

# OpenTheo

## Acts 15:1 - 15:35



### Acts - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides an in-depth analysis of Acts 15, a pivotal chapter in the development of the universal church. He discusses the controversy surrounding the requirement of circumcision for Gentile believers and the decision made by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to allow uncircumcised individuals into the church. Gregg emphasizes the importance of spiritual life over institutionalized religion and the acceptance of Gentiles into the church based on faith and grace rather than external works or observances.

### Transcript

We're in Acts chapter 15 now. This is a great pivotal chapter. It's pivotal in the same way that chapter 10 was pivotal.

That was where we saw the conversion of Cornelius. The conversion of Cornelius was the first time that the leaders of the church realized that uncircumcised people could become saved. But there were still Jewish Christians who were not comfortable with it.

And although they didn't deny that these uncircumcised people could come into the church, they believed that after these people had come into the church, they really should become Torah observant. And we're told in chapter 15 verse 1 that certain men came down from Judea, that would be to Antioch where Paul and Barnabas were living and ministering, and taught the brethren, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. Now this idea that you could not be saved unless you get circumcised was of course contrary to the sort of the de facto policy of the apostles in Jerusalem.

But these people had come from Judea. They were what we call Judaizers. In many cases, Paul in his letters writes to refute Judaizers.

They remained a problem in the church. And apparently even after this Jerusalem council, though the Jerusalem council was the first ecumenical council of the church in which a major decision was made on behalf of the whole church. And in this case, it's clear that Jerusalem is functioning in the worldwide church in Acts 15 as, for example,

the Roman Catholics feel that the church of Rome should, and they feel did.

What's interesting about this is they did not consult the church of Rome about this. They did not go into Rome and see who the bishop was there and say, what do you think about this? Instead, they went to Jerusalem. Now it's not clear exactly to what degree the Gentile churches answered to Jerusalem.

There's no indication that Jerusalem was governing these Gentile churches. They seem to have been independent indigenous congregations that in many cases sprang up spontaneously on occasion, especially the churches that Paul and Barnabas had founded. They were launched as a result of missionary efforts from Antioch, but not Jerusalem.

We don't really have any real evidence that Jerusalem was in any sense governing these churches. But the apostles did, and the apostles, most of them lived in Jerusalem. And so as long as most of the apostles were in Jerusalem, this was the reasonable place to go and to deliberate something that would set norms for the entire church worldwide.

After all, the church worldwide was one church. It was many churches, but one church. And we have to understand it's after the Jerusalem Christians fled and started evangelizing outside Jerusalem that we have the phenomenon of the one church being many churches, but one.

And this is something that the church didn't have to think about in the first many years because all the Christians were in Jerusalem for the most part, at least all the one church was. It's when other churches began to spring up that their relationship to the one church had to be decided. That's why the apostles had to visit Samaria when Philip had evangelized.

That's why apparently Peter visited Lydda and Joppa in order to see to it that he could approve of what Philip had done in those towns and consider it part of the same movement as that in Jerusalem rather than a rival movement. And the idea of the universal church is still an important phenomenon that Christians often forget because the word church is used three different ways in the Bible. It is used, for example, in the book of Ephesians, which is a whole book about the church.

The word church in Ephesians refers to the universal church. What Paul talks about is the global transcendent phenomenon, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ. Christ only has one bride spread around the globe made up of all believers who are through the Holy Spirit, one body, even if they do not know each other.

This is why the church in Antioch, when they heard about the famine in chapter 11 of Acts, they took up an offering to send to the Christians in Judea, in another country, not because they were answerable to them, but because they were one body with them. They felt, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12, when one member of the body suffers, all

suffer. No matter what part of the world you live in, you're part of the body of Christ.

Paul spent his last two missionary journeys traveling in places like Asia Minor and Greece, collecting offerings from the Gentile churches to take back to Jerusalem, and most of these people would never meet anyone from Jerusalem. They were not involved with the church in Jerusalem in any kind of fellowshiping experiential way, but they were one body with them, and they were glad to share the burdens with their brethren in Judea, because the church worldwide is one church, and the one body of Christ globally transcends nations and generations, and is something that Paul, I think, probably codified the doctrines about this more than any other apostle in writing, and Ephesians is a book that Paul wrote that kind of talks about this phenomenon of the universal church. Now, it's not the only book, but there are other uses of the term church, but when Jesus said, upon this rock I will build my church, he only spoke of having one church.

It's in many nations, every nation, but it's one church. It's one body of Christ, one temple of the Holy Spirit, one family of God. That's the church that Jesus built upon this rock, and that's, you know, the universal church.

The word universal in, I don't know if it's, I think, Latin, but it's the word Catholic. Now, again, Catholic does not mean Roman Catholic. The idea of the Roman Catholic Church developed through the early centuries until, not until, you know, many centuries after the time of Christ, the Pope of Rome, the Bishop of Rome, was considered to be the head of all the churches.

