
Ministry of the Holy Spirit
Acts 15:1-21
Lesson 26 – Is Jesus Enough?

Acts 15:1-21 (NIV)

¹Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." ²This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So, Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ³The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad.

⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. ⁵ Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." ⁶ The apostles and elders met to consider this question. ⁷ After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. ⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹ He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?

¹¹ No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." ¹² The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³ When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. ¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: ¹⁶ "'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things' ¹⁸ that have been known for ages.

¹⁹ "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. ²¹ For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."

Discussion Questions

📖 Why was the issue of circumcision such a serious threat to the Gospel in Acts 15?

- **Primary Text:** Acts 15:1–2
- **Cross References:** Galatians 1:6–9; Galatians 5:2–6
- *Discussion:* Why does adding anything to faith in Christ change the Gospel rather than improve it?

📖 What are some modern-day examples of saying "Jesus plus something else" is required for salvation?

- **Primary Text:** Acts 15:1
- **Cross References:** Ephesians 2:8–9; Romans 3:28
- *Discussion:* What religious traditions or personal achievements are people tempted to trust alongside Christ?

📖 Peter declared that God "made no distinction" between Jew and Gentile. What does this teach us about God's grace?

- **Primary Text:** Acts 15:8–11
- **Cross References:** Romans 10:12–13; Galatians 3:26–29
- *Discussion:* How does the Gospel remove barriers of race, culture, status, and religious background?

📖 Why is grace so difficult for people to receive and believe?

- **Primary Text:** Acts 15:11
- **Cross References:** Romans 5:6–8; Titus 3:4–7
- *Discussion:* Why do we naturally want to earn what God freely gives?

📖 What is the difference between religion and the Gospel according to this passage?

- **Primary Text:** Acts 15:10–11
- **Cross References:** Matthew 11:28–30; Colossians 2:20–23
- *Discussion:* How can religious traditions become burdens that Christ never intended people to carry?

📖 How can obedience become evidence of salvation instead of an attempt to earn salvation?

- **Primary Text:** Acts 15:10–11
- **Cross References:** James 2:17–18; John 14:15; Ephesians 2:10
- *Discussion:* What is the difference between obeying because you are saved versus obeying to become saved?

📖 James said believers should not "make it difficult" for people turning to God. How can churches unintentionally make coming to Christ more difficult today?

- **Primary Text:** Acts 15:19
- **Cross References:** Matthew 23:4; Romans 14:13
- *Discussion:* What unnecessary expectations or traditions might discourage seekers?

📖 What is the difference between salvation and sanctification? Why is that distinction important?

- **Primary Text:** Acts 15:11
- **Cross References:** Philippians 1:6; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24
- *Discussion:* How does understanding sanctification help us be more patient with ourselves and others?

📖 **Why is it dangerous to judge someone's salvation solely by where they are in their spiritual growth?**

- **Primary Text:** Acts 15:8–11
- **Cross References:** Romans 14:1–4; 1 Samuel 16:7
- *Discussion:* How can the church encourage growth without becoming judgmental?

📖 **How does remembering that "Jesus paid it all" produce humility instead of pride?**

- **Primary Text:** Acts 15:11
- **Cross References:** 1 Corinthians 1:29–31; Philippians 3:7–9
- *Discussion:* Why does grace leave no room for boasting?

📖 **What practical signs show that a church is centered on grace instead of legalism?**

- **Primary Text:** Acts 15:19–21
- **Cross References:** John 13:34–35; Galatians 5:1, 13–14
- *Discussion:* How can believers maintain biblical holiness without falling into legalism?

📖 **If someone asked you today, "Is Jesus enough?" how would Acts 15 answer that question?**

- **Primary Text:** Acts 15:11
- **Cross References:** John 14:6; Hebrews 10:10–14; Colossians 2:13–14
- *Discussion:* How does Christ's finished work on the cross give believers confidence and assurance of salvation?

Share your major takeaways from the Lesson/Sermon this week.

Commentary

A. The Problem Arises: Two Questions About Salvation, 15:1-5

(15:1-5) **Introduction:** this is the story of the great Jerusalem council. It is called great because...

