

The Accusation the Apostle Paul's Enemies Could Never Prove

When we first meet Paul in the book of Acts, we meet a Pharisee and a student of Gamaliel, the man who defended the apostles before the Sanhedrin. Paul is a Greek-speaking Jew from Tarsus.

His Hebrew name is Sha'ul (Saul); his Greek name is Paul. Contrary to popular Christian legend, Jesus did not change his name from Saul to Paul. Instead, Diaspora Jews (those outside Israel) commonly had both a Hebrew name and a Greek name. The same custom is common even today among the Jewish people. When among Greek-speakers he used his Greek name, Paul.

Paul never abandoned the Torah. He remained a Torah-observant Jew until the day he died. His enemies claimed otherwise. False rumors circulated about Paul and his work among the Gentiles.

When Paul came to Jerusalem after many years of spreading the gospel among the Gentiles, he met with James the brother of Yeshua and the other elders of the community—the survivors among the Master's original disciples and His family. James presided over the Jerusalem council of elders. History remembers James as a man so devoutly Torah-observant that he was called “the Righteous” even by non-Messianic Jews. The original disciples of Yeshua and the ultra-observant brother of Yeshua voiced their concerns regarding Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. They had heard the rumors that Paul taught against Torah, but they were not willing to believe the slander.

Nonetheless, the Jerusalem elders expressed their concerns, not because they suspected Paul of actually teaching against

Torah but because they wanted to clear his name among the believers:

“Then they said to him, “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are who believe, and they are all zealous for the law. They have been informed concerning you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to observe the customs. What then shall be done? The assembly will certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come (Acts 21:20–22).”

According to James and the elders, three specific allegations had been raised against Paul:

- 1. He taught Jews to turn away from Moses. (Moses = Torah)**
- 2. He taught Jews not to circumcise their children.**
- 3. He taught Jews not to live according to the customs. (Customs = Oral Torah)**

Ironically, most Christian theologians have accepted these false allegations as gospel truth. In their zeal to prove that Paul taught against the Torah, they naturally want to believe that the accusations reflect the actual teachings of Paul. According to Christianity’s traditional view of Paul, they are quick to agree, “Of course Paul taught against Torah, against circumcision and against Jewish customs.”

But he did not. His opponents and adversaries misconstrued his message to the Gentile believers as an anti-Torah posture. Paul taught the Gentile believers that they did not need to become Jewish (circumcised) and live as Jews (under the full yoke of Torah and Jewish tradition), but he did not teach that message to Jewish believers. His rule for all the churches was that Jews should remain Jewish and Gentiles should remain Gentile. He taught that the Gentile believers needed to

observe the Torah's basic ethics (the laws of Noah) and the apostolic decree, but that if a Gentile did become Jewish (circumcised), "he is obligated to keep the whole law" (Gal. 5:3).

James and the Jerusalem elders had already endorsed Paul's message to the Gentiles. They said, "Take these men and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may have their heads shaved. Then all will know that what they were told concerning you is nothing, but that you yourself live in observance of the law. As for the Gentiles who believe, we have written and concluded that they should observe no such thing, except that they abstain from food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from strangled animals, and from blood" (Acts 21:24–25).

They rejected the notion that Paul was not Torah-obedient. Had Paul been anything other than a Torah-observant Jew, he should have seized the moment to correct the Jerusalem elders. He did not. Instead, he consented to their plan to demonstrate to all of Jerusalem that he was, indeed, Torah-observant. {eoa}

Note: The preceding was excerpted from Daniel Lancaster's book Restoration, published by First Fruits of Zion. You can order it for free here.

Daniel Thomas Lancaster is a writer, teacher and the Director of Education at the Messianic ministry of First Fruits of Zion (), an international ministry with offices in Israel, Canada and USA, bringing Messianic Jewish teaching to Christians and Jews. He is the author of several books about the Jewish roots of Christianity and the Jewishness of the New Testament, and he is the author of the Torah Club Bible study program (). He also serves as the teaching pastor at Beth Immanuel (), a Messianic Jewish synagogue in Hudson, Wisconsin. Daniel can be reached at outreach@.