Then, of course, because he was in Rome, it's called the Roman Universal Church, but before there was a Pope and before there was Roman Catholicism, there was just the idea of the universal church, of which the word Catholic is a word that means universal. Now, the word church is also used in Scripture of local churches, which are all the Christians in a given town or locality. The church in Philippi, the church in Thessalonica, the church in Ephesus, the church in Smyrna, the church in Sardis, the church in Philadelphia in Revelation, this refers to the church in a town is all the Christians in that town, just as the universal church is all the Christians in the world, the local church is the local sampling in an area of that universal church.

All the Christians in any town are part of the universal church around the world, and therefore, they're part of the universal church of that town, too. They are simply the sampling in that locality of the one phenomenon of the church. Then, the word church is also used of smaller units.

For example, Paul greets the church in the house of Priscilla and Aquila in Romans chapter 16. He greets the church in the house of Philemon in the book of Philemon, and there are churches in houses. Now, this would be what we would more refer to as congregations.

In a town, a very large town like Rome, it would not be practical for all the Christians who must have numbered in the many thousands to meet together in one place. Now, I realize that we today have churches that have many thousands in one building, but they're not one family. Most of them never know the names of anyone else in the congregation.

There's too many people to get to know, and a lot of times, they have many services. So, the people go to the first service, never meet any people from the second or the third service. This is not the same thing.

In the early church, they met in smaller groups than that. There might be thousands of Christians in the local church in Rome, but they met in apparently about five different or more home churches. When Paul wrote to the Roman church in chapter 16 of Romans, he seems to allude to and send greetings to about five different home groups, and there may have been more, but each one was called the church in the house here and the church in the house there, but they were all part of the one church in Rome, which was part of the one church worldwide.

So, you can see the church as in different contexts referring to in, you know, successively larger concentric circles. There's the church in this house that meets, you know, a particular time and place. It's part of the larger church in the whole town and is one with all the other small congregations.

They're all one church. Paul wrote to five different congregations, and nobody expected they'd all read the same letter. If I wrote a letter to a church in Temecula, where I live, it's not likely any other church would be interested in reading the letter.

Even that church might not be interested in reading it, but let's just say I had a relationship with that church. Let's say it was a Baptist church or a Methodist church or a Presbyterian church. Well, then those of that denomination would perhaps, if they had any respect for me, read such a letter, but people of other denominations in the same town would not.

And so, we have a different kind of situation than Paul envisaged and then was known in the early church. All Christians were part of one church, and the apostles were the universal leaders of the universal church while they were alive. And therefore, when it came to the question, should all Christians accept a doctrine that believers need to be circumcised, or should all Christians accept a doctrine that believers do not need to be circumcised, this had never been really decided formally.

Peter and some others had accepted uncircumcised people into the church, but there were still people who objected to it. And we might say reasonably so because there had never been anything said very clearly that indicated that the laws of Moses should not be kept anymore. Although Jesus had said that not one jot or tittle of the law will fail until

all has been fulfilled.

And I believe that the early church understood that all has been fulfilled in Christ. And therefore, I mean, the Jerusalem church still kept these laws, but I think it was more cultural than anything because they did come to accept the fact that Gentiles, who are also part of the same body as themselves, don't have to keep them. So, it's not a universal Christian obligation, but the Jews, let's face it, they lived in Jerusalem.

They were Jews. They'd always kept these laws. The temple was the center of their city and the center of their society.

For them to stop going to the temple would seem very rude, and they didn't have any excellent reason to avoid it. The temple, after all, was God's house at one time. It was now really defunct, and the sacrifices in it were of no real value, but it didn't hurt for them to keep circumcising their children and doing that.

But the Gentiles, who had never done that, the question is, should they be brought under that same obligation? And the Jerusalem church met together to decide that. It says, certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question.

This is the first mention of there being elders in the church of Jerusalem. There were apostles there, but all local churches, if they had qualified people, did have elders in them. And the apostles, of course, were authorities over the entire church worldwide as apostles.

The elders of the local church would have been the ones who probably were simply of the local Jerusalem Christians, the ones who oversaw them on a regular basis, since the apostles were doing more missionary work by this time. But the elders still had authority in Jerusalem, and their opinion on this subject would be extremely important. So they were included to be consulted, the apostles and the elders to be asked about this.

So being sent on their way by the church, Paul and Barnabas passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles, and they caused great joy to all the brethren. Now there's a sense in which they're kind of campaigning for their side of this controversy. Paul and Barnabas are on the side that say the Gentiles don't need to keep the law, don't need to be circumcised.

Their critics are saying they do. And as they're traveling to Jerusalem to decide the question, they're telling all the Christians between Antioch and Jerusalem as they go, hey, God's doing a great work with these uncircumcised Gentiles. Everyone's getting

excited about it.

So they're getting a lot of support in a sense. Sympathetic support for their position, even before they arrive at the council. I think it's interesting how Luke words things in verse 3, he says, so being sent on their way by the church.

If you contrast that with chapter 13, verse 4, when Paul and Barnabas went to the Gentile world on their first missionary journey, it says in Acts 13, 4, so being sent out by the Holy Spirit. In Acts 13, it specifically says they were sent out by the Holy Spirit. In this place, they were sent out by the church.

