

# James and the two churches

This study is a more microscopic inspection of the division between the church and Israel. I examine the 'two churches' understanding of many mid-Acts dispensationalists and again show why it is a wrong understanding. The dividing line is between 'the righteousness which is of the law' and 'the righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ'. Peter's little flock, the initial flock of believing Jews of Jerusalem, were the only members of the global church of God for a time. They were not a separate church called 'believing Israel' but were the forerunners of the church, the body of Christ.

The power and doctrine of justification by faith were later revealed to Paul and by the time of Acts 21 only a small remnant of the original Jerusalem believers had not been broken off because of their continued reliance upon justification by the works of the law. James and his Jerusalem multitude of Acts 21 therefore present a problem. They were somewhat Christian but denied the power of Christ by continuing to trust in the law for righteousness.

## Paul's last visit to Jerusalem

Our apostle, the apostle of the Gentiles, had a loving heart toward his Jewish kinsmen of the church at Jerusalem who had yet to acknowledge the authority given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ in his heavenly ministry. He also had a loving heart toward his Jewish kinsmen at Jerusalem who hated the way of Jesus and would like to see this former chief persecutor of the new way dead. Paul loved his worst enemies.

*"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;"*  
(Matthew 5:44 AV)

*"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:"* (Romans 9:1-3 AV)

*"If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." (I Corinthians 14:37 AV)*

Paul asked the believers in Rome to pray for him prior to his last visit to Jerusalem. He undertook this dangerous visit to bring a monetary gift from the Gentile churches.

*"But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things." (Romans 15:25-27 AV)*

“Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in *your* prayers to God for me; That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which *I have* for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints;” (Romans 15:30-31 AV)

Paul was willing to die prior to his last visit to Jerusalem – a visit to James and his multitude of believers.

“And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul’s girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? **for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.** And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.” (Acts 21:10-14 AV)

Now when Paul was in danger from the unbelievers in other cities, the believers were only too aware of the danger and they went to great lengths to keep him safe.

“And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. **Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.**” (Acts 9:23-25 AV)

“But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. .... **And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night** unto Berea: who coming *thither* went into the synagogue of the Jews.” (Acts 17:5-10 AV)

“But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. **And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul** to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.” (Acts 17:13-14 AV)

“And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul’s companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. **And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.**” (Acts 19:29-30 AV)

**What was the matter with James?**

But James and his multitude were strangely BLIND to the risk Paul was taking in coming to visit and bring a monetary offering from the Gentile churches. James had so little

concern for Paul's safety that he PUT PAUL IN MUCH GREATER DANGER by insisting he perform a purification ritual IN THE TEMPLE – a hornet's nest of unbelieving Jews. Paul was spotted by Jews who had a WANTED - DEAD OR ALIVE poster out on him. If you are familiar with the events of Acts 21 you will know that Paul was only saved by the intervention of the Roman garrison. The unbelieving Jews of Jerusalem literally tried to tear him apart. James and his multitude seem to have 'faded the scene' during and after Paul's troubles. They never showed up to help poor old Paul.

Why was James so blind and seemingly unaware of the uproar that would ensue if Paul's enemies spotted him? I have been around on this planet for over 60 years now and have some insight into what makes people tick. Plus I now have the Spirit of truth to guide me into all truth.

James' church at Jerusalem had only flourished because of their JEWISH PIETY. They acknowledged that James' half brother was the Messiah but they went to even greater lengths than the Pharisees to prove to the unbelieving Jews that they WERE ZEALOUS OF MOSES' LAW.

*"And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and **they are all zealous of the law:**" (Acts 21:18-20 AV)*

It is my strong opinion that James and his Jerusalem church were only allowed to coexist in Jerusalem because of this ZEALOUS DISPLAY OF PIETY. For whose benefit was this excruciating religious piety? Was it for God or for men?

*"For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." (Galatians 1:10 AV)*

Answer, MEN – the hoards of HOSTILE UNBELIEVERS in Jerusalem. James and his church were currying favour from the Sanhedrin with their rigorous piety – above that of the Pharisees.

But it was ultimately futile. According to Josephus, James and some of his brethren suffered martyrdom at the hands of the Sanhedrin not long after the events of Acts 21.

### Where is the dividing line? Was James a Christian?

This presents all bible believing Christians with a problem. Where is the dividing line? Was James a Christian?

CHRIST IS NOT DIVIDED.

*"Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Corinthians 1:13 AV)*

## BLINDED ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH ARE DIVIDED.

There is a simple dividing line.