- all the apostles were involved in its discussion and decision.
- the council declared forever that a man is saved apart from ritual, saved by the grace of God through faith alone.

Two questions arose about salvation.

1. The basic question about salvation: Is a ritual or ceremony necessary to be saved? (v.1-3).

2. The enlarged question about salvation: Does a man have to accept the whole law before he can be saved? (v.4-5).

1. (15:1-3) Salvation vs. Ritual: the basic question arising about salvation. Is a ritual or ceremony necessary to be saved? Note five significant points.

1. The dissenters from the Judean churches were a powerful force, so powerful that their argument and emphasis have continued down through the centuries. (See Deeper Study #1, Judaizers—Galatians 2:4 for more discussion.) Note that the visitors from Jerusalem moved among the Antioch believers and taught their own ideas. The dissenters were...

- teachers and leaders.
- well-versed in the Scripture.
- some of the very first believers, considered mature.
- elder statesmen.
- esteemed highly.

Therefore, what they said was considered very important. The problem was this: if the dissenters were allowed to continue, the believers of Antioch were bound to become upset and confused. The result would have been explosive and devastating: the Antioch church would have been split and its ministry and witness made ineffective.

2. Scripture clearly declares what the dissension was; there can be no mistake about what was being said: "Except ye be circumcised [undergo this ritual]...ye cannot be saved." Note three critical facts.

a. A person's eternal fate was at stake. The dissenters did not say you should undergo the ritual...

- to be obedient to Scripture
- to please God
- to please the church
- to demonstrate your love
- to identify with believers
- to keep from being a stumbling block

The dissenters were saying believers must undergo the ritual and be circumcised *to be saved*. They were saying it was the ritual, the circumcision that *saved* them; a believer was just not saved unless he was *ritualized*. They were claiming salvation was...

- God's grace plus a ritual.
- God's grace plus man's own hand.
- God's grace plus man's own work.
- a spiritual thing (God) plus a physical thing (circumcision).

b. The issue was not whether a believer should be circumcised. (See Deeper Study #2, Circumcision—Acts 15:1; notes—Acts 10:1-33 for more discussion.) Paul never said that circumcision was wrong. He maintained that since Christ had come, circumcision was a personal matter and a matter of conscience. If a person wished to be circumcised, let him be. Down through the centuries a host of Gentile believers (even two thousand years after Christ) have been circumcised and not become Jews. The physical act of circumcision does not make a person a Jew any more than any other physical ritual makes a person a member of any other race. It is the *nature and commitment* of one's body, mind, and soul that makes a person a true member of a race or of anything else.

Again, the issue was not whether a person should be circumcised or *ritualized*, but whether a ritual was necessary to be saved. The answer was critical, affecting all generations of believers. The answer would determine a man's *primary* relationship to Jesus Christ: Is a man's confrontation and saving experience to be focused upon Jesus Christ *or* upon *Jesus Christ and something else*?

⇒ Is a person's mind and attention to be upon Jesus *alone*, or upon Jesus and a ritual?

⇒ Is a person's faith to be in Jesus *alone*, or in Jesus and a ritual?

- ⇒ Is a person's profession to declare Jesus *alone*, or Jesus and a ritual?
- ⇒ Is a person's life to bear testimony to Jesus *alone*, or to Jesus and a ritual?
- ⇒ Is a person's witness to be Jesus *alone*, or Jesus and a ritual?

Does God save a person whose body, mind, and soul are focused upon His Son *alone* or upon Jesus *and*...

- some ritual?• some ceremony?• some act? some work?• some human effort?• some physical substance?

The answer should be clear to all who think and are *honest* and *unselfish*. God has *only* one Son who loves Him supremely, only one Son who has proven His love by obeying God supremely, even to the point of suffering for all the sins of the world. And God loves His dear Son supremely.

