

# Acts 15 Commentary

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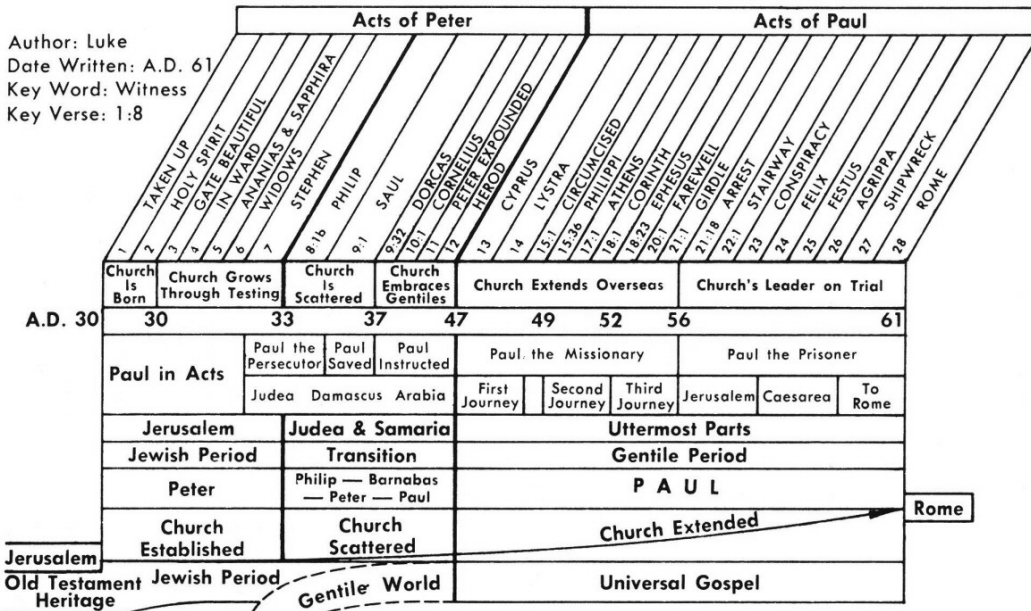
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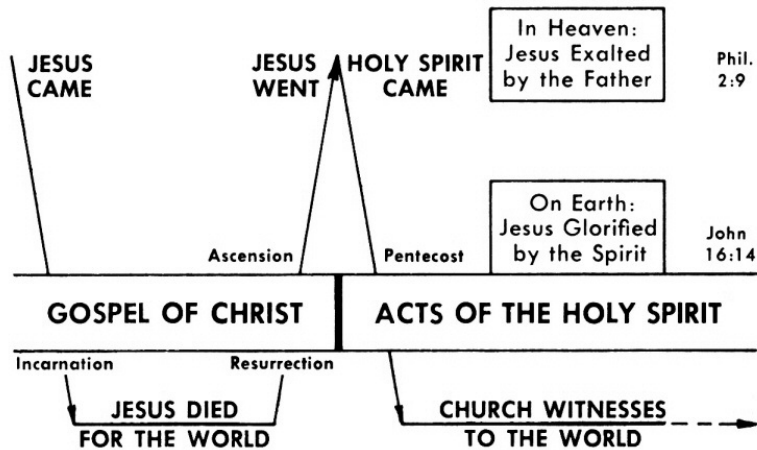
Author: Luke  
 Date Written: A.D. 61  
 Key Word: Witness  
 Key Verse: 1:8



Click chart to enlarge

Chart from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission

### THE EXPANDING WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT-EMPOWERED CHURCH



Click chart to enlarge

Considering the fact that Acts 13 is such a strategic chapter in regard to world evangelism, take a moment and study Irving Jensen's chart at top of the page (click it to enlarge it which is what I have to do at age 72!). Notice the **bold vertical line** (|) at the end of Acts 12 and beginning of Acts 13 which Jensen estimates to be about year 47 (it could be a short time prior). Note the horizontal description of "Church" - **Church Established** in the first 13 years from Acts 1 through Acts 7, then the **Church Scattered** between Acts 8 through Acts 12, which occurred over a period of about 14 years (and remember all dates and times are at best approximations because Luke gives only a few events that allow us to give specific dates, such as the death of Herod in A D 44 in Acts 12:23) and lastly, beginning in Acts 13 (and until the end of this age), the **Church Extended**, this extension being the primarily the fruit of Paul's Three Missionary Journeys which "upset the world!" (Acts 17:6) Now, you have a good grasp of the chronological context of Acts 13. And as they say in the restaurant when your delicious meal is served "Enjoy!" The three missionary journeys are summarized below (this note will be repeated in subsequent chapters). Click links for the maps of each journey.

<a href="#">Paul's First Missionary Journey</a>	Acts 13:4-14:28
<a href="#">Paul's Second Missionary Journey</a>	Acts 15:36-18:22
<a href="#">Paul's Third Missionary Journey</a>	Acts 18:23-21:26

- Maps in table above are from the **Holman Bible Atlas** ([digital book](#); [Hardcover/Paperback version](#)) copyrighted © 1998 B&H Publishing Group, used by permission, all rights reserved. This is one of the best resources for Bible maps as the maps also include helpful short descriptions of the events portrayed on the maps. Please do not download these maps for use on another website. Thank you.
- [Here is a map](#) with all three journeys on one map.

## THE ITINERARY OF PAUL'S THREE MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
1. <a href="#">Antioch</a> Acts 13:1-3	1. <a href="#">Antioch</a> Acts 15:36-40	1. <a href="#">Antioch</a> Acts 18:23
2. <a href="#">Seleucia</a> Acts 13:4	2. <a href="#">Syria</a> Acts 15:41	2. <a href="#">Phrygia/Galatia</a> Acts 18:23-28
3. <a href="#">Salamis on Cyprus</a> Acts 13:5	3. <a href="#">Cilicia</a> Acts 15:41	3. <a href="#">Ephesus</a> Acts 19:1-41
4. <a href="#">Paphos on Cyprus</a> Acts 13:6-12	4. <a href="#">Derbe</a> Acts 16:1	4. <a href="#">Macedonia</a> Acts 20:1
5. <a href="#">Perga in Pamphylia</a> Acts 13:13	5. <a href="#">Lystra</a> Acts 16:1-5	5. <a href="#">Greece</a> Acts 20:2
6. <a href="#">Pisidian Antioch</a> Acts 13:14-50	6. <a href="#">Phrygia/Galatia</a> Acts 16:6	6. <a href="#">Macedonia</a> Acts 20:3-5
7. <a href="#">Iconium</a> Acts 13:51	7. <a href="#">Mysia</a> Acts 16:7	7. <a href="#">Philippi</a> Acts 20:6
8. <a href="#">Lystra</a> Acts 14:6-20	8. <a href="#">Troas</a> Acts 16:8-10	8. <a href="#">Troas</a> Acts 20:6-12
9. <a href="#">Derbe</a> Acts 14:20	9. <a href="#">Samothece</a> Acts 16:11	9. <a href="#">Assos</a> Acts 20:13
10. <a href="#">Lystra</a> Acts 14:21	10. <a href="#">Neapolis</a> Acts 16:11	10. <a href="#">Mitylene</a> Acts 20:14
11. <a href="#">Iconium</a> Acts 14:21	11. <a href="#">Philippi</a> Acts 16:12	11. <a href="#">Samos</a> Acts 20:15
12. <a href="#">Pisidian Antioch</a> Acts 14:21	12. <a href="#">Amphipolis</a> Acts 17:1	12. <a href="#">Miletus</a> Acts 20:15-38
13. <a href="#">Pamphylia</a> Acts 14:24	13. <a href="#">Apollonia</a> Acts 17:1	13. <a href="#">Cos</a> Acts 21:1
14. <a href="#">Perga</a> Acts 14:25	14. <a href="#">Thessalonica</a> Acts 17:1-9	14. <a href="#">Rhodes</a> Acts 21:1
15. <a href="#">Attalia</a> Acts 14:25	15. <a href="#">Berea</a> Acts 17:10-14	15. <a href="#">Patara</a> Acts 21:1
16. <a href="#">Antioch</a> Acts 14:26	16. <a href="#">Athens</a> Acts 17:15-34	16. <a href="#">Tyre</a> Acts 21:3-6
	17. <a href="#">Corinth</a> Acts 18:1-17	17. <a href="#">Ptolemais</a> Acts 21:7
	18. <a href="#">Cenchreae</a> Acts 18:18	18. <a href="#">Caesarea</a> Acts 21:8-14
	19. <a href="#">Ephesus</a> Acts 18:19	
	20. <a href="#">Caesarea</a> Acts 18:22	
	21. <a href="#">Jerusalem</a> Acts 18:22	
	22. <a href="#">Antioch</a> Acts 18:22	

**Charles Swindoll** points out that "When we study the journeys of Paul in the book of Acts, we're not just reading the travel log of a man; we're observing the redemptive plan of God unfolding as He promised. Through the ministry of Saul of Tarsus, God's mission to reclaim His creation from the death grip of evil would move to its next stage. The plan of this mission was outlined in the Lord's promise at His ascension, where He said,

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses..."

1. In Jerusalem [Stage 1: Acts 2–7],
2. and in all Judea and Samaria [Stage 2: Acts 8–12],
3. and even to the remotest part of the earth [Stage 3: Acts 13–28]." (Acts 1:8-)

**Acts 15:1 Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."**

KJV Acts 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

- **Some men came down** Acts 21:20; Galatians 2:4,12,13
- **teaching the brethren** Acts 15:5; Romans 4:8-12; Galatians 5:1-4; Philippians 3:2,3; Colossians 2:8,11,12,16
- **according to the custom of Moses** Genesis 17:10-27; Leviticus 12:3; John 7:22
- **you cannot be saved** Acts 15:4; 1 Corinthians 7:18,19; Galatians 2:1,3; 5:6; 6:13-16
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**AN ATTACK ON**

## SOLA FIDE

**Sola fide** is Latin for "faith alone," which you have likely heard in the saying, "By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone." These teachers were attacking the "solos" especially the "sola" that all one needed to be saved by Christ was faith in Christ.

Notice that Acts 15 is strategically situated between the First and Second Missionary Journeys. This makes Acts 15 one of the most important chapters in the Bible (my wife accuses me of saying that about every chapter I am studying!). And what makes this chapter so critical is it documents the battle for the integrity of the Gospel and the vindication of Paul's teaching of justification by faith alone in Christ alone.

As **Wikipedia** says "Sola fide (Latin: by faith alone), also known as justification by faith alone, is a Christian theological doctrine commonly held to distinguish many Protestant churches from the Catholic Church, as well as the Eastern Orthodox Churches and Oriental Orthodox Churches."

**Spurgeon** - It was time that this question was settled once for all, before division grew up as the result of it. The first question—"Can the Gentiles be saved?" had been answered; the second was the one before us—"Must they not be circumcised?"

**John MacArthur** rightly reminds us that "At various times in its history, the church's leaders have met together to settle doctrinal issues. For example, historians recognize seven ecumenical councils in the first several centuries of the church's existence. Of those seven, perhaps the two most significant were the Councils of **Nicea** (325 AD), and **Chalcedon** (451 AD). At those councils, erroneous teaching about the person and nature of our Lord was condemned, and the biblical position carefully defined. As important as those councils were, the Jerusalem Council, described in this chapter, was the first and the most significant of all. For it fixed the most momentous doctrinal question of all: What must a person do to be saved? The apostles and elders successfully resisted the pressure to impose Jewish legalism and ritualism on the Gentile believers. In other words, they forbade the inclusion of works as a part of salvation. They affirmed for all time the truth that salvation is wholly by God's grace through faith alone, apart from any human efforts." (MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Acts)

Messianic Jewish commentator **Steven Ger** writes "That the issue of Gentile believers and their relationship to Jewish believers was still percolating and ready to unexpectedly boil over at the advanced date of late a.d. 49 (or perhaps even early a.d. 50), almost seventeen years since the birth of the church, was a major problem that threatened to throw the church into unprecedented internal crisis. **In this pivotal chapter, among the most critical in the New Testament**, Luke outlines the impassioned discussion surrounding this conflict and the eventual solution arrived at through the Jerusalem Council by the assembled church leadership." (Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series – The Book of Acts: Witnesses to the World)

**William Larkin** writes that "In a day when the cultural diversity of world-class cities is more "stew pot" than "melting pot," the church needs to relearn lessons from the Jerusalem council. These lessons will help the body of Christ seize the moment for further evangelistic advance, for we will be able to model a harmonious cultural diversity that the world with all its ethnic strife can only hope for. Here is great good news for Theophilus and us: a gospel that recognizes diversity yet enables harmonious living based on a higher unity, our identity in Christ. (IVP New Testament Commentary Series – Acts)

**Swindoll** quips that "Whenever you put people together, contention happens. Even in the church. Some might even say especially in the church....The question is not whether a church will have contention, but how a church will move to resolve internal conflict....How this first generation of believers resolved the conflict would not only affect generations of Christians, but it would also set the precedent for how earnest believers would resolve contention within their own communities." (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – Acts)

**Richard Longenecker** gives an excellent background to help understand why serious doctrinal problems began to unfold in Acts 15 - The convening of the Jerusalem Council in approximately AD 49 was an event of great importance for the early church. There can be no doubt that Gentiles were always meant by God to share in the promises to Israel. This is a recurring theme of the OT (cf. Ge 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Isa 49:6; 55:5–7; Zep 3:9–10; Zec 8:22). It was the underlying presupposition for all Jewish proselytizing (cf. m. 'Abot 1:12; Mt 23:15). And it is implicit in the sermons of Peter at Pentecost (2:39) and in the house of Cornelius (10:35). But the correlative conviction of Judaism was that Israel was God's appointed agent for the administration of these blessings—that only through the nation and its institutions could Gentiles have a part in God's redemption and share in his favor. And there seems to have been no expectation on the part of Christian believers at Jerusalem that this program would be materially altered. In the experience of the church, all Gentiles who had come to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah had been, with only one exception, either full proselytes or near-proselytes (i.e., "God-fearers"). Only Cornelius's conversion did not fit the pattern (cf. 10:1–11:18). But his conversion was viewed as exceptional and certainly not a precedent for any change of policy. The practice of preaching to Gentiles directly, however, which was begun by Paul in his mission on Cyprus and throughout southern Asia Minor, was a matter of far-reaching concern at Jerusalem, especially in view of the tensions arising within Palestine after the death of Herod Agrippa I in AD 44. As the faithful remnant, believers in the Jerusalem church naturally expected the Christian mission to proceed along the lines that

God had set out long ago. They could point to the fact that, with few exceptions, commitment to Jesus as Israel's Messiah did not make Jews any less Jewish. Furthermore, sometimes it even brought Gentiles who were only loosely associated with the synagogues into greater conformity with Jewish ethics. (Expositor's Bible Commentary)

**Williams** adds that "It was one thing to accept the occasional God-fearer into the church, someone already in sympathy with Jewish ways; it was quite another to welcome large numbers of Gentiles who had no regard for the law and no intention of keeping it."

Remember that for the Jews, it was necessary for a Gentile to first become a proselyte (become circumcised and obey the Law) before he would be allowed to embrace Judaism. But the Gospel in effect bypassed this traditional tract leading to conversion, and allowed Gentiles to directly become converts by belief in Jesus. Of course, what confused many of the orthodox Jews was that when the Gentiles converted they did not become Jewish converts but were an entirely new entity, Christian converts that composed the Church. However the Jews saw Christianity as the culmination of Judaism! So the stage was set for dissension and deliberation of the Biblical doctrine of salvation and how Judaism related to the Church.

Luke had just ended chapter 14 by telling us that Paul and Barnabas "spent a long time with the disciples." (Acts 14:28). But the "celebration" over God's Gospel of grace was about to come to screeching halt by a group of Judaizing party crashers who announced that God's grace needed a touch of God's Law!

**Some men** - Judaizers from Jerusalem. The designation **Judaizer** is derived from the verb [ioudaizo](#) (used only in Gal 2:14+) which means to live like a Jew, especially according to their customs, traditions, rituals, manners and laws and especially their law demanding circumcision. Robertson adds that "They had volunteered to go without church action in Jerusalem for their activity is disclaimed by the conference (Acts 15:24+)."

**Constable** notes that "It was probably during the time Paul was in Syrian Antioch, after returning from the first missionary journey and before attending the conference in Jerusalem (ch. 15), that he wrote the Epistle to the Galatians. He did so to instruct the believers in the churches he and Barnabas had planted. This would have been in the late 40s A.D., probably 49 A.D. Galatians appears to have been the first of Paul's inspired epistles."

In Acts 11:2+ we see Jews debate Peter over circumcision, Luke recording that "when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him." (KJV = And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him.)

**Gotquestions** calls these men who **began teaching the brethren** Judaizers - In the early church, those who taught a combination of God's grace and human effort were called "Judaizers." The word Judaizer comes from a Greek verb ([ioudaizo](#)) meaning "to live according to Jewish customs." The word appears in Galatians 2:14 where Paul describes how he confronted Peter for forcing Gentile Christians to "Judaize." A Judaizer taught that, in order for a Christian to truly be right with God, he must conform to the Mosaic Law. Circumcision, especially, was promoted as necessary for salvation. Gentiles had to become Jewish proselytes first, and then they could come to Christ. The doctrine of the Judaizers was a mixture of grace (through Christ) and works (through the keeping of the Law). This false doctrine was dealt with in Acts 15 and strongly condemned in the book of Galatians. ([Who were the Judaizers?](#))

**Came down from Judea** - Recall that "**came down**" reflects the fact that Jerusalem was elevated, so leaving the city is termed go down and entering the city go up. There is a bit of a play on words, for though faith in Christ raises one **up** to new life and freedom, these law bringers sought to bring the disciples back **down** into legalism and bondage to the law. The designation **from Judea** stands for "from Jerusalem" which was in Judea, as the city was still the central hub for the spreading spokes of the young church. Recall that Paul and Barnabas had taught at the church in Antioch for an entire year (Acts 11:26+), for they knew that the best defense against doctrinal error is sound (healthy) doctrine.

**John MacArthur** describes these men writing that "False teachers have plagued the church throughout its history. They are emissaries of Satan, sent to destroy the church's power and corrupt its proclamation."

You can rest assured that when the church begins to grow and people begin to get saved, Satan will not sit still. And these men in Jerusalem did not sit still but were willing to travel 300 miles to inject error and cause disturbance in the church at Antioch. Jesus alluded to the zeal evil men would manifest in order to inject error and confusion into the hearts and minds of souls declaring...

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because **you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte**; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. (Mt 23:15).

**And began teaching the brethren** - Their bad teaching as with all good teaching had as its goal to change the way of thinking of the disciples regarding the way of salvation. And their desire of course was that a change in thinking would issue in a change in action, specifically that they would seek circumcision to assure they were indeed saved. **Robertson** suggests that "Their attitude was one of supercilious superiority." Imagine yourself as a Gentile who had believed in Jesus, and now you are informed belief was not sufficient and thus your salvation was invalid!

**Began teaching** (imperfect tense) ([1321](#))([didasko](#) from **dáo**= know or teach; English = didactic; see study of related noun [didaskalia](#) and the adjective [didaktikos](#)) means to provide instruction or information in a formal or informal setting. Didasko convey the idea of the idea of systematic teaching, as Paul and Barnabas had carried out for a year (Acts 11:26+). Didasko was used to refer to a choir director who trained the choir over a long period of rehearsals until they are able to perform. In that same sense these false teachers were attempting to train the disciples in Antioch to "sing their tune," which was called "Circumcision Assures Salvation." This "tune" had been in the "Top Ten" list of Jewish "tunes" for centuries. But it was a "tune" with a dangerous message, which is why Paul and Barnabas react so vigorously in Acts 15:2.

**Vincent on teaching** in the imperfect tense - were teaching. They had not merely broached the error, but were inculcating it (teaching and impressing by frequent repetitions or admonitions) .

**Brethren** ([80](#))([adelphos](#) from **a** = denotes unity + **delphus** = a womb) means brother or near kinsman. "Adelphós generally denotes a fellowship of life based on identity of origin (family, race, etc). Figuratively as in this passage **adelphos** describes members of the Christian community.

**Constable** points out that "This situation posed the fourth crisis in the history of the early church. The first was selfishness (Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5), and the second was murmuring (over the treatment of the Hellenistic widows, Acts 6). The third was simony (Simon Magus, Acts 8), and now doctrinal controversy raised its ugly head (the "Galatian heresy," Acts 15). This was the most serious problem thus far both in terms of the issue itself and its potential consequences. It involved the correct interpretation of the facts of the gospel."

One would have thought that Peter's experience with the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10:34-38, Acts 11:17-18) would have addressed the issue circumcision, for Peter did not require these Gentiles to be circumcised. Apparently, although there was some push-back (Acts 11:2+), the powers in Jerusalem were satisfied, but now Paul and Barnabas were reporting countless conversions among the Gentiles for God "**had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles**" (Acts 14:27+) -- so the Gentile problem now had to be addressed head on by the more legalistic Jews.

What is amazing (and very sad) is that in America there is a movement that apparently is growing in numbers and it is not that dissimilar from this first century controversy. Here is a snippet to give you an idea of what this (and [some other Hebraic movements](#)) are teaching in an "evangelical setting"...

Those of the Hebrew Roots belief hold to the teaching that Christ's death on the cross did not end the Mosaic Covenant, but instead renewed it, expanded its message, and wrote it on the hearts of His true followers. They teach that the understanding of the New Testament can only come from a Hebrew perspective and that the teachings of the Apostle Paul are not understood clearly or taught correctly by Christian pastors today. Many affirm the existence of an original Hebrew-language New Testament and, in some cases, denigrate the existing New Testament text written in Greek. This becomes a subtle attack on the reliability of the text of our Bible. If the Greek text is unreliable and has been corrupted, as is charged by some, the Church no longer has a standard of truth. (Read more - [What is the Hebrew Roots movement?](#))

**THOUGHT** - I recently spoke with a mature believer in Jesus whose sister has become entangled in this movement and now refuses to even speak with anyone except her sister about the movement. Sadly the believing sister has been completely unable to dislodge her sister from the tenets of this movement. About 8 years ago, 2 men I had discipled began to espouse teachings that advocated keeping of the Old Testament laws. I met with one of the men who had set under me for 3 or more years and had even been in Christian ministry and despite my best "apologetic" attempts he would not budge from his beliefs advocating keeping of the OT laws. I have since lost contact with him. I am sure some of you reading these notes have friends or family who have been affected by these aberrant OT teachings, which in my opinion appeal to our fallen flesh nature - what can I do to merit blessing, etc. It can be very subtle.

Paul's teaching on **justification by faith** alone is the basic point of disagreement. The Judaizers clearly would not have agreed with the statement he made in Acts 13:39+ that "through Him (JESUS) everyone who believes ([SOLA FIDE!](#)) is **freed** ([dikaioo](#) - most often translated *justified*) from all things, from which you could not be **freed** ([dikaioo](#)) through the Law of Moses." In short, Paul taught right standing before God is only attainable by faith in the Righteous One! There was no caveat, disclaimer or addendum to Paul's teaching that one could ONLY be justified ONLY by faith in the ONLY Son of God.

**Merida** writes "In all fairness to the Jewish critics, they raised a natural question. The first Christians were Jewish; Jesus was Jewish; the old-covenant people were Jewish. Christianity was a messianic movement that was foretold in the Old Testament. And since Jews had always demanded that Gentile converts be circumcised and adhere to the rituals of the Torah in order to be accepted into the community (**ED: THAT IS THAT THEY BECOME JEWISH "PROSELYTES"**), it was probably difficult for them to

understand the sudden change. They failed to realize that with the incarnation of Christ, everything had changed. This doctrinal issue also posed a practical problem: how could Jewish Christians enjoy table fellowship with Gentile Christians if the Gentiles failed to adhere to the same ritual laws the Jews did? The Jewish Christians could be defiled by the Gentiles' eating habits! Because the issue was so serious—potentially leading to the formation of two separate churches, one Gentile and one Jewish—a conference was held to deal with the matter." (Ibid)

**Warren Wiersbe** gives us great summary of the problem asking "What were these legalists actually doing and why were they so dangerous? They were attempting to mix Law and grace and to pour the new wine into the ancient brittle wineskins (Luke 5:36-39). They were stitching up the rent veil (Luke 23:45) and blocking the new and living way to God that Jesus had opened when He died on the cross (Heb. 10:19-25). They were rebuilding the wall between Jews and Gentiles that Jesus had torn down on the cross (Eph. 2:14-16). They were putting the heavy Jewish yoke on Gentile shoulders (Acts. 15:10; Gal. 5:1) and asking the church to move out of the sunlight into the shadows (Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 10:1). They were saying, "A Gentile must first become a Jew before he can become a Christian! It is not sufficient for them simply to trust Jesus Christ. They must also obey Moses!" (Bible Exposition Commentary). **Ed:** In short these false teachers were saying the Gentiles had to go through Mt Sinai before they could go to Mt Calvary.

Messianic Jewish commentator **Steven Ger** writes "These unauthorized teachers, or as Fruchtenbaum calls them, "these self-appointed guardians of orthodoxy," had appended the gospel of grace to include the reception of a religious rite. Not that these intimidators would have been content merely with Gentile circumcision. The phrase they used which betrayed their intentions was circumcision "according to the custom of Moses," indicating that circumcision was merely their initial requirement. This aberrant instruction was directed to the synagogue-affiliated proselytes of the gate, God-fearers and especially those Gentiles who had no previous connection with Judaism, bullying them all into believing that they first needed to become full Jewish proselytes before they could become authentic followers of the Messiah. **The teaching of these agitators hit the Antioch church like a massive theological tsunami.** (Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series – The Book of Acts: Witnesses to the World)

**Unless you are circumcised** - Well, yes and no. Yes, that is true if you are referring to spiritual circumcision, but "no" if you are referring to physical circumcision. These two circumcisions are antithetical and diametrically opposed. The source of their spurious "theology" may have been passages such as Genesis 17:14 and Exodus 12:48-49. This false doctrine denied the efficacy of and the sufficiency of the finished work of Christ who declared "**It is finished,**" ([tetelestai](#) = [perfect tense](#) of [teleo](#)) or "**Paid in full!**" (Jn 19:30+). The sin debt was permanently paid in full and nothing else needed to be done except to believe!