“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:” (Romans 3:20-22 AV)

By this criteria James and his multitude were much closer to blinded Israel than they were to the church, the body of Christ. They could not have been part of the elect remnant of Israel according to grace. The WORKS of the law, boasted of by James and his multitude, EXCLUDED them from the remnant according to the election of grace.

“Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. **But if it be of works, then is it no more grace:** otherwise work is no more work. What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and **the rest were blinded**” (Romans 11:5-7 AV)

James and his multitude in Jerusalem were super-pious Jews but they were less than the least of the carnal Gentile saints at Corinth whose righteousness was by faith of Jesus Christ.

James and his multitude did not acknowledge the wisdom and revelation given unto Paul. James assumed seniority over Paul and started ordering him about. Paul humbled himself and went along with it, probably in the hope that he may ultimately gain James and his people who were still under the law.

“And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;” (1 Corinthians 9:20 AV)

## James and the sinking ship

The James that Paul met with in Acts 21 wrote the book of James in our bible. His epistle was deemed canonical. But the events of Acts 21 show that James and his “thousands of Jews” were doctrinally worlds apart from Paul and his churches among the Gentiles. So just where did James fit into the rapidly changing world of the early church?

The ‘sinking ship’ model of the fall of Israel and the “lifeboat” model of the early Christian church seems to best fit events. Think of Israel as a big passenger liner that has struck a rock and begun sinking. The rock that the liner called Israel struck was the Holy Spirit of God that indwelt poor Stephen as he was stoned to death at the behest of the Jewish leaders.

The sinking of Israel is her sinking from the favour and presence of God. From the moment of striking the rock, Israel was divided into two groups. THOSE WHO ESCAPED IN THE LIFEBOAT AND THOSE WHO WENT DOWN WITH THE SHIP.

Those who escaped in the lifeboat remained in the household of God and went on to take Gentiles on board and become the Christian church. The lifeboat first docked at Antioch in Syria and that is the centre from which Paul's missionary journeys to the Gentiles originated (see Acts 11-13). It is clearly the GROWTH direction of the household of God. The lifeboat called "REMNANT OF ISRAEL" took a multitude of Gentiles on board and became a new cruise liner called "THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH".

Israel "after the flesh" was clearly diminishing or "sinking" from the sight of God at the same time that the church among the Gentiles was growing in God's sight.

"I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" (Romans 11:11-12 AV)

*[We must keep in mind that God is not done with Israel. Their sinking out of the household of God is temporary. But for the purposes of this exercise I will stay with the sinking ship model.]*

It is clear to me that James and his "thousands of Jews", though partial believers (Acts 21:20), totally missed the Lord's revelations to Paul and therefore never truly became Christians. The doctrine of Christianity was revealed primarily to the Apostle Paul by the heavenly, glorified Lord Jesus Christ himself.

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Galatians 1:11-12 AV)

James assumed authority over Paul in Acts 21 because Paul had come into James' territory – the sinking ship of Israel. Because of their clinging to the law, James and his followers were counted among "Jerusalem which is IN BONDAGE with her children" – the BONDAGE OF THE LAW.

"For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children." (Galatians 4:25 AV)

That is where James and his people fit into God's scheme of things. God has such a heart for Israel that he left a large body of law-zealous believers ON THE SINKING SHIP. James and his people never left Israel (physically and doctrinally) and so were accessible to unbelieving, sinking Israel and may have been responsible for many otherwise lost souls being saved. BUT THEY ALL ULTIMATELY WENT DOWN WITH THE SHIP CALLED ISRAEL.

[Note that because James and his thousands of believing Jews were 'zealous of the law' their salvation was not as members of the church, the body of Christ. I believe that God could only have saved them on the basis of his longstanding arrangement with Israel which required them to "keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17).]

It is very easy and very dangerous to underestimate the love of God for his people Israel.

## James had RELIGION

By his own words in his own epistle, addressed to the "twelve tribes which are scattered abroad", JAMES HAD RELIGION.

"If any man among you seem to be **religious**, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's **religion** is vain. Pure **religion** and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:26-27 AV)

I wrote a song in which I called Christianity "The New Religion". I eventually removed it from my downloads page because I became persuaded (by communications from objecting grace believers) that Judaism is the only God-given religion. Christianity is GRADUATION and EMANCIPATION from religion.