- ⇒ Could God add anything to the plan of salvation, add anything that would divert man's attention from His Son, especially in the very first moments of confrontation?
- ⇒ Could God want a man's mind to be upon anything other than His Son, to be upon rushing to *experience* some ritual instead of focusing his attention solely upon His dear Son?
- ⇒ Is it possible that something else is needed other than Jesus Himself?
- ⇒ Is there *honestly* some physical substance needed in addition to God's only Son?
- ⇒ Is there really a ritual, an ordinance, that has a heart that can reach out and save a man from death? Or, do people alone have hearts, and the Person of God alone have the heart of salvation?

This does not mean a person is not to be baptized or not to share in any other ritual or ordinance. A person who has his eyes upon Jesus Christ is focusing upon Jesus Christ, and that means he is immediately following Jesus through the very first act of the Christian life—being baptized. But in every instance, the man is saved and owes his salvation to the Lord Jesus Christ and to Him alone. (See Deeper Study #1, Baptism—Acts 2:38 for more discussion.)

c. Paul and Barnabas argued time and again against this teaching, declaring that ritual (circumcision) is not necessary for salvation. Note the words, "no small dissension and disputation [questioning]." The arguments...

- were frequent and long.
- involved the questioning and challenging of each other as well as dissension.
- were unyielding, with neither side giving an inch.

The issue was bound to be critical to Paul or else he would not have gone to such limits in arguing the point. Paul's great commitment to the Lord would not allow him to waste time in useless argument (cp. 2 Tim. 2:16, 23-26). This fact alone should speak to the hearts of any who stand on the other side.

3. There was the decision of the Antioch church to seek counsel from the Jerusalem church. The Antioch church had no doubt about its position. Note that the Antioch church was not seeking for the Jerusalem church to enlighten them on the doctrine of salvation. The church sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem for three reasons.

a. God told Paul to go: "I went up by revelation" (Galatians 2:2). God willed a great church council (one that would include the earliest apostles)—a council that would issue a great verdict proclaiming the truth to every generation.

b. A declaration by the apostles would carry great weight and help tremendously in silencing those who would add a ritual to the requirements for salvation.

c. A declaration by the Jerusalem church would provide a great weapon to use in the struggle against "ritual salvation." The Jerusalem church was the *ritual* center, the home base of those preaching the error. Therefore, if the Jerusalem church would issue a strong verdict denying the necessity of ritual for salvation, the position of "salvation by grace" alone would be greatly strengthened.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

"But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31).

4. There was the triumphant and glorious march of a great church, encouraging and loving God's servants. Note the revealing words, "And being brought on their way by the church." As Paul and Barnabas began their journey to Jerusalem, a great company from the Antioch church escorted them as a mark of great affection and honor. Despite the ever present opposition to Paul that seemed to be in practically every church, there were some believers who loved and respected him deeply.

"Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship" (Acts 20:38).

"And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed" (Acts 21:5).

"Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well" (3 John 6. See note—Acts 28:15).

5. The servants utilized every opportunity to preach. As Paul and Barnabas travelled toward Jerusalem, they *proclaimed Christ to the believers* where churches had been founded. They also proclaimed the great movement of God that had taken place among the Gentiles. Note the "great joy" of the Christian brothers.

⇒ The Phenician churches were founded by laymen over a decade before (cp. Acts 11:19).

⇒ The Samaritan churches had been founded by Philip and Peter and John (cp. Acts 8:5, 25).

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Matthew 16:15).

"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with

enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:2-5).

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2).

2. (15:4-5) Salvation: the enlarged question arising about salvation. Does a man have to accept the whole law before he can be saved? Note three points:

1. Paul and his company were received and welcomed by the Jerusalem church, including the apostles and elders. They *all* seemed to be present; the council was a critical session. The word "received" (*paredechthēsan* ^{PWS: 3188}) has the idea of a formal meeting of the church. Paul was reporting to "the church...the apostles and elders" in a called meeting. Apparently there were two days of meetings (Acts 15:4, 6).

Note that Paul declared "all things that God had done." The saving of men "by grace through faith" was not his doing. God was the One who was accepting people through faith alone.