**Larkin** has an interesting observation that "Such a "proselyte model" of Gentile conversion was natural to Jews steeped in the Old Testament, which promises that in the last days Gentiles, through the witness of a restored Israel, will flow to Jerusalem and be incorporated into the one people of God (Isa 2:2-3; Isa 25:6-8; Isa 56:6-7; Isa 60:2-22; Zech 8:23)."

**Swindoll** - Circumcision identified a male as a true "son of the covenant," heir to the promises of God to the descendants of Abraham and citizens of Israel. Anyone not born Jewish and circumcised on the eighth day had to learn Hebrew history and become sufficiently knowledgeable about the Mosaic Law. After a thorough examination of his knowledge, he would be baptized and then circumcised. Only then would he be considered a true "son of the covenant," a real citizen of God's kingdom. (Ibid)

**Warren Wiersbe** wrote, "The progress of the Gospel has often been hindered by people with closed minds who stand in front of open doors and block the way for others."

**Are circumcised** (4059)([peritemno](#) from [perí](#) = around + [témno](#) = cut off - see study of [peritome](#)) means literally to cut something off or away ("to cut off around"), signifying a removal of that which has been cut away, in this present context clearly referring to the foreskin.

**TDNT** - Non-biblical Use. Attested from the days of Homer, [peritémnō](#) means "to cut around," "to make incisions," "to encircle with a view to robbing" (e.g., cattle or lands), and then, as a ritual technical term, "to circumcise."

**According to the custom of Moses** - The mention of the name Moses stirs up images of the Law of Moses. And indeed that is what these Jews were proposing. It was fine be have faith in Jesus the Messiah, but according to dogma one also needed to obey Moses. And so these men begin to mix grace with law, and like oil and water, they simply do not mix!

**Custom** (habit)(1485)([ethos](#) from [etho](#) = to be used, to be accustomed) refers to a usual or customary manner of behavior, habit, pattern of behavior which is more or less fixed by tradition or the usual practice. It may be established by law or otherwise generally sanctioned by the society.

**Gilbrant** on the uses of ethos - **Ethos** carries two basic meanings: (1) an informal sense of "custom," i.e., "habit." E.g., Jesus' "habit" (ethos) was to go to the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39). (2) The second meaning described a formal "custom" or "law." Luke uses it in this later sense in this passage referring to the custom of Moses (similar uses are in Acts 6:14+; Acts 21:21+; Acts

28:17+).

**You cannot be saved** - The Greek is more literally "you are continually absolutely not able to be saved." In essence, they were teaching no circumcision, no salvation!

**Can** (present tense)(1410)(**dunamai**) conveys the basic meaning of that which has the inherent ability to do something or accomplish some end. But these false teachers as noted above modified the verb "can" or "could" with a preceding Greek negative particle (ou) which signifies absolute negation. In other words, absolutely no way is the idea.

**Dunamai** is in the **present tense** which signifies the Word of Truth is continuously able or continually has inherent power to save. Luke has a similar statement writing that...

For no (ou = absolutely **no**) **word** (**rhema**) from God shall be void of power (**adunateo** - essentially the converse of **dunamai**). (**Luke 1:37 ASV**)

**Comment:** This verse says not one single Word of God is powerless or unable. Modern translations do not really convey the sense of the power of the Word quite as clearly as the **ASV** - e.g., the **NAS** = "*For nothing will be impossible with God.*"

The **Amplified Version** is somewhat better "*For with God nothing is ever impossible and no word from God shall be without power or impossible of fulfillment.*"

**Be saved** (4982)(**sozo**) means to be rescued from great peril with added nuances of to protect, to keep alive, to preserve life, to deliver, to heal, and to be made whole. These "Judean Experts" were saying there was no spiritual rescue, no spiritual healing and spiritual wholeness without physical circumcision.

Keep the context in mind - On the first missionary journey Luke had used the word **'believe'** (or related word in the **pist-** word group) some 10 times - Acts 13:8+ Acts 13:12+ Acts 13:39 Acts 13:41 (negative sense), Acts 13:48, Acts 14:9, Acts 14:22, Acts 14:23, Acts 14:27.

While genuine believers can agree to disagree on certain ways of interpreting the Scripture, such as eschatology (study of prophecy), there can be absolutely no disagreement on the foundational **soteriological issues** (**study of salvation**), because the fate of souls hangs in the balance between Heaven or Hell, eternal life or eternal punishment.

Warren Wiersbe writes that "The progress of the Gospel has often been hindered by people with closed minds who stand in front of open doors and block the way for others. In 1786, when William Carey laid the burden of world missions before a ministerial meeting in Northampton, England, the eminent Dr. Ryland said to him, "Young man, sit down! When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine!" More than one Spirit-filled servant of God has had to enter open doors of opportunity without the support of churches and religious leaders." (Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Daring).

#### Related Resources:

- [Do Christians have to obey the Old Testament law?](#)
- [What is the Sacred Name Movement?](#)
- [What was the meaning and importance of the Jerusalem Council \(Acts 15\)?](#)
- [Christian liberty – what does the Bible say?](#)
- [What is the Hebrew Roots movement?](#)
- [The Hebrew Roots Movement](#)
- [Hebrew Roots Movement - Wikipedia](#)
- [What is 119 Ministries?](#)

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#### Tony Merida Outlines Acts 15

- Grace Disputed (Acts 15:1-5)
- Grace Defended and Displayed (Acts 15:6-21)
  1. Peter's defense (Acts 15:7b-11)
  2. The defense of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:12)
  3. James's defense (Acts 15:13-19)
  4. Grace displayed (Acts 15:20-21)
- Grace Delivered and Described (Acts 15:22-35)  
(Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary – Exalting Jesus in Acts)



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## Pure Milk

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby. —1 Peter 2:2

Acts 15:1-11,19-21

Recently it was discovered that some milk producers in China had been diluting cow's milk and adding the industrial chemical Melamine. This chemical was added because it artificially enhanced protein readings. Several infants died and others became seriously ill. Such adulteration is not new. Other countries have been adding Melamine to animal feed for at least 40 years for the same purpose, resulting in the death of animals.

Another kind of adulteration is when people add to God's Word, "the pure milk of the Word" as Peter described it (1 Peter 2:2). The word pure means "unadulterated" or "uncontaminated." The early church had to deal with those who considered circumcision necessary for salvation (Acts 15:1). That idea was rejected because it was not in accordance with the Word of God, which says that salvation is by grace alone. Peter encouraged his brethren in the Lord: "Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples? . . . We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved" (Acts 15:10-11).

Examine carefully any teaching that asks you to do anything more than what is in God's Word. Otherwise it can be deadly to your spiritual well-being.

By C. P. Hia

Today's Reflection

The Lord has given man His Word,  
His will He has made known;  
Let man not try to change that Word  
With words that are his own. —D. De Haan

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**Gotquestions - Sola fide**, which means "faith alone," is important because it is one of the distinguishing characteristics or key points that separate the true biblical Gospel from false gospels. At stake is the very Gospel itself and it is therefore a matter of eternal life or death. Getting the Gospel right is of such importance that the Apostle Paul would write in Galatians 1:9, "As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" Paul was addressing the same question that sola fide addresses—on what basis is man declared by God to be justified? Is it by faith alone or by faith combined with works? Paul makes it clear in Galatians and Romans that man is "justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law" (Galatians 2:16), and the rest of the Bible concurs.

Sola fide is one of the five solas that came to define and summarize the key issues of the Protestant Reformation. Each of these Latin phrases represents a key area of doctrine that was an issue of contention between the Reformers and the Roman Catholic Church, and today they still serve to summarize key doctrines essential to the Gospel and to Christian life and practice. The Latin word sola means "alone" or "only" and the essential Christian doctrines represented by these five Latin phrases accurately summarize the biblical teaching on these crucial subjects: sola scriptura—Scripture alone, sola fide—faith alone, sola gratia—grace alone, sola Christus—Christ alone, and sola Deo gloria—for the glory of God alone. Each one is vitally important, and they are all closely tied together. Deviation from one will lead to error in another essential doctrine, and the result will almost always be a false gospel which is powerless to save.

**Sola fide** or faith alone is a key point of difference between not only Protestants and Catholics but between biblical Christianity and almost all other religions and teachings. The teaching that we are declared righteous by God (justified) on the basis of our faith alone and not by works is a key doctrine of the Bible and a line that divides most cults from biblical Christianity. While most religions and cults teach men what works they must do to be saved, the Bible teaches that we are not saved by works, but by God's grace through His gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Biblical Christianity is distinct from every other religion in that it is centered on what God has accomplished through Christ's finished work, while all other religions are based on human achievement. If we abandon the doctrine of justification by faith, we abandon the only way of salvation. "Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Romans 4:4-5). The Bible teaches that those that trust Jesus Christ for justification by faith alone are imputed with His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21), while those who try to establish their own righteousness or mix faith with works will receive the punishment due to all who fall short of God's perfect standard.

**Sola fide**—the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from works—is simply recognizing what is taught over and over in

Scripture—that at some point in time God declares ungodly sinners righteous by imputing Christ’s righteousness to them (Romans 4:5, 5:8, 5:19). This happens apart from any works and before the individual actually begins to become righteous. This is an important distinction between Catholic theology that teaches righteous works are meritorious towards salvation and Protestant theology that affirms the biblical teaching that righteous works are the result and evidence of a born-again person who has been justified by God and regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

How important is sola fide? It is so important to the Gospel message and a biblical understanding of salvation that Martin Luther described it as being “the article with and by which the church stands.” Those who reject sola fide reject the only Gospel that can save them and by necessity embrace a false gospel. That is why Paul so adamantly denounces those who taught law-keeping or other works of righteousness in Galatians 1:9 and other passages. Yet today this important biblical doctrine is once again under attack. Too often sola fide is relegated to secondary importance instead of being recognized as an essential doctrine of Christianity, which it certainly is.

“Consider Abraham: ‘He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’ Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘The righteous will live by faith’” (Galatians 3:6-11).

#### Related Resources:

- [Sola Fide: The Reformed Doctrine of Justification](#) - J.I. Packer
- [Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone](#) - Ligonier
- [God Does Not Justify Sinners by Grace Alone Through Faith Alone in Christ Alone to Make Salvation Easy for Us](#)- Thabiti Anyabwile

**Acts 15:2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.**

KJV Acts 15:2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

NET Acts 15:2 When Paul and Barnabas had a major argument and debate with them, the church appointed Paul and Barnabas and some others from among them to go up to meet with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this point of disagreement.

NLT Acts 15:2 Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them, arguing vehemently. Finally, the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question.

ESV Acts 15:2 And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

- **Paul** Acts 15:7; Galatians 1:6-10; 2:5; Jude 1:3
- **the brethren determined** Acts 15:25; Exodus 18:23; Galatians 2:1,2
- **some others of them** Acts 15:22,27; 10:23; 11:12
- **should go up to Jerusalem** Acts 15:4,22,23; 1 Samuel 8:7; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Galatians 2:2; Philemon 1:8,9
- **the apostles and elders concerning this issue** Acts 15:6,23; 21:18; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 11:5
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**BIG BROUHAHA  
BEGINS BREWING!**

The word [brouhaha](#) is defined as "is a state of social agitation when a minor incident gets out of control, sometimes referred to as

an **uproar** or **hubbub**. Typically, a brouhaha is marked by controversy and fuss that can seem, afterwards, to have been pointless or irrational." This congers up the picture of "much ado about nothing." The definition is a reasonably good description of what began to transpire in the church at Antioch, with the exception that it is far from a "minor incident." In fact it is "much ado about something!" It is a major incident, for the foundations of Biblical salvation were being shaken by the addition of works to grace.

**Anderson** points out that had the Judaizers "succeeded, Christianity would have become but a sect of Judaism, but God ensured that the result of Acts 15 was the **salvation of Christianity** itself. Unfortunately, most of the branches of Christendom have not learned the lesson even to the present day." (What the Bible teaches – Acts and James)

**And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them** - As an aside Acts 15 begins with a dispute between the Judaizers and Paul and Barnabas and ends with a dispute between Paul and Barnabas! Not a happy chapter in that sense! **Great dissension** is more literally the idiomatic phrase "no small dissension" or "no little argument and debate." Think about why this was so significant -- if the "Judaizers" were correct then Paul and Barnabas had been wrong in this evangelistic message, for they had failed to tell the converts that in addition to believing in Jesus, they needed now to live like Jews! This legalistic addition was tantamount to a "declaration of war!" Little wonder that Paul and Barnabas turned on the "[afterburners](#)" so to speak!

**Solomon** warned of the danger of **dissension** writing that "The beginning of **strife** (Lxx = **stasis** as in Acts 15:2) is like letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out (Lxx = [mache](#) = a fight). (Pr 17:14)

**Larkin** calls this sharp dispute "turbulent quarreling" adding that "The behavior of Paul and Barnabas teaches us that it is right to contend for the truth of the gospel in spite of the debate that may ensue. No local church or denomination should settle for politically expedient peace at the expense of doctrinal purity. At the same time, Antioch's decision to appeal to Jerusalem shows us that doctrinal purity maintained in an atmosphere of contentiousness—at the expense of peace—is an equally wrong situation." (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series – Acts)

**John Phillips** makes an interesting observation regarding the effect of the dissension and debate writing that "The Antioch church was torn asunder, confused, and rendered almost wholly ineffective. That, of course, was Satan's answer to Paul's evangelism: paralyze the church with inward strife; direct all energy against other believers; put the church on the defensive, keep it squabbling. It is significant that we have no record at this time of further plans for missionary activity and no record of souls being saved at Antioch. Evangelism had come to a halt." (Exploring Acts)

Although the context is different in Jude, the danger is similar is that false teachers sought to distort the Gospel of the grace of God...

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity ([anagke](#)) to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly ([epagonizomai](#) in present tense) for the faith (not subjective - believing but objective - what is believed - see [the faith](#)) which was once for all handed down to the saints. 4 For certain persons have crept in unnoticed ([pareisduno](#)), those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn ([metatithemi](#)) the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:3-4+) (See [What is apostasy and how can I recognize it?](#); [How can I recognize a false teacher / false prophet?](#))

Paul and Barnabas showed the hearts of true shepherds in not shrinking back, but in confronting and refuting the false doctrines of the Judaizers.

**THOUGHT** - Confrontation is not easy but is necessary if the foundation of the Gospel is undermined by false teaching. I was told of a man suspected of being a false teacher and so I simply went to the class he was teaching so that I could hear first hand what he was teaching. I did not ask any questions, but simply listened. He knew I was in the class but never addressed me during the class or after. Within about 2 weeks this false teacher hot-footed it to another Bible church in the area. While I did not follow him, I did call a doctrinally sound man at the church to warn him this man was coming to his church. That was my last contact. This is probably as "easy" of a confrontation that one could have. The point is we need to be willing to speak the truth in love, but we also need to be absolutely certain that what is being taught is heretical. It would be easy to let our personal feelings for another person cloud our thinking and discernment. We need to heed Mt 7:1-2 (my children's favorite passage to quote to me!) but not forget Mt 7:4-5 so we might "see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

**Dissension** ([4714](#))([stasis](#) from [histemi](#) = to stand) strictly speaking refers to a stance or posture, thus as something which is standing or is in existence (Heb 9:8 = "outer tabernacle is still standing,"). Stasis is used figuratively in this passage to describe a lack of agreement respecting policy, strife, discord, dispute, contention ("a **dissension** between the Pharisees and Sadducees and the assembly was divided" = Acts 23:7, "as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to

pieces by them" = Acts 23:10)

**Debate** (2214)(**zetesis** from **zetéo** = to seek) is a word used by the Greeks to indicate philosophical inquiry. However the most common meaning of **zetesis** in the NT refers to the exchange of words for the purpose of disputing, engaging in contentious, controversial questions. This same word is used in Acts 15:7 "After there had been much **debate**."

All 7 NT uses of **zetesis** - Jn. 3:25; Acts 15:2; Acts 15:7; Acts 25:20; 1 Tim. 6:4 = "controversial questions"; 2 Tim. 2:23 = "speculations"; Titus 3:9 = "controversies"

**The brethren** - The designation **brethren** is not in the Greek but added for continuity. Undoubtedly the **brethren** refers to the believers in the church at Antioch, the ones that were being taught in Acts 15:1.

**Determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them** - The NET renders it "the church appointed." In addition to **Paul and Barnabas** there would be **others** from the church at Antioch. The church at Antioch also sent **some others** of their body along with the missionaries, presumably to serve as witnesses. It is interesting to compare some others with Paul's letter to Galatians where he says "I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also....But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised." (Gal 2:1,3+). In fairness, it should be noted that there is considerable disagreement as when Paul visited Jerusalem. If he wrote Galatians before the Jerusalem Council then we cannot interpret Gal 2:1,3 as indicating that Titus went from Antioch to the Jerusalem Council. See my comments on Galatians 2:1 which I entitle a "chronological conundrum" because of the lack of consensus.

**Determined** (5021)(**tasso**) was used in secular Greek of arranging troops or ships in proper position for battle (an interesting use in view of the "*word battles*" that had begun over what saved a soul!). In the present context **tasso** meant to appoint or order to a task and both the NET and ESV render **tasso** as **appointed**. So the idea is "to give instructions as to what must be done." (BDAG) In Acts 22:10+ the Lord Jesus speaking to Paul said at his conversion "Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that **has been appointed** (**tasso**) for you to do." In English appoint means to assign a duty, responsibility or obligation to someone. Their duty was to resolve the [ruckus!](#)

**Luke** has the most NT uses of **tasso** - Matt. 28:16; Acts 13:48; Acts 15:2; Acts 22:10; Acts 28:23; Rom. 13:1; 1 Co. 16:15

**Should go up to Jerusalem** - This description of "**go up to Jerusalem**" is the antithesis of "**came down from Judea**," (Acts 15:1). To **go up to Jerusalem** they would have to traverse some 300 miles from Antioch in Syria to ascend the hill into Holy City. This would have been a "lively" journey filled with interchanges regarding the two opposing views and one can only imagine the vigorous debating that went on during this 10 day trip (+/- 10 days because a person can log 20-30 miles per day on foot).

**To the apostles and elders concerning this issue** - The **apostles** in this context refers to the official apostles such as Peter, John and James, men who had walked with Jesus in His 3 year ministry and who had spent time with Him after His resurrection. Note the designation of **elders** indicating that by this time the church in Jerusalem presumably had appointed elders, much like Paul and Barnabas had done in the newly planted churches in Galatia (Acts 14:23+).

**Apostles** (652)(**apostolos** from **apostello** = send in turn from **apo** = off from + **stello** = send) which literally means "sent one". **Apostolos** was a technical word designating an individual sent from someone else with the sender's commission, the necessary credentials, the sender's authority and the implicit responsibility to accomplish a mission or assignment. In a word an apostle is a "sent one!"

**THOUGHT** - Beloved, are we not all "SENT ONES" in a practical sense? Indeed, As far as your neighbors are concerned, YOU are Christ's ambassador, whether you like it or not. And who is your neighbor? Whoever is near (the root meaning of the word neighbor! See [neighbor = plesion](#)) We have a charge to proclaim the excellencies of Him Who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1Pe 2:9-10+) We are to live in such a way before the fallen world that we "sanctify Christ as Lord in (our) hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks (us) to give an account for the hope that is in (us), yet with gentleness and reverence." (1Pe 3:15+) May God grant that our watchword be "Here I am Lord. Send me!" (Isa 6:8+, cp 1 Cor 1:17) Take courage, for you do not have to do it on your own...just follow the template of the faithful brethren and "filled with the Holy Spirit, (begin) to speak the Word of God (the Gospel) with boldness." (Acts 4:31+, cp Acts 1:8+, Acts 9:28+, Acts 14:3+, Acts 18:26+, Acts 19:8+, Eph 6:20+, 1Th 2:2+)

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**A. B Simpson** said that the Gospel, "Tells rebellious men that God is reconciled, that justice is satisfied, that sin has been atoned for, that the judgment of the guilty may be revoked, the condemnation of the sinner cancelled, the curse of the Law blotted out, the gates of hell closed, the portals of heaven opened wide, the power of sin subdued, the guilty conscience healed, the broken hearted comforted, the sorrow and misery of the Fall undone."

**Acts 15:3 Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren.**

KJV Acts 15:3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

NLT Acts 15:3 The church sent the delegates to Jerusalem, and they stopped along the way in Phoenicia and Samaria to visit the believers. They told them-- much to everyone's joy-- that the Gentiles, too, were being converted.

- **being sent on their way by the church** Acts 21:5; 28:15; Romans 15:24; 1 Corinthians 16:6,11; Titus 3:13; 3 John 1:6-8
- **were passing through** Acts 8:14; 11:19
- **describing in detail** Acts 15:12; 14:27; 21:19,20
- **were bringing great joy to all the brethren** Acts 11:18; 13:48,52; Isaiah 60:4,5; 66:12-14; Luke 15:5-10,23,24,32
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Antioch to Jerusalem  
Click to Enlarge

## THE TIMES ARE A'CHANGING

In 1964 a young Jewish man named Bob Dylan popularized a song entitled [The Times are A'Changing](#) which is in essence the message that received a warm reception among the Jewish believers in Phoenicia and Samaria as they heard good news of the reception of *the* good news by the Gentiles!

**Ger** writes that "The stakes could not have been higher. The ultimate question on the table was nothing less than whether the church should be identified as either the righteous remnant of Israel or a completely new and unanticipated creation which, while distinct from Israel, was composed of both a righteous Jewish remnant as well as a righteous element of Gentiles." (Ibid)

**Therefore, being sent on their way by the church-** The text does not say, but given the import of this great dissension, the **church** likely did what they did before they sent Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. And what did they do? **They were ministering to the Lord and fasting...they had fasted and prayed.**" (Acts 13:2-3+) There is nothing "magic" about fasting, but it does hone your spiritual senses and allow you to better focus on God's Word and Will.

**They were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria** - Notice that **passing through** indicates they traveled by foot and not by sea. From Acts 11:19 we can deduce that most of the believers in **Phoenicia** (a Gentile region) were Jews (Hellenized Jews) who had scattered following Stephen's martyrdom and Jewish traditions would not have been as entrenched as with the Jews in Jerusalem. In **Samaria** the party encountered Samaritan believers, those who were generally despised by the orthodox Jews. Notice that while **they were passing through**, they did not do so without intentionality and purpose but were taking time "describing in detail" what God had done.

**THOUGHT** - Oh, how we need to see the various places and circumstances we are **passing through** as opportunities to redeem in some way for the glory of God and the growth of His Kingdom! What a difference that would make in our Christian life if we sought such a Spirit led and Spirit empowered mindset 24/7! One of my favorite phrases in Psalms is Ps 107:2 "Let the redeemed of (delivered by) the LORD say so, whom He has redeemed (delivered) from the hand of the adversary," and this is exactly what Paul and Barnabas were doing!

From the map above note the party would have traveled along the coast (where **Phoenicia** was located) through the major cities of [Sidon](#), [Tyre](#), [Acco](#) (Acre) and then to [Shechem](#) in [Samaria](#).

**Describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles-** While there may have been some discussion of the debate over the need for circumcision, Paul and Barnabas chose to "[Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate the Positive](#)" ("*Brethren and sistern, be seated. Gather around me everybody while I preach a sermon...the topic will be sin and that's what I'm agin...when everything looked so dark they said "We've got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, and latch on to the affirmative and don't mess with "Mr. In-Between."*" [give it a listen](#) because you are not likely to hear a song like this anytime in 2019!) and described **in detail** the Gentile conversions and in so doing they redeemed the time wisely.

**Describing in detail** (1555)([ekdiegeomai](#) from **ek** - out + [diegeomai](#)) is used only here and Acts 13:41+ (quoting from Septuagint

of Hab 1:5+) and means to tell or describe in detail. There are 4 uses in the Septuagint - Job 12:8; Ps. 118:17; Ezek. 12:16; Hab. 1:5+. The [present tense](#) pictures Paul and Barnabas continually describing in detail the Gentile reception of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the true and living God! **Vincent** adds that this verb "is a very strong expression for the fullest and clearest declaration: declare throughout." Given that they had a year's worth of experiences in their first missionary journey, this would have been quite a memorable detailed description.

**Conversion** (1995) (**epistrophe** from **epi** = to + **strepho** = to turn) is literally turning about, turning toward or twisting. (**THOUGHT**- Because of sin all of our thinking is "twisted" but the Gospel "untwists" our warped way of thinking!) Figuratively as in this NT use (the only NT use), **epistrophe** meant they changed their belief and their behavior, a good description of repentance.

**BDAG** says **epistrophe** refers to "(1) turning one's attention to something - attention and (2) change of one's way of thinking or believing - conversion." The related verb **epistrepho** is used with a similar sense to describe **conversion** (and repentance) in Acts 3:19+ ("repent and **return**"), Acts 9:35+, Acts 11:21+, Acts 14:15+ ("**turn from** these vain things to a living God"), Acts 15:19+, Acts 26:18+ ("so that they **may turn from** darkness to light"), Acts 26:20+. Note especially Luke's use of **epistrepho** as a description of Gentile conversion later in this chapter in Acts 15:19 where the apostle James declares "it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who **are turning to** God from among the Gentiles." The implication in the phrase "turning to God" is that they are "turning away from" something else, specifically dead, mute, worthless idols. (see this pattern clearly in 1 Thes 1:9-10+).

