

# MORE SEED & BREAD, ISSUE NO. 330

## Galatians 2:7

### A Case of Mistaken Identity

By Candy Davis

The label on my uncle's IV bag read George Keprios, but his name is Jack Keprios. George Keprios is my dad. By chance, the two brothers wound up admitted to the same hospital at the same time. The hospital mixed up their identities, resulting in Uncle Jack receiving medication prescribed for my dad. No telling how badly this could have ended. When mix-ups are made in a different area, that of Scripture, a bad outcome can result as well in the form of faulty doctrine, as we will see.

A case for us to consider is found in Galatians 2:7: **But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter** (KJV throughout).

This verse, typically interpreted, reads like this: **When they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision [gospel of the Gentiles, the non-Jews] was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision [gospel of the Jews, the law-keeping descendants of Abraham] was unto Peter.**

We, as serious Bible students, will investigate whether this verse is a victim of mistaken identity.

**IDENTIFYING THE CIRCUMCISION:** Is the circumcision correctly identified as the Jews? The word "circumcision" in our verse is translated from the Greek *peritomē* and means "to cut around." This is in line with the Israelites, considering God gave them circumcision as a sign for His covenant with *them*.

*The fact that circumcision is often used interchangeably with "the Jews" throughout our Bible (Acts 10:45, Rom. 4:9) supplies added support to the assertion that the circumcision here is the Jews. With this we agree.*

**IDENTIFYING THE UNCIRCUMCISION:** Is the uncircumcision correctly identified as the Gentiles? It is not uncommon, when we see the word "uncircumcision," to assume this means the non-Jews, or the Gentiles. ("Gentile" is improperly translated from the word *ethnos*, which actually means "nation." Each time we see the word "Gentile" in Scripture we should substitute the word "nation" in our minds.)

Again, the Greek for "circumcision" is *peritomē*. In Greek grammar, to show a negative, or the absence of something, the prefix *A* is added to the base word. Thus, to show the absence of circumcision--of being without circumcision--we would add the prefix *A* to *peritomē*, giving us *aperitomē*.

Using a lexicon to check our verse, we may be puzzled to find that *aperitomē* is not the word for "uncircumcision" here at all. The word we see is *akrobustia*.

**IDENTIFYING THE AKROBUSTIA:** First, some historical context. When we say "Jews," we commonly think of those who live within the boundaries of the land of Israel. Nearly forgotten, however, are the ancestral Israelites living in exile outside the land following their captivity in Babylonia (Deut. 4:27, 28:64; James 1:1).

As Jews, these exiles were still expected to keep the law of Moses to the letter (James 2:10) in order to stay in relationship with God. Their problem? They lived too far from Jerusalem to travel there for the ceremonies and rituals as dictated by the law. Thus many Jews eventually gave up trying to live like Israelites and just became "Greeks," (*Hellen[ists]*) living the same Greek lifestyle as those around them. A remnant of Jews could be found, nevertheless, who maintained a heart for God and a desire to please Him by keeping His law as best they could.

Significant to our study is the manner in which these ancestral Israelites (both the remnant and the "Greek" Jews) were regarded by the Jews in the homeland. One presumes the Jews inside the land would take pity on their unfortunate relatives, but this is hardly the case. The religious leaders, the Pharisees, were puffed up with self-

importance owing to the perfection with which they could keep the law, not to mention the power they wielded over their countrymen. These leaders looked down their noses at their relatives in the dispersion. The Pharisees went so far as to coin a derogatory label to mock the ancestral Jews: *akrobustia*. If this word sounds familiar, it should, for this is the word we saw for “uncircumcision” above.

*Akrobustia* means “foreskinners.” This was the Pharisees’ cruel way of saying to their exiled kin, “You may be Israelites by blood, but you cannot keep the law to God’s standards--so you are no Jew in our sight. You are the uncircumcision, the *akrobustia*.” (One can almost hear the Pharisees spit to the ground with disdain.)

And with this we have uncovered a case of mistaken identity: The uncircumcision (*akrobustia*) in our verse are not the Gentiles at all, as most assume. The uncircumcision, correctly identified, are the ancestral Jews living outside the land of Israel.