2. The Jerusalem dissenters were "of the sect of Pharisees which believed"

DEEPER STUDY #2

(15:1) **Circumcision:** before Christ, circumcision had been the physical sign that a man was a follower of the true God. It was the sign that a man believed the promises that God had made to Abraham and Israel (cp. Genesis 17:10-14; Romans 4:11). God never intended circumcision to have any value other than being a sign. It was not meant to bring righteousness to any man—not even to Abraham (Romans 4:9-10). It was given only as a sign, a sign of the faith that a man already had in God's promises. Righteousness was imputed to the man because he believed God's promises; then the man was circumcised as a sign of his faith in God (Romans 4:11-12).

However, many abused God's purpose for circumcision.

1. Some made circumcision a substitute for true righteousness. A man was thought to be safe and secure in the arms of God if he was circumcised. Believing God and loving men had little to do with being a child of God. Many forgot the circumcision of a pure heart and became Jews of the circumcision in name only. Circumcision became merely a handmade, external, physical sign.

2. Some used circumcision as a way to divide and categorize people. A great wall of division was thrown up around the uncircumcised (cp. 1 Samuel 17:26, 36; 2 Samuel 1:20). Any man who was uncircumcised was thought to be *cut off* and *far off*, not only from those thought to be the people of God (the Jews and the circumcised), but from God Himself. An uncircumcised man was looked upon with bitter contempt. In the mind of the Jew, God was thought to love only Israel, despising and rejecting the Gentile nations.

3. God has done away with circumcision as a sign of righteousness since Christ has come (Galatians 5:6; Galatians 6:15; Col. 2:11). Righteousness is now of the heart and in the spirit, not in the letter of rules and regulations (cp. Romans 2:25-29; Romans 4:8-12, 23-25). The truly righteous man is the man who is God's *inwardly*—the man whose spirit has been *recreated* into the very nature of God. God's very own righteous nature is implanted into the very nature of man when he is *born again*. A man *born again* by the Spirit of God is God's *new creation* (John 3:3f; 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Peter 1:20; 2 Peter 1:4).

DEEPER STUDY #3

(15:5) **Pharisees**: apparently there was a large number of Pharisees who accepted Jesus as the true Messiah after His death and resurrection. This would be a natural result to an honest and thinking Pharisee.

1. The Pharisee was looking for the Messiah to come. He knew the Scriptures. Therefore, when he heard the apostles prove from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah, he was bound to see the evidence. If he had an honest and open heart he would be touched and convicted by the Holy Spirit and converted.

2. The Pharisee would tend...

- to see Jesus as the fulfillment of Judaism, not the replacement of it.
- to see Jesus as an addition to the law, not replacing or embracing the law.
- to see Jesus adding belief to ritual, not replacing ritual.
- to see Jesus adding baptism to the ordinances, not replacing the ordinance.

Simply stated, the Pharisee, because of his extensive training and lifetime commitment to the keeping of the law, would be very slow to give up the law. He would be slow to rest completely in Jesus' righteousness. But note: Scripture says some did make a complete break. There were only "certain ones" who rose up against the message of salvation by faith alone (Acts 15:5).

DEEPER STUDY #4

(15:5) **Salvation— Works**: note that the question in Jerusalem became much larger than mere circumcision. In Antioch the question had been, "Does a man have to be circumcised to be saved?" In Jerusalem the enlarged question was, "Does a man have to keep the whole law to be saved and accepted into the church? Does he have to accept the law as well as accept Christ?" (See Deeper Study #1—Galatians 2:4.)

The root question is for all generations.

⇒ Can a man earn the favor of God? Or does he receive the favor of God?

⇒ Is he acceptable to God because he keeps the law? Or is he saved by confessing that he breaks the law and is utterly dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ?

⇒ Does he work to make himself righteous? Or does he cast himself upon Jesus' righteousness?

⇒ Does he say, "Lord, I come in my own righteousness"? Or, "Lord, I come in Jesus' righteousness"?

⇒ Does he say, "Lord, I come offering my own package of works"? Or, "Lord, I come needing your mercy for coming short"?

⇒ Does he come to God to be praised for what he has achieved by his own hands and efforts? Or does he come to praise God for what God has done for him in Jesus?

