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**Non-Christian Beliefs Mentioned in the Bible: Part 10**  
***Judaizers***

By Freddy Davis

**Introduction**

The word Judaizer comes from the Greek verb *Judaize (Ioudaizein)*. This word is used only once in the Greek New Testament, in Galatians 2:14, when the apostle Paul publicly challenged Peter as he was attempting to influence Gentile converts to "judaize" (to live according to Jewish customs). The word is, obviously, related to the word "Jew," but its meaning must mostly be inferred from the teachings we see in the biblical writings about the actions and beliefs of this group.

The Judaizers held a set of beliefs that are strongly spoken against in the New Testament. They were a group of early converts to Christianity from Judaism who believed that people had to accept certain Jewish customs and beliefs in order to receive Christian salvation. They, themselves, hung on to the Mosaic traditions – particularly circumcision – while they attempted to be a part of the new Christian community.

**History**

It seems, according to a story in the book of Acts, that the Judaizer movement first emerged within the early church around 49 A.D. in Antioch. The first time the activities of the "Judaizers" are mentioned is in Acts 15:1 where we read, "Certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'"

It seems that the Judaizing Christians were causing problems in the Antioch church. Because of this, Paul took an entourage from Antioch to Jeru-

salem for a church council to deal with this matter. Paul and Barnabas, in particular, wanted to inquire of the apostles and elders in the Jerusalem church concerning this issue. The people in the Antioch church concurred and sent a group to get this matter settled.

We learn in Acts 15:5 that those who were primarily promoting the Judaizer point of view were Pharisees who had come to believe in Christ. This is a very logical place for the Judaizing philosophy to have begun because the Pharisees were very strong legalists to begin with. They insisted that Gentiles could not be saved unless they were first circumcised and obeyed the Law of Moses.

Paul made the case that, in Christ, there was no longer any distinction between Jew and Greek, as God had saved the Gentiles by faith (Acts 15:8-9). He stated this strongly in Galatians 2:16 where he said: A man is not justified by observing 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 observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

After much discussion, the Jerusalem council decided that the Gentiles should not be subject to circumcision. We find the final proclamation in Acts 15:23-29. It reads: Forasmuch as we have heard that certain who went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls; to whom we gave no commandment; it seemed good unto us, having come to one accord, to choose out men and send them unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore

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Judas and Silas, who themselves also shall tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that ye abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which if you keep yourselves, it shall be well with you. Fare ye well."

Following that decision by the Jerusalem Council, it seems that the group of Judaizers who were most committed to that theological position then abandoned Palestine and went to other places in an effort to convert the Gentiles to their views. These people were probably the "false apostles" Paul often mentioned in his letters. They were also known as Nazarenes or Ebionites. As Paul, then went around doing his missionary work, he came across these Judaizers in various places and had to confront their teachings.

### ***The "Judaizers" vs. Paul in Galatia***

Within a few years of the conference in Jerusalem, the "Judaizers" are seen actively working in Asia Minor and Greece. Paul addressed the problems they were causing in his letter to the Galatians which was written somewhere around 55-57 A.D. In this letter, Paul first affirmed his apostleship and declared his authority as a church leader to speak on proper Christian theology. As he shared, he reproved the Galatians for even listening to the false Judaizer theology and called them "foolish. He made it abundantly clear that salvation comes only through Christ, and that the Law of Moses could do nothing for the Christians in Galatia.

### ***The "Judaizers" vs. Paul in Corinth***

Seemingly, the "Judaizers" moved into the life of the church in Corinth around 57 A.D. It appears that

when they had become established, they brought charges against Paul related to his theology and his authority as an apostle. So, in 2 Corinthians, Paul strongly defended himself and condemned the Judaizers. He did this by comparing his ministry to that of the Judaizers so the believers in Corinth could clearly see the differences, and grasp how the Judaizers were false teachers.

### ***The "Judaizers" vs. Paul in Colossae***

The "Judaizers" who infiltrated the church in Colossae in Asia Minor did so around 60-61 A.D. The main issue that became a problem in this church seemed to regard the observance of festivals and the food prohibitions found in the Law of Moses. In particular, the Colossians were taught that they had to follow the commandments of Moses not to eat certain foods, and to observe the Sabbath and other holy days. Paul made it clear that one could not judge a person's salvation based on these things.

### ***The Decline of the Judaizers***

The "Judaizers" seem to have been in decline by the time of Paul's death in 64 A.D., with further downward pressure caused by the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 A.D., and the accompanying end of temple worship. At that point, most of the impetus of the Judaizing theology had been lost. There are later indications of the existence of "Ebionite" or "Hebrew" Christians, but it seems that these groups were small and few, and did not pose much of a concern.

### **Authority**

While the Judaizers claimed to be Christians and recognized Jesus as the Messiah, they didn't accept his sacrificial death on the cross as the means of achieving salvation. While the churches that were begun by the apostles of Jesus and their theological offspring accepted the concept of salvation by faith as authoritative, the Judaizers looked to a different author-

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ity. They accepted a form of Judaism that recognized the teachings in the Old Testament books of the Law to be the authoritative foundation for religious belief. Their approach to interpreting the law was founded upon a literal interpretive method that was extremely legalistic, and saw following the law as the means for entering a relationship with God.

## Evidence for the Authority

While there is tremendous evidence for the validity of the Old Testament scriptures as God's revelation to man, the legalistic interpretive approach of the Judaizers was a human construction.

## Worldview Beliefs

### God

The Judaizers claimed to be Christians, and the Christian faith is built upon the belief that the God of the Old Testament is the true God. They, thus, believed in the God of the Bible. In fact, they also looked to Jesus as the Messiah, but did not embrace this atoning sacrifice as the ultimate means for achieving salvation.

### Man

Human beings, for the Judaizers, were understood to be persons created in the image of God, but fallen.

### Salvation

Salvation, for the Judaizers, was achieved on the basis of keeping the Mosaic law. It was especially believed that for a person to

enter the faith, it was necessary for males to be circumcised, and for all to observe the Jewish festival days.

## Other Beliefs and Practices

### Hybridized Jewish Beliefs

There was, in the Jewish religion, a way for non-Jews to convert to Judaism. They could become Jewish proselytes by submitting to circumcision. The Judaizers tried to carry this tradition into the Christian church by forcing Gentiles to become Jewish proselytes before they could come to Christ. This doctrine was a mixture of grace (through Christ) and works (through the keeping of the Law). It appears that these individuals agreed with much of the doctrine of the apostles, but tried to regulate how the Gentiles were able to enter into the church. They believed that

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people could only become a part of the covenant people of God by being circumcised and keeping the ceremonial law.

### ***Two Types of Judaizers***

It seems that there were two classes of Judaizers. Some of them considered the ceremonial law to be binding only upon Christians who were ethnic Jews. The other class believed that the keeping of the Jewish ceremonial law was also required for Gentile converts.

Paul was very strong in denouncing this entire point of view and insisted that only one thing is necessary for salvation; faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 15:1-29). Paul spoke extensively about this topic in his letter to the Galatians. He insisted that when an individual became a new person in Christ, he was set free from the requirements of the Jewish law.