**Gilbrant** on **epistrophe** - In classical literature **epistrophē** primarily refers to the act of "turning about, turning away," or "turning around" as in maneuvering a ship or changing a person's position. Sometimes in philosophical writings it has a figurative meaning: "turning one's attention to pious devotion to the divine" (cf. Moulton-Milligan). Linked with the verb *poieō*, it also has the figurative meaning "to give attention to." In the Septuagint **epistrophē** and its verb cognate **epistrephō** are used literally (e.g., Judges 8:9; Ezekiel 47:7). **They also are used figuratively to indicate repentance.** The word is employed to express the theological implications of the Hebrew term *shūv*. It is from this that the Greek word acquires its higher religious meaning. Although the Septuagint used *epistrophē*/*epistrephō* extensively for "conversion," the New Testament writers preferred *metanoia* and *metanoēō* in referring to repentance. The verbal form *epistrephō* is used 36 times in the New Testament, half of which express the act of repenting or converting. *Epistrophē*, however, occurs only once in the New Testament, in Acts 15:3, where it is used to express the "conversion of the Gentiles." (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

## MEGA JOY OVER GENTILE CONVERSIONS

**And were bringing great joy to all the brethren** - **Bringing** is [poieo](#) which means to do, to produce or to accomplish, so the effect of the encouraging report of all the Gentile conversions was to accomplish or produce **great joy!** Notice the word "**all**" - the Spirit swept in on entire congregations who heard this great report, giving them **all great** supernatural **joy**. What a scene it must have been (see "[Ee-Taow](#)" below). The contrast of **great joy** in **all the brethren** with the argumentative attitude of the Judaizers could not be more striking. One can only imagine what these legalistic Jews thought about the joyful response of all the disciples! It is sad when one cannot rejoice when precious souls are rescued by God's grace from the horrible fate of eternal punishment! As **Larkin** says "**joy** is the appropriate response to news that persons of any cultural group have come to salvation (Lk 1:14; Lk 15:7, 10, 32; Acts 11:23). One of the best [litmus tests](#) for the presence of the saving grace of God in our hearts is whether they overflow in joy at the news that another has found the Savior." (Ibid) A corollary thought is that one has to seriously question whether these Judaizing Jews have actually truly received Jesus as Savior and Lord (cf Jn 1:11).

Salvation of lost souls generates **joy** on earth and joy in Heaven for Jesus taught "I tell you that in the same way, there will be **more joy in Heaven** over one sinner who **repents** (NOTE HOW JESUS ASSOCIATES "**REPENTS**" WITH GENUINE CONVERSION!) than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.." (Lk 15:7+) As an aside, Heaven will not be a dull, boring existence but will be a life full of feeling and emotion as men were intended to experience when God created us. Think of your reaction when you see Jesus and then when you see those you loved on earth! **J.O.Y.** = Jesus, Others, Yourself - **Joy! Joy! Joy!**

**Joy** (5479) ([chara](#)) is a feeling of great pleasure, of inner gladness, or of delight. Biblically speaking joy is not our natural response (happiness is a better description of our "natural" reaction), but a supernatural gift of the Spirit, a manifestation of a soul saturated with the Spirit (Gal 5:22+; 1 Th 1:6+). And so it follows that **joy** in the NT is virtually always used to signify a feeling of "*happiness*" that is based on spiritual realities (independent of what "*happens*"). **Joy** is a part of God's very essence and His Spirit manifests this supernatural joy in His children. In sum, **Joy** is the deep-down sense of well-being that abides in the heart of the person who is filled with the Spirit and knows all is well between himself and the Lord. There is a chorus from an old spiritual song that is apropos..."Happiness happens but joy abides." Of course, the caveat to that little ditty is that it abides as we abide in the Vine, energized by the Spirit of Christ.

**Joy** or **rejoicing** were frequently described by Luke as associated with conversions, especially of Gentile conversions - Read these

- Acts 8:8 Samaritans = "So there was much rejoicing in that city." Now the Samaritans were rejoicing over the Gentile conversions!
- Acts 8:39 Ethiopian eunuch, "went on his way rejoicing."
- Acts 11:23 Barnabas rejoiced at the Gentile conversions in Antioch,
- Acts 13:48 when they heard Acts 13:47, "they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord"
- Acts 13:52 disciples "were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."
- Acts 15:3 joy at the salvation of the Gentiles
- Acts 15:31 when they read the edict of the Jerusalem council that they did not need to be circumcised in order to be saved,
- Acts 16:34 Philippian jailer "rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household."

**"Ee-Taow"** - Centuries later another group of pagan Gentile idol worshippers would hear the Good News that Jesus died in their place and an entire village on Papua, New Guinea believed shouting "**Ee-Taow**" (It is true! It is true!). [Watch this video](#) to see what happened to this primitive tribe for over 2 hours when the Spirit opened their heart to see Jesus (Acts 16:14+). You will be amazed, and perhaps their reaction will help you understand Luke's phrase "**were bring great joy to all the brethren!**"

**THOUGHT** - Did you experience **great joy** when you first received Christ as your Savior and Lord? Most of us would probably answer "Yes," but too often as the days turned into years, the trials and afflictions and the subtle (and not so subtle) snares of the [world](#), the [flesh](#) and the [devil](#) began to take their toll on our soul and dissipate the joy ("a slow leakage of joy") that once was spontaneous and "supernaturally natural" (so to speak). And so for many saints sadly their heart has begun to grow cold and their joy slowly and steadily has been jettisoned. So you may find that to one degree or another you have left your first love and the joy that your love of Jesus brought into your life. Beloved, if that describes your state today, asked God to restore the years that the locusts have eaten (Joel 2:25KJV+), reviving your spiritual vigor (read Ps 119:25+), restoring the joy of your salvation (Ps 51:10-15+ note it is a plea, a prayer) as you "remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first." (Rev 2:4-5+). And I like Paul am "confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you **will perfect it** until the day of Christ Jesus." (Php 1:6+) Indeed, "**Faithful** is He Who calls you, and He also **will bring it to pass.**" (1 Th 5:24+) And consider praying in faith Romans 15:13+ "Now may the God of hope fill you with **all** (not "some") **joy** and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen and amen! The dying world desperately needs to see "joy filled" (Spirit filled) disciples of Jesus (Gal 5:22+, cf 1 Th 1:6+).

**Acts 15:4 When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.**

KJV Acts 15:4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done **with** them.

NLT Acts 15:4 When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done **through** them.

NIV Acts 15:4 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.

- **they were received by the church** Acts 18:27; 21:17; Matthew 10:40; Romans 15:7; Colossians 4:10; 2 John 1:10; 3 John 1:8-10
- **they reported all that God had done with them** Acts 15:3,12; 14:27; 21:19; Romans 15:18; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 5:19; 6:1
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **A RECEPTION AND A REPORT**

**When they arrived at Jerusalem they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders**- They received a cordial welcome, which they probably were not altogether sure of receiving.

**Were received** (3858) ([paradechomai](#) from **para** = from, beside, near + [dechomai](#) = accept deliberately and readily, receive kindly and so to take to oneself what is presented or brought by another) means literally to receive or accept near or beside and then to accept deliberately, willingly, favorably and readily. The picture is of one putting out a "Welcome Mat" for Paul and Barnabas and thus conveys the sense that the body of Christ received them and embraced them with delight. It is surprising that Luke records no specific reaction of joy by the Jerusalem church when they heard the report of the Gentile conversions.

**And they reported all that God had done with them** - Notice the word "**all**" which would include the praises for conversions but also the persecutions for proclamation of the Gospel. And just as Luke recorded when Paul and Barnabas "had arrived (IN ANTIOCH IN SYRIA) and gathered the church together, they began to **report** ([anaggello/anangelo](#)) all things that **God had done with them** and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." And notice the preposition **with**" (meta) which Louw-Nida says is "a marker of an associative relation, usually with the implication of being in the company of - 'with, in the company of, together with." In other words they were simply God's "instruments" and God acted through them. The English definition of "**with**" helps us see this picture noting that "if one person or thing is with another or does something with them, they are together or they do it together." The **NLT** paraphrases it as "**everything God had done through them.**" (Acts 15:4NIV also has "through them.") Once again we see the juxtaposition of **God's sovereignty** and **Man's responsibility**. God's Spirit clearly gave the missionaries His supernatural enablement, but they undertook in faith and obedience to carry forth the Gospel proclamation and to follow up with discipleship (cf Jesus' description of Paul as "a chosen instrument of Mine" in Acts 9:14+). God could have done it all without Paul and Barnabas, but it was and still is His good pleasure to use His redeemed children to redeem the lost children of Adam! In short, all believers are now in the "lost and found" business (so to speak)!

**THOUGHT** - Do you have any recent reports of **all that God has done with you** in the spreading of His Gospel and glorification of His Son? God desires to use you in His great plan of redemption of the lost! The "**co-**" in "commission" (aka the Great Commission - Mt 28:19+, cf Paul's intense desire and exertion to **make disciples** in Col 1:28+, Col 1:29+) means "**with**" as in "[co-operate](#)", etc. Sadly for many the "Great Commission" has become the "Great Omission!" God is not looking so much for your ability as your availability. Or as you have likely heard it phrased, He is looking for a few "F.A.T." men and women - **Faithful, Available, Teachable**. If that describes you, you are in for the adventure of a lifetime (Listen to [Steven Curtis Chapman's Great Adventure](#) - "Let's Go! Saddle up our horses. We've got a trail to blaze..."). ([See similar THOUGHT](#) below on "**through them.**")

**They reported** (312) ([anaggello/anangelo](#) from **aná** = again, back {like our English prefix "**re-**"= again thus "**re**-port" or "**re**-hear" = to say again} + **aggéllō** = tell, declare related to **áγγελος** = messenger) means to bring back word and then to announce or report, tell of things especially things that God has accomplished. God is always the initiating and enabling Agent Who empowers His agents as they undertake their Gospel mission. **Anaggello** is the same verb Luke used in Acts 14:27 recording that Paul and Barnabas began to "**report all things that God had done with them** and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles."

The missionaries were always quick to attribute their success in the spread of the Gospel to God, which is a good pattern for all of us to express when we experience any [genre](#) of genuine spiritual success! Paul repeatedly attributed his success to God's sufficiency and never to own sufficiency, writing for example...

For I will not presume to speak of anything except what **Christ has accomplished through me**, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, (Ro 15:18+)

But by the **grace of God** I am what I am (GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY), and His **grace** toward me did not prove vain ([kenos](#) - worthless, completely lacking in eternal value and thus spiritually "zero!"); but I labored ([kopiao](#) = to point of weariness!) even more than all of them (MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY), yet not I, but the **grace** of God with ([syn](#) speaks of intimacy - think of "divine **syn**-ergy") me. (1 Cor 15:10+)

Not that we are **adequate** ([hikanos](#)) in ourselves to consider **ANYTHING** as coming from ourselves, but our **adequacy** ([hikanotes](#)) is from God (cf Jn 15:5), Who also **made us adequate** ([hikanoo](#)) as servants of a New Covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (**NLT** says "The old written covenant ends in death; but under the new covenant, the Spirit gives life."). (2 Cor 3:5-6+, cf John 6:63)

**Acts 15:5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.**



KJV Acts 15:5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

NET Acts 15:5 But some from the religious party of the Pharisees who had believed stood up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise the Gentiles and to order them to observe the law of Moses."

NLT Acts 15:5 But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, "The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses."

- **some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying** Acts 21:20; 26:5,6; Philippians 3:5-8
- **It is necessary** Acts 15:1,24; Galatians 5:1-3
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## ADDING TO AND NEGATING THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

**But** - Term of contrast. So much for the "Welcome Mat" in Acts 15:4! Here we see a cooler reaction from some in **the sect of the Pharisees**.

**Some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying** - Apparently they **stood up** in the midst of the church assembly. Recall that Paul himself was a Pharisee of Pharisees who **believed**. Was the belief of these men genuine? Most commentators agree that these were likely genuine believers.

**Spurgeon** - The old leaven showed itself. How closely do old ways and thoughts cling to even regenerate men!

**Sect** (139)([haireisis](#) from [haireo](#) = to Take for oneself; cf [hairetikos](#)) denotes a choosing or a choice and came to mean an opinion chosen or a tenet generally held to be true and then came to refer to a sect, party or faction that held tenets distinctive to it. The Pharisees were the most influential of the three major Jewish sects (the others being the [Sadducees](#) and [Essenes](#)). It is interesting that [haireisis](#) gives us our word heresy which strictly speaking is "the choice of an opinion contrary to the body of those who profess such opinions." (Vincent) Or as the English definition states heresy refers to "any opinions or doctrines at variance with the official or orthodox position." It is an ironic play on words that the members of a "[haireisis](#)" were advocating **heresies!**

**Guzik** makes the point that "For a Pharisee to really be a Christian, it would take more than an acknowledgment that Jesus was Messiah; he would have to forsake his attempts to justify himself by the keeping of the law and accept the work of Jesus as the basis of his justification. In Lystra, Paul and Barnabas did not allow the pagans to merely add Jesus to their pantheon of Roman gods. They commanded that they had to turn from their vain gods to the true God (Acts 14:14-15). These Pharisees who had become Christians had to do the same thing: Turn from their efforts to earn their way before God by keeping the law, and look to Jesus. You can't just add Jesus and now say "Jesus helps me to justify myself through keeping the law."

**Pharisees** (5330)([pharisaios](#)) is transliterated from the Hebrew [parash](#) (06567 - to separate) from Aramaic word [peras](#) (06537) ("Peres" in Da 5:28-[note](#)), signifying to separate, owing to a different manner of life from that of the general public. As **MacArthur** says "it was their zeal for the law that caused the Pharisees to become focused on rituals and externally keeping the law. They abandoned true religion of the heart for mere outward behavior modification and ritual (cf. Mt. 15:3-6), leading Jesus to scathingly denounce their pseudospirituality: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others" (Mt. 23:23; cf. 6:1-5; 9:14; 12:2; Luke 11:38-39)." There were more **Pharisees** than Sadducees (according to [Josephus, Ant. 17.2.4](#) there were more than 6,000 Pharisees at this time). Pharisees differed with Sadducees and were strict adherents to the laws of the OT and to traditions such as angels and bodily resurrection, in contrast to the Sadducees who were did not believe in angels or resurrection (they were anti-supernaturalists).

**MacArthur** adds that "**Pharisees**, unlike their arch rivals the Sadducees, could become Christians and retain many of their distinctive beliefs. They believed in the literal interpretation of Scripture, a literal resurrection, life after death, and the existence of angels (cf. Acts 23:8)." (Ibid)

**Had believed** (4100)([pisteuo](#)) means to be confident and convinced, which if genuine signifies absolute confidence and trust, complete surrender, and heartfelt obedience. In this case Luke uses the perfect tense which signifies belief at a point of time in the past with continuing effect. This would suggest that their belief was indeed legitimate, even if a distorted by their belief that works needed to be added to Christ. Swindoll says that had believed "indicates that they were genuine believers." (cf Jn 19:38, 39).

**It is necessary** - The Pharisees who have failed to grasp that Gospel is a Gospel of grace (Acts 20:24) add two works they feel are necessities (as viewed in their "legalistic eyes") (1) circumcision and (2) keeping the "Ten Commandments" (so to speak). As noted

above, these were essentially the requirements for Gentiles to become Jewish proselytes. In essence they are claiming that God commanded these responses in order to achieve salvation.

**Is necessary** (present tense - continually) (1163)(**dei** from **deo** = to bind or tie objects together) refers to what is not optional but needful (binding) out of intrinsic necessity or inevitability. **Dei** describes that which is under the necessity of happening or which must necessarily take place, and as stated above, conveys a sense of inevitability.

Paul would later (possibly his first letter written from Antioch about 49 AD) noted a huge problem for anyone who advocated the addition of circumcision writing "I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law." (Gal 5:3+) By his phrase "receives circumcision" Paul means receives it as a necessary addition to salvation by faith. Of course no one could possibly keep the whole Law which is Paul's way of saying "No one needs to add circumcision to faith alone in Christ alone."

**To circumcise them** (4059) see preceding discussion of [peritemno](#). Of course, it would not be until later that Paul would elaborate on the spiritual meaning of circumcision (See Excursus on [Circumcision](#)), but one cannot help but think that the Spirit had already laid this important insight on his heart. It is therefore surprising that those truths are not used in the arguments against the need for physical circumcision. It would not be until almost 10 years later that he would explain spiritual circumcision (cf Ro 2:25-29+).

**And to direct them to observe the Law of Moses** - They were saying that for believers keeping the Law was not optional but was a practice to which they were bound. In other words like military commanders these Pharisees were calling for unquestioning obedience to their instructions.

**Kenneth Gangel** makes the point that "We dare not confuse the Ten Commandments with **the law of Moses**. From our perspective we often view those two as one, but they were not. The New Testament never argues that Christians should not pay attention to the Ten Commandments (**ED: AN SEEK TO KEEP THEM RELYING ON THE POWER OF THE INDWELLING SPIRIT**), though certainly they will never lead to salvation. This argument was not about that. It dealt with the ritualistic practices of the Jews which set them apart from other people—circumcision, food laws, and other guidelines for living." (Holman New Testament Commentary – Acts)

**Direct** (instruct, order, prescribe) (3853)(**paraggello** from **para** = beside + **angelo/aggello** = to announce) means to pass on an announcement from one to another who is at one's side, as to what must be done, and usually with the idea of a command or charge. **Paraggello** was "a strong word" (Vincent), often was used in the context of a military command and demanded that the subordinate obey the order from the superior (2Ti 4:1+) and required unhesitating and unqualified obedience. (cp Lk 5:14, 8:29, Lk 9:21KJV, Acts 1:4, 4:18; 5:28KJV; Acts 15:5KJV; 1Th 4:11). **MacArthur** adds that **paraggello** conveyed "the idea of binding a person to make the proper response to an instruction. The soldier was bound to obey the orders of his superiors; a person involved in a legal matter was bound by the court's orders; a person of integrity was bound by moral principles; a patient was bound to follow his doctor's instruction if he wanted to get well; and a successful writer or speaker was bound by the standards of his craft. ([Matthew Commentary](#))

**Paraggello** in Acts - Acts 1:4; Acts 4:18; Acts 5:28; Acts 5:40; Acts 10:42; Acts 15:5; Acts 16:18; Acts 16:23; Acts 23:22; Acts 23:30

**R C H Lenski** elaborates on the importance of this "additional" requirement by the believers who were Pharisees - To add anything to Christ as being necessary to salvation, say circumcision or any human work of any kind, is to deny that Christ is the complete Savior, is to put something human on a par with him, yea to make it the crowning point. That is fatal. A bridge to heaven that is built of 99/100 of Christ and even only 1/100 of anything human breaks down at the joint and ceases to be a bridge. Even if Christ be thought of as carrying us 999 miles of the way, and something merely human be required for the last mile, this would leave us hanging in the air with heaven being still far away. (The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles)

**Tony Merida** adds that "Sadly, even today we see people disputing the idea that salvation is by grace alone. Many adhere, sometimes without even realizing it, to a Jesus-plus-something-else gospel: Jesus plus baptism, Jesus plus church attendance, Jesus plus quiet times. But if we add **ANYTHING** to the Gospel, we lose the Gospel. Gospel math works like this: **Jesus plus nothing equals everything**. The work of Jesus Christ is totally sufficient. This gospel of the saving exclusivity of Jesus by the grace of Jesus will always be disputed because **the default mode of the human heart is works-based righteousness** not faith-based righteousness. Salvation by grace alone distinguishes Christianity from every other world religion. Religion is built on human performance, but no one has ever been saved by human performance or religious observance" (Ibid) (Bold added)

#### Acts 15:6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter

KJV Acts 15:6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

- Acts 15:25; 6:2; 21:18; Proverbs 15:22; Matthew 18:20; Hebrews 13:7,17
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JERUSALEM COUNCIL CONVENES

Most authorities date this council as occurring in about 49 AD (all dates approximate). For chronological context recall that the Holy Spirit came on the Jerusalem believers in about 30 AD. Paul had his Damascus Road revelation of Jesus in about 33-34 AD (Acts 9:3-22). Peter witnessed to Cornelius in about 38 AD (Acts 10-11). So the Jerusalem Council is occurring about a decade after the Gentile Cornelius (et al) was converted (Acts 10:1-11:18).

**The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter** - Comparing this description with Acts 15:12 ("All the people kept silent,") and Acts 15:22 ("with the whole church"), it is clear that this gathering was not just the leaders but the entire church.

**Apostles** (652)([apostolos](#)) focuses on their authority as extending from the sender and in this context describes one of the 12 apostles, one who had seen the risen Christ and who was sent forth by Him with His full authority to plant the flag of faith in every community to which His master led him.

**Elders** (4245)([presbuteros](#)) properly was a mature man with seasoned judgment and experience and as described in Acts 14:23 were to provide general oversight in the church (1 Tim 3:5; 1 Pe 5:2).

**Came together** (4863)([sunago](#) from **sun** = with + **ago** = to lead) means literally to lead together. This verb gives us English [synagogue](#) where Jews worship.

**Tony Merida** observes that "Three speeches that defend the gospel of grace are recorded. First, Peter reported his experience in his evangelization of the Gentiles. Next, Paul and Barnabas reported how God used them to reach the Gentiles. Then, James interpreted their experiences in light of the Scriptures. These men were shepherds biblically caring for the flock." (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary – Exalting Jesus in Acts)

**Acts 15:7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.**

KJV Acts 15:7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

NET Acts 15:7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that some time ago God chose me to preach to the Gentiles so they would hear the message of the gospel and believe.

- **After there had been much debate** Acts 15:2,39; Philippians 2:14
- **you know that in the early days** Acts 10:5,6,20,32-48; 11:12-18; Matthew 16:18,19
- **God made a choice among you** Acts 1:24; 9:15; 13:2; 1 Chronicles 28:4,5; John 3:27; 15:16; Galatians 2:7-9
- **by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word** Acts 1:16; 3:18; 4:25; Exodus 4:12; Jeremiah 1:9; Romans 10:17,18
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## HEAR THE GOSPEL AND SIMPLY BELIEVE

**After there had been much debate** - The two opposing views were allowed to be aired for all to hear the merits and demerits. "Peter wisely permitted this to continue for a time lest the impression be given that the results were a foregone conclusion." (Toussaint)

**Lenski** - We now see why Luke says nothing about the church in v. 6; the laity did not participate in the debate, the speakers were those immediately concerned, the apostles and the elders officially. We may take it that the Judaizers had their full say, and that their contentions were also answered. All that, however, was only preliminary, and Luke passes it by. (The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles)

**Debate** (2214) see [zetesis](#) from [zetéo](#)

Warren Wiersbe comments "We get the impression that Peter sat patiently while the disputing ("questioning") was going on, waiting for the Spirit to direct him. "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him" (Pr. 18:13NKJV). (Bible Exposition Commentary)

**Peter stood up and said to them** - "Peter steps up first (surprise, surprise!)." (Merida) **Stood up** describes Peter in Acts 1:15+ standing up in the midst of the brethren ([anistemi](#) in both verses). Peter is now about to make his last appearance in the book of Acts. While it is James (the brother of Jesus) who presides over this meeting, Peter takes the initiative as he has had a similar experience 10 years earlier with Judaizers who accused him when he had come up to Jerusalem and those Jews ("who were circumcised") took issue with him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." (Acts 11:2-3+)

**Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you** - Peter first reminds the assembly of past Gentile conversions. The phrase **in early days** is an idiom which literally reads "from ancient days." The **choice among you** that God made was that Peter would proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles. Some suggest the time phrase means at the beginning of time, but others feel it refers to the fact that it has been about 10+ years since Peter first spoke the Gospel to Cornelius (about 38 AD and it is now about 49 AD). And so it is fitting that Peter speaks because he had already received full approval from the congregation in Jerusalem against the Judaizing legalists in Acts 11:18+ Luke recording "When they heard this (that God gave the Gentiles the same gift as He gave the Jews - Acts 11:17+), they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

**Wiersbe** - Jesus had given the keys of the kingdom to Peter (Matt. 16:19), and he had used them to open the door of faith to the Jews (Acts 2), the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17), and the Gentiles (Acts 10). (Bible Exposition Commentary)

**Toussaint** comments that "The issue of whether to accept Gentiles was settled then and there (AT THE CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS)."

**Robertson** says that Peter's "point is that what Paul and Barnabas have reported is nothing new. The Judaizers made objection then (Acts 11:1-17) as they are doing now."

**Made a choice** (1586)([eklego](#) from [ek](#) = out, out of, out from + [légo](#) = select, choose) (see also word study on related word [eklektos](#)) means literally to select out, single out or choose out of. [Eklego](#) was used in Acts 1:2+ of the apostles Jesus had chose, in Acts 1:24+ of God's choice of the apostle to replace Judas, in Acts 6:5+ of the choice of Stephen along with others, and in Acts 13:17+ of God's choice of Israel.

**That by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe** - Peter is referring to his proclamation of the Gospel that God used to bring the salvation of the Gentile Cornelius (and his family and friends) in Acts 10-11.

**The word of the gospel** - This exact phrase is found only here. It is also surprising that the noun [euaggelion](#) is used only here and in Acts 20:24+. The verb for preaching the gospel does occur in Acts 8:25, 40, Acts 14:7, 15, 21, and Acts 16:10.