⇒ Is man to receive the glory because he has done good? Or is the glory to be lifted up to God for who He is and what He has done?

The Jerusalem Council Meets: The Great Declaration on Salvation, 15:6-22

(15:6-22) Introduction: this passage covers one of the most important church council meetings ever held. It is the great declaration on salvation.

1. (15:6) Church, Council Meeting: the great Jerusalem council met a second time. The whole church was meeting—the apostles, the elders, and the people (Acts 15:12, 22). Once again, the scene is that of an extremely important council meeting, the importance of which cannot be overstressed. Note the sensitive consideration being shown by the leaders. The apostles were not *lording* it over the elders, nor the elders over the people. The issue being considered was of such great magnitude that the leaders were demonstrating humility and sensitivity to the needs of all. Note also there was "much disputing." No one was ignored or silenced. All were allowed to say what they thought

2. (15:7-11) Salvation: Peter's great declaration—all people are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter drove home three points.

1. Peter recalled that it was God and God alone who saved the Gentiles, that is, Cornelius and his house. The event had taken place *some ten years before*, but it was given and established by God to be the example and the pattern which the church was to follow (Acts 15:10. Note this is important, a critical point for every church to heed in every generation.) The event had been planned, initiated, and executed from beginning to end by God and God alone (cp. Acts 10:1-48; see outline—' Acts 10:44-48 and notes—' Acts 10:44-48 for more discussion).

a. Cornelius and his house had believed the Word *while* Peter was in the process of preaching the Word. They believed *while* they were listening and hearing the Word.

b. God had given the Holy Spirit *while* they were believing the Word. Note how Peter stressed that salvation is the act of God.

⇒ God "knew their hearts," that they were believing within their hearts. God and God alone knows the heart.

⇒ God bore witness to the belief of their hearts.

⇒ God bore witness by giving the Holy Spirit to them.

⇒ God gave the Holy Spirit by His act alone (not by baptism nor by laying on of men's hands).

⇒ God gave the Holy Spirit just as He did to the Jews.

c. God cleansed their hearts by faith. The stress is upon the word *faith*, not upon ritual or ceremony. Again, the stress is upon God. God knows the heart, when a man believes, when a man's heart is moved toward the Lord Jesus, grasping and believing what Jesus has done for him. When God sees that, He cleanses the man's heart.

2. Peter confessed the yoke of the law; he confessed man's inability to keep the law. This was a question, but note it was also a serious charge: "Why tempt ye God?" Peter said that God had already demonstrated the truth about salvation. The matter was made known clearly and unmistakably in the experience of Cornelius. If a person declares that a man is saved by God's grace *plus* a ritual or the law, he tempts God; he prescribes and dictates to God. He questions...

- what God has already done.
- if God knew what he was doing.
- if what God had done was best.

Questioning God is, of course, walking upon sinking sand. It is very dangerous. Note what Peter said about the law.

a. The law is a "yoke," a burden. The picture is that of the oxen yoke (cp. Matthew 11:29-30; Matthew 23:4; Galatians 5:1). To insist that a man...

- undergo a ritual,
- accept the law

...in order to be saved is to put a yoke upon a man, a yoke that no man can bear.

b. No man can keep the law; the Jews had proven the fact (see Deeper Study #2, Law—Galatians 3:10 for discussion).

3. Peter reminded the church of their basic belief: all men are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter declared the doctrine of salvation. It was the very same as Paul's (cp. Ephes. 2:8-9). All men are saved in the same way: "though the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ."

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23-24).

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephes. 2:8-9).

"But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:4-7).

3. (15:12) Salvation, Source: Paul and Barnabas' great declaration—God and God alone has wrought miracles and wonders to verify the message of salvation by grace. Note the stress is "miracles and wonders," not points and arguments. Why? God's miracles show clearly that He approves the preaching of Paul and Barnabas. The message, "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves," is verified and proven by God's stamp of approval.

One may wonder if Paul asked the question he asked of the Galatians:

"Received ye the Spirit by the work of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Galatians 3:2).