Now, that doesn't mean that this mission was not as spiritual and not as important or not the will of God as much as their other one, but it's just a point of detail. The Holy Spirit had sent them out on their first missionary journey, specifically by prophetic utterance, as we read in chapter 13. However, there is no specific prophecy given by the Holy Spirit that they should go and do this.

It was simply decided by the church that it would be a good idea to settle this question in Jerusalem. So they were sent out by the church on this mission. And so they, as I said, they kind of campaigned for their position in the churches as they went along on their way to Jerusalem.

Verse 4, and when they'd come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all things that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees, who had become believers, rose up saying, it is necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses. So this is the position that had brought them there.

Some of these Pharisees who had been converted. It's interesting to read about Pharisees converted because in the gospels, the Pharisees were the deadly opponents of Jesus, always trying to plot to kill him, always trying to trip him up. But after the resurrection of Christ, which by the way, the Pharisees, unlike the Sadducees, believed in the resurrection of the dead, they were quicker to believe in the resurrection of Christ than the Sadducees were.

And therefore in Acts, it's not the Pharisees, but the Sadducees who are persecuting the church. And we find some Pharisees actually getting saved and becoming part. But it's hard to get the legalism out of a Pharisee, even after he's converted.

By the way, there are people in the church today who never were Pharisees in that sense, but are every bit as legalistic. Legalism is one of those hard things to get out of a nature of a religious person. It's hard to transition from being religious to being spiritual.

And by spiritual, I'm not using some kind of ethereal elitist kind of a term. I'm just saying someone who's led by the Holy Spirit, somebody whose whole relationship with God is

defined in terms of God's Spirit living within them and leading them and producing them the fruits of love and joy and peace and goodness and self-control and patience and that kind of stuff. So, you know, it's a spiritual life.

It's a spiritual phenomenon. But it's so easy for what is spiritual to be institutionalized into a religion. And religion is not always a word that should be used negatively.

But in this context, when I'm contrasting being spiritual with being religious, I mean being religious in the sense that you've now begun to judge religious matters from external religious behaviors, circumcision being such, keeping kosher diet would be such. In modern times, it might be in some churches, people smoking or drinking or dancing or whatever is considered to be not okay for Christians and those and their whole denominations that have formed holiness denominations that forbid all these things, whereas other denominations don't. Drinking alcohol, for example, is something that like Pentecostals and some Baptists, they just feel it's a sin.

Other people do not. And someone who believes it's a sin to do so, that's part of their spirituality as far as they're concerned. They don't smoke or drink or chew or run with the girls who do.

And they are therefore religious. And they are righteous because they don't do these things. But see, their whole concept of relationship with God and service of God and pleasing God is all about external things.

That's the opposite of spiritual. Jesus said God is a spirit and he's looking for those. He is seeking those who worship him in spirit and in truth.

The Pharisees were abundant. Jesus didn't have, God didn't have to look far for them. They served him, they worshipped him, but in ritual and externality.

He's looking for someone who worships in spirit and in truth has got his relationship with God is internalized. And so the Pharisees were people who are very religious in the negative sense of that word. And when you become a Christian, it doesn't make you automatically not religious.

In fact, some people can mix and perhaps very legitimately religious activity with spirituality. There are people who go to much more high church kind of services than I would feel comfortable in, but I'm sure that not all of them are just religious. I'm sure many of them, it's a very spiritual thing.

But the point is there is a difference between defining a relation with God in terms of spiritual transformation, spiritual rebirth on the one hand, and the keeping of rituals and ceremonies of a religious nature on the other. And the Pharisees, before they were Christians, they were totally legalistic and religious. And apparently these ones had not gotten very far from that mentality, though they had now become believers in Christ.

And by the way, I have met many believers in Christ who are very legalistic. They don't insist on following the Jewish law, but sometimes they're very legalistic in their application of Christian teachings. Certain groups, for example, will not take an oath in court because Jesus said, do not swear at all.

Some religious groups, some Christian groups believe that any resistance of evil in a forcible way is wrong because Jesus said to turn the other cheek. And I think they're taking things Jesus said in some cases in a rigid legalistic way rather than getting the spirit of what he's trying to say and living by that. But that's another story.

The Pharisees, they were the ones who stood up and said, you've got to be circumcised or else you can't be saved. Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas, and excuse me, I was looking earlier, but now we're looking at the verse five. They rose up saying it's necessary to be circumcised and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

So the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter, which is what they had gone to Jerusalem to do. And this was the first council where some theological point was now officially decided by the gathered leaders of the church, especially the Jerusalem church, but also the apostles who were over all the church. And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to the men and brethren, you know that a good while ago, God chose among us that by my mouth, the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

In other words, God chose me to be the first one to evangelize the Gentiles. So I should have some credibility in this particular question. This is what we're discussing.

Of course, Peter would have credibility in any case, because he is always respected as one of the chief apostles. But the fact that he was the one that God selected, he said to bring the first Gentiles in the church. No doubt he mentions that to say my testimony here should carry considerable weight.

