

Abraham in the New Testament: Faith and Works in the Letters of James and Paul

Darin White, McNair Scholar
Dr. Michael Baltutis, McNair Mentor
Department of Religious Studies

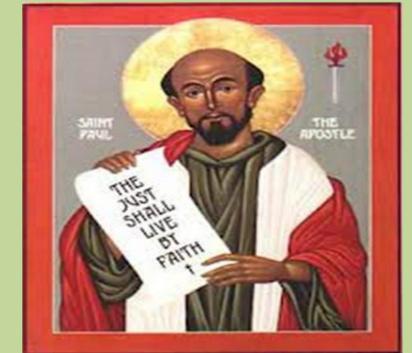
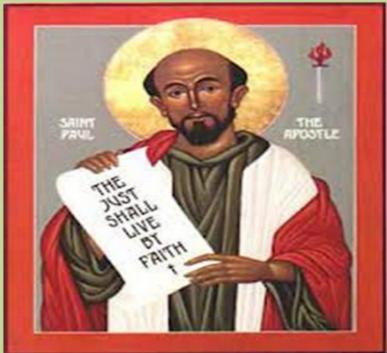


Abstract

During the first century C.E. Christianity's theology was still being figured out between Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity. Paul, a self-proclaimed apostle of Jesus Christ, proclaimed that circumcision wasn't necessary for Gentiles to become Christians. On the other hand there was a Jewish sect that believed circumcision was necessary. James was of the group that believed Gentiles weren't required to circumcise themselves; however, James' delegation at Antioch still didn't eat with Gentile Christians. There remained a division. What was seen as right for one group wasn't right for the other group and vice versa. This division can best be illustrated by James' use of the story of Abraham to argue that faith required works for justification. Paul, on the other hand, used the story of Abraham to argue faith alone was required for justification. History has shown that Paul's theology became prevalent. The letters of James and Romans, written by James and Paul, focus on the story of Abraham in the Hebrew Bible; each author was able to tailor their story to their argument, Paul focusing on faith while James focused on works.

Introduction

- In the letter to the Romans, Paul uses the birth of Isaac in the Genesis narrative to show that Christians are descendants of Abraham through faith.
- In the letter of James, James uses the sacrifice of Isaac in the Genesis narrative to show that Messianic Jews believed faith without works is dead.



Objective

- To show the differences between the Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians in the early first century as described by Paul and James in the letter of James and the letters to the Romans within the Genesis account of Abraham

Argument

Paul

- You cannot be saved by works (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- Saved by faith alone (Romans 3:28)
- Faith without works saves

James

- You cannot show that you are saved by works (James 2:14, 18)
- Saved by works (James 2:18)
- Faith without works is dead (James 2:17)



Conclusions

New theology was being written in the early first century church between Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians. This division can be seen in the letters of James and Romans. Paul and James both used the Genesis narrative of Abraham to prove different points; Paul used the birth of Isaac to express salvation by faith and James used the sacrifice of Isaac to stress salvation by faith and works.

References

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