4. (15:13-21) Salvation, Source: James' great declaration—all men must be able to turn to God apart from the burden of ritual and law. James was the Lord's brother. (See Introduction, Author—James, for more discussion.) Apparently, he was the leading elder or minister of the church at Jerusalem. Note four points.

1. James supported Peter's great declaration. The way James worded his support is significant.

⇒ "God...did visit the Gentiles" (*epeskepsato* ^{PWS: 4237}): looked upon, oversaw, cared for, looked after, provided for the Gentiles.

⇒ "to take out of them a people": to choose; to appoint; to remove them from the Gentile nations and select a chosen people. The word "people" (*laon* ^{PWS: 2879}) is the same word used of the Jewish people (cp. Acts 10:2). The point is that God was calling *a new people out*—a new body, a new nation, a new race—to be His chosen people, just as He had done with Abraham and the Jews. (See Deeper Study #8, pt.6—Matthew 21:43; note—Ephes. 2:11-18; note—Ephes. 2:14-15; note—Ephes. 2:19-22; and note—Ephes. 4:17-19 for more discussion.)

⇒ "For His name": two verses clearly show what God means by choosing a people "for His name."

"Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me" (Isaiah 43:10).

"For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the LORD; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory" (Jeremiah 13:11)

2. James declared that Scripture supported the truth. God *calls out* people from both the Jews and the Gentiles. He quoted Amos 9:11-12 and applied it to Jesus Christ and believers. God promised three things.

a. "I will return." This is referring to the first coming of Jesus Christ. And He had come—no one present would deny that.

b. There will be Jewish believers: "The tabernacle of David" refers to believing Jews, the true tabernacle or true body of Jews. James was applying the prophecy to the present situation. The people of David, the true indestructible tabernacle of David, the true body of David (believing Jews) will be "built up again...I [God] will set it [them] up."

c. There will be Gentile believers, believers who...

- seek the Lord.
- are called and known by God's name.

3. James declared that God *foreknew* and *destined* from the beginning of the world...

- salvation by faith.
- salvation to all men who seek the Lord and become identified with Him.

This is and always has been the purpose of God (cp. Romans 16:25-27; Ephes. 3:8-9). And He is now bringing His purpose to pass.

4. James recommended a written exhortation instead of burdening rules. He did this for three reasons.

a. That no man be troubled or hindered from turning to God by rituals and law. All men cannot keep a ritual. All who can should, but some are just not able to keep a ritual due to such things as birth defects, injury, disease, or paralysis. And although everyone should obey God, no one is capable of keeping the law, not perfectly. Therefore, no one is saved by the law. The only hope of salvation is for man to turn to God and *trust* God to accept him simply because God loves that much.

b. That all men live as they should. Note the great significance of the sins which James listed...

- idolatry: following and sacrificing to the gods of man's imaginations and desires; partaking of things that pertain to idols (Acts 15:29).

"I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world" (1 Cor. 5:9-10).

- fornication: all forms of immorality.

"I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world...for then must ye needs go out of the world" (1 Cor. 5:9-10).

- "things strangled": the sin of indulgence, of going against God's law and fulfilling one's own desire. Specifically, it refers to eating forbidden meats, to the dietary laws of the Jews (see Deeper Study #3—Acts 10:11-16).

"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18).

- "blood": may refer to murder or to the blood of animals. It probably refers to murder.

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matthew 5:21-22).

Note: these four sins are the sins so common to mankind as a whole.

c. That no man offend or be a stumbling block to another. The sins listed by James were very offensive to the believing Jews. They were often preached against by Jewish rabbis. James stressed this fact, pointing out that keeping these four simple exhortations would please the body of Jewish believers, the strict religionists.

5. (15:22) **Church**: the church council's decision was agreement. Note two points.

1. The whole church agreed with what had been proclaimed, at least officially.
2. The church went beyond the decision, reaching out to settle whatever disturbance and doubt existed. It reached out by sending two chief ministers back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. The two men would...
 - reinforce the message of the decision: salvation is by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and nothing else
 - exhort the new believers in the faith, and assure them that the message of the Judaizers was error.

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