"For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the **Jews' religion**, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the **Jews' religion** above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers." (Galatians 1:13-14 AV)

"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." (Galatians 3:23-25 AV)

"Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all." (Galatians 4:24-26 AV)

"So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free. Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." (Galatians 4:31-5:1 AV)

Therefore because James used the words religion and religious regarding his own teaching, it becomes a simple matter of fact that HE NEVER LEFT JUDAISM and cannot have been a member of the body of Christ while he walked the earth

## What about the other Jewish believers?

- How is it possible to know if other Jews of Paul's time acknowledged the wisdom and revelation given to him?
- How is it possible to know if other Jews of Paul's time got their righteousness by the law or by faith of Jesus Christ?

ANSWER: For most of them it is impossible.

Because of Paul's great love for his countrymen and his admitted willingness to become "as them that are under the law" to win them to Christ, we cannot even be sure of the status of those Jews he mentions by name in his epistles. But there is a good chance that any Jewish believers that Paul acknowledges, such as Andronicus and Junia, had come to the righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ. Aquila and Priscilla totally got their Christianity from Paul so we can be sure of them. Apollos was educated by Aquila and Priscilla so he's also a safe bet. There is no record of Paul's missionary partners Barnabas and Silas ever having a doctrinal difference with him. Paul and Barnabas fell out over John Mark's usefulness as a missionary, not because of doctrine.

We can rest assured that Peter was a Christian because he had read Paul's epistles and, unlike James, acknowledged the wisdom and revelation from God that Paul had received.

*"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." (2 Peter 3:15-16 AV)*

John's writings provide evidence that he had come to the righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ. We cannot know how much John learned from Paul and how much he received by revelation. The latter seems more likely his main source of wisdom because of his very different terminology. Nowhere does he seem to be quoting Paul yet the message is still clearly one of eternal life by faith in Jesus Christ.

*"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:" (John 1:12 AV)*

## Were there TWO Spirit-filled churches?

As a novice mid-Acts dispensationalist I was taught that a very complex state of affairs existed throughout most of the book of Acts. I was taught that there were TWO global churches of God.

1. A global Jewish Christian church of God referred to as "believing Israel". This supposedly consisted of Jews and Gentile proselytes saved through the preaching of the gospel of the circumcision by Peter and others. They required repentance, water

baptism and continued adherence to the law. Early on they were called “Peter’s little flock”.

2. A global Gentile/Jew Christian church of God referred to as “the church, the body of Christ”. This supposedly consisted of Gentiles and Jews saved through the preaching of the gospel of the uncircumcision by Paul and others. They required only faith in Christ.

So according to this teaching anyone you met on the road during the Acts period could be one of the following:

1. A believing Jew of “believing Israel” – a so-called “Hebrew kingdom saint” (e.g. Peter).
2. A believing Gentile proselyte of “believing Israel” – a “Gentile kingdom saint” (e.g. Cornelius)
3. A believing Jew of the church, the body of Christ (e.g. Aquila).
4. A believing Gentile of the church, the body of Christ (e.g. Titus)
5. An unbelieving Jew.
6. An unbelieving Gentile.

None of the New Testament writers gave any indication that there were two global churches of God indwelt by the Holy Spirit – one called “believing Israel” and the other called the church the body of Christ. Although there were thousands of Jews in James’ Jerusalem church by the time of Acts 21, they were totally out of touch with where the Lord Jesus Christ had taken Paul doctrinally. James’ multitude was not a different “flavour” of Christianity. Because they could not accept the revelations given to Paul they had gotten left behind in the wake of the movement of God to the Gentiles and to salvation without the works of the law. They were “living in the past” and remained Jews – they did not become Christians though they may have claimed that they were. In their efforts to placate the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem they had become more Jewish than ever and far removed from the Spirit that dwelt in Paul’s churches among the Gentile nations. I believe that most of the Judaizing “false brethren (Galatians 2:4)”, that sought to drag the Gentile churches back under Moses’ law, came from among James’ multitude of followers. The Judaisers sought to appease the hostile, unbelieving Jews.

*“As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.” (Galatians 6:12-13 AV)*

Although some of his followers may have been Judaisers we know that James himself did not believe that the Gentile believers were required to obey the law of Moses. That is the “no such thing” that James refers to in this scripture.

*“As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that **they observe no such thing**, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.” (Acts 21:25 AV)*

However this is another clear indication that James believed JEWISH Christians SHOULD obey the law. This is in DIRECT CONTRADICTION with Paul's teaching that there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ. There is only ONE doctrine FOR ALL CHRISTIANS – Jew or Gentile, and a central theme of that doctrine is that we are become DEAD TO THE LAW and married to Christ..

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28 AV)

“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become **dead to the law** by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.” (Romans 7:4 AV)

Paul's revelations were more than James and his followers could bear so he initially avoided contending with them.