**Gospel** (2098) ([euaggelion](#) from [eú](#) = good + [aggéllō](#) = proclaim, tell) is literally good news or glad tidings. In secular Greek it originally referred to a reward for good news and later became the good news itself. The word **euaggelion** was commonly used in the first century as our words "good news" today. The idea then and now is something like this - "Have you any **good news** (euaggelion) for me today?" This was a common question in the ancient world. In ancient secular Greek **euaggelion** described **good news** of any kind and prior to the writing of the New Testament, had no definite religious connotation in the ancient world until it was taken over by the "Cult of Caesar" which was the state religion and in which the emperor was worshipped as a god (see more discussion of this use below).

**Believe** (4100)([pisteuo](#)) means they considered the Gospel to be true and therefore worthy of their trust. Notice Peter only says believe and adds nothing about circumcision or keeping the Law.

**Acts 15:8 "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;**

KJV Acts 15:8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;

- **God, who knows the heart** Acts 1:24; 1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Kings 8:39; 1 Chronicles 28:9; 29:17; Psalms 44:21; 139:1,2; Jeremiah 11:20; 17:10; 20:12; John 2:24,25; 21:17; Hebrews 4:13; Revelation 2:23

- **Testified to them** Acts 14:3; John 5:37; Hebrews 2:4
- **giving them the Holy Spirit** Acts 2:4; 4:31; Acts 10:44,45; Acts 11:15-17
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE FIRST GENTILE CONVERTS RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT

**And God, who knows the heart** - Peter calls God the "heart knower" (kardiognostes)! In other words God saw the spiritual transformation that took place in the Gentiles when they believed the Gospel Peter proclaimed to them. God did not make a mistake with the Gentiles when He bore witness them at Caesarea that they were truly His children by faith alone.

**Who knows the heart** (2589)(**kardiognostes** from **kardia** = heart + **ginosko** = to know) is literally 'to know what is in the heart', one who knows the heart, searcher of hearts, one who knows what someone else thinks, one who knows the inner life or character (men know our reputation, but God knows our character!) Only God can see into the secret places of each person's heart. The only other use is in Acts 1:24+ at a crucial time when the apostles were seeking a replacement apostle "they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen." Clearly this is another crucial moment in the infancy of the church, so it is not surprising they might use a similar phrase!

**THOUGHT** - God penetrates our charades, our masks, our fronts, our secret sins, our deceptive cloaks of self-righteousness and He examines our innermost thoughts intimately! He searches and finds out what is in the center of our life, what is the dominating influence in our will and understanding. Given this natural bent of our hearts (toward self deception) we all have reason to join King David in his prayer in (Ps 139:23,24 26:2 and Job also Job 31:6). Thus we see that a man after God's own heart (David Acts 13:22) and a man who is blameless, upright, fearing God & turning away from evil (Job 1:1) To re-enforce this truth ponder 1Sa 16:7 1 Ki 8:39 1 Chr 28:9 Ps7:9 Ps 44:21 Pr 17:3 Jer 11:20 Jer 19:10 Jer 20:12 Ro 8:27 Rev 2:23.

**Testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us** - Peter in a sense is calling God to the witness stand! What does Peter mean by just as He also did to us? Luke explains in Acts 10 that Peter and the other Jewish witnesses "were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God." (Acts 10:46). In other words it could not be more plainly and clearly stated that God gave the Gentiles in Caesarea the same attestation that He had given to the apostles themselves and also to the first believers in Jerusalem on Pentecost.

**Ger** - The possession of the Holy Spirit is the indication that believers are God's children (Gal. 4:6) and is the identifying mark of a Christian (Rom. 8:11).

Paul echoes Peter's argument in his epistle to the Galatians "This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:2-3+)

**Testified** (witness, gain approval) (3140)(**martureo**) means God bore witness or gave evidence to the Gentiles in Caesarea that their conversion was genuine by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He had given the Jews the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4+).

Luke records Peter's previous testimony in Jerusalem regarding his experience with the Gentiles -

And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. 16 "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"(Acts 11:15-17)

**Robertson** explains that Peter's logical point or argument is that "They had accepted (Acts 11:18) this witness of God then and it was true now of these other Gentile converts."

**Spurgeon** - This is the vital doctrine of Christianity—salvation by grace, and that grace revealed in our crucified Lord. Luther says, "We must not yield nor give up this article though heaven and earth should perish." Peter's short and telling speech was a noble contribution to the Gentile cause.

**Acts 15:9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.**

KJV Acts 15:9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

NLT Acts 15:9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith

NIV Acts 15:9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.

- **nd He made no distinction** Acts 14:1,27; Romans 3:9,22,29,30; 4:11,12; 9:24; 10:11-13; 1 Corinthians 7:18; Galatians 3:28; Galatians 5:6; Ephesians 2:14-22; 3:6; Colossians 3:11
- **cleansing their hearts by faith** Acts 10:15,28,43,44; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Heb 9:13,14; 1 Pe 1:22
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE IMPARTIALITY OF GOD

**Impartiality** is one God's great attributes whereby He treats all men and women equally, not demonstrating favoritism. God does not show prejudice towards or against any person or party. Moses writes He is "the awesome God Who **does not show partiality.**" (Dt 10:17). King Jehoshaphat of Judah declared "the LORD our God will have no part in unrighteousness, or **partiality.**" (2 Chr 19:7). Luke had recorded a similar declaration by Peter about 10 years earlier when he opened his mouth and said "I most certainly understand now that **God is not one to show partiality,** but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him (IMPLICIT - WHETHER THEY ARE JEW OR GENTILE)." (Acts 10:34,35+)

With an **impartial** hand, the Lord  
Deals out to mortals their reward;  
The kind and faithful souls shall find  
A God as faithful and as kind.  
([Isaac Watts - Play hymn](#))

**And He made no distinction between us and them** - God did not judge one way and then another. He did not differentiate between Jews and Gentiles. He is not partial either to Jews or to Gentiles. He made (makes) no distinction between circumcised and uncircumcised, Levitically clean and unclean! God is in a sense "color blind" and "ethnicity blind!" That's Peter's point to these prejudiced Pharisees!

**Wiersbe** - God erased a difference (Acts 15:9, 11). For centuries, God had put a difference between Jews and Gentiles, and it was the task of the Jewish religious leaders to protect and maintain that difference (Lev. 10:10; Ezek. 22:26; 44:23). Jesus taught that the Jewish dietary laws had nothing to do with inner holiness (Mark 7:1-23), and Peter had learned that lesson again when he had that vision on the housetop in Joppa (Acts 10:1ff). (Bible Exposition Commentary).

**Made** (no) **distinction** (1252) (**diakrino** from **diá** = separation, "thoroughly back and forth" + **kríno** = distinguish, decide, judge) literally means "to separate throughout or wholly", to judge "back and forth" between two which can either (positively) refer to close-reasoning (discrimination) or negatively "over-judging" (going too far, vacillating). The context indicates which sense is meant. In the present context diakrino is coupled with a negative meant that God concluded that there was no difference between Jew and Gentile believers. Diakrino is used in Acts 10:20 (of the Holy Spirit telling Peter to go "without misgivings") and in Acts 11:2 ("when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised **took issue** with him" - similar to our current scenario!).

Don't miss the little Greek word for "**no**" (oudeis = literally "not one") is critical for it is the stronger word for negation (then "me"). This powerful negating conjunction rules out by definition or in other words "shuts the door" objectively leaving absolutely no exceptions. And so **oudeis** categorically excludes distinction, declaring as a fact that no valid example of divine distinction exists now or ever! Strong rebuttal by Peter! **Oudeis** is the very word Peter had used before the Sanhedrin when he categorically declared there is salvation in **no one** (oudeis) else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) This is also the word Paul used when he made the famous declaration (which I personally think was part of the "secret" of his strong finish) "But I do **not** (OUDEIS) consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God." (Acts 20:24+)

Peter now moves to the subject of "**cleansing**" which was a sensitive issue with the legalists who were primarily focused on the external aspects of cleansing. He has just stated that God does not see as man sees, for God looks at the heart of man, the spiritual center of his being (cf 1 Sa 16:7). And since God can see the filth in the hearts of men, He cleanses them of that filth when they believe the Gospel. This is where all true spiritual cleansing occurs, by faith in the Gospel.

**Spurgeon** - "**He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.**" The Jewish or Pharisaic party

violently opposed the gospel. Wherever the apostles went, the Jews who did not believe, being moved with envy, stirred up the people against them. The message of salvation of the Gentiles by grace through faith grated on their ears, for they thought it was contrary to the law of Moses. Believers who used to be Pharisees brought a good share of pharisaic tendencies with them into the church, and these were dangerous to the young kingdom of Christ. Peter, at the great Jerusalem Council, was enabled to answer those who said circumcision was necessary to be saved, and he recounts how he came to that understanding. By God's instruction, he went and preached to Cornelius and his household, who all became believers. Then Peter told how the Spirit of God rested on them. It was evidently the same Spirit who had descended on the circumcised ones at Jerusalem, since they experienced the same results (Acts 10:46). If the Spirit puts no difference between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, why should the church do so? Peter therefore said, "Can anyone withhold water and prevent these people from being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47). He therefore commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord and thus affirmed his belief that faith had purified them. The Jerusalem Council then affirmed this truth of the gospel about Gentiles.

**Cleansing their hearts by faith** - Or purifying their hearts morally speaking and describing man's morally sick heart. The heart of man's sin problem is the problem of his heart. God supernaturally purified the sinful hearts of both the Jews and the Gentiles. He could not have put it more plainly - the **cleansing was by faith** NOT by works! Peter is essentially giving another description of salvation, but it would have been a picture familiar to these OT experts, for they had read (but failed to comprehend) the great promise from God in Ezekiel 36 (WHICH IS IN EFFECT A PROMISE OF THE NEW COVENANT EVEN THOUGH EZEKIEL DOES NOT USE THAT SPECIFIC PHRASE).

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean (Lxx = katharizo); I will cleanse (Lxx = katharizo) you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a **new heart** and put a new spirit within you; and **I will remove the heart of stone** from your flesh and **give you a heart of flesh**. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes (GOD'S SPIRIT GIVES US THE DESIRE AND POWER - PARALLELS TRUTH OF Php 2:13NLT+), and (NOW GOD DESCRIBES MAN'S PART, OUR RESPONSIBILITY ENABLED BY THE SPIRIT OF GRACE) you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (WARNING: DON'T TRY TO ACCOMPLISH THE SECOND PART OF THE PROMISE, WITHOUT FIRST LAYING HOLD OF THE CRITICAL FIRST PART OF THE PROMISE - IT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GRACE AND LAW, LEGALISTICALLY "KEEPING RULE" BUT DOING SO NATURALLY, NOT SUPERNATURALLY. THE RESULT? BONDAGE TO YOUR FLESH, NOT FREEDOM IN CHRIST!) (Ezekiel 36:25-27+)

**Swindoll** adds that "The concept of salvation by grace through faith was not new. God had always wanted His people to have "circumcised hearts" (ED: SEE EXCURSUS) (see Deut. 10:16; Deut 30:6+), instructing them to "love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5). The concept of salvation through faith applied to their patriarch, Abraham, of whom the Scriptures say, "he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6+). Besides, the outward symbol of circumcision applied to Abraham and his descendants as part of a specific kind of covenant. This was a new covenant, one with different terms and applicable to a broader group of people—with "no distinction" (Acts 15:9). (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – Acts)

**Cleansing** (2511)(**katharizo** from **katharos** = pure, clean, without stain or spot; English words **-catharsis** = emotional or physical purging, cathartic = substance used to induce a purging) means God made their hearts clean by taking away the undesirable part. To cleanse from filth or impurity. Katharizo was used frequently in the Septuagint to describe ritual cleansing, but also used in the sense of moral cleansing as for example of the Jewish **Day of Atonement** (modern "**Yom Kippur**") in Lev 16:30+ where Moses said "it is on this **day that atonement** shall be made for you to **cleanse** (Lxx = katharizo) you; you **will be clean** (Lxx = katharizo) from all your sins before the LORD." Of course the cleansing on the Day of Atonement was simply a shadow (a type) pointing to the Messiah's perfect and forever cleansing from sin on the Cross (see Col 2:16-17+)

Notice that kathaizo is also used in Acts 10:15 and Acts 11:19, where the cleansing of the food pointing to the cleansing of the hearts of the Gentiles by faith.

**Katharizo** is used with the meaning of "moral cleansing" in Acts 15:9 by Paul writing that Christ "gave Himself for (Gk = huper = in place of = speaks of substitutionary atonement) us to redeem (**lutroo** = to pay a price to buy a slave off the slave block!) us from every (HOW MANY?) lawless deed, and to purify (katharizo) for Himself (WE ARE NO LONGER OUR OWN! cf 1:Cor 6:19-20+) a people for His own possession, (AND WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE NOW? TO BE...) zealous for good ("KNOW" AN "O" OUT = "GOD") deeds (SPIRIT INITIATED, SPIRIT WROUGHT, "BRANCH ABIDING IN VINE" DEEDS). (Titus 2:14+)

We see a parallel use of **katharizo** by the writer of Hebrew = (Heb 9:13,14) For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the **cleansing** (katharizo) of the flesh (AS ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT - YOM KIPPUR), (ARGUMENT FROM THE LESSER TO THE GREATER, FROM THE "SHADOW" TO THE "SUBSTANCE") how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, **cleanse** (katharizo) your

conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (CLEANSING OF THEIR HEARTS BY FAITH WOULD INCLUDE CLEANSING OF THEIR CONSCIENCE).

In sum, Peter is a good disciple (which means "learner") for he heard the voice and heeded the voice from Heaven (at least when he heard it the second time!) that ""What God **has cleansed** ([katharizo](#)), no longer consider unholy." (Acts 10:14) The context was referring to "clean" and "unclean" foods, now refers to hearts! Peter was now declaring what he had been taught from Heaven.

**Hearts** (2588) ([kardia](#)) refers of course not to the physical organ (over 800 mentions and none refer to the physical organ!), but is always used figuratively to center of our personality, to so to speak to our "**control center**" (to make a play on the ["air traffic control center"](#) at the airport which carefully guards and guides what flies in and what flies out. How applicable to our "hearts" which are so prone to wander!). In short **kardia** refers to the the [affective](#) center of our being wherein lies the capacity of moral preference and volitional desire. The **kardia** generates thoughts that make the decisions which the mind works out. In other words, our logic flows out of our heart-decisions and not vice versa. Gleason Archer called the **kardia**, the "desire-producer that makes us tick" for it is the place where our "desire-decisions" occur, and which establish who we really are. WHO ARE YOU? HAVE YOU HAD A HEART CHECK UP RECENTLY? We are assiduous to do this medically, but woefully lax in doing it spiritually (beloved, I speak from experience!). But here Peter says it is as God unblocks the spiritual atherosclerosis of our old sinful heart, not by opening the coronary arteries, but by giving us a total heart transplant! Daily confession and repentance are thereafter necessary to avoid "spiritual atherosclerosis" and gradual, subtle hardening of the heart! (Read and practice daily "preventative maintenance" = 1 Jn 1:9+, Pr 28:13+).

**Gary Hill** rightly reminds us that "Life is a continuous contest, waged and won in the **heart**. *As the heart goes, so goes the rest of us*. This is true in "*both directions*": *negatively* (Jn 14:1, 27; Acts 7:51, 8:21; Ro 1:21) and *positively* (Acts 16:14; Ro 2:29; Heb 10:22). The heart, as the seat of decision-making, also involves emotions (desires) that are key to making choices....Cognition (the use of the "mind") is vital, but the **heart** "steers our being" as the primary organ of decision-making. The **heart** forges our personality ("soul"), intellect ("mind"), and actions ("strength"). Accordingly, the **heart** is the primary (driving) force in preferring good (Mt 5:28; Ro 6:17), or evil (Mt 5:28). The mind (reasoning) reacts to (works out) **heart**-choices ("internal persuasions"), but making choices (core-decisions) comes from the **heart**." ([Discovery Bible](#))

**Spurgeon on Purifying their hearts by faith** - As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.' As you believe in him unto justification, believe in him to sanctification. If anybody tells you that you are to get justification in one way and sanctification in another way, do not believe him. Jesus Christ is 'of God made unto us ... sanctification, and redemption'. Pharisees virtually teach us that we are to be sanctified by the law, though justified by faith; but we know better. These are twin covenant blessings and are not to be had apart. Believe in Christ to conquer sin as well as to pardon sin. Believe that the only power which can subdue a base passion in you is the power which washed you from your iniquity of old. Trust Christ with the power of sin as well as the guilt of sin. You need not go through a round of performances in order to be purified in heart; you need not look for a higher life than Jesus gave you when you looked and lived: there is no higher life, for he gave you his own. What more do you want than the Holy Spirit who quickens you? What is higher than that? What more can you have than faith has brought you and will bring you? Jesus has given you himself. Did you believe in half a Christ at the beginning? Did you receive from him a lower and inferior life? Shame on you to think so. You trusted your soul wholly with him, did you not, and did he not give his whole self to you? Do you mean to say that you trusted him to save you from hell, and not from sin? Did you trust him to blot out the past, and were you fool enough to trust to yourself for keeping in the future? If so, you did not believe in him at all; your faith was faulty at the very core, for Christ must be everything or nothing.

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**C H Spurgeon** from introduction of his sermon [Faith Purifying the Heart](#) ([Listen to Mp3](#)) -

THE Jewish or Pharisaic party violently opposed the gospel from without. Wherever the apostles went, the Jews who believed not, being moved with envy, stirred up the people against them. They could not endure to hear of the salvation of the Gentiles by grace through faith: it grated on their ear, for they thought that this doctrine was contrary to the law of Moses in which they boasted. They were children of the bondwoman, under the old covenant of works, and they could not endure that the children of the promise should come to the inheritance. They struggled and rebelled against the gospel of salvation by grace, for it went against their natural pride and their national exclusiveness. Yea, and even when any of them, as blessed be the grace of God was the case, became converted, the old man was still within them, and the spirit of bondage was still apt to assert itself. Those who had been of the sect of the Pharisees brought a good share of Pharisaic tendencies with them into the church, and these were dangerous to the young kingdom of Christ. I scarcely know whether legal principles were not able to do more mischief inside the church by perverting pure doctrine than they could do outside the church by exciting persecution. One can hardly imagine how the gospel could have escaped being overlaid and smothered by Judaism, like a babe by its mother, had it not been for the preserving grace of God, and the indwelling Spirit within the church of God. Ye know, brethren, how we mourn at this day that certain who claim to be Christians are laboring most zealously to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear. They invent



pompous ceremonies, observe days and months, and are bound by rubrics and regulations, all of which are an idle and needless servitude to outward forms. Certain others would bind us with creeds and ordinances not plainly taught in the word of God, nor agreeable thereto, of which Peter and John knew nothing whatever, having no force but that which comes of human authority. The old Pharisaic spirit is a great forger of bonds and builder of prisons, it would subject us to ordinances of "Touch not, taste not, handle not," and fetter us with rules of many sorts: for it cannot understand the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. It teacheth this and it teacheth that, whereof the apostles would have said, "We gave no such commandment." We must contend against this spirit as much now as ever. Still must we refuse to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Christ is all. We are complete in him, and we will not permit a single letter to be added to his perfect law of liberty.

Peter at the great Jerusalem council was enabled through his experience to answer those who said that unless a man was circumcised he could not be saved. Depend upon it, brothers and sisters, there is nothing like practical work for Christ to teach us Christ's truth. For the most part the heretics of the present day are a clique of literary men, adepts at the pen, but quite unable to speak. It may be that their failure in this direction sours them, and sets them upon opposing the gospel ministry. At any rate they are a set of theorizers who know nothing of practical service for the Lord, and so they make up all manner of nonsense according to their own fancies. They sit in their studies and do nothing, and then criticize those who are doing hard service and are successful in it. They are so busy with nibbing their quills and polishing their periods, that they care nothing about saving souls; and they are so intent upon making discoveries which shall manifest their own gigantic intellects that they cannot soil their hands with practical work among the poor and ignorant. Having nothing upon their hearts their whole nature runs to head, and the head being unbalanced by a busy heart takes to spinning cobweb theories and novelties of heresy. Fiercely liberal, the spirit which they manifest against the orthodox is grandly bigoted: in this they are earnest, but in little else except in engendering grievous errors, which are ravaging the churches and ruining souls. Among the do-nothings all mischief begins. Give a man practical work for Jesus, and keep him at it, and he will, like Peter, learn as he goes on, and, like a river, filter as he flows. Peter could not continue to believe in restricting the gospel to the Jews after the Lord had bidden Cornelius send for him from Joppa, that he might teach him the gospel: his actual service refined his theory. If those who ruled botanical science never saw a flower, would you wonder if they ran into gross heterodoxies of belief? A naturalist who never saw a living animal would not be likely to be very sound in his zoology; and even so, those who never deal with the souls of men, who never see penitents under conviction, nor hear the songs of new-born believers in Christ, nor see men rejoice in affliction and triumph in death, are sure to blunder when they set up for teachers. They lean back in their study chairs and blow bubbles, and vent doubts, to the subverting of the faith of many godly but feeble souls, and all for the want of something better to do. I prescribe as medicine for them, and I heartily wish they would take it, to do something for Christ and the good of fallen men. Peter got out of what would otherwise have been his natural condition of bigotry by being exercised in the service of his Master.

Peter tells us how he came to see that circumcision was not needful. At the divine bidding he went in and preached to Cornelius and his household, and while he was preaching they believed. He had not finished his sermon before they had all become believers, and he adds, "God the heart-knower bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he gave unto us." They believed, and he knew that their faith had purged their hearts; for the Lord sent the Holy Ghost upon them there and then. The Holy Ghost dwells not in unclean hearts, but when the temple of the heart has been purified, there he comes. Though these men had never been circumcised, yet they were purified in heart, for the Spirit of God rested upon them: it was evidently the same Spirit which had descended upon the circumcised ones at Jerusalem, since it produced the same results, "for they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God." Now, if the Spirit put no difference between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, why should the church do so? Peter therefore said, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" He therefore commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord, and thus affirmed his belief that faith had purified them. He saw that the Lord had given the choicest of gospel blessings to uncircumcised believers, even the power of the Holy Ghost, and therefore he felt that they were to be received into the church without circumcision. Peter's argument is eminently clear and convincing. You and I cannot be impartial, because we, being Gentiles, are naturally pleased with an argument which includes us in the blessing, but if we were sitting as judges to listen to the pleading of the apostle, I feel sure we should say, -Whether it bless us or curse us, the reasoning is unanswerable: if God would not give the Spirit except the heart had been purified, then these men's hearts were purified, and it is evident that they were purified by faith alone, seeing that they were uncircumcised and altogether outside the Jewish law. Seeing, then, that they are pure in heart, what need can there be of further purification? What need to lay upon them the outward and visible sign, the putting away of the filth of the flesh, when it is proved by divine witness that they are pure in heart already? It is well argued, Peter, and we rejoice in the conclusion.

**Acts 15:10 "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?"**

KJV Acts 15:10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

- **Why do you** Exodus 17:2; Isaiah 7:12; Matthew 4:7; Hebrews 3:9
- **put God to the test** Matthew 11:28-30; 23:4; Galatians 5:1
- **which neither our fathers** Galatians 4:1-5,9; Hebrews 9:9
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## REMOVAL OF THE YOKE OF THE LAW!

Peter's question in this verse would have reminded the OT experts in the assembly of the words in "painful" Exodus recorded just after Israel had been redeemed from slavery in Egypt - "Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? **Why do you test** (Lxx uses same verb as in Acts 15:10 = [peirazo](#)) **the LORD?**"...He named the place Massah (Heb = trial, testing; Lxx = [peirasmos](#)) and **Meribah** (Hebrew literally = strife or contention) because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested (Lxx = [peirazo](#)) the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us, or not?" (Ex 17:2, 7) Mose repeats this warning at the second giving of the Law warning Israel "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test (Lxx uses the cognate verb [ekpeirazo](#)), as you tested Him at Massah." (Deut 6:16)

**Now therefore** - Term of conclusion. Based on what Peter has just stated -- salvation is by faith and the faith that effects God's salvation is no different in Jews or Gentiles so there is no difference in the salvation of a Jew and a Gentile. They are both born from above by God. Peter turns the tables on the Judaizers themselves.

**Why do you put God to the test** - Or as the authorized version asks in very convicting terms "Why are you tempting God?" You can just picture them beginning to wince and squirm! How did they tempt God? As Peter has just stated, God had told him that the Gentiles were cleansed or saved in the same way as the Jews. And yet the argument of the Pharisees was contra faith alone as taught by God Himself. Thus they are "testing" God or as **Robertson** says they are implying that God "had made a mistake this time, though right about Cornelius. It is a home-thrust (BY PETER)."

**THOUGHT** - In short, the Pharisees were behaving just like their rebellious Jewish ancestors. The parallel is amazing in that both groups quickly tested God even after His amazing grace had set them free -- The Israelites being liberated from bondage to slavery in Egypt and the legalistic Israelites being liberated from bondage to sin (cf Acts 15:5 "had believed")! Lest we be too hard on either group, we need to remember that they are both a perfect picture of our fallen flesh (still resident in all believers) which is so quick to forget the gifts of God's grace and manifest an ungrateful, grumbling spirit! Lord forgive us all and give us all "sanctified grateful memories" of Your daily goodness and grace, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

**Lenski** says they are testing God because "They are not dealing with these Gentiles but with God himself and with his will as he has made it so clearly known. They are tempting or trying God to see whether he will keep still to their contradiction of his will or will resent it and punish them." (The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles)

As an aside in the early days of the church (about 30-33 AD) Peter had asked Ananias' wife Sapphira "Why is it that you have agreed together **to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test**(same verb - [peirazo](#))?" (Acts 5:9+) One wonders if these legalists in the assembly remembered what happened to Sapphira after Peter's question, but if they did, it would have made them very uncomfortable!