And it should. And it did, actually. So he says, so God, who knows the hearts, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us.

Now, of course, he's referring to what happened in the house of Cornelius, but he emphasizes God who knows the hearts. This is a feature of God that was mentioned back in chapter one when they were seeking to replace Judas. And they had a couple of candidates to be the next apostle.

And they prayed and over these candidates said, God, you who know the hearts of all men, you show us which one you have selected. In other words, they're seeing that it's not religiosity and external observance. It's what's in the heart that God's looking at.

Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. That, of course, is a famous statement that God spoke to Samuel the prophet when he was selecting among



Jesse's sons, one to be the next king. But God said to him, man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart.

God sees the heart, and the apostles expected that that's what's going to be important to God in selecting a new apostle. Now he says, now God who knows the hearts chose these people. He also knew they weren't circumcised.

So if he's just giving them a physical examination, he'd know they were uncircumcised and unworthy on Jewish standards to be accepted in the community of God's people. But God looked on the heart, and he didn't care that they weren't circumcised. And he showed his acceptance of them because of their pure hearts.

And it says, he made no distinction between us and them purifying their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved in the same manner as they. Now that's the end of Peter's speech.

It may be a short summary, but it's amazing how similar it is to a speech that Paul gave to Peter in Galatians chapter 2. In Galatians chapter 2, that's when Peter had come down to Antioch, and he himself compromised on this point because he had been among the Gentiles and eating with them freely and without compunction. But when certain men from James, that is from Jerusalem church, came to Antioch, Peter kind of subtly just kind of withdrew, not subtly enough, apparently. Everyone noticed he was withdrawing from table fellowship with the Gentiles in order not to displease the more legalistic brethren who had come from Jerusalem.

Paul would have nothing of it. And in Galatians chapter 2, Paul says in verse 11, when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face because he was to be blamed. For before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles, but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.

And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him so that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. Apparently when Peter withdrew from table fellowship, the other Jews were watching Peter for their cue to, oh, he doesn't think it's okay, so we're not going to do it either. And even Barnabas, who of course was a close associate of the Jerusalem apostles, he followed Peter's lead too.

But Paul calls that a hypocrisy. Why? Because he knew that all of them had freely eaten with the Gentiles before these guys came from Jerusalem. They're only pretending that it's not okay with them because they're trying not to probably incur the displeasure.

Now, in sympathy with these guys, we have to acknowledge that Paul himself in 1 Corinthians 9 said that when he's with those who are under the law, he observes the law.

And when he's with those who are not, he does not so that he might win those in these different cultural groups. Paul himself was flexible, as we shall see in the next chapter, chapter 16, he circumcised Timothy to avoid offending Jews.

Later on, he came to, in chapter 21, he came to Jerusalem and he was asked to participate in temple rituals to avoid offending the Jews, and he did. And so Paul did compromise those with those things because his policy, as he says in 1 Corinthians 9, around verse 20, he says that when he's with Jews, he keeps the law. So why couldn't Peter do the same thing? Well, the reason this was different in Paul's mind is that the question of the acceptability of uncircumcised Gentiles in the church was very much still an open and controversial question at this point.

And Peter knew better than to take sides with those of the circumcision party, because as Paul was concerned, they were opposing the gospel as God had revealed it to Paul and Barnabas, and they knew, and even Peter knew. But Peter was acting like he didn't because he didn't want to make the Jews from Jerusalem unhappy. And Paul calls that hypocrisy.

But look what Paul says, when I saw that they were not straightforward, this is Galatians 2.14, about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter, before them all, if you being a Jew live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We who are Jews by nature, meaning Paul and Peter and others that were there, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, for by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified. But if, I'm not going to read on at this point, because he goes off into another thing, but at this point, he's told Peter, isn't it hypocritical for you to impose on the Gentiles something you yourself do not keep? You live as a Gentile, meaning you're not keeping kosher. You're not avoiding table fellowship with Gentiles.

You're living like a Gentile. Why will you, by your precedent, put the Gentiles under pressure to get circumcised and live like a Jew? He says, we know, although we have been under the law, we are Jews, not sinners like the Gentiles before, who were Jews, but we know that we're not justified by keeping the law, but by faith. Now, these are the things that Peter says at the Jerusalem Council, which was no doubt not very much later than Paul had made these statements to him.

We see that Peter had accepted and absorbed Paul's doctrines on this, and perhaps Peter had believed them before that, but needed to be reminded under that, those circumstances. But Peter, notice he says that in verse 10, we should not put a yoke on the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear. Now, what he means that we and our fathers were not able to bear the yoke, he means the law.

Well, is the law impossible to keep? Actually, it's not. There were Jews who kept the law,

and even non-Jews. Job was not a Jew, and although he didn't keep the law, he did live a righteous and blameless life before God.

John the Baptist's parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth, were Jews, and we're told in Luke chapter 1 that they lived a perfect and blameless life according to the law. Paul himself says in Philippians 3 that before he was a Christian, according to the keeping of the law, he was blameless. He kept it strictly.

