

## Acts 15, Acts 21 and Ezekiel

Acts 15:29 is not speaking about the consumption of blood. As with every other use of “blood” in the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, the word refers to “death”, usually a violent one.

In a blood transfusion, the presence of blood in a medical bag never represents the death of the donor, let alone a violent one.

Acts 15:29 must be understood in the same way that it was understood by the original hearers and by the primitive church. They had no idea of modern technology any more than we know of the culture and technology of humanity 2000 years from now.

Jesus Christ was a Jew. His followers, known as The Way or as Christians, were a small Jewish sect.

When Gentiles started to join this Jewish sect, the primitive body faced a major major hurdle. How were Jewish standards such as circumcision and religious practices to be accommodated? What was expected of the Jewish members? What was expected of the Gentiles members? This is the thrust of the meeting recorded at Acts 15.

In his summation and pronouncement, James pointed the Gentile members to a passage in the Hebrew Scriptures that if they understood its underlying significance for the Jews, would help them understand the Jewish members better (“do well”).

The experience of the Jews during the Babylonian Captivity under Nebuchadnezzar left them with a deep collective memory they never could erase. (The book of Revelation draws on this.) This memory was constantly reinforced every Sabbath when the Scriptures were read to them.

During the Babylonian Captivity, when Ezekiel heard that Jerusalem had been destroyed, he wrote to the Jews:

“Therefore say to them, `This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Since you EAT MEAT WITH THE BLOOD still in it and look to your IDOLS AND SHED BLOOD, should you then possess the land? You rely on your SWORD, you do detestable things, and each of you DEFILES HIS NEIGHBOR’S WIFE. Should you then possess the land?” (Ezekiel 33: 25 - 26 NIV, emphases supplied)

Note the parallels between this statement by Ezekiel and the statement made by James centuries later.

“You are to abstain from FOOD SACRIFICED TO IDOLS [“look to your idols and shed blood”], from BLOOD [“your sword”], from the MEAT OF STRANGLED ANIMALS [“eat meat with the blood still in it”] and from SEXUAL IMMORALITY [“defiles his neighbor’s wife”]. You will do well to avoid these things.” (Acts 15: 29 NIV, emphases supplied). See also verses 20 and 21.

When the issue arose again later between Christians of Jewish background (Acts 21:20, 24) and those of a Gentile background, the reasoning is repeated:

“As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should ABSTAIN FROM FOOD SACRIFICED TO IDOLS, from BLOOD, from the MEAT OF STRANGLED ANIMALS and from SEXUAL IMMORALITY.” (Acts 21:25, NIV, emphases supplied)

These passages in Acts are thus saying to the Gentile Christians that when they understand the importance that the statement by Ezekiel has to those Christians who had been Jews, they will understand the importance circumcision has for them.

This confirms that by “blood”, James is speaking of death, a point made by early church fathers. Those Gentiles will “do well” to know how seriously the Jews take their heritage, so they should make allowances and be tolerant.

<http://www.jwstudies.com/blood.html>