**Ger** - Peter charged the assembly not to **test** God by challenging his authority but, rather, to trust Him in the prerogative He has exercised. He argued that demanding Gentile circumcision and their subsequent Torah observance would involve exactly such a presumptuous **test**. (Ibid)

**Put to the test** (tempt)([3985](#))([peirazo](#) from the noun **peira** = test from **peiro** = perforate, pierce through to test durability of things) is a morally neutral word simply meaning "to test". Whether the **test** is for a good (as it proved to be in Heb 11:17) or evil (Mt 4:1 "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be **tempted** by the devil") depends on the intent of the one giving the test and also on the response of the one tested. (See study of similar word [dokimazo](#))

**Ger** - Peter called the Torah, the Mosaic Covenant, an arduous yoke (similar to Paul's argument, Gal. 5:1), an unbearable burden which Israel, from its inception as a nation, had never been able to impeccably keep. God had established the New Covenant through the Messiah for precisely that reason (Jer. 31:31-32; Luke 22:20; Heb. 8:7). Therefore, they should not force the Gentiles to attempt what not even Jewish believers could endure.

**By placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke-** To place a **yoke** on the **neck** was an ancient idiom which pictured restricting people! Toussaint adds that "Putting a yoke on the disciples' necks was an appropriate way to state the second result, for "taking the yoke" was used to describe Gentile proselytes coming into Judaism. It spoke of an obligation."

**Messianic Jewish writer Steven Ger** adds that "**Yoke**" was a common rabbinic designation for the Torah, cited in the Mishnah concerning proselytes taking up "the yoke of the commandments." ([Mishnah, Berakhot 2:2](#)) While rabbinic literature, both ancient and contemporary, is filled with eloquent testimony to the joys and delights of keeping God's gracious gift of Torah, the average Jew has not often found this to be the case, particularly when filtered through the interpretive grid of the rabbinic oral tradition. Peter was merely stating a candid fact, one that could be bluntly reaffirmed by countless Jews throughout Jewish history."

Thus Peter's metaphor is crystal clear that the "**yoke**" stood for anything added to faith, in this specific case referring to the addition of circumcision and keeping of the Mosaic Law. The picture is of **yoke** that was so "heavy" (figuratively speaking) that the fathers in the Old Covenant did not have strength to bear. Paul's words in Galatians are a good "commentary" writing "It was for **freedom** that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to **a yoke of slavery**." (Gal. 5:1) Jesus castigated the Pharisees with a similar declaration that "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders (COMPARE TO A "YOKE"), but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.(Mt 23:4)

**Disciples** (3101)([mathetes](#) from **math-** = "*mental effort* that thinks something through") in this context describes followers of Christ, those who had believed in Jesus, Jew and Gentile.

**Yoke** (2218)([zugos or zygos](#) related to verb **zeúgnuni** = to join especially by a yoke, to bind) literally a wooden bar over the neck of a pair of animals joining them to pull together. Figuratively a connector which unites two to move (work) as one.

**THOUGHT** - You can mark it down as an immutable principle that God's law, apart from the grace of Christ, is a heavy yoke that no one can bear. So if you are a believer don't place yourself under legalistic burdens. And be balanced for grace is not a license to sin or be "law less." Freedom is not the desire to do as you please (THE WORLD'S DEFINITION), but is the (supernatural) power to do as you should.

**Which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear** - The **fathers** refers to all the Jewish ancestors from the day the nation of Israel was created by God up to the day Peter is speaking. The fathers had barely left Egypt before they began to worship a golden calf. So even at the outset Israel could not bear the yoke of the Law! Peter's logic is flawless for he is saying in effect that the believing Pharisees wanted to put a yoke on the necks of the Gentiles that they themselves had failed to bear! Works in the flesh never work when "yoked" with faith in the Savior! Paul expressed a similar idea in his sermon in the synagogue in Iconium (which resulted in conversions among Jews and Gentiles, but which eventually got him run out of town!) "**through** Him (cf "**through** the grace of the Lord Jesus" in Acts 15:11)**everyone** (NOTE NO ETHNIC QUALIFICATIONS) who believes (NOTHING ELSE NEEDED) is freed (JUSTIFIED) from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses." (Acts 13:39+) No human being other than the God-Man Jesus Christ ever fulfilled the Law perfectly (cf Heb 4:15), i.e., they were never able to bear its yoke.

In Matthew 11 Jesus substituted His light and easy "**yoke**" of the Gospel for the **yoke of the Law**, as He gave the invitation to all who had ears to hear

"**Come** to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.**Take** My yoke (same word [zugos](#) but clearly a different result than trying to bear the yoke of the Law!) upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 "For My **yoke** is easy and My burden is light (BOTH EASY AND LIGHT CONTRAST WITH THE LAW!)."(Mt 11:28-30+)

**Comment** - When one took Jesus' yoke circumcision and kosher eating were matters of liberty and choice, not to be forced on others or allowed to become a cause for pride nor a mark of one who was especially "holy" (especially when compared to Gentile disciples who were neither circumcised nor ate kosher).

**Able** (2480)([ischuo](#) from **ischus** = might) means to be strong in body or in resources, having efficacy. It refers refers to strength that "gets into the fray" (action), i.e. *engages* the resistance. **ischuo** in the present passages speaks of their Jewish ancestors as NOT having the required personal resources to accomplish the objective of keeping the Law (relying on their fallen flesh). It is interesting that Paul uses *ischuo* later refuting the call to circumcise believers writing "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision **means** ([ischuo](#) = more literally avails or accomplishes) anything, but faith working (energeō in present tense) through love." (Gal 5:6+) What a contrast with the use of **ischuo** in Php 4:13+ where Paul testifies "I can ([ischuo](#)) do all things through Him Who ([endunamoo](#) in [present tense](#) = continually) strengthens me."

**Bear** (carry, endure)(941)([bastazo](#) from **basis** = foot) means literally to take up and hold (Jn 10:31, 20:15, Acts 21:35) or to bear (Mt

3:11, Mk 14:13, Lk 22:10). The meaning in this present passage is figurative and means to bear something burdensome, specifically the legal requirements of the Mosaic Law. What a contrast this burdensome yoke is to bear in our flesh versus bearing it when we believe in Christ and take His yoke, for John writes "this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and **His commandments are not burdensome.**" (1 John 5:3)

**Wiersbe** comments explains the reason for the **yoke** stating that "the Law was given to the Jewish nation to protect them from the evils of the Gentile world and prepare them to bring the Messiah into the world (Gal. 4:1-7). The Law cannot purify the sinner's heart (Gal. 2:21), impart the gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:2), or give eternal life (Gal. 3:21). What the Law could not do, God did through His own Son (Ro 8:1-4). Those who have trusted Christ have the righteousness of God's Law in their hearts and, through the Spirit, obey His will. They are not motivated by fear, but by love, for "love is the fulfilling of the Law" (Rom. 13:8-10)." (Ibid)

**David Guzik** explains why God's commandments are no longer difficult to bear...

**His commandments are not burdensome** when we see how wise and good the commandments of God are. They are gifts from Him to show us the best and most fulfilling life possible. God's commands are like the "manufacturer's handbook" for life; He tells us what to do because He knows how we work best. God's commands are not given to bind or to pain us, or because God is like an irritated old man.. His commandments are not burdensome because when we are born again, we are given new hearts—hearts which by instinct wish to please God. As part of the New Covenant, the law of God has been written on the heart of every believer (Jeremiah 31:33+). His commandments are not burdensome when we compare them to the religious rules men make up. John is not trying to say obedience is an easy thing. If that were so, then it would be easy for us to not sin, and John has already acknowledged that we all do sin (1 John 1:8+). **John is thinking of the contrast Jesus made between the religious requirements of the religious leaders of His day, and the simplicity of loving God and following Him. Jesus said all the rules and regulations of the Scribes and Pharisees were as heavy burdens** (Matthew 23:4). In contrast, Jesus said of Himself, My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:30+). Instead of the burdensome requirement to keep hundreds of little rules and regulations, Jesus simply says to us, "Love Me and love my people, and you will walk in obedience." (ED: AND OF COURSE HE MAKES THIS IMMINENTLY POSSIBLE BY GIVING US HIS SPIRIT WHICH MAKES SUCH SUPERNATURAL LOVE A VERY REAL POSSIBILITY. WHILE THE SPIRIT WILL NOT FORCE US, HE WILL ENABLE US TO EXERCISE OUR VOLITIONAL CHOICE TO OBEY GOD AND TO LOVE GOD AND OTHERS. WE ARE MOTIVATED TO OBEY NOW OUT OF LOVE NOT LEGALISM!) His commandments are not burdensome when we really love God. When we love God, we will want to obey Him and please Him. When you love someone, it seems little trouble to go to a lot of difficulty to help or please that person. You enjoy doing it, though if you had to do it for an enemy, you would be complaining all the time. Just as the seven years of Jacob's service for Laban seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her (Genesis 29:18), so obeying God's commands does not seem a burden when we really love Him. An old proverb says, "**Love feels no loads.**" ([Enduring Word Commentary](#))

**Hiebert** adds that "Love-prompted obedience is not a crushing burden that exhausts the believer's strength and destroys his sense of freedom in Christ. He finds that the new life in Christ makes obedience possible and has implanted in him a desire to do the will of God (ED: AND GIVEN HIS SPIRIT WHO ENERGIZES THIS OBEDIENCE - cf Php 2:13NLT+); for he realizes that God has given His laws for the believer's own protection and highest welfare. He finds in them guidance concerning "what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Ro 12:2+). For him "the statutes again become songs, and the commandments prove to be the stepping-stones to freedom." As Dodd points out, John "does not mean that God's demands upon us are less exacting than we supposed, but that they are accompanied by the assurance of power to fulfil them." **God's commandments become burdensome whenever a Christian desires to do something inconsistent with His directives; when a believer attempts to carry out his own will, God's commandments seem cruel and restrictive and fellowship with God is broken. Then he finds that he must come back to a loving obedience.**" (1 John Commentary - W Edmond Hiebert)

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**AN EASY YOKE** - A Sunday school teacher read Matthew 11:30 to the children in her class, and then asked: "Jesus said, 'My yoke is easy.' Who can tell me what a yoke is?" A boy raised his hand and replied, "A yoke is something they put on the necks of animals so they can help each other."

Then the teacher asked, "What is the yoke Jesus puts on us?" A quiet little girl raised her hand and said, "It is God putting His arm around us."

When Jesus came, He offered an "easy" and "lighter" yoke compared to the yoke of the religious leaders (Matthew 11:30). They had placed "heavy burdens" of laws on the people (Matthew 23:4; Acts 15:10), which no one could possibly keep.

God knew we would never be able to measure up to His standards (Romans 3:23), so He sent Jesus to this earth. Jesus obeyed His Father's commands perfectly and bore the punishment of death for our sins. As we humble ourselves and recognize our need for forgiveness, Jesus comes alongside us. He places His yoke on us, freeing us from guilt and giving us His power to live a life that's pleasing to God.

Are you in need of Jesus' help? He says, "Come to Me . . . . Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me" (Matthew 11:28-29). He longs to put His arm around you  
By Anne Cetas

Heavy is the load of guilt  
That sinners have to bear;  
Light and easy is the yoke  
That Jesus wants to share.  
—D. De Haan

**Acts 15:11 But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."**

KJV Acts 15:11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

NIV Acts 15:11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

- **that** Ro 3:24; 5:20,21; 6:23; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Corinthians 8:9; 13:14; Galatians 1:6; 2:16; Ephesians 1:6,7; 2:7-9; Titus 2:11; 3:4-7; Revelation 5:9
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **JEWES AND GENTILES SAVED THROUGH GRACE**

Paul would later write that we are "justified ([dikaioo](#) - DECLARED RIGHTEOUS OR FOREVER IN RIGHT STANDING BEFORE GOD) **as a gift by His grace** through the redemption ([apolutrosis](#)) which is in Christ Jesus" (Ro 3:24+)

**Robertson** says "Peter speaks as the spiritual emancipator. He had been slow to see the meaning of God's dealings with him at Joppa and Caesarea, but he has seen clearly by now. He takes his stand boldly with Paul and Barnabas for Gentile freedom....His doctrine of grace is as clear as a bell. He has lifted his voice against salvation by ceremony and ritualism. It was a great deliverance."

**But (alla)** - A strong term of contrast which means something like "on the contrary." Peter contrasts the impossible to bear yoke of the Law with the glorious grace of the Lord Jesus. The contrast could not be greater. Mens' works versus Christ's work finished (Jn 19:30)!

**We - We** Jews who have been **saved**.

**Believe** (plural - Peter is speaking for other believing Jews)([4100](#))([pisteuo](#)) in this context means that Peter has consider the Gospel of grace to be true and therefore worthy of one's trust. He (and the other Jews included in the plural "we" presumably the apostles like James, etc) held a firm conviction as to the goodness, efficacy, or ability of the Gospel to save one's soul by simple faith completely independent of any "additives."

**Spurgeon** - What the sun is to the heavens, that the doctrine of a vicarious satisfaction is to theology. Atonement is the brain and spinal cord of Christianity. Take away the cleansing blood, and what is left to the guilty? Deny the substitutionary work of Jesus, and you have denied all that is precious in the New Testament.

**That we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus - Through** is placed at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis. The preposition "**through**" is dia which means across, successfully across, and in a sense is a picture of a "**door**" (**the grace of the Lord Jesus**, a phrase that is synonymous with THE GOSPEL), **through** which one walks by faith across to the other side from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's beloved Son.

**Toussaint** observes that "The statement, **We are saved, just as they are**, is amazing. A Jew under the Law would say the opposite and in reverse order ("they are saved as we are"), but one who knew God's grace, as Peter did, would not say that. Salvation for anyone—Jew or Gentile—is by God's grace (v. 11) and is by faith (v. 9; cf. Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8)." (The Bible Knowledge Commentary)

It seems that some believers still have a misconception that the way one was saved in the Old Testament was different from the way one is saved in the New Testament. That is unfortunately a common misunderstanding for salvation in the Old Testament was also by grace through faith in Messiah (looking forward to His sacrifice), and is typified by the salvation of Abraham in Genesis 15:6 which says "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness (I.E., HE WAS IN EFFECT JUSTIFIED OR DECLARED RIGHTEOUS IN GOD'S SIGHT)." In Galatians 3:8+ Paul explained that "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would **justify** (declare righteous) the **Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham**, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." So what did Abraham believe? Clearly he believed the Gospel! Not only that but he was saved in Genesis 15 and circumcision was not given as a sign until Genesis 17. Clearly Abraham did not need circumcision to be saved by faith! Circumcision was a sign and a seal but brought no life or salvation. It was an important symbol, but it could not save. Only faith in Christ can save.

**Saved** (4982)(**sozo**) means they were delivered from danger and into the condition of safety. So in this verse Peter refers to God's "Operation Rescue," in which He rescued Peter and the other Jewish believers from the penalty and power of sin and eternal ruin and brought safely into His eternal kingdom. He will go on to say that "Operation Rescue" was also offered to the Gentiles.

**Grace** (undeserved favor) (5485)(**charis** from from **chairo** = to rejoice. English = charity. Beggars need "charity" as sinners need *grace*, for we are all spiritual paupers outside of Christ, but "God gives where he finds empty hands"-Augustine [cf Mt 5:3+] is a word which at its core conveys the sense of favor. Grace in this passage speaks of the Lord's *favor*, freely extended to give *Himself* away to sinners because He "ever leans toward them." (Read Lk 19:10+)

**Adrian Rogers** says the best definition of grace that he has ever heard is that God's grace is "both the **desire** and the **ability** to do the will of God."

**Grace** in simple terms is God's unmerited favor and supernatural enablement and empowerment for salvation and for daily sanctification. Grace is everything for nothing to those who don't deserve anything. Grace is what every man needs, what none can earn and what God Alone can and does freely give (see Ro 8:32-note where "freely give" is **charizomai** from **charis** = a grace gift!). Grace addresses man's sin, while mercy addresses man's misery. The **gift of grace** makes men fit for salvation, miraculously making separated strangers into God's **beloved** sons (1Th 1:4+, 1Jn 3:1+, 1Jn 3:2+, 1Jn 3:3+).

**In the same way as they also are** - There is no verb (**are**) in the Greek, but the sentence reads more literally "even as also they." The intent is clear that the Jews that had been saved were saved in the same way as the Gentiles are saved. Just as God made no distinction in general, here Peter says in essence He makes no distinction specifically regarding how anyone is saved. We all walk through the same "door." Notice how this parallels the words of Jesus Who "left the door wide open" so speak when He declared "I am the **door**; if anyone (IN GREEK THIS MEANS "ANYONE!") enters through Me (BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH), he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." (Jn 10:9)

**Spurgeon** - You expect to hear Peter say to these gentlemen, "These Gentile dogs, as you call them, can be saved, even as you." No, he turns the tables and says to them, "We believe that you may be saved, even as they." Suppose some of our members should say, "Yes, we believe that a drunkard may be saved, and a person who has been a harlot, may, perhaps, be saved, too." But imagine now that I were to stand up and reply, "My dear brethren, I believe that you may be saved even as these." What a rebuke it would be! This is precisely what Peter meant.

A company of Jews have assembled to discuss a certain matter; some of them look very wise and bring up certain suggestions that are rather significant. They say, 'Well, perhaps these Gentile dogs may be saved; yes, Jesus Christ told us to go and preach the gospel to every creature; therefore, no doubt, he must have included these Gentile dogs. We do not like them, though, and must keep them as much under our rules and regulations as we can; we must compel them to be circumcised; we must have them brought under the full rigour of the law; we cannot excuse them from wearing the yoke of bondage.' Presently the apostle Peter gets up to speak, and you expect to hear him say to these gentlemen, 'Why, these 'Gentile dogs', as you call them, can be saved, even as you.' No; he adopts quite a different tone; he turns the tables and he says to them, 'we believe that you may be saved, even as they.' It was just as if I should have a company of persons here now who had been very bad and wicked and who had plunged into the deepest sin, but God's grace has met with them and made them new creatures in Christ Jesus: there is a church-meeting, and when these persons are brought before the church, suppose there were some of the members who should say, 'Yes, we believe that a drunkard may be saved, and a person who has been a harlot may, perhaps, be saved too.' But imagine that I were to stand up and reply, 'Now, my dear brethren, I believe that you may be saved even as these'—what a rebuke it would be! This is precisely what Peter meant. 'Oh' he said, 'do not raise the question about whether they can be saved; the question is whether you, who have raised such a question, will be saved'; 'we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.' (Spurgeon)

**Constable** adds that "By referring to **the Jews being saved in the same manner as the Gentiles** instead of vice versa, Peter repudiated any thought of Jewish superiority. Clearly he had recovered from his temporary lapse at Syrian Antioch (Gal. 2:11–14). Salvation is by grace (v. 11) through faith (v. 9) plus nothing.

**Lenski** comments that "The fact that later Peter himself did not live up to his own words in Antioch and had to be rebuked in public by Paul (Gal. 2:11–21+) changes nothing as to the truth and the import of Peter's address here in Jerusalem; it only points a warning for us lesser men." (The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles)

**Acts 15:12 All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.**

KJV Acts 15:12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

- **relating** Acts 15:4; 14:27; 21:19
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE END OF THE DEBATE!

**All the people kept silent** - The assembly (including the opposition) held their peace after Peter's speech. The debate had come to an end. No one dared to contradict Peter! "The silence was eloquent!" (Lenski)

**Kept silent** ([4601](#))([sigao](#)) means they said nothing but kept quiet after Peter's speech. In Acts 12:17 after Peter had been miraculously released from incarceration, he had to motion with his hand to call the saints "to be silent" so he could explain how he had escaped.

**And they were listening** - Luke uses the imperfect tense which emphasizes how attentively everyone was listening. It is as if the missionaries would speak a word and the crowd but immediately "grab" that word and this occurred over and over. The saying that "[hanging on every word](#)" would be an apt description of the audience. How many preachers would love to have such attentive listeners! This scene reminds me of "Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, **listening** (imperfect tense) to His word." (Lk 10:39+)

**To Barnabas and Paul** - Luke reverts to placing **Barnabas** before **Paul**. Recall that "When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them." (Acts 15:4) Now they seem to add the signs and wonders to validate without a doubt that it was **what God had done with them**.

**Spurgeon** - These addresses would have great weight in the discussion.

**Lenski** - **Barnabas** spoke first because he was the older man and was better known than Paul in the congregation in Jerusalem. (The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles)

**Robertson** say Barnabas is first "possibly because in Jerusalem Barnabas was still better known than Paul....One of the crying needs in the churches is fuller knowledge of the facts of mission work and progress with enough detail to give life and interest. "

**Toussaint** on the **signs and wonders** - These would especially convince the Jews (cf. 1 Cor. 1:22) so **they listened** in silence. This response implied they would not argue against the testimonies of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. (Ibid)

**As they were relating what signs** ([semeion](#)) **and wonders** ([teras](#)) - Luke summarizes Acts 13-14 in one sentence. The miracles were God's "stamp of approval" on the work done through the missionaries. Peter had just given the same argument authenticated by the miracle of God's giving of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles (Acts 15:8 referring to "the same gift" = Acts 11:17+, the gift having been manifested by their speaking in tongues - Acts 10:45, 46, 47+) For discussion of **signs and wonders** see commentary on Acts 14:3 where the missionaries were at Iconium "**speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.**" As an aside, one might see these **signs and wonders** as a partial fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel 2:28-32+ that Peter had quoted on Pentecost (Acts 2:19).

**Longenecker** suggests that the emphasis on **signs and wonders** indicates "It was a report not of their successes but of how God

had acted, and its implication was that by his acts God had revealed his will." (EBC)

**Relating** (continually thoroughly explaining - present tense) (1834)(**exegeomai** from **ek** = out or as an intensifier + **hegeomai** = lead) means literally to lead out, then to unfold, declare by making plain, especially to tell it fully. **Exegeomai** means to "lead completely out" which means more than simple "telling" for it also unfolds something to reach a proper understanding, e.g., the "leading out" (expounding) of the facts proceeds to its necessary objective. Barnabas and Paul were narrating their experiences in a way that clarified what was uppermost importance and had the highest priority.

**Exegeomai** gives us our English word **exegesis** which literally means "lead out" (draw out) the meaning of Scripture to its needed outcome and life-application. Leading out the true message of Scripture is based on correct understandings of the grammar of the original Hebrew-Greek texts. Barnabas and Paul "**exegeted**" the "**signs and wonders God performed among the Gentiles**" which enabled the disciples to understand the significance of living in this new age of the Holy Spirit.

#### Related Resources:

- [What is good biblical exegesis?](#)
- [What is the difference between exegesis and eisegesis?](#)

**Lenski** points out that in relating **the signs and wonders** "They thereby clinch the decisive point of Peter's address, namely that God bestowed the same miraculous manifestations on Cornelius and on his house that he had bestowed on the 120 Jewish believers at the time of Pentecost. God did those signs and wonders among the Gentiles, for no apostle ever worked a miracle by his own volition. The apostles were only his instruments as the significant **dia** (expresses instrumentality or means) once more states. Peter's experience was already sufficient, but that experience was multiplied in the case of Barnabas and of Paul. God had thus set his seal of approval on the work of receiving Gentiles into the church by faith alone without circumcision and other Levitical observances." (The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles)

**God had done through (dia) them among the Gentiles** - We see the same phrase referring to what "**God had done with them.**" (Acts 14:27+, Acts 15:4+) and the similar description "*with reliance on the Lord.*" (Acts 14:3+) Luke repeatedly emphasizes that these missionaries were not superhuman but were mere men who were pliable, willing instruments in the hand of the Almighty God. To use Paul's description, they were vessels "for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work." (2 Ti 2:21+)

**THOUGHT** - What a powerful and vital truth. We are to be like *gloves* who continually, submissively, humbly, willingly allow God's hand to do with us and through what He wills to be done for our good and His glory! Does this not convict all of us who too often think we are doing God's work and yet we are relying on our power? God make us ever mindful that we are but created instruments in the Master's hand and for Thy glory in Christ. Amen. ([See similar THOUGHT](#) on what God had done with them)

**Wiersbe** - If you will review the record of the first missionary journey (Acts 13-14), you will see that the emphasis is on what God did in response to men's **faith**. See Acts 13:8, 12, 39, 41, 48; 14:1, 22-23, 27. Note also the emphasis on **grace** (Acts 13:43; 14:3, 26). God opened for the Gentiles "**the door of faith,**" not "**the door of Law.**" For that matter the Antioch church, which commissioned Paul and Barnabas, was founded by people who "believed and turned unto the Lord" (Acts 11:21) and experienced the grace of God (Acts 11:23). They were saved the same way sinners are saved today, "by grace, through faith" (Eph. 2:8-9). (Ibid)

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A simple overview (I realize it does not look "simple" but it is far less detailed than most lexicons) of the various senses of the preposition **dia** which can have many nuances in the NT...

**Through** (1223)(**dia**) is a preposition occurs about 670 times in the NT as a preposition with the genitive and accusative cases. in the NT and over 1500 times in the Septuagint. The majority (225x) of NT uses are translated with the English word "**through.**" [Click for partial list](#) of NT uses of **dia** (Mt thru Romans 5:11). **Dia** is used with two Greek noun cases - (1) with the **genitive** case **dia** can motion through a place (see summary below) or describe the instrument of an action (by, by means of) (Stated another way **dia** with this meaning introduces the intervening agent or "instrument" as the necessary "go-between"). (2) with the **accusative** **dia** gives the basis of an action = on account of, by reason of, for the sake of, because of; through, Luke 17:11

For more in depth discussion [click here for 4 pages on "Dia" in the Dictionary of New Testament Theology \(volume 3, page 1180\)](#). Here is an **excerpt** - Originally **dia** signified "passing through and out from," a sense reflected in Matt. 4:4 ("... every word that proceeds from [ekporeuomenō dia] the mouth of God") and 1 Cor. 3:15 ("he himself will be saved, but only as one who escapes through fire," **dia pyros**)....**Means or Instrument.** From the local sense of **dia** there naturally developed the instrumental sense, which marks the medium through which an action passes before its accomplishment.