When it comes to the external keeping of the law, it doesn't take a saint to not murder, or to not commit adultery, or not steal, or not, you know, dishonor their parents, or not bow down to idols, or not use bad language or blasphemy, or, you know, or even to keep the Sabbath. It takes a determination to do so, but there's nothing in those things that are an impossible cultural lifestyle to adopt. But what's interesting is the Jews in their history never did really keep those things consistently.

Even though a person could, and some people did, most Jews did not. They lapsed into idolatry, they lapsed into all kinds of sin, and that's why the prophets had to come and say, you know, you're doing worse than the Gentiles, I'm gonna have to send the Assyrians, I'm gonna have to send the Babylonians. God had to judge them because they, even in the book of Judges, right after Moses and Joshua's death, they were lapsing again and again into idolatry so that, you know, God had to discipline them and then deliver them through the judges.

What I'm saying is that the Jews as a nation did not seem to have it in their hearts to obey the law of God. Some people did, and those who did could do so, but in general, most people did not have it in their hearts. Now, in Psalm 40 in verses 6 through 8, David said that he had the law written in his heart, and Moses himself exhorted the Jews to circumcise their hearts and not just their foreskins.

And Jeremiah also, in Jeremiah 4, 4 said the same thing. These are Old Testament exhortations. People could internalize the law.

If they loved God, they could say, I want to live a holy life. I want to follow God's law, and if they wanted to, they could. It's just that wanting to requires a certain degree of spiritual motivation that most people did not have.

And to impose these laws on a nation of people who were no better internally than the Gentiles themselves, who did not have a pure heart, was to impose on them something that they just did not find possible to keep doing. Not because it was an impossible law, but because they were impossibly rebellious by nature. Now, Peter's saying, we haven't been able to bear this burden.

Why put this yoke on the Gentiles? And Paul had said that to him. You know, you don't live like a, you're living like a Gentile. Why do you make the Gentiles live like Jews?

Notice Peter also, in his comments, believes in justification by faith and by grace, just like Paul does.

Some people say that Paul and Peter had slightly different emphases or different gospels. Sometimes it is said that the Jerusalem apostles, like James and John and Peter, were more law observant, or more believed that it was important to observe the law. Whereas Paul, some people suggest Paul preached almost an entirely different gospel of grace.

He did not. Paul and Peter had the same beliefs. In verse 9, Peter says at the end that God purified their heart by faith.

And in verse 11, he says, but we believe that through grace, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved in the same manner as they. So Peter says we're saved through grace. We're saved by faith.

Paul says the very same thing. We know Ephesians 2a, by grace you've been saved through faith, puts that all together in one statement. But we find many statements of Paul about justification by faith and that we're saved by grace, not by work.

So Peter and Paul are on the same page here, which then of course puts James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, under some pressure. It would appear that James may have inclined considerably more toward Torah observance than even Peter did. In later literature, James, as he's called James the Just, is known to have been a very law observant Jew in Jerusalem, respected by Jews and Christians alike.

He was sometimes called camel knees. You may have heard that before. James's nickname was camel knees because he spent so much time praying his knees had become so calloused they looked like the knees of camels.

And so, you know, this man was a very devout man and he didn't wander far from Jerusalem, so he never got off the reservation at all with the legalists. He was right in there keeping all the law. It wasn't a problem for him.

He was a man inclined to do so and he was living in Jerusalem where the temple was, so why not? James was law observant. James wrote the book of James, by the way, this same James wrote the book of James, where he talks about, you know, keeping the law, but he calls it the law of liberty, the royal law, which is to love your neighbor as you love yourself. But it's clear that James, I think the circumcision party thought that James was going to be their champion here.

They, remember the ones who came to Galatia, I mean to Antioch that Paul mentions in Galatians, men from James came up and Peter was intimidated by them. From James suggests that James was viewed sort of as a champion of this particular party. If so, he certainly disappointed his constituents here at this council because he hearkened to

Peter.

He also hearkened to the scripture. He quotes scripture as we'll see. It's interesting, Paul and Barnabas also give their testimony after Peter in verse 12.

All the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul, declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. So I guess they figured that showing that God had worked these wonders among the Gentiles was his way of showing his approval of them. But then when everyone else had spoken, James spoke.

It's interesting, it says after they had become silent, James answered. James is the one who gives the answer. We've heard the testimony, now we're going to see who makes the judgment call.

He's like the judge in this court. In fact, he even says in verse 19, I therefore judge that we should not do such and such. James is the presider over this court and he's listened to the testimony of Peter and of Paul and Barnabas, but he only refers to Peter's testimony.

Perhaps it's because Paul and Barnabas, it's their gospel that was on trial, so he doesn't cite their testimony in their own favor, but he cites Peter's testimony and the scripture's testimony in favor of Paul and Barnabas. He says, men and brethren, listen to me, verse 14, Simon, meaning Peter, and in the Greek here, it's the word simeon, which is the Aramaic form of the name Simon. There's a little bit of local color here that Luke records that James actually used the Aramaic name for Peter because they were no doubt speaking Aramaic.