“And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;” (1 Corinthians 9:20 AV)

He went along with James' insistence that he show to the Jews that HE ALSO KEEPEST THE LAW.

“Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that **thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.**” (Acts 21:24 AV)

Paul probably planned to deal with it further at a later time but as it turned out he never got the chance.

There was only ONE GLOBAL CHURCH OF GOD throughout the Acts period – the growing body of people indwelt by the Holy Spirit of Christ, the church the body of Christ.

*[Prior to Paul's revelation of justification and righteousness by faith alone the believers had a mixture of the old law of Moses and the new faith in Christ. After Paul's revelation they either acknowledged Paul and went forward to pure faith in Christ (e.g. Peter) or ignored Paul and went backward to Moses' law (e.g. James).]*

Anyone you met on the road could only be one of the following:

1. BELIEVERS IN THE LIFEBOAT: A believing Jew or Gentile of the church, the body of Christ. They were justified by the faith of Jesus Christ ALONE and were indwelt by the Spirit (e.g. Barnabas, Titus). There were also some Jews and Samaritans who had received water baptism but had not yet received the Holy Spirit (e.g. the Samaritans

of Acts 8:17 and the disciples of Acts 19:6). They became members of the church, the body of Christ when they received the Spirit.

2. BELIEVERS GOING DOWN WITH THE SHIP CALLED ISRAEL: A Jew or Gentile proselyte professing belief that Jesus was Israel's Messiah yet continuing to insist that justification and righteousness come BY THE LAW. These people remained Jews "after the flesh" and were NOT members of the church, the body of Christ (e.g. the false brethren of Galatians 2:4 and the "certain came from James" of Galatians 2:12). If any were saved it was under Israel's old arrangement with God requiring obedience to the law (Matthew 19:17).
3. An unbelieving Jew.
4. An unbelieving Gentile.

## The "two churches" surface mentality

Those mid-Acts dispensationalists who adhere to the "two churches" understanding have a strangely surface approach to the scriptures. They treat the people on the pages like literals in a sorting machine and forget that they are dealing with REAL PEOPLE.

A classic example of this surface mentality is their view of the salvation of Cornelius and his family and friends. The "two churches" people look on the surface of things and see that Cornelius was saved by the preaching of Peter – therefore (they say) he was saved into "believing Israel" and was effectively a Gentile proselyte into "believing Israel".

BUT LOOK DEEPER, crank up the microscope, and you will see that Cornelius was saved by THE HEARING OF FAITH.

*"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." (Acts 10:44 AV)*

Cornelius and his people received the Holy Spirit WHILE THEY WERE STILL LISTENING TO PETER. This is called being saved by the hearing of faith and totally aligns with salvation into the church, the body of Christ.

*"This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Galatians 3:2 AV)*

The "two churches" people would also say that Cornelius was saved by believing the GOSPEL OF THE CIRCUMCISION and was therefore saved into "believing Israel".

Really? Crank up the microscope again and read the words that Peter preached.

*"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; **whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.** And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and*

to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.  
**To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.**" (Acts 10:38-43 AV)

Only a surface mentality could not see that this contains nearly all of the elements of PAUL'S GOSPEL. The only difference is that Peter didn't mention that Jesus was buried.

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, **how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:** After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." (1 Corinthians 15:1-8 AV)

The "two churches" people can't see the similarity and forget that a GOSPEL is merely GOOD NEWS, not a bunch of requirements like repentance and water baptism.

### Let us be "one churchers"

So please let us SIMPLIFY things wherever we can rather than make them more complicated and therefore esoteric and elitist.

"For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in **simplicity** and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward." (2 Corinthians 1:12 AV)

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the **simplicity** that is in Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:3 AV)

There were many local churches of God all belonging to the ONE GLOBAL CHURCH OF GOD THROUGHOUT THE BOOK OF ACTS. The local church of God at Corinth, the local church of God at Ephesus etc. were parts of the global church of God on planet Earth - the church, the body of Christ.

The will of God and each person's choices determined whether or not they were in it.

Once having received the Spirit we must not go back to the works of the law.

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith

of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Galatians 2:16 AV)

"I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." (Galatians 2:21 AV)

"Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3 AV)

By the time of Acts 21 it seems very clear to me that the James-led multitude of believers at Jerusalem had reverted to righteousness by the works of the law and was not a part of the new global church of God called Christianity. They were not a part of the new movement of God and went down with the sinking ship called Israel. You cannot be zealous of the law and dead to the law at the same time.

"And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all **zealous of the law**:" (Acts 21:20 AV)

"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become **dead to the law** by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." (Romans 7:4 AV)