### A. WITH **GENITIVE CASE** -

I. **of place** (implies motion through a place usually and logically usually after verbs of motion like going, coming, etc) = *through* - Mt 2:12,12:43; Lk 5:19; 6:1; Jn 10:1f; Acts 9:25; 20:3; Ro 15:28; 1 Cor 3:15, Heb 11:29; *throughout* = 2 Cor 8:18; *out of* = Mt 4:4

### II. a marker of extension in time—

1. to denote extent (of a whole period of time, to its very end) = *through, during, throughout* Lk 5:5 (= "all night" - ; Acts 23:31; Heb 2:15; Heb 9:6.
2. to denote a period of time within which something occurs = *During* - Acts 5:19, 16:9, 17:10, Lk 9:37, within 3 days = Mt 26:61, Mk 14:58
3. to denote an interval of time = *after* - Mk 2:1+; Acts 24:17+; Gal 2:1+

III. **of means** = instrument, agency = *by means of, through, with, by, via* (of the instrument or intermediate cause, between the act of the will and the effect, and through which the effect proceeds). In this use **dia** functions as a marker of instrumentality or circumstance whereby something is accomplished or effected

1. of means, instrument, manner (overlaps with #4 below) - Mt 2:15, 17, 23 ("by means of the prophet"); Acts 1:16; 15:27; 20:28; 1 Cor 16:3; 1 Pe 1:7; 2 Jn 12; in Lk 8:4.
2. of attendant circumstance = *with* Ro 2:27; 8:25; 14:20; 2 Cor 2:4; in a state of Ro 4:11.
3. of efficient cause = *through, because of, via, by means of* = Ro 3:20; 7:5; Ro 7:8, 11, Ro 3:27, 1 Cor 1:21; 1 Cor 4:15; Gal 2:16, 2:19, 5:6. Heb 7:11; Frequently "**through faith**" - Ro 1:12; 3:22, 25, 30-31; Gal 2:16; 3:14, 26; Eph 2:8; 3:12, 17. **By or through the will of God** = Ro 15:32; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:5; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 2 Ti 1:1.
4. of persons serving as the agency or agent (e.g., frequently of things spokenthrough prophets) = *by, through* - Mt 2:15; Acts 11:28; Ro 1:5; 1 Cor 1:9; Gal 1:1; 3:19; Heb 2:2; in the presence of 2 Ti 2:2; represented by Ro 2:16.

### B. WITH **ACCUSATIVE CASE**

I. **of place, marker of extension through an area** = *through* Lk 17:11.

II. **to indicate the reason why something happens, results or exists** = *because of, for the sake of, on account of* - Mt 10:22; 15:3, Mk 2:27 ("for" = for the sake of); Lk 23:25; Acts 21:34. *Out of* Mt 27:18; Jn 7:13; Phil 1:15. (**dia ti** = why? Mk 2:18; Lk 5:30; Jn 7:45; 1 Cor 6:7. See below also the combination **dia touto** which often has the sense of for this reason.

### Dia in combination -

1. **Dia pantos** (a) **regularly**: an idiom, literally 'through all' or (b) **always**: continually (All NT occurrences of **dia pantos** = Matt. 18:10; Mk. 5:5; Lk. 24:53; Acts 2:25; Acts 10:2; Acts 24:16; Ro 11:10; 2 Th 3:16; Heb 2:15 = "all their lives" (throughout their lifetime); Heb. 9:6; Heb. 13:15)
2. **Dia touto** = for this reason, therefore (Matt. 6:25; Matt. 12:27; Matt. 12:31; Matt. 13:13; Matt. 13:52; Matt. 14:2; Matt. 18:23; Matt. 21:43; Matt. 23:34; Matt. 24:44; Mk. 6:14; Mk. 11:24; Mk. 12:24; Lk. 11:19; Lk. 11:49; Lk. 12:22; Lk. 14:20; Jn. 1:31; Jn. 5:16; Jn. 5:18; Jn. 6:65; Jn. 7:22; Jn. 8:47; Jn. 9:23; Jn. 10:17; Jn. 12:18; Jn. 12:27; Jn. 12:39; Jn. 13:11; Jn. 15:19; Jn. 16:15; Jn. 19:11; Acts 2:26; Rom. 1:26; Rom. 4:16; Rom. 5:12; Rom. 13:6; Rom. 15:9; 1 Co. 4:17; 1 Co. 11:10; 1 Co. 11:30; 2 Co. 4:1; 2 Co. 7:13; 2 Co. 13:10; Eph. 1:15; Eph. 5:17; Eph. 6:13; Col. 1:9; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Thess. 3:5; 1 Thess. 3:7; 2 Thess. 2:11; 1 Tim. 1:16; 2 Tim. 2:10; Phlm. 1:15; Heb. 1:9; Heb. 2:1; Heb. 9:15; 1 Jn. 3:1; 1 Jn. 4:5; 3 Jn. 1:10; Rev. 7:15; Rev. 12:12; Rev. 18:8)
3. **Dia ti** = *why?* - Matt. 9:11; Matt. 9:14; Matt. 13:10; Matt. 15:2; Matt. 15:3; Matt. 17:19; Matt. 21:25; Mk. 2:18; Mk. 7:5; Mk. 11:31; Lk. 5:30; Lk. 19:23; Lk. 19:31; Lk. 20:5; Lk. 24:38; Jn. 7:45; Jn. 8:43; Jn. 8:46; Jn. 12:5; Jn. 13:37; Acts 5:3; Rom. 9:32; 1 Co. 6:7; 2 Co. 11:11; Rev. 17:7 (

Acts 15:13 After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, **listen** to me.

me:

NLT Acts 15:13 When they had finished, James stood and said, "Brothers, listen to me.

- **after** 1 Corinthians 14:30-33; James 1:19
- **James** Acts 12:17; 21:18; Mark 15:40; Galatians 1:19; 2:9,12; James 1:1
- **Brethren** Acts 2:14,22,29; 7:2; 22:1
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## LISTEN UP!

Unlike Paul when he spoke his first recorded sermon in the synagogue, began by standing up and "motioning with his hand" saying "Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen." (Acts 13:16). Peter had made a similar motion when he described his miraculous escape from Herod's prison (Acts 12:17). James simply says "**Brethen, listen to me.**"

**After they had stopped speaking** - To whom does this refer? The context might suggest the missionaries, but most writers interpret this as a description of others in the assembly who spoke up. As **Guzik** says "This is more evidence of the honorable hearts of the men who had opposed Paul and Barnabas. They were willing to be convinced. They didn't endlessly argue the issue and were willing to admit they were wrong."

**Ger** agrees with **Guzik** - When the moment was finally reached when everyone who cared to weigh in on the controversy had done so and there was nothing more to be said, the chief elder of Jerusalem and president of the Jerusalem Council, the apostle James, articulated his solution.

**James answered, saying** - The Hebrew is more accurately "Jacob" (Ya'akov). James is in charge of the council and so speaks up. It is notable that it was James, not Peter, who presided over the council, which is certainly different than most of our encounters with Peter where he almost always seems to be in charge. It is also interesting that Luke does not once mention that James was the half-brother of Jesus, which implies that all in the assembly were fully aware of this relationship.

**Wiersbe** has an interesting note that "**James** had strong leanings toward the Law (there are at least ten references to law in his epistle), so he was most acceptable to the legalistic party in the Jerusalem church." Along this same line it is interesting that James in his letter would later emphasize that saving faith always issues in good works, and in so doing he gave the proper Biblical balance for works, emphasizing that faith alone saves, but the faith that truly saves is not alone but is evidenced by good works (James 2:14-26+, cf Paul's words in Eph 2:8-9+ of salvation by grace through faith and Eph 2:10+ this salvation leads to good works).

**Steven Ger** elaborates on James noting that "Although he had not been a disciple during his brother's earthly ministry, James became a believer following his Jesus' death, perhaps at the moment when Jesus made an individual post-resurrection appearance to him (1 Cor. 15:7). James led the Jerusalem church for eighteen years, from a.d. 44-62, rising to prominence following the dispersion of most of the apostles to their respective itinerant ministries. Church tradition remembers his nickname of James "the Just," or "the Righteous." Pious, ascetic and devout in his adherence to Torah, he was well esteemed throughout Jerusalem, respected in both Christian and non-Christian circles. Another exceptional church tradition records the detail that his calloused knees were as hard as a camel's from time spent kneeling in prayer. He was the author of the epistle of James, much of which robustly echoes the ethics of his brother's Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). The facility he demonstrates with Greek in his epistle suggests a higher level of education than is commonly assumed was possessed by Galilean craftsmen, leading many to reconsider the impact of the Greco-Roman-Galilean cultural matrix in which James was raised, as well as to revisit our perception of the educational preparation of Jesus. (Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary – The Book of Acts: Witnesses to the World)

**F F Bruce** suggests in regard to **James** as the leader "The church's readiness to recognize his leadership was due more to his personal character and record than his blood relationship with the Lord."

**Brethren, listen to me** - I love the old KJV rendering "**Hearken unto me**" the usual appeal for attention. James now will present his resolution. After calling the brethren, he gives a command ([aorist imperative](#)) to hear, with the implication of to heed what he is about to say about this crucial matter. **Lenski** writes that "It seems to have been the Jewish custom (see Acts 6:3 for another instance) that the chairman formulated and offered the resolution and himself simply presented it to the assembly for adoption or otherwise."

**Lenski** adds an interesting note that "**James** belonged to the Hebrews and not to the Hellenists (on the distinction Acts 6:1+). He, no doubt, lived in the Jewish fashion, for in Gal. 2:12+ some who came to Antioch from him influenced even Peter to eat only with them and in a marked way to turn from the tables of the Gentiles. This fact made his address the more effective."

**Robertson** observes that "**James** was termed [James the Just](#) and was considered a representative of the Hebraic as opposed to

the Hellenistic wing of the Jewish Christians (Acts 6:1+ - see Hellenistes). The Judaizers had doubtless counted on him as a champion of their view and did...wrongfully make use of his name against Peter at Antioch (Gal. 2:12). There was instant attention when James began to speak."

### Acts 15:14 Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.

KJV Acts 15:14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

NET Acts 15:14 Simeon has explained how God first concerned himself to select from among the Gentiles a people for his name.

NLT Acts 15:14 Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for himself.

- **Simeon** 2 Peter 1:1
- **has related** Acts 15:7-9; Luke 1:68,78; 2:31,32
- **Taking from among the Gentiles** Isaiah 43:21; 55:11-13; Romans 1:5; 11:36; 1 Peter 2:9,10
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## GOD HAD A PEOPLE AMONG THE GENTILES

James begins his speech with a statement that undoubtedly would have amazed (even shocked or startled) some of the legalistic Jews in the audience -- God actually had made provision for Gentiles in His Kingdom! And so James reiterates Peter's contention of that he was God's initial instrument of Gentile salvation.

**Simeon** - Simeon is Peter's Jewish name, whereas Peter is his Aramaic form of his real name, Simon. Robertson adds that "This little touch would show his affinities with the Jewish Christians (not the Judaizers). This Aramaic form is used also in Luke 2:25, 34 of the old prophet in the temple. Possibly both forms (Symeon, Aramaic, and Simon, Greek) were current in Jerusalem."

**Jack Arnold** observes that **James** "did not refer to Peter as "revered," "holy father" or "mighty vicer," but plain **Simeon**. Apparently Peter had no more authority at the council than James. James made it very clear that the purpose of God in this present age is to take, or call out, from the masses of Gentiles a people for His own name. God, through the preaching of the good news of Christ, is sovereignly bringing Gentiles to salvation to be part of the people of God, the church, in this present time. **What is the purpose of God in this age?** To evangelize and save a people for Himself. The purpose of God is not to *Christianize* but to *evangelize*, not *social welfare* but *spiritual welfare*. Because God is taking a people from the Gentile masses, we see that it is not His purpose to make everybody a Christian, nor is it His purpose to save every person. We should not expect that in the present age everyone should be saved and we should not fold up spiritually if everyone does not believe in Christ. It has always been true that there has been an elect remnant and that remnant has only been a small percentage of the world's population. Who are the elect remnant? All who receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Some, but not all, will be saved; yet **we have the confidence that God is calling out, or taking out, His own as a people for His name**. For sure, this verse denies the false teaching of [universalism](#) (all men will be saved). God is taking out some but not all. Who are the some? All who bow to Jesus Christ and accept Him as sovereign Lord and Savior. James merely agrees with Peter. Those Judaizers and legalists who said, "Without circumcision you cannot be saved," were ignoring the fact that Gentiles were already being saved. God was already saving Gentiles without asking anyone permission to do so and He was doing it without any ritual, or the Mosaic Law.

**Has related how God first concerned Himself about** - James begins by focusing on God's initiation of "Operation Rescue." It was not derived from the heart of men, but was in the heart of God (cf Jn 3:16). The verb concerned for it was often employed to describe a gracious invitation and was used by Luke to describe God's gift of His Son in Lk 1:68+ ("Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For **He has visited us** and accomplished redemption for His people" - note that Zacharias father of John the Baptist was so certain of the redemption Messiah would accomplish that he here spoke of it as if it had already taken place!), and Lk 1:78+ ("Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high **will visit us**" - Zacharias goes on to describe Messiah's incarnation as a great light from heaven - Read Mal 4:2+, cf Isa 9:2+)

**Has related** (thoroughly explained) ([1834](#)) See preceding discussion of [exegeomai](#).

**Concerned Himself** ("visited" = NLT)(1980)([episkeptomai](#) from **epí** = upon or intensifying already existing idea in verb + **skopeo** = regard, give attention to, look at, contemplate) literally means to look upon, to go to see, to examine closely, to inspect, to examine the state of affairs of something, to look after or to oversee. The idea of visiting is more than just making a social call.

As **Hiebert** writes "In classical Greek, [episkeptomai](#) was commonly used of visiting the sick, whether by a doctor or a friend. In Jewish usage, it commonly denoted to visit with the aim of caring for and supplying the needs of those visited (Job 2:11; Jer. 23:2; Ezek. 34:11; Zech. 11:16; Mt. 25:36, 43). The term implies concern and personal contact with the needy; it involves more than a matter of charity by proxy." Beloved, is not Hiebert's description of this verb a perfect description of our Father's love for the lost, whether they are Jew or Gentile? Yea, and Amen!

**Peterson** on **concerned Himself** - God first did this when Peter **visited** Cornelius with the message of salvation, but every gospel initiative after that can also be classified as a divine visitation: God encounters people personally through the preaching of the gospel. (Pillar NT Commentary)

**Robertson** makes an interesting observation that [episkeptomai](#) (which occurs only 11x in the NT) is "This same verb...in James 1:27+ and is one of various points of similarity between this speech of James in Acts and the Epistle of James."

**Ray Stedman** points out that "These Judaizers had been saying to the Gentiles, "Without circumcision you cannot be saved." But they were ignoring one very stubborn fact -- those Gentiles were already saved. God had already been saving Gentiles without asking anybody's permission to do so, and he was doing it without any ritual, or even any reference to the Law of Moses. And with this point they could not argue. That was extremely important because it forced them to take note of the direction of God's activity. They saw that God was already doing what they said could not be done, and, thus, God was overruling them." But now notice the second point. It is supremely important! That activity was accepted as the valid activity of God only as it corresponded to the written Word of God. (WHICH HE BEGINS TO ALLUDE TO IN Acts 15:15).

**Spurgeon** - I wish that the people of God would again awaken to the truth that to gather a people from among men is the great purpose of the present dispensation. It is still true, as James said at the Jerusalem Council, "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name" (Acts 15:14). We are not to cling to the old wreck with the expectation that we will pump the water out of her and get her safely into port. No, the cry is very different. "Take to the lifeboat! Take to the lifeboat! You are to leave the wreck. Then, you are to carry away from the sinking mass that which God will save." You must be separate from the old wreck, so it will not suck you down to sure destruction.

**Taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name**- BDAG translates it as "God concerned himself about winning a people from among the nations." This is the amazing statement from Jesus' brother James. The verb **taking** is **lambano** which means to get hold of something by laying on one's hands or grasping and taking the object in hand. It then merges into the idea that what is taken is possessed or acquired. It is a beautiful picture of the unmerited favor of God figuratively reaching down from Heaven with His hand to take hold of a remnant of godless, idol worshipping, pagan Gentiles, forever rescuing them for eternal destruction. And not only does He graciously rescue them, but even more amazing, He gives them **His Name**, making them His possession (read 1 Peter 2:9+ and Titus 2:14+), bringing them into His family as children of God. Amazing grace indeed!

James makes a fascinating play on words for the word **people** (Greek = *laos* gives us "laity") was a word that was often used in the context of describing the Jews as the **"people of God"** in stark contrast to the Gentiles, which were not a "people of God." (cf 1 Peter 2:10) The Gospel changes everything and James under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit "gets it!" And so in his calling the despised Gentiles **"a people"** of God, he doubly shocked his Jewish audience, because for centuries the Jews had carried that honorable title (see Dt 7:6; 14:2; 28:10). And because this was so shocking, and would have been so difficult for the Jewish hearers to "swallow," James will go on to quote from the Old Testament to show that this is nothing new and radical but that it was always in God's heart to have a **"people"** from among the despised Gentiles!

It is also interesting to note the similarity of the phrase **"taking from"** (literally "taking out") and the meaning of the Greek word [ekklesia](#) for **"Church"** which literally means "called out", a called out people from both Jews and Gentiles.

As James asserts "The Gentiles were not to be considered "junior partners" within the church, but share equal status in God's sight. Indeed, this is the definition of the church Paul will later develop (Eph. 2:11-22; Eph 3:6)." (Ger)

**Acts 15:15 "With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,**

KJV Acts 15:15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

- Acts 13:47; Romans 15:8-12
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JAMES DEFENDS HIS DECLARATION WITH THE WORD OF GOD

**With this** - With what? With the fact that God's plan of redemption of mankind has always included Jews and Gentiles as James has just clearly declared. But as noted above, because it so "unbelievable" especially to the more religious Jews, James will now defend his declaration with the Word of God which the Jews could not refute nor rebut. As discussed below the passage he chose from Amos 9:11-12<sup>+</sup> has led to considerable differences of interpretation.

**The words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written** - Notice that James does not say "that the Scripture might be fulfilled as it is written." He is not saying the Amos 9:11-12<sup>+</sup> passage quoted in the following passages is fulfilled prophecy but only that other prophets are in agreement with what Amos 9:11-12<sup>+</sup> said. There is a big difference!

James' response gives us an excellent pattern for how to handle "great dissension and debate." Seek God in His Holy Word and trust that He has a good word to give regarding the disagreement, for in Christ and His Word "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col 2:3, cf Pr 30:5). As discussed below James uses a verb which gives us our English word "**symphony**" explaining in a sense that Peter and the Old Testament prophets were playing the same tune in "God's symphonic" work known as the "song of redemption."

Notice that although James quotes from only one prophet (Amos) in his defense of Peter, Paul and Barnabas, but he uses the word **prophets** in the plural indicating that this same principle found in Amos could be found (was in agreement) with the other Jewish **prophets**.

For example, the Old Testament taught that Gentiles would share in the promises made to Israel (Ge 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Isa. 49:6; 55:5-7; Zeph. 3:9-10; Zech. 8:22). The Old Testament prophets also spoke of Gentile salvation as happening in the last days (Isa. 2:2; 11:10; 25:8-9; Zech. 8:23) through the witness of a restored Israel (Isa. 2:3; 60:2-3; Zech. 8:23).

**Bock** adds that "The reference to the **prophets** is important. James's point is not just about this one passage from Amos; rather, this passage reflects what the prophets teach in general, or what the book of the Prophets as a whole teaches. Other texts could be noted (Zech. 2:11; 8:22; Isa. 2:2; 45:20-23; Hos. 3:4-5; Jer. 12:15-16)...God had promised Gentile inclusion; now he is performing it." (BECNT- Acts)

**Warren Wiersbe** - James quoted Amos 9:11<sup>+</sup> during the Jerusalem conference when the leaders discussed the matter of the place of the Gentiles in the church (Acts 15). The question was, "Must a Gentile become a Jew in order to become a Christian?" But note that James did not say that Amos 9:11 was fulfilled by the Gentiles' coming into the church, but that the prophets (plural) agreed with the Gentiles' being a part of the church (Acts 15:13-18). After all, if believing Gentiles are one day going to be a part of the Messianic Kingdom (David's dynasty restored), why can't they be a part of the church today? Why should they be forced to become Jewish proselytes in order to become Christians? However, some interpret Amos 9:11 and the words of James to mean that the church is the "tabernacle of David" so that the Old Testament prophecies about the kingdom are now fulfilled in the church. How the church is like David's kingdom "as in the days of old" is difficult to understand, and the references to Edom (Amos 9:12<sup>+</sup>) and the fruitfulness of the land (Amos 9:13-15<sup>+</sup>) are also difficult to apply to the church. (Commentary on Amos - Be Concerned)

**Is written** (1125)(**grapho** from root **graph-** = engrave as on reports, letters; English = graphic) means to engrave or inscribe with a pen or stylus characters or letters on a surface which can be wood, wax, metal, leather, stone, parchment, dirt, paper, etc. The great phrase **It is written** occurs 76 times in the **NAS**. When we were children and our parents told us to do something and we questioned "Why?", the answer was usually "Because I said so!". Why are we commanded to be holy? Because God said so! A popular saying is "God said it, I believe it, that settles it." This sounds good but isn't accurate because God's Word is true, regardless of whether we believe it or not. A more accurate "saying" would be "God said it, that settles it!" **It is written** should put a stop to every complaint or excuse which is indeed James' intention!

One other important observation is that the verb **grapho** is in **perfect tense** (gegraphtai) signifying that God's Word has been written down at a point of time in the past (in this case the prophecy in Amos 9:11-12) and remains on record as the eternal, unchanging Word of God. It stands **written**! Indeed, as the psalmist declared "Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven." (Ps 119:89)

**THOUGHT** - Beloved, does this truth found in the perfect tense of grapho not give you great assurance that regardless of what trials you are walking through today, will deliver you "from every evil deed, and will bring (you) safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen." (2 Ti 4:18+) and so you

can be "confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.." (Php 1:6+, cf 2 Ti 1:12+, 1 Th 5:24+). Play Steve Green's great rendition of ['He Who Began a Good Work'](#).

## THE PROPHETS ARE IN HARMONY

**Agree** (in harmony with)(4856)([sumphone](#) from **sun** = together, speaks of intimate association + **phoneo** = make a sound) literally means to sound together or share the same sound. **Vine** writes that the idea is "to be in accord, primarily of musical instruments" and so to be in harmony or unison. Peter's testimony (and that of Barnabas and Paul) is in perfect harmony with that of the prophet Amos (who James quotes) Peter himself had used this same word **sumphone** in describing Ananias and Sapphira's "sinister symphony" (Acts 5:9+) In other words the NT fulfilment is in harmony with the OT prophecy.

**J Vernon McGee** will go on to quote Amos 9:11-12 - Notice that he did not say that the calling out of the Gentiles was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Amos, but rather that it agreed with the words of the prophets. The assembly should not think it a strange thing that God should visit the Gentiles with salvation, because this had been clearly predicted in the OT. God had foretold that Gentiles would be blessed as such, and not as believing Jews. The quotation from Amos looks forward to the Millennium, when Christ will sit upon the throne of David and when the Gentiles will seek after the LORD. James did not intimate that this prophecy was being fulfilled at the time he spoke. Rather, he said that the salvation of Gentiles which was then taking place was in harmony or agreement with what Amos said would take place later. (Thru the Bible)

**Acts 15:16 'AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT,**

KJV Acts 15:16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:

- **After these** - Amos 9:11,12
- **rebuild the tabernacle** 2 Samuel 7:11-16; 1 Kings 12:16; Psalms 89:35-49; Isaiah 9:6,7; Jeremiah 33:24-26; Ezekiel 17:22-24; Zechariah 13:8; Matthew 1:20-25; Luke 1:31-33,69,70
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JAMES QUOTES THE PROPHET AMOS

James will now demonstrate that what Peter has stated is in perfect harmony with the Word of God written by a Jewish prophet. This is a very difficult verse and the battle rages over how James used this specific Old Testament Scripture. We will have to agree amicably to disagree about some of the details but at the same time remaining unified in the truth that Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace through faith apart from the works of the Law. That was the main thrust of James in this difficult to interpret passage.

And so in Acts 15:16-18 James quotes from Amos 9:11-12 (see commentary) but he quotes **not** from the Hebrew [Masoretic text](#) but from the **Septuagint** version, the Greek translation of the Old Testament which reads somewhat different when compared to the Hebrew. Here is the NAS translation that is based on the Hebrew Masoretic text:

"In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, And wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins And rebuild it as in the days of old; 12 That they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by My name," Declares the LORD who does this.

Here is the English translation of the Septuagint rendering of Amos 9:11-12 with the two major differences in **bold**:

"In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and will rebuild the ruins of it, and will set up the parts thereof that have been broken down, and will build it up as in the ancient days: that the remnant of **men** (INSTEAD OF EDMO), and all the Gentiles upon whom My Name is called, **may earnestly seek me**, saith the Lord who does all these things."

Let me miss the main point because of the confusion and various interpretations of James' quoting Amos 9:11-12, we need to keep in mind that **his main purpose for quoting this passage is to show to the legalistic Jews that God has always promised a place for the Gentiles in His plan of redemption and in that plan they did not have to first become Jewish proselytes but**

were simply to earnestly seek Him.