Simeon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name, and with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written. Now, the quotation he gives is from Amos chapter 9, verses 11 and 12. It reads a little differently in the Hebrew text, but he's quoting the Septuagint, which is the Greek Old Testament.

The Jews often followed the Greek Old Testament because 300 years before Christ, Alexander the Great had conquered all the regions and had imposed the Greek language on the people, and as a result of that, a decreasing number of Jews actually were reading Hebrew and more were knowing Greek, and so a group of Jewish scholars in Alexandria, Egypt, you know, they made a translation of their Hebrew scriptures into Greek called the Septuagint. This was centuries before the time of Christ, and by the time of Christ, the Septuagint was widely used throughout the Roman Empire by the Jews. It was their Bible.

It was the Greek Bible, just like, you know, in the 1700s, English-speaking Christians

were using the King James Version. You know, most Christians are not reading the Greek and the Hebrew. They're reading a translation into their own language in English, so also the Greek-speaking world of Jews was reading mostly the Bible in a translation in their language in Greek, and many of the quotes, perhaps most of the quotes in the New Testament, where the New Testament artists do quote Old Testament passages, they quote the Greek more often than not.

They quote the Septuagint, which reads a little differently. In this case, it says, after this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins and I will set it up so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord who does all these things.

Now one way this differs from the Hebrew of the passage, the Hebrew passage in verse 17 would read that the remnant of Edom, but the Edomites were now extinct. Herod the Great, who is now long dead, was the last known Edomite, and so James is saying the fulfillment of this prophecy, which in its original talks about Edom, Edom just represents Gentiles in general, that God is saying he's going to accept non-Jews, Gentiles. Now one phrase that's difficult and many people misinterpret is the beginning where he says, I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down.

One popular way that a lot of people have understood this today, and this is largely in charismatic circles, they believe the tabernacle of David refers to the tent that David erected over the Ark of the Covenant when he brought it to Jerusalem. Now the tabernacle of Moses, built in the book of Exodus and continued to be used after the Israelites came into the Promised Land, was the first house of the Ark of the Covenant, but that tabernacle of Moses was apparently destroyed at Shiloh by the Philistines around 1 Samuel chapter 4, and the Ark was kept for many years in a private home, and then it was brought to Jerusalem by David and he put a shelter over it, a, you know, minimalist kind of a shelter, a tent over it, and many people say the tabernacle of David, in contrast with the tabernacle of Moses, was this tent that David put over the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem. Now what then would it mean that God would rebuild the tabernacle of David? This is a false understanding, I believe, but it's very common, so I'll tell you what it is that some people say.

Some people say the tabernacle of David is unlike the tabernacle of Moses in that the worship around the Ark was musical. Moses never ordained any instruments of music or singing in his, in the rituals of Judaism. David introduced musical instruments, songs, he wrote music, worship songs, and therefore at the tabernacle that David erected, 24 courses of priests and their musicians ministered day and night in music.

So certain charismatic teachers, a great number of them by the way, you'll encounter this if you ever listen to charismatic teachers about this, they believe the tabernacle of David symbolizes worship music in its purest form and that what God's going to do in the

last days is restore the purest worship music, and usually those who say these things are musicians and no doubt think that their music is representative of that. Now this is a total misunderstanding of what Amos is saying and what James is saying. James is not talking about the restoration of musical ministry here, he's talking about the inclusion of the Gentiles, but what is the tabernacle of David? It is not a reference to the tent that David set up in Jerusalem, it is a figure of speech based on the common expression in the Old Testament, the house of David.

The house of David means the dynasty of David and it's a very common term in the Bible, the house of David, the house of David. God is raised up in the house of David, a savior, it even says in the New Testament. Now since the house of David refers to the dynasty of David, and yet in the figure of a house, Amos is using a sort of a play on words.

He doesn't talk about the house of David, he talks about the sukkoth in the Hebrew, the sukkoth is the tent or the shack. The feast of sukkoth or the feast of tabernacles was a feast where people would set up sukkothim, sukkothim, which would be little lean twos made of branches and leaves and so forth. It's a shack, it's a shed, it's a place you'd spend a night or a few nights, but it's not where you'd want to live, it's not a real house.

And that Amos has described the house of David or the dynasty of David as having been so corrupted and so degenerated that you could hardly call it a shed. It's like a shack, it's like a sukkoth of David. It's simply a way of sort of demeaning the state of the dynastic line of David at the time of Amos.

The kings that followed David in his house, in his dynasty, were very corrupt for the most part. And Amos is saying, yeah, this house of David hardly deserves even to be called a house, it's more of a ramshackle shed. It's so dilapidated, and he means morally dilapidated, that the dynasty of David has been so corrupted he doesn't deign to call it a house at all.

Now, but he says, but that sukkoth of David will be restored, and that means that the dynasty of David will be restored to its former glory. This is a reference to the Messiah coming, who is of the dynasty of David. He is the final king of the dynasty of David, and in Jesus, the house of David is restored to its glory, with the glorification of Jesus himself.

