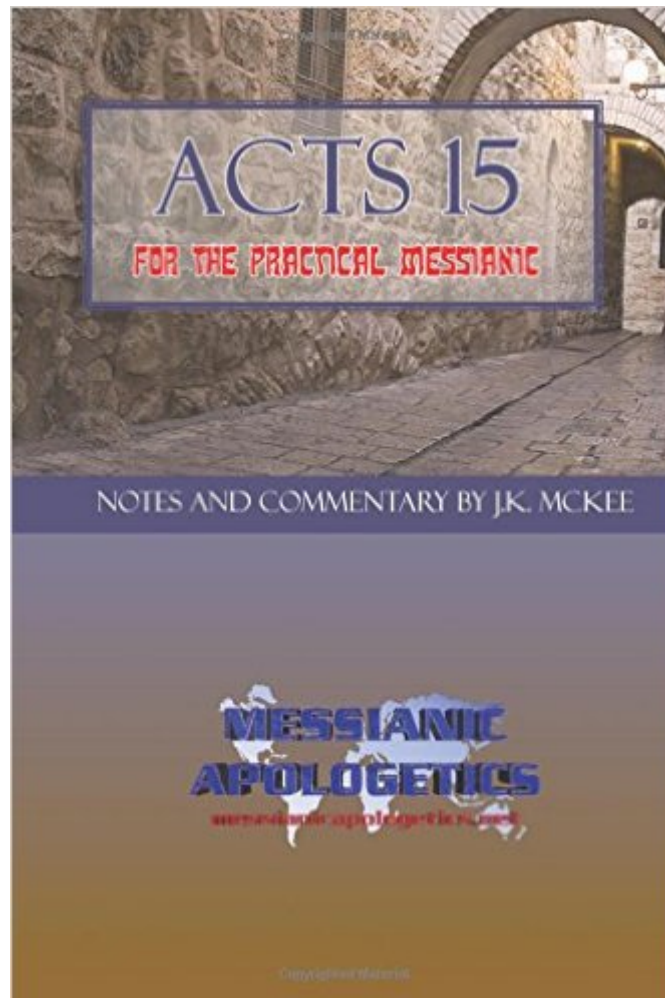


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# Acts 15 For The Practical Messianic



## Synopsis

There is some shifting going on in today's Messianic world as it concerns the unity that Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are to experience in Messiah Yeshua, and whether or not non-Jewish Believers are really called to obey God's Torah. Much of this controversy is not based in an objective, historically conscious reading of the Scriptures but instead in shifting ministerial alliances and religious politicking. The answer is not going to be found in evaluating who-said-what, but will be found in going to the Biblical text and in accurately evaluating what the trajectory of God's Word is. Around two decades after the ascension of Yeshua into Heaven, the message of salvation began being spread to the Mediterranean world outside the Land of Israel, and many from the nations eagerly embraced it. Was this just a bi-product of the message going to the Jewish people in the Diaspora, or was it the Father's Divine plan? What was to take place with the new, non-Jewish Believers? Did they have to be circumcised and become Jewish proselytes? Or were all of the Believers, regardless of their ethnicity, to come together in a new environment rooted in the completed work of God's Son? The Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 assembled to consider these issues, and it fairly ruled on what was to be done. Too many of today's Messianics refer to Acts 15 without a great deal of consideration for the context of the events as they took place in the First Century C.E. We often assume things that we should not assume, and we overlook things that we should not be overlooking. This study critically examines Acts 15 in detail, is engaged with current Acts scholarship, and tries to properly compare and contrast the ancient setting of the Jerusalem Council with some of what we see going on in the emerging Messianic movement today. What can we learn from all of this? What important lessons have we avoided for far too long?

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Since the dawn of the Christian era, Christians have taught that Acts 15 is the basis for a "Law-free" gospel. And, more recently, certain vocal Messianic organizations have adopted this consensus view of Acts 15, claiming that the Gospel is Law-free for Gentiles. But the question is whether the consensus view can be accurate when it has failed to address the following exegetical barriers: (1) textual variants present in Acts 15: "...from the scribe's standpoint, changes were made to promote a doctrinal or ideological view not in the text being copied.... Intentional alterations include.... often small changes... or longer additions such as found in manuscripts of the 'Western' textual tradition, where anti-Judaic... and other tendencies have been detected," (Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament by Stanley E. Porter) (2) lack of a definitive explanation of James' fourfold decree: "At the heart of the chapter is verse 20, the council's decree. Yet for New Testament scholars this verse has been a puzzle; even under the most careful historical enquiry, the meaning and rationale of the decree were never entirely clear," Proselytes and Pressure Cookers: The Meaning and Application of Acts 15:20 by John Proctor). Schnabel, for example, explains that there are as many as six different interpretations of the fourfold decree today! (see Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Schnabel, 2012). McKee believes that such confusion has caused some severe problems for Believers: "...the Body of Believers today has lost much of its direction for the future. There are many problems among those in our faith today.

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