The Table below compares the Hebrew, the Septuagint and James' translation.

COMPARISON OF AMOS 9:11-12 IN ACTS 15:16-18		
Translated from Hebrew	Translated from the Septuagint (NETS)	Luke's Account of James's Citation
In that day	On that day	<b>After these things</b> I will return,
I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and wall up its breaches	I will raise up the tent of David that is fallen	and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen,
I will also raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old;	and rebuild its ruins and raise up its destruction, and rebuild it as the days of old	and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it,
that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by My name	in order that those remaining of humans and all nations upon whom my name has been called might seek out me	so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name
declares the LORD who does this.	says the Lord who does these things.	says the Lord.

Note that James has mankind instead of Edom and seek instead of possess. The Hebrew consonants for "Edom" (H123) and for "Adam" (H120) are identical ('dm) And the original Hebrew texts was written without vowels which were added much later. The confusion in the vowels ("A" or "E" were added much later) is easy to understand. Some ancient scribes who supplied vowel markings for the Hebrew text upon which our English translations of the Old Testament rest apparently understood the text as "remnant of Edom," while others, including the Septuagint translators and James, understood it as "remnant of mankind." Similarly the only distinction in the Hebrew between "possess" (yāraš) and "seek" (dāraš) is in one consonant. The text James used may well represent the original. Notice that James begins with the words "After these things I will return," and these words are not the original Hebrew or Septuagint. James substitutes "after these things" for the original "in that day" and also adds the words "I will return."

Stanley Toussaint comments on the major problem, which is not the text per se but the interpretation of the text:

Several observations need to be noted before the passage is interpreted:

- (1) James **did not say** Amos 9:11-12 was fulfilled in the church; he simply asserted that what was happening in the church was in full agreement with the Old Testament prophets.
- (2) The word "**prophets**" is plural, implying that the quotation from Amos was representative of what the prophets in general affirmed.
- (3) **James' main point is clear: Gentile salvation apart from the Law does not contradict the Old Testament prophets....**

Bible students interpret these verses in one of three ways.

- (1) **Those who hold to amillennial theology say the rebuilt house** (skēnēn, "tent") **of David** is the church which God is using to preach to the Gentiles. While this view at first appears plausible, several factors oppose it. (1) The verb **return** (anastrepsō) used in Acts 15:16 means an actual return. Luke used it only in Acts 5:22 ("went back") and here (he did not use it in his Gospel); in both occurrences it describes a literal, bodily return (ED: IF ONE INTERPRETS THE TEXT LITERALLY OF COURSE). Since God's Son has not yet returned bodily, this rebuilding has not taken place. (2) Christ's present ministry in heaven is not associated with the Davidic throne elsewhere in the New Testament. He is now seated at the right hand of God (Ps. 110:1; Ro. 8:34; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pe 3:22). When He returns He will sit on David's throne (2 Sa 7:16; Ps. 89:4; Mt. 19:28; 25:31). (3) The church was a mystery, a truth not revealed to Old Testament saints

(Ro 16:25; Eph. 3:5-6; Col. 1:24-27); so the church would not be referred to in Amos.

**(2) A second view of the passage is commonly held by premillenarians.** According to this view there are four chronological movements in this passage: the present Church Age ("taking from the Gentiles a people for Himself," Acts 15:14), the return of Christ to Israel (Acts 15:16a), the establishing of the Davidic kingdom (Acts 15:16b), and the turning of Gentiles to God (Acts 15:17). While this does interpret these verses in a logical fashion, this approach has some difficulties. (1) The quotation begins with the words "**After this.**" Premillenarians assert James used this phrase to suit his interpretation of the passage. But since the quotation begins with "**after this**" James must be quoting the sense of Amos 9:11. Therefore this phrase looks back, not to Acts 15:14, but to Amos 9:8-10, which describes the Tribulation ("a time of trouble for Jacob," Jer. 30:7). (ED: WHILE THIS IS POSSIBLE IT IS NOT ABSOLUTELY CLEAR THAT AMOS 9:8-10 DEFINITELY DESCRIBES THE TRIBULATION) (2) If the temporal phrase "**after this**" refers to the present Age in Amos 9:11, Amos would then have predicted the church in the Old Testament.

**(3) A third view, also premillennial, may be more plausible.** James simply asserted that Gentiles will be saved in the Millennium when Christ will return and rebuild David's fallen tent, that is, restore the nation Israel. Amos said nothing about Gentiles needing to be circumcised. Several factors support this interpretation: (1) This fits the purpose of the council. **If Gentiles will be saved in the Kingdom Age (the Millennium), why should they become Jewish proselytes by circumcision in the Church Age?** (2) This approach suits the meaning of "**in that day**" in Amos 9:11 (ED: SEE COMMENTS ON THE PHRASE "IN THAT DAY" IN AMOS 9:11). After the Tribulation (Amos 9:8-10) God will establish the messianic kingdom (Amos 9:11-12). James (Acts 15:16) interpreted "**in that day**" to mean that "at the time when" God does one (the Tribulation) He will then do the other. In that sense James could say "After this." (3) This interpretation gives significance to the word "**first**" in Acts 15:14. Cornelius and his household were among the first Gentiles to become members of Christ's body, the church. Gentile salvation will culminate in great blessing for them in the Millennium (cf. Ro. 11:12). (4) A number of prophets predicted Gentile salvation in the Millennium, as James stated in Acts 15:15 (e.g., Isa. 42:6; Isa 60:3; Mal. 1:11). (The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty) (Bold added)

**AFTER THESE THINGS** - As discussed James changed the original words from "**in that day**" to "**after these things,**" the question arises as to what time does this time phrase refer? In other words the question is "**After what?**" If we examine the context, there is nothing in the preceding passage that allows us to determine the "timing." If we observe the entire context from which James takes this quotation, it is clear that Amos 9:11-15 describes a time of future glory and blessing on the nation of Israel. It describes conditions that clearly have not yet been fulfilled. We know from comparison to other descriptions of the end times restoration of Israel that Amos 9:11-15 describes a time which will follow a period of great distress for the nation of Israel, a time that other Scriptures refer to as the [Great Tribulation](#) (Mt 24:21+), the [Time of Jacob's Distress](#) (Jer 30:7+) or the **time of great distress** (Daniel 12:1+). After this time of Israel's future testing the promises of Amos 9:11-15 will be consummated. So this could be the time to which James refers when he says "**after these things.**"

**Bock** suggestion regarding the phrase **after these things** - Jeremiah 12:15 may be the source for the opening "After these things I will return," but this is less than clear, since the phrases may be only a transition into the citation that shows how James sees the timing. (Ibid)

In using this passage James' intention was not to teach the Jews about Israel's future, but to use a prophetic passage that demonstrated that the Gentiles had always been part of God's plan of redemption.

**Swindoll** adds that "James didn't, however, mean to imply that the church was fulfilling all that Amos prophesied. The oracle of Amos (ED: READ THE FULL ORACLE IN Amos 9:11-15 AND THE ASSOCIATED COMMENTARY) describes the restoration of Israel, which hasn't happened yet. James merely used the prophecy to demonstrate that the Lord had always intended to bring elect Gentiles into His kingdom. (Ibid)

**John MacArthur** commenting on Amos 9:11-12 writes that "Some have thus concluded that the passage was fulfilled in Jesus, the greater Son of David, through Whom the dynasty of David was reestablished. The Acts reference, however, is best seen as an illustration of Amos' words and not the fulfillment. The temporal allusions to a future time ("**In that day,**" Amos 9:11), when Israel will "**possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations**" (Amos 9:12), when the Lord will "**plant them on their land, and they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them**" (Amos 9:15), all (HE IS APPARENTLY REFERRING TO Amos 9:11-15 SEE THE COMMENTS ON THAT PROPHECY) make it clear that the prophet is speaking of Messiah's return at the Second Advent to sit upon the **throne of David** (cf. Isa 9:7), not the establishment of the church by the apostles. (From "[Interpretative Challenges](#)" in Amos - Introduction)



**I will return** (390)([anastrepho](#)) is a verb not used in the Gospels, but is first used in Acts 5:22+ where Luke writes "they **returned** and reported back," clearly speaking of a literal return. There is no reason from the context of Acts 15:16 to suggest that the phrase "I will return" should not be interpreted literally. When we interpreted literally, it seems to be a "real stretch" to say that "I will return" refers to First Coming of the Messiah. In English dictionaries the verb return is defined as "to go or come back to place." The implication is that one has been there at some previous time. So it defies the usual meaning of the verb return (in Greek or English!) to say that "I will return" signifies the First Coming. A normal, literal reading of the text does not allow that interpretation (in my humble opinion). On the other hand, return when interpreted literally most logically refers to the Second Coming, when Jesus literally, bodily returns in keeping with the promise He Himself made when He said "I will come again." Thus it follows that a literal interpretation of "I will return" would make it very difficult to state that the prophecy of the rebuilt **tabernacle of David** is fulfilled in the Church. In other words, since Jesus has not yet literally returned the rebuilding has not taken place. Not only would one have to "twist" the normal meaning of the verb "return" but they would also have to spiritualize the tabernacle of David!

I am shocked at reading the **Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible** which flat out comments on the phrase "**I will return**" writing that "This is referring to the first coming of Jesus Christ. And He had come—no one present would deny that." The POSB goes on to add that "There will be Jewish believers: "**The tabernacle of David**" refers to believing Jews, the true tabernacle or true body of Jews." (ED: THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW ONE CAN DERIVE AN UNUSUAL INTERPRETATION AS THE RESULT OF [SPIRITUALIZATION OF THE TEXT!](#)) 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." (POSB-Acts) When you read a comment like this it makes you wonder if words have any meaning at all! These POSB comments make no sense when compared to the Amos passage. What is fascinating is that others who spiritualize the text conclude that the **tabernacle of David** is the Church! Can you not see what begins to happen when you are "fast and loose" with spiritualization of the Biblical text in an attempt to make it "fit" into one's pre-conceived eschatological view? I like what **Charles Zimmerman** says about this type of interpretation...

The pronounced spiritualizing method used by the adherents of this view (ED: THAT THE RAISED TABERNACLE IS THE CHURCH) is noted for its absence of "controls" in interpretation. That is, there are no consistent literal and grammatical bounds within which they must operate. Its attraction lies in its flexibility. **However, if words do not mean what they say within the bounds of common sense interpretation, then the reader has nothing to guide him in his understanding. He is in imminent peril of going astray theologically at any point.** (ED: AMEN!) (["To This Agree the Words of the Prophets," Grace Journal 4:3 Fall 1963:28-40](#))

#### Related Resources:

- [What is wrong with the allegorical interpretation method?](#) (Allegorical Interpretation is synonymous with Spiritualizing the Text)
- [What is biblical literalism?](#)
- [The Importance of Meaning](#)
- [Art and Science of Interpretation](#)
- [Rise of Allegorical Interpretation](#)

**John Walvoord** flatly states....

By no possible stretch of the plain meaning of the passage can the **tabernacle of David** be made to be an equivalent of the New Testament Church. The prophecy concerns the rebuilding of that which was fallen down. The "ruins" are to be rebuilt "as in the day of old." The nature of the blessings are earthly, territorial, and national, and have nothing to do with a spiritual church to which none of these blessings has been promised. (J F. Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom)

Here is a prophecy by **Albert Barnes** which shows the effect of pronounced spiritualization on one's interpretation. In this case Barnes is explaining the phrase "**I will return**" which James added to the original Amos 9:11-12 prophecy. Barnes says...

When the people of God are subjected to calamities and trials, it is often represented as if God had departed from them. **His returning** is an image of their restoration to his favor and to prosperity. (ED: OF COURSE I THINK THIS INTERPRETATION IS ABSOLUTELY INCORRECT, BUT QUOTE IT TO SHOW THE DANGER OF SPIRITUALIZING A LITERAL TEXT! THIS IS NOT GOOD BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS!)

**Toussaint** adds that "Christ's **present ministry** in heaven is **not associated with the Davidic throne elsewhere in the New Testament**. He is now seated at the right hand of God (Ps. 110:1; Ro 8:34; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pe 3:22). **When He returns He will sit on David's throne** (2 Sa 7:16; Ps. 89:4; Mt. 19:28; 25:31). (3) The church was a mystery, a truth not revealed to Old Testament saints (Ro 16:25; Eph. 3:5-6; Col. 1:24-27); so the church would not be referred to in Amos." (The Bible

**AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN** - Tabernacle (or booth) of David refers to the dynasty of David. Some interpret this figuratively and say this was fulfilled by Christ's resurrection! Others interpret this literally and when interpreted in this way it refers to a literal Tabernacle of David.

Regarding the "**Tabernacle of David**" read the prophecy in Isaiah 9:6-7 which we often hear at Christmas but often fail to grasp the yet future aspect to be fulfilled at the Second Coming.

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us (MESSIAH'S FIRST COMING); And the government will rest on His shoulders (MESSIAH'S SECOND COMING); And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the **throne of David** (CP "REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN") and over his kingdom (THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM), To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6-7+)

**Comment** - It is worth quoting the comment in the ESV Study Bible which often is generally "amillennial" in prophetic passages. This comment however seems to leave that door "open" explaining that the **Prince of Peace** "is the ruler whose reign will bring about peace because **the nations** (IMPLICATION? THERE WILL BE NATIONS AND NATIONS NORMALLY IN THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF GENTILES! Compare comments on Zechariah 14:16-19+ A PASSAGE THAT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT TO INTERPRET LITERALLY IF THERE WERE NO LITERAL MESSIANIC KINGDOM!) will rely on His just decisions in their disputes (cf. Isa. 2:4+; Isa 11:6-9+; Isa 42:4; 49:7; Isa 52:15+). This kind of king contrasts with even the best of the Davidic line that Judah has experienced so far, because these titles show that this king will be divine. (ESV Study Bible)

**AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT** - As we have been proposing this phrase would be difficult to interpret if one does not interpret it literally. David's Tabernacle has not literally been either rebuilt or restored. To reiterate, one would have to totally spiritualize the text to say that this was fulfilled in the Church. James does not say that the prophecy of Amos 9 was fulfilled in the church. In fact he does not state that the prophecy was fulfilled. His main point was that Gentile salvation apart from the Law does not contradict the OT prophets.

**John MacArthur** comments based on a literal interpretation of the Amos 9:11-12 passage that "The Amos passage speaks of the millennial kingdom. It is then that God **will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, ... rebuild its ruins, ... and restore it**. In the millennial kingdom, the **rest of mankind will seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old**. Gentiles will be saved as Gentiles, without first becoming Jews, or else Acts 15:17 would make no sense. The passage from Amos, quoted in that verse, clearly speaks of those outside the covenant community of Israel being saved, with no mention of their first becoming Jewish proselytes. James reassured his Jewish audience that the inclusion of Gentiles into the church did not abrogate God's plan for Israel. In fact, in the kingdom they will be the messengers to bring Gentiles to God (Zech. 8:20–23). James's point is that the prophet said Gentiles will be in the kingdom without becoming Jewish proselytes. Therefore there is no need for them to become proselytes in the present age. His speech is a fitting conclusion to the speeches in defense of salvation by grace. Peter began by stressing that Gentiles in the past were saved by grace alone; James concluded by showing that that will also be the case in the future. Therefore, Gentile salvation in the present must also be by grace alone. (MacArthur NT Commentary-Acts)

## INTERPRETATION OF AMOS 9:11-12 A DIFFICULT PASSAGE

For a fuller treatment of this difficult passage the reader is referred to the paper by [Charles Zimmerman - "To This Agree the Words of the Prophets," Grace Journal 4:3 \(Fall 1963\):28-40](#). Here is the summary of the interpretation Zimmerman favors - regardless of which interpretation you hold, this paper is highly recommended as it deals with all of the major interpretations...

In summary, James makes reference to Peter's declaration concerning God's **!!!** taking out of ' the Gentiles a people for His name. This primarily involved His plan of including both Jew and Gentile in the New Testament Church. To this, James says, the words of the prophets concerning the Messianic Kingdom agree. The time order of the events are in perfect harmony. After this period of Gentile conversion, the Lord will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David and establish His reign in the promised Messianic Kingdom. During this time

Israel shall enjoy their promised blessings and the residue of men (identified as "all the Gentiles") shall seek after the Lord.

A legitimate paraphrase may read as follows: "Simeon has declared (led out in the full meaning of) how God first visited the Gentiles to take out from among them a people for (to bear) His name. And to this visitation of the Gentiles the words of the prophets agree with respect to the order of events in God's plan, as it is written, After these things pertaining to Gentile conversion under grace, I will return (in glory) and I will build again the tabernacle and throne of David which is fallen and I will build again the ruins of it and I will set it up again in the land of its former domain. That the remainder of men might seek the Lord; namely, all" the Gentiles upon whom my name has been called, saith the Lord, who is doing these things" (Acts 15: 14-17).

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**ESV Study Bible Note** - James concentrated on Amos 9:11-12, which looked to the time when God would restore the house of David. Luke provides the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the text, which speaks of the Gentiles (Gk. ethnē) seeking the Lord. But even the Masoretic (Hebrew) Text fits with what James argued, since it speaks of a people called by my name (Amos 9:12), and those **called by God's name** are in a saving relationship with Him. Amos looked to a time when God would claim a people for himself from among the Gentiles. James concurred with Peter that the time of Gentile inclusion in God's people had now arrived.

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**Derek Thomas** (amillennial view) - James understood the restored Israel to be the church rather than ethnic Israel. It is precisely at this point that one imagines the assembly being struck with awe as the implications of the new covenant were pressed upon their minds through James's words. The implication was clear: there was no longer an ethnic Israel that had any religious significance. The promises given to Israel were now firmly in the court of the church, and this church was made up of all those who put their trust in Jesus Christ, whatever their ethnic background. (REC - Acts)

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**Donald Sunukijan** - At the Jerusalem Council, James cited Amos 9:11-12 as proof that the Gentiles of his day need not be circumcised and live as Jews in order to be saved (Acts. 15:1-20). James was aware that Israel's judgments were not yet over (cf. the Lord's statements regarding the coming destruction of the temple and renewed persecution and death, Matt. 24:1-22; Luke 21:5-24, and that the restoration had not yet begun; cf. Acts 1:6-7). But James also knew from Amos' succinct statement and from extended passages in other prophets (cf. "prophets" in Acts 15:15; also note Isa. 42:6; 60:3; Mal. 1:11) that when the promised kingdom would come, the Gentiles will share in it as Gentiles and not as quasi-Jews. Since this was God's millennial purpose, James concluded that the church should not require Gentiles to relinquish their identity and live as Jews. James was not saying the church fulfills the promises to Israel in Amos 9:11-12. He was saying that since Gentiles will be saved in the yet-to-come Millennium, they need not become Jews in the Church Age (see extended comments on Acts 15:15-18). (From his comments on Amos in The Bible Knowledge Commentary)

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**John Stott** summarizes James's citation of Amos - God promises first to restore David's fallen tent and rebuild its ruins (which Christian eyes see as a prophecy of the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, the seed of David, and the establishment of his people) so that, secondly, a Gentile remnant will seek the Lord. In other words, through the Davidic Christ Gentiles will be included in his new community. (Message of Acts, 247)

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**Dwight Pentecost** comments on Acts 15:14-17 - "A close examination of this passage reveals that there is a progression of thought leading to James' conclusion. **First**, God visits the Gentiles, taking from them a people for His name. In other words, God has promised to bless the Gentiles as well as Israel, but each in his own order. The Gentile blessing is first. **Second**, Christ will return—after the outcalling of the people for His name. **Third**, as a result of the coming of the Lord, the tabernacle of David will be built again; that is, the kingdom will be established exactly as promised in the Davidic Covenant. Amos clearly declared that this rebuilding will be done 'as it used to be' (Amos 9:11); that is, the blessings will be earthly and national and will have nothing to do with the church. **Fourth**, the residue of men will seek the Lord; that is, all the Gentiles will be brought to a knowledge of the Lord after the kingdom is established. This same truth is taught in passages like Isaiah 2:2; 11:10; 40:5; 66:23.

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**Thomas Constable gives a good summary** - There have been three main interpretations of James' use of Amos' prophecy (Amos 9:11–12).

(1) Some interpreters believe James meant that the inclusion of Gentiles in the church fulfilled God's promise through Amos. (Lenski) These (generally amillennial) interpreters see the church as fulfilling God's promises to Israel. This view seems to go beyond what Amos said since his prophecy concerns the tabernacle of David, which literally interpreted would involve Israel, not the church.

(2) A second group of interpreters believe James meant that God would include Gentiles when He fulfilled this promise to Israel in the future. However there was no question among the Jews that God would bless the Gentiles through Israel in the future. The issue was whether He would do this apart from Judaism, and this interpretation contributes nothing to the solution of that problem. This view does not seem to go far enough.

(3) A third view is that James meant that the present inclusion of Gentiles in the church is consistent with God's promise to Israel through Amos. The present salvation of Gentiles apart from Judaism does not contradict anything Amos said about future Gentile blessing. This seems to be the best interpretation.

"In other words, James says, God is working out His own plan: Israel, His covenant people have been set aside nationally because of their rejection of the Messiah. God is now taking out a people, Jew and Gentile, to constitute the Church of God. When He completes this work, the Lord is coming back the second time. That will be the time of blessing for the whole world [i.e., the millennial reign of Christ]."

James added the quotation from Isaiah 45:21 in verse 18b probably to add authority to the Amos prophecy.

"The thought that the church was the divinely intended replacement for the temple is probably to be seen in 15:16–18."

The non-dispensational understanding of this text is that James was saying that the messianic kingdom had come and Amos' prediction was completely fulfilled. Progressive dispensationalists believe he meant that the first stage of the messianic kingdom had come and that Amos' prediction was partially fulfilled. Normative dispensationalists view the messianic kingdom as entirely future. They believe Amos was predicting the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan and that James was saying that the present situation was in harmony with God's purpose. Thus the Amos prediction has yet to be fulfilled. Deciding between these options depends on whether or not one believes the church replaces Israel in God's plan. If it does, one will side with non-dispensationalists here. If one believes the church and Israel are distinct in the purpose of God, then one has to decide if there is better evidence that Jesus has begun to rule over David's kingdom now (progressive dispensationalism) or not (normative dispensationalism). I believe the evidence points to the fact that David's kingdom is an earthly kingdom and that Jesus will begin reigning over it when He returns to earth at His second coming.

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**Warren Wiersbe** assesses this difficult passage quoted by James as follows - Note that (James) did not state that what Peter, Paul, and Barnabas had said was a *fulfillment* of this prophecy. He said that what Amos wrote *agreed with their testimony*. A careful reading of Amos 9:8-15 reveals that the prophet is describing events in the end times, when God will regather His people Israel to their land and bless them abundantly. If we "spiritualize" these promises, we rob them of their plain meaning and James' argument falls apart. Amos also prophesied that the fallen house ("tent") of David would be raised up and God would fulfill His covenant with David that a king would sit on his throne (see 2 Sam. 7:25-29). This future King, of course, will be Jesus Christ, the Son of David (2 Sam. 7:13, 16; Isa. 9:6-7; Luke 1:32) who will reign over Israel during the kingdom. In fact, the only Jew alive today who can prove His genealogy and defend His kingship is Jesus Christ! God revealed these truths gradually to His people, but His plan had been settled from the beginning. Neither the Cross nor the church were afterthoughts with God (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; Eph. 1:4). The Judaizers thought that Israel had to "rise" in her glorious kingdom before the Gentiles could be saved, but God revealed that it was through Israel's "fall" that the Gentiles would find salvation (Rom. 11:11-16). At the time of the Jerusalem Conference, David's house and throne indeed were fallen; but they would be restored one day and the kingdom established. (Ibid)

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Messianic Jewish writer **Steven Ger** gives us his analysis of the Amos 9:11-12 passage - The Amos passage speaks of God's restoration of the fallen ruins of the tabernacle of David during the future messianic kingdom. (ED: THAT IS WHAT ONE WOULD CONCLUDE IF THE PROPHECY IS INTERPRETED LITERALLY) The tabernacle was a picture of the house of David, the Davidic dynasty, which metaphorically fell into ruin when the final Davidic king was deposed from power by Babylon (2 Ki 25:7). Amos promised that, in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant (2 Sa 7:12-16), the dynasty of David would be restored to its former glory in the messianic kingdom.

The Amos passage goes on to relate that when the kingdom of God is established (IN THE MILLENNIUM), Gentile salvation will be normative. James was not claiming that because of the contemporary salvation of Gentiles that this prophecy was presently being fulfilled, wholly or partially. Rather, James was making a rather sophisticated present day application of a future prophecy. If Gentile salvation is to be understood as normative within the messianic kingdom, it should not be very surprising to anyone if Gentile salvation were to occur somewhat earlier. James was arguing that there was nothing unbiblical or even unanticipated concerning the salvation of Gentiles and that future Gentile salvation in no way precluded contemporary Gentile salvation. **The reason James chose this particular passage from Amos is that it shows Gentiles seeking God specifically as Gentiles, and not as Jewish proselytes, masterfully settling the issue of whether circumcision was necessary.** James finishes his application with a reminder to recognize that the testimony of Scripture is that the inclusion of Gentiles in God's program has always been part of His

plan. Indeed, the Messiah was expected to be a light to multitudes of Gentiles (Isa. 42:6; 49:6).