Our Galatians 2 passage, in truth, should be understood like this: **But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision [the ancestral Jews living in exile out in the nations (*ethnos*)] was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision [the law-keeping Jews living inside the land] was unto Peter.**

This interpretation is in accord with God’s commission to his apostles (Mark 16:15). God wanted His gospel of grace (which brings salvation and forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ) to reach all His children, and--this is important--these children include the “other sheep of another fold (John 10:16),” meaning all 5-1/2 million of the ancestral Jews living out in the nations (*ethnos*) among the non-Jews (Acts 21:21).

The Pharisees may have belittled the ancestral Jews by calling them “foreskinners,” (*akrobustia*) but in God’s eyes, these relatives were as much His children as the law-keeping Jews in the land. It is false to claim that God was ready to start a new dispensation before the very last of His children afar off (Acts 2:39) had heard the gospel. Yet there are some in Christendom who assert this very thing.

**IDENTIFYING A FAULTY THEOLOGY:** For the record, we are among those who believe in the Acts 28:28 dispensational boundary line. A separate circle of dispensationalists--the Mid-Acts believers--places the boundary much earlier, often Acts 9, with Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. Here is where God commenced the Dispensation of Grace, says Mid-Acts, and along with it came a brand-new gospel for a brand new audience. Let us break this down.

First, it is the Gentiles (*ethnos*) who comprise the new audience, according to Mid-Acts. They defend this idea by using a particular Scripture, none other than Galatians 2:7, their foundational verse. Here is their interpretation: **But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision [the new gospel of grace for the Gentiles (*ethnos*)] was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision [the old gospel of the kingdom for Israel] was unto Peter.**

Right off the bat we see that the mistaken identity of the uncircumcision (*akrobustia*) strikes again. We know from before that the uncircumcision are not--not--the Gentiles; they are the ancestral Jews living outside the land. So, whatever the gospel may be, it was not for the Gentiles, not yet at least, but for the Jews in the dispersion.

Based on this verse, Mid-Acts declares there to be two different gospels: the old kingdom one for Israel (Matt 10:7), soon to fade off the scene (**More Seed & Bread** No. 317, **Three Strikes and Mid-Acts Is Out**), and the new grace gospel for the Gentiles (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Yet if the gospel of grace were something new and primarily for the Gentiles, it should not appear until Acts 9 at the earliest. The reality is that the same gospel taught by Paul (Acts 13:38, Eph. 1:7) is the one preached by Peter back in Acts 2:38 and Acts 5:31. This deserves repeating: Peter and Paul preached the same gospel, not different ones. The only difference occurs in the benefits the gospel provides, and this depends on the needs of the particular audience hearing it. The law-keeping Jews in Israel had offerings in the law, as well as the Day of Atonement, to help them deal with sins. These Jews benefited from the gospel in their own way; now they wanted to please the Lord for his gracious work of salvation and thus they became zealous for the law (Acts 21:20). The Jews outside the land were a different story. They had been unable to keep the law before this time, but now, through the gospel of grace, all their sins are forgiven, even the sin of failing to keep the law (Acts 13:38-39). At last these Jews could be back in relationship with God while staying put in the nation of their birth.

Mid-Acts theology is faulty in at least two ways. First, it supplants a portion of God's plan for Israel. Let us think about this. If early in the Acts period Paul is sent running with the gospel to the Gentiles, this leaves the ancestral Jews living outside the land deprived of their chance to hear the gospel and be saved into God's *ekklesia*. Scripture confirms that no such thing occurred. All of Israel did in fact hear the gospel during the span of the Acts Period (Mark 16:20, Rom. 10:18), just as God had purposed (Mark 16:15).

Second, Mid-Acts theology deceives those who trust the doctrine; it takes certain Jewish teachings in Paul's Acts epistles and applies them to us today. The result is confused believers who, for example, observe "the Lord's Supper" (I Cor. 11); usurp instructions intended for the apostles and apply them to governments of today (Rom. 13:1-8); take spiritual gifts assessments to discover which ones are theirs (Rom. 12:6-8). These believers, we could say, are victims of mistaken identity. By way of taking Jewish doctrine and applying it to themselves, they wind up believing or behaving like Israelites in one way or another.

Returning to the episode at the hospital, we recall that a medication mix-up occurred due to mistaken identity. Mid-Acts, for much the same reason, is a faulty theology. They mistake the identity of the uncircumcision (*akrobustia*) as being the Gentiles, and upon this flaw they base much of their doctrine. May our lesson be to be on the lookout for cases of Scriptural mistaken identity.