Now, this is how James is understanding it, because that's the way Amos meant it, that the house of David would be restored in the person of the Messiah. Though it had fallen to a great and dilapidated disorder in the time of Amos, it would be rebuilt or restored. God would, you know, renovate the dynasty by bringing again a glorious and righteous king of the house of David, and that shack would be rebuilt into a house worthy of that name again.

Now, James is more interested in quoting the second part of that. He says, so that the

rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even the Gentiles who are called by my name. Now, James knows this is connected to Jesus, because it is in Jesus that the house of David has been restored, and the result of it, according to Amos, would be that Gentiles and all the nations would be brought to God, and so James is seeing in this prophecy a prediction of what they are seeing before their eyes in his day.

He's not talking about the end times. If you look at Amos chapter 9, I'm trying to make that a reference to the end times, like popular teachers sometimes do, you're missing the whole point. James is not predicting something about the end times.

He's talking about what's happening before their eyes. He said, Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for him, and with this the words of the prophets agree, and he quotes his prophecy. Now, he's saying this prophecy of Amos agrees with, or is in a sense describing, what we are seeing with God bringing Gentiles into the church.

That's James's point. Now, that verse 18 is strange. It says, known to God from eternity are all his works.

Most of this sentence are not found in the Greek manuscripts, the older Greek manuscripts at all, and only a little portion of it, and it's attached to the end of verse 17, so that in the older manuscripts, what it actually says at the end of verse 17 is that says the Lord who does all these things known from eternity. It's kind of in the Alexandrian text, it's attached to the end of verse 17, and it's much shorter. Then in verse 19, therefore James says, I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, and from things strangled, and from blood.

For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city being read in the synagogues every sabbath. Then it pleased the apostles and elders with the whole church, including apparently the former Judaizers, they seem to have come around, to send those chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely Judas, who is also called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, and they wrote this letter by them. The apostles and elders and the brethren, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, greetings.

Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words unsettling your souls, saying you must be circumcised and keep the law, to whom we gave no such commandment, it seemed good to us being assembled with one accord to send chosen men with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report 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 you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual



immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.

Farewell. So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch, and when they had gathered together the multitude, they delivered the letter, and when they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. Now Judas and Silas themselves, being prophets also, exhorted the brethren with many words and strengthened them, and after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles.

However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there. This verse 34 is not found in the older manuscripts. It would appear that it was included by someone, a scribe or so added that to explain how Silas happened to still be in Antioch when Paul went on his second missionary journey from there, because he and Barnabas parted company and he took Silas with him, who apparently was in Antioch with him, but this says that Judas and Silas went back from Antioch to Jerusalem, and to explain that anomaly, someone apparently wrote, but Silas stayed.

Now the older manuscripts don't say that, and therefore when Paul did take Silas, we have to assume that Silas had returned to Antioch or that Paul sent, you know, messengers to Jerusalem and asked him to come with him, and he did, but that's another story. And Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord with many others also. Now I read all that so that I could take a break here and talk about the letter and the decision that was made.

The most important thing here is, of course, what the council decided. They decided that the Gentiles should not be put under the burden of the law. Now notice the kind of language that the Jews themselves, the Jewish Christians, use to speak of the law.

In verse 10, Peter referred to it as putting a yoke on the necks of the Gentiles, which even the Jews did not easily bear. It's a yoke, it's a burden. Now when Jesus said in Matthew 11, take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

My yoke is easy. He's contrasting that with the yoke of the law. He said, come unto me all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I'll give you rest.

The burden was the law that the Jews were under. The Pharisaic teaching put these people under burdens. He said, no, come, I'll give you rest from that, and you take my yoke.

My yoke is easy. Following me is not a burden, but the law was. And Peter says, why should we put a yoke like this, this burdensome yoke on the Gentiles? And notice in verse 19, James says, I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles.

Putting them under the law is troublesome. It's trouble they'd be given. He says the same thing when he writes the letter in verse 24.

He says, some went out from us having troubled you, and with words unsettling your soul saying you must be circumcised. The idea that we have to keep Torah is unsettling, it's burdensome, it's troublesome. This is how the Jerusalem Jewish apostles spoke of it.

Peter and James. It's a yoke that's hard to bear. And in verse 28 in the letter they say, seem good to lay upon you no greater burden than these few things.

So they see the imposition of Torah upon anyone, on Jews or Gentiles, as a yoke that is difficult to bear. It's a burden. To put people under that is to trouble them and unsettle them.

Yet there are people today who are called Torah observant Jewish roots people who tell us that we should be keeping the Torah. Quite contrary to everything in the New Testament. These people are troubling the church today.

Fortunately most of them are online rather than in churches. But they read about it online, they come into churches and they cause trouble. But there are some Torah observant churches, they usually call themselves messianic synagogues, which distances themselves from the church enough that they don't really end up disturbing the life of ordinary churches so much.

