they had already been given, which one did they violate? THE FIRST ONE! Really the first and second. “YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GOD’S BEFORE ME... “YOU SHALL NOT MAKE IDOLS”. What did they do? They made their own God, in the form of an idol- the golden calf.**
- **THIS SETS UP the history of the rest of the OLD TESTAMENT. The Israelites live in a covenant relationship with God, one they fail to keep, resulting in a repeating cycle of national sin, national collapse, national repentance, God’s deliverance, restoration.... And then rebellion again.**
- **But nonetheless, over the generations the Mosaic Law becomes indelibly ingrained into the very fabric of Hebrew life, consciousness, and worship of God. IMPORTANT- for the OT**

Hebrews, THE LAW was not just a religious framework by which they related to God. THE LAW was the FRAMEWORK OF LIFE ITSELF.

- **It was into this framework that Christ was born- and the Revolution was on.**

✠ Enter, the Revolution

- **As Paul says in Galatians 4**

Galatians 4:4-5 *But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.*

- **WHEN CHRIST- through His death and resurrection- ESTABLISHED THE NEW COVENANT- the Mosaic Covenant became the OLD COVENANT.**
- **O.C, about which the writer of HEBREWS SAID THIS:**

Hebrews 8:13 *By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.*

- **SO- THE MOSAIC COVENANT- the framework through which Israel- and humanity for that matter- would know, obey, and experience the presence and provision of God... THE MOSAIC LAW- the relational framework for knowing God throughout almost all of the OLD TESTAMENT... BECAUSE OF WHAT JESUS CHRIST ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH HIS DEATH, BURIAL, AND RESURRECTION... that framework, covenant, and the law... was now OBSOLETE. NO LONGER IN EFFECT.**
- **THIS BRINGS US TO ACTS 15. Paul and Barnabas have been preaching the revolutionary message of the NEW COVENANT- the Grace of God in Jesus Christ- through the Northern Mediterranean world, and they’ve now returned to the home base of the new and growing Gentile church, in ANTIOCH.**
- **As the scene opens, we see the Revolution of the NEW COVENANT meet pushback from the keepers of the OLD COVENANT.**

✠ The Old Covenant pushes back

Acts 15: 1-5 *Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”*

- **In other words, Faith in Christ is NOT ENOUGH. You also must obey the Mosaic Law- meaning you must remain under the Mosaic Covenant.**
- **YES, forgiveness and salvation are through CHRIST, but we are STILL UNDER THE MOSIAC COVENANT.**
- **In response, Paul and Barnabas: “NO, we are not!”**

² *This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ³ The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.*

⁵ *Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.”*

– **SO THIS WAS THE ISSUE before the council, and still before the church today.**

✠ **The issue! On what basis does a person receive the Grace of God: forgiveness and new life in Christ?**

Is it through FAITH in Christ, or faith in Christ PLUS the Law?

- **As we will see in the next three Sundays, after much prayer and discussion, this gathering arrived at a decision that was both emphatic and clear.**
- **Salvation is by GOD’S GRACE, through FAITH IN CHRIST- ALONE. IN CHRIST, we are NO LONGER UNDER THE MOSAIC LAW, and we are no longer under the mosaic COVENANT.**
- **CHRIST HAS INAUGURATED A NEW COVENANT, and the Mosaic Covenant/Law is now the OLD COVENANT, and it is now OBSOLETE.**
- **CHURCH! The Jerusalem council was a pivotal moment in the development of the early church, and the significance of this event cannot be overstated.**

✠ **Not just history**

- **BUT NOT just history lesson- event, what resulted from it, is incredibly important for US TODAY.**
- **You see- for entire history of church, right up to this day, there has been temptation to place ourselves BACK UNDER Old Covenant. It’s counterintuitive, but true. CONSIDER these questions....**
- **As NC disciples of Jesus, how do we interpret and apply moral, ethical, and religious commands of OT?**
- **To what degree are commands of OC/OT relevant to how we live in an obedient relationship to God, now? If we teach “As followers of Christ, this is how you should live in obedience to God”, do we include OT commands and ethical structures in that teaching?**
- **If no longer live under OC law, then what is source for moral and ethical truth regarding HOW WE LIVE?**
- **On what basis does a person become incorporated as part of the family of faith? Is it through their faith in Christ, or do we place additional requirements of moral, ethical, religious, and cultural expectations?**
- **IF that answer is YES, then DO WE CREATE BARRIERS that MAKE IT UNNECESSARILY DIFFICULT for people to turn to God?**
- **Acts 15 and the story of the Jerusalem Council speaks into all of these questions that are so important for the church today. And we will take our first step into this discussion NEXT WEEK.**