But they are a faction from the body of Christ who are saying that Christians should be keeping the Torah. It's like the book of Acts never happened. It's like Galatians was never written for these people.

They don't even understand it. But they are troubling the church. They're unsettling people's minds.

They're trying to lay a burden on people. Now what about these things, the four things? What are they? Fornication, eating things, eating blood, eating things strangled, and meat sacrifice to idols. Three of these have to do with what you can eat and can't eat.

The other is fornication. Fornication is any kind of sexual sin. Now some scholars think that by fornication the apostles mean a specific kind of sexual sin, namely marrying somebody who's too closely related to you.

There are laws forbidding marriage between people in very close relations biologically. And some feel that that's the fornication they're referring to. But they don't say so.

Fornication is very generic. Adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, incest, those are all aspects of fornication. And then there's three things that have to do with what you eat.

Don't eat blood, don't eat things strangled, and don't eat meat sacrifice to idols. Now it sounds like these things are being put on them and they're being asked to keep these

things as a concession. Why are these things even mentioned? Well he says in verse 21, because, now this is why we're asking the Gentiles to abstain from these four things, because Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city being read in the synagogue every Sabbath.

Meaning there's a lot of Jews in every Gentile city where there are synagogues. And people there for generations have been indoctrinated and sensitized by the teachings of Moses that are read in every Sabbath in the synagogue. That means there's a bunch of people who have these Jewish convictions who would be easily, you know, offended, appalled even by certain Gentile practices.

Now Gentiles generally were pagan, of course, most Gentiles were not Christians. And pagan Gentiles had appalling sexual morality. I mean they had prostitutes in their pagan temples as priestesses.

I mean they, sexual immorality was just part of paganism. Eating meat sacrificed to idols was part of worshiping idols. Eating blood was always abhorrent to Jews and the Gentiles didn't care.

They ate blood and even things strangled. Apparently eating an animal strangled was a way of killing it so its blood remained in it. If you slit its throat its blood will drain out or if you butcher it normally but if you strangle it the heart stops beating and a dead body doesn't bleed and so you'd have more blood in the meat apparently making it more juicy or more tasty.

And so the Gentiles apparently often would strangle their food rather than butcher it normally and therefore they'd eat it with the blood in it which is another thing. Don't eat blood. So these were Gentile, very common Gentile practices but they went very severely against the sensitivities of the Jews.

And so in order to avoid offending the Jews because Moses has a lot of his followers in every town who've been sensitized by the reading of the law every Sabbath in the synagogue. To avoid offending them we'd like to ask you to stop doing those things or to avoid doing those things. At the end of the letter in verse 28 it says if you keep yourselves from these you'll do well.

It's clear they're not putting them under the law because these things some of these things aren't even mentioned in the law. Eating things strangled is not one of the laws in Moses' law but what they're doing is coming up with a selection of items that they know very well that Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire tend to practice and which are particularly disgusting to the Jews and wishing not to offend the Jews or make them feel that Christianity is a disgusting thing they're asking that the Gentiles go out of their way not to do things even if they have the liberty to do some of them not to do them in a place where you're going to offend people about it. And Paul talks to the Corinthians

about this and the Romans too in Romans 14 and 15 and also in 1st Corinthians 8 through 10.

Paul talks about meat sacrificed to idols he said you know it's not a big deal there's nothing unclean of itself to those who think it's unclean something but those there's nothing unclean of itself an idol isn't anything we know that but he says not everyone knows that and those who don't get offended and stumble if you eat meat sacrificed so he says even though you have liberty don't do it if you're going to stumble a brother but he said however when it comes to eating that's one thing but fornication he says you're not supposed to do that anytime fornication is not okay for Christians apparently eating some of these things it's okay as far as God is concerned but it's preferable not to do it if you're going to stumble people and that was James's concern too and so they sent this letter and so when Paul and Barnabas then went out on their second missionary journey they carried this letter with them to the Gentile churches and this would of course end the debate and that's one reason we know that Galatians was written before this there are some who believe Galatians was written later in Paul's life but there's no sense in it he wouldn't have to write Galatians if this decree existed if Judaizers came to his Gentile church and said oh you got to keep the law excuse me the apostles in Jerusalem wrote this letter says we don't Paul wouldn't have to write Galatians the fact that he had to argue the case in Galatians means he wrote it before the council just before apparently and by the way in Galatians he never even alludes to the Jerusalem council's decree which is strange if it existed because that would have been the strongest argument he would have against imposing circumcision on the Gentiles he wouldn't even have to write any other arguments just say hey this has been decided listen let's not reinvent the wheel here the apostles already discussed this and it's settled the fact that Paul did not refer at all to the Jerusalem council in Galatians means that he wrote it before that happened uh and that and therefore we could say that probably in that last verse of chapter 14 where Paul and Barnabas stayed a long time in Antioch that's when Paul wrote Galatians and not afterwards we will also note the other letters and when they were written as we go through Acts that's going to involve us in the second and third missionary journeys which begins really at the end of this chapter we won't read any further in this chapter today and we'll we'll pick it up with the beginning of the second journey next time