**There are some who misinterpret James here, believing that he was arguing that this prophecy was fulfilled by first century contemporary circumstances.** They erroneously suppose that the **ruined tabernacle of David** is the **church**. It is difficult to determine how they could hold this **broadly spiritualized view**, as David's tabernacle is described as fallen and in ruins, in need of **restoration**. Anyone who has read the first fifteen chapters of Acts definitely knows this description not to be true of the victorious first century church! **Amos was prophesying of Israel, not of the church, which was an undisclosed mystery within the Hebrew Scripture** (Eph. 3:4-5; Col. 1:26-27). (Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary – The Book of Acts: Witnesses to the World)

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#### **Steven Cole's analysis of this difficult passage quoted by James -**

There are several difficult interpretive issues in James' use of the quote from Amos 9:11-12. For one thing, he does not cite the Hebrew text, but rather the Greek Septuagint version, and even there he differs at several points. Perhaps he was citing it from memory and modifying it to give the sense of it as it related to his application. Also, it has been pointed out that James' citation agrees exactly with one of the Jewish Essene sect texts of Amos 9. If some of the scrupulous Jewish Christians in his audience came from this sect, James may have been showing them that their own version supported the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's purpose (Richard Longenecker, Expositor's Bible Commentary [Zondervan], 9:447).

The main difficulty concerns the interpretation of the quote from Amos. Most premillennial commentators interpret it to refer to the second coming of Christ and the future restoration of David's throne, followed by worldwide witness to the Gentiles in the millennium. Thus James would be arguing that since Amos predicted the future inclusion of the Gentiles in God's purpose apart from their becoming Jewish proselytes, there is therefore no need for them to become Jewish proselytes in the present situation (John MacArthur, Jr., Acts 13-28 in The MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Moody Press], p. 69).

**It seems to me, however, that James is using the quote from Amos to refer to what God was doing in the present, not to what He would do in the future. This is not to deny a future aspect and greater fulfillment of the prophecy in the millennial kingdom. But I think James uses the quote to establish that God's purpose in the present age includes the calling of the Gentiles apart from their becoming Jews** (see Stedman's sermon [Acts 15:1-21 What's God Doing?](#)).

Another problem concerns the interpretation of Acts 15:18. The quote from Amos 9:12 ends with "says the Lord, who does these things." The rest of the verse is James' comment. The problem is, his comment is so elliptical (incomplete) that it is hard to make sense of it. This resulted in a number of textual variants introduced by scribes who expanded the phrase into a complete sentence (Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament [United Bible Societies], second ed., p. 379). Probably James' brief comment means, "The Gentiles' inclusion in the gospel was no surprise to God, who knew it from eternity."

All the interpretive problems aside, the bottom line is that James was using Scripture to support Peter's argument, that salvation for all people, Jew or Gentile, is by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The quote from Amos and James' concluding comment support what Peter emphasized in verse 7, that the salvation of the Gentiles originated with God, not with man. It was not something that Peter or Paul and Barnabas dreamed up. God purposed to do it from eternity, and He revealed it through His prophets centuries before.

**Acts 15:17 SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,'**

KJV Acts 15:17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

- **the rest of mankind** - Ge 22:18; 49:10; Ps 22:26,27; 67:1-3; 72:17-19; Isa 2:2,3; 11:10; Isaiah 19:23-25; 24:15,16; 49:6,7; 66:18-21; Jeremiah 16:19; Hosea 2:23; Joel 2:32; Micah 4:1,2; 5:7; Zechariah 2:11; 8:20-23; Malachi 1:11
- **the Gentiles** Genesis 48:16; Numbers 6:27; Isaiah 43:7; 65:1
- **who** Numbers 24:23; Isaiah 45:7,8; Daniel 4:35
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**So that** - This is a **term of purpose** which should always cause us to ask what is the purpose or what are the facts that allow this purpose to be stated?

**THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD** - The original Hebrew of Amos 9:12 reads "That they may possess the remnant

of Edom and all the nations who are called by My name," Declares the LORD who does this." As noted in the preceding table James substitutes "of mankind" for **Edom** which is a quote from the Septuagint version which reads "that the remnant of men, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, may earnestly seek me, saith the Lord who does all these things." (Amos 9:12 Lxx English) James as the writers of the NT when quoting OT prophecies changed the passage slightly placing the seeking of the Lord after the "rest (remnant)" and before "the Gentiles." This is a very clever touch by James, because he knew that the original Hebrew rendering would not necessarily serve to defend his point that the Gentiles were part of God's plan of redemption. On the other hand, the Septuagint was well known at this time and the way in which the Jews had translated it would support James' argument that God was seeking Gentiles who sought Him. In short, James is saying that the Gentiles were part of God's plan of redemption even in the Old Testament prophet Amos.

**AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME** - Remember that in Acts 15:15 James had referred to **prophets** in the plural, indicating that he could have quoted passages from many OT prophets to make his case for Gentile salvation. Indeed, the prophecy of Joel makes essentially the same statement for it says "And it will come about that **whoever** (THIS "OPENS" THE DOOR FOR THE GENTILES! cf Acts 14:27+) calls on the name of the LORD Will be delivered ; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, As the LORD has said, Even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.(Joel 2:32+) It is notable that Joel 2:32 is quoted twice in the New Testament, once by Peter at Pentecost and once by Paul in the book of Romans. Notice that in both quotations the pronouns "**everyone**" and "**whoever**" indicate that God has opened the door of salvation not only to Jews but to Gentiles, as the context of Paul's quotation makes crystal clear when he states in Ro 10:12 that there is **no distinction between Jew and Greek!**

Acts 2:21+ 'AND IT SHALL BE THAT **EVERYONE** WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.'

Ro 10:12-13+ For there is **no distinction** between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is **Lord of all**, abounding in riches for **all who call on Him**; for "**WHOEVER** (JEW OR GENTILE) WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

## Acts 15:18 SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO.

KJV Acts 15:18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

- Acts 17:26; Numbers 23:19; Isaiah 41:22,23; 44:7; 46:9,10; Matthew 13:35; 25:34; Ephesians 1:4,11; 3:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8; 17:8
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE PURPOSE OF GOD IS AN OLD ONE

**SAYS THE LORD** - This is the "seal of approval" on James' quotation and on every word promised in the Scripture for that matter!

**WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO** - The omniscient God knows the future and has a plan and saving Gentiles was integral to His plan of redemption.

James alludes to another prophet quoting Isaiah 45:21 ""Declare and set forth your case; Indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me."

It follows that the believers ought not to be taken by surprise since such a thing as Gentile blessing had always been in the purpose of God (**known from long ago**).

**Known**(1110) (**gnostos** from **ginosko** = know experientially) is that which is knowable, perceived, understood. **Gnostos** then means (1) of something clearly recognizable known, made known, remarkable (Acts 4.16); (2) well-known; of person's acquaintance, friend (Lk 2.44, Lk 23:49, Jn 18:15, 16; Lxx - Ps 88:8, 18); (3) of what can be known intelligible, knowable (Ro 1.19). The first use in the Septuagint refers to the "tree of knowledge of good and evil", where the Septuagint reads "learning the **knowledge** (Lxx - gnostos) of good and evil." (Ge 2:9). Isaiah 19:21 says "the LORD will make Himself known to Egypt" which is what He does in Ro 1:19.

KJV Acts 15:19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

- **that** Acts 15:10,24,28; Galatians 1:7-10; 2:4; 5:11,12
- **turning** Acts 26:20; Isaiah 55:7; Hosea 14:2; 1 Th 1:9
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **A JUDGMENT NOT TO STIR UP TROUBLE**

**Therefore** - Term of conclusion. Based on three "witnesses" testifying in a sense (Simeon, Barnabas and Paul, James quoting God's Word). Two witnesses were all that were required in the OT but here we add one for good measure.

**It is my judgment** - If this is the correct nuance of krino (see NET Note below), then James is clearly in charge of the proceedings and this declaration is in the form of a binding decision.

**Judgment** (2919)(krino) means to form an opinion after separating and considering the particulars in the case. It was used in Homer of Ceres separating the grain from the chaff (Iliad, v, 501).

**Guzik** on **krino** in this context - The ancient Greek phrases it even more strongly as "I determine" or "I resolve" (Expositor's). In addition, when the decision of James was published, it was presented as the mutual decision of all present (Acts 15:25: It seemed good to us). Clearly, James' leadership was supported by everyone present.

**Adam Clarke** adds that ""The rest either argued on the subject, or gave their opinion; James alone pronounced the definitive sentence."

**NET Note** has lengthy discussion of judgment (krino) -

Or "I have decided," "I think." The verb krino has a far broader range of meaning than the often-used English verb "judge." BDAG places this use in Acts 15:19 in the category "judge, think, consider, look upon" followed by double accusative of object and predicate. However, many modern translations give the impression that a binding decision is being handed down by James: "it is my judgment" (NASB, NIV); "I have reached the decision" (NRSV). Louw-Nida on the other hand, translate the phrase here "**I think that we should not cause extra difficulty for those among the Gentiles.**" This gives more the impression of an **opinion** than a **binding decision**. The resolution of this lies not so much in the lexical data as in how one conceives James' role in the leadership of the Jerusalem church, plus the dynamics of the specific situation where the issue of Gentile inclusion in the church was being discussed. The major possibilities are: **(1) James is handing down a binding decision** to the rest of the church as the one who has ultimate authority to decide this matter;**(2) James is offering his own personal opinion** in the matter, which is not binding on the church;**(3) James is voicing a consensus opinion** of all the apostles and elders, although phrasing it as if it were his own;**(4) James is making a suggestion** to the rest of the leadership as to what course they should follow. In light of the difficulty in reconstructing the historical situation in detail, it is best to use a translation which maintains as many of the various options as possible. For this reason the translation "**Therefore I conclude**" has been used, leaving open the question whether in reaching this conclusion James is speaking only for himself or for the rest of the leadership.

## **JAMES' MESSAGE: "LEAVE THEM ALONE!"**

In context to create extra trouble would be to require the Gentiles expressing faith in Christ to also undergo circumcision and keep the Laws, that even the Jews themselves were unable to keep. While James does not state it specifically, clearly he is in agreement with Peter, Barnabas and Paul and that those of the sect of the Pharisees who believed were wrong.

As **MacArthur** says "Keeping the law and observing rituals were not requirements for salvation. The Judaizers were to be forbidden to trouble the Gentiles by teaching otherwise." (Acts Commentary)

**That we do not trouble** (3926)(parenocheo from pará = in addition to or close beside + enocheo = to disturb) is used only here

in the NT and means to create additional disturbance, add extra trouble or cause unnecessary trouble or difficulty. They need to be cautious when not to negatively influence the Gentiles turning to God. This verb is used in the Septuagint in Da 6:18, 23+ describing how the lions absolutely did not trouble or annoy Daniel! Daniel's peaceful night's sleep may have been the greatest miracle!

**Gilbrant** - This verb can be found in classical Greek from the Fifth Century B.C. and means "cause disturbance, annoy, trouble." It appears in the Septuagint about 10 times translating various Hebrew words and usually meaning "to trouble." For example, Samson was "troubled" by his wife (Judges 14:17), and in 1 Samuel 28:15 Saul "troubled" Samuel by calling him up from the dead. (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

**Swindoll** writes that "The expression "**do not trouble those who are turning to God**" is critical (Acts 15:19). The phrase identifies any addition of works (circumcision, baptism, Law keeping—any human activity other than simple belief, childlike trust, or genuine faith) as a man-made obstacle to God's agenda." (Ibid)

**R. Kent Hughes** applied these principles to the modern church, "We so easily push our preferences on others. We assume they will either do things our way or they are unspiritual. We too often put others through the paces of our own heritage before we fully accept them as brothers and sisters. Sadly, sometimes a church will radiate more of this than the gospel!" (Preaching the Word - Acts)

**Those who are turning to God** - Those who are continually turning to God. Paul uses this same verb to describe the Gentiles in Thessalonica who "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God" (1 Th 1:9). Idolatry was common among the Gentiles so while James does not say "**from idols**" that is clearly the implication; i.e., the Gentiles were turning to God from idols.

**Turning to** (present tense)(1994)(**epistrepho** from **epí** = motion toward + **strepho** = twist, turn quite around or reverse) means to revert, to turn about, to turn around, to return and figuratively to convert. The idea is a definite turn to God in conduct as well as in one's mind.

**Luke** is fond of this verb with 18 of the 35 NT uses -

Lk. 1:16; Lk. 1:17; Lk. 2:39; Lk. 8:55; Lk. 17:4; Lk. 17:31; Lk. 22:32; Jn. 21:20; Acts 3:19; Acts 9:35; Acts 9:40; Acts 11:21; Acts 14:15; Acts 15:19; Acts 15:36; Acts 16:18; Acts 26:18; Acts 26:20; Acts 28:27

**Acts 3:19** "Therefore repent and **return**, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;

**Acts 9:35** And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him (Read Acts 9:32-34), and they **turned** to the Lord.

**Acts 11:21** And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.

**Acts 14:15** (Paul and Barnabas in Iconium trying to call the Gentiles to "turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM."

**Acts 26:18** to open their eyes so that they may **turn from** darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

**Acts 26:20** they were declaring "to the Gentiles, that they should repent and **turn to** God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance."

**Acts 28:27**; FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES; OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND **RETURN**, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM."

**From among the Gentiles** - Gentiles were free from the Mosaic Law, for they were not under law but under grace and they now followed the Law of Christ "for you are not under law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14b).

**Johnny Hunt** wrote, "These are concessions for fellowship. Freedom in Christ does not grant the right to sin or to offend another brother."

**Illustration**: It is like the two porcupines that found themselves in a blizzard and tried to huddle together to keep warm. But because they were pricked by each other's quills, they moved apart. Soon they were shivering again and had to lie side by side once more for their own survival. They **needed** each other, even though they **needed** each other. There are many 'porcupine' Christians running around. They have their good points, but you can't get near them because the bad points will prick you.



Paul would later write

"To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. (1 Cor 9:20-21)

**Jack Andrews** - The Jews were not to cause the Gentiles to stumble. They were not to trouble the Gentiles who were turning to God. The Gentiles in turn were not to cause the Gentiles to stumble by with their former practices. It was no longer a question of law, but a question now of love. Are we going to act in love towards our brothers and sisters?

**Acts 15:20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.**

**KJV** - But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

**Young's Literal** - but to write to them to abstain from the pollutions of the idols, and the whoredom, and the strangled thing; and the blood;

- **they abstain from things contaminated by idol** Acts 15:29; Genesis 35:2; Exodus 20:3-5,23; 34:15,16; Numbers 25:2; Psalms 106:37-39; Ezekiel 20:30,31; 1 Corinthians 8:1,4-13; 10:20-22,28; Revelation 2:14,20; 9:20; 10:2,8
- **from fornication** 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9,13,18; 7:2; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Hebrews 12:16; 13:4; 1 Peter 4:3
- **from what is strangled** Acts 21:25; Ge 9:4; Lev 3:17; 7:23-27; 17:10-14; Dt 12:16,23-25; 14:21; 15:23; 1 Sa 14:32; Ezek 4:14; 33:25; 1 Ti 4:4,5
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **PRACTICAL MATTERS AFFECTING FELLOWSHIP**

The major doctrinal issue was resolved, so now James turns to practical matters that affect fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers.

**But (alla)** - This is a strong term of contrast. Having dealt with issues that might trouble the Gentiles, now James turns to four issues that might trouble the Jews! The council would now give four practical guidelines which would make it easier for Jewish believers to fellowship with Gentile believers.

As **John MacArthur** says "The danger was that the Gentiles, reveling in their freedom in Christ, would pressure the Jewish believers to exercise that same liberty and violate their consciences." And in [1 Corinthians 8:1-3 The Limits of Our Liberty, Part 1 MacArthur](#) adds that "It isn't as simple as whether it's right or wrong. It boils down to **who does it affect?** And maybe there are some things that are right in themselves, but if you do them, they will wound somebody who thinks they are wrong...**So, how do we decide?** What do you do in your life when you got one of those *gray-area* things? Do you have a process by which you make a decision? Let me offer you a series of terms that can act as a filter through which you can filter any behavior that is in the *gray area* (see [The Limits of Our Liberty](#))." (Bold added)

Note the phrase **we write** for clearly only one person actually wrote the letter, presumably James, but the phrase **we write** underscores the clear consensus of the leadership regarding the directives in the letter to the Gentiles.

**THOUGHT** - Every church has to have someone at the "helm," so to speak, in control of the wheel to steer the ship often through troubled waters stirred up by Satan and his emissaries, but this leader needs to be a man who sees himself as a **we** and not a **me**! The only One in control of the helm as a "Me" so to speak, is also the only One Who can calm the seas, speaking of course of Jesus, the Head of the Body (Col 2:19, Eph 1:23; 4:12-16; Col 1:18).

**That we write to them that** (1989) (**epistello** from **epi** - to + **stello** - to send) to send a communication to inform or instruct by letter. Used twiced in Acts to refer to the letter from the Jerusalem Council to the Gentiles (Acts 15:20, Acts 21:25). Used in Hebrews to describe the "letter of exhortation" (Heb 13:22). No uses in the Septuagint. **Vincent** adds that **epistello** "Originally (meant), to send to, as a message; hence, by letter. The kindred noun **epistole**, whence our *epistle*, means, originally, anything sent by a messenger.

*Letter* is a secondary meaning."

**Gilbrant** on **epistello** - classical Greek this word is used to mean "to send or announce a message, direction, or administrative order." It can refer to a command given by word of mouth, but usually it refers to something that is written. Thus the noun derivation *epistolē* (1976), "epistle," is "that which is transmitted by the messenger," i.e., the "letter" itself. Lacquer has demonstrated from the letters of emperors and magistrates of this period that *epistellō* "always meant write rather than send" (Moulton-Milligan).

**Constable** (quoting Pentecost in part) writes that "To help Gentile converts not put a stumbling block in the path of Jews, James recommended that Christian teachers encourage their disciples to avoid four things. These were the things (food, etc.) associated with idolatry (cf. 1 Cor. 10:14-22), and fornication (Gr. *porneias*, all kinds of sexual aberrations). They were also to avoid eating strangled animals rather than those with the blood drained out, and blood (the essence of life; cf. Gen. 9; Lev. 17:11). These were ethical and moral issues, not just matters of ceremonial defilement."

**NET Note** - Three of the four prohibitions deal with food (the first, third and fourth) while one prohibition deals with behavior (the second, refraining from sexual immorality). Since these occur in the order they do, the translation "abstain from" is used to cover both sorts of activity (eating food items, immoral behavior). These restrictions are not on matters of salvation, but are given as acts of sensitivity to their Jewish brethren, as v. 21 makes clear. Another example of such sensitivity is seen in 1 Cor 10:14–11:1.

**Jack Arnold** - The Gentiles would take their best animals and offer them to their pagan gods. The gods who were spiritual ate the animal flesh spiritually, even though nothing happened to the meat. Then the Gentiles would take the meat and sell it in the meat market which usually was next door to the heathen temple. This was the best place in town to buy meat or to eat a juicy steak. The converted Gentiles had no real scruples about this and it was not a matter of conscience with them. However, this was very offensive to the Jews who had been brought up on a very strict diet and who had been taught to eat nothing offered to idols. These Gentile converts were to make this concession to the converted Jewish brethren, not to put the Gentiles back under the Mosaic Law but to keep from being offensive to the Jewish brethren so as not to disturb the unity, harmony and peace of the church. There were two big questionable practices in the early church – drinking wine and eating meat offered to idols. The conclusion was that one Christian brother would do nothing that would cause another Christian brother to stumble spiritually, even though there was nothing intrinsically wrong in these acts. ([Acts 15:13-35 The Jerusalem Council - Practice](#))

**Paul** later wrote...

1 Corinthians 8:13 (commentary) Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.

1 Corinthians 10:31-33 (commentary) Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.

#### **Related Resources for more on "Christian Liberty"...**

- [1 Corinthians 8:1-3 The Limits of Our Liberty, Part 1](#) - John MacArthur
- [1 Corinthians 8:4-13 The Limits of Our Liberty, Part 2](#) - John MacArthur
- [1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1 Principles of Christian Freedom](#) - John MacArthur

**They** ([present tense](#) - continually) **abstain from things contaminated by idols** - Notice that the phrase "**contaminated by idols**" parallels "**things sacrificed to idols**" in Acts 15:29. Thus this prohibition clearly deals with food offered to pagan idols and later sold in the corner butcher shop. Secondly, notice that the verb **abstain** although it is not an actual command is in the [present tense](#) which calls for abstinence to be their habitual practice. While the Council's letter did not instruct the Gentiles on how to do this, we know from other NT passages keep this prohibition as a lifestyle, especially in a culture steeped with idols, would have necessitated jettisoning self-reliance and learning to rely on the Holy Spirit.

#### **Related Resources.**

- [Need for the Holy Spirit to obey NT commands](#) (and in many context also applying to NT verbs calling for habitual practice)
- [Paradoxical Principle of 100% Dependent and 100% Responsible](#)

**Contaminated** (234) (**aligema** from **aligeo** = make ceremonially impure - used in Daniel 1:8+, Mal 1:7, 12+) is used only here in the NT. **Friberg** says refers "the effect of contact with idols (ceremonial) pollution, ritual defilement." **BDAG** has "avoid pollution (pl. denotes separate acts) by images (of deities)."

**Vincent** on **aligema** - A word not found in classical Greek, and only here in the New Testament. The kindred verb *aligeo*, to pollute,

occurs in the Septuagint, Dan. 1:8; Mal. 1:7, and both times in the sense of defiling by food. Here the word is defined by things sacrificed to idols (ver. 29); the flesh of idol sacrifices, of which whatever was not eaten by the worshippers at the feasts in the temples, or given to the priests, was sold in the markets and eaten at home. See 1 Cor 10:25–28; and Ex 34:15."

**Zodhiates** defines **aligema** as "Pollution by unclean (i.e., forbidden) food. Occurs only in Acts 15:20, in which what is expressed as "pollutions of idols" and in Acts 15:29 is called **eidōlóthuta** (1494), "meats offered to idols." The verb **aligéō** is used to refer particularly to pollution by meats or drinks (Sept.: Da 1:8; Mal. 1:7, 12). The Apostle Paul alludes to the customs of heathen nations among whom, after sacrifice had been completed and a portion of the animal given to the priests, the remaining part was either displayed by the owner for sale in the market or became the occasion of a banquet either in the temple or at the owner's house (1 Cor. 8:1-13). (The Complete Word Study Dictionary – New Testament)

**They abstain...from fornication** (better translation is "**sexual immorality**" as in NET, NLT, NKJV, ESV, CSB, NIV) - You are probably saying well it is obvious that the Gentiles should stay away from

Note that the verb **abstain** applies not only to food, but also to fornication. To reiterate the only way to successfully abstain as a lifestyle ([present tense](#)) is by continual dependence on the Holy Spirit to give the desire to abstain and the power to abstain (Php 2:13NLT+), especially in light of the fact that Gentile fornication was a common practice and was readily accepted in the first century pagan society. Be careful of falling into the subtle trap of saying "I'll stay away from \_\_\_\_\_." Without dependence on the Holy Spirit, you have just placed yourself under a legalistic spirit! And when you place yourself under the law, you actually arouse the desire to do that from which you are trying to abstain! (See Effect of Placing Yourself Under the Law)

**Abstain** ([568](#))([apechomai](#)) means to keep away and in the [middle voice](#) (reflexive = the subject initiates the action and participates in the results) which is as a call for the subject to be personally involved in the action. Paul uses this same verb giving a similar exhortation - "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain ([apechomai](#) in the [present tense](#)) from sexual immorality ([porneia](#))." (1Th 4:3+)

**Guzik** on **abstain from fornication** suggests that "we shouldn't think that it simply meant sex outside of marriage, which all Christians (Jew or Gentile) recognized as wrong. Instead, James told these Gentiles living in such close fellowship with the Jewish believers to observe the specific marriage regulations required by [Leviticus 18](#), which prohibited marriages between most family relations. This was something that would offend Jews, but most Gentiles would think little of. Gentile Christians had the "right" to eat meat sacrificed to idols, to continue their marriage practices, and to eat food without a kosher blessing, because these were aspects of the Mosaic Law they definitely were not under. However, they were encouraged (required?) to law down their rights in these matters as a display of love to their Jewish brethren."

**John Stott** adds that "All four of the requested abstentions related to ceremonial laws laid down in Leviticus 17 and 18, and three of them concerned dietary matters which could inhibit Jewish-Gentile common meals."

**Jack Arnold** on **fornication** - It seems that both Jews and Gentiles would know what sexual immorality is wrong. We must understand the background to figure out why this prohibition was given. Premarital and extramarital sex (fornication and adultery) were so common among the Gentiles in that day that their consciences had been dulled. They did not see these acts as disgraceful. They were practiced without shame and without remorse. Without a written law (as the Jews had) telling these Gentiles that fornication was wrong, they did not think it was wrong. The Gentiles practiced sexual immorality as part of their pagan religions and it was part of their lifestyle. It was important, therefore, that the new Gentile converts understand the moral law of God on this matter and abstain from all illicit sexual activity. The sin of sexual immorality causes one to destroy himself, for illegal sexual relationships destroy one's moral fiber, mess up his emotional life and tear him up psychologically. Fornication breaks up the inner integrity of man. Christians are constantly exhorted, therefore, to flee sexual immorality.

- "Yet the body is not for immorality (fornication), but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body" (1 Cor 6:13b).
- "Flee immorality (fornication). Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body" (1 Cor 6:18).
- "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality (fornication), impurity, sensuality, . . ." (Gal 5:19).
- "But do not let immorality (fornication) or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints; . . ." (Eph. 5:3).
- "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality (fornication); . . ." (1 Th 4:3).

Fornicators, in lands that have not had a Christian influence in today's world, still have little conscience about sexual purity. Yet, what about so called Christianized America? America is experiencing a sexual revolution. America, in reality, is experiencing a new rash of *paganism*. America is going back to hedonism and sexual debauchery. What unbelievers today call the **new morality** is imply **old paganism**. (ED: SEE BARNA REPORT BELOW) There is nothing new about the new morality, and God's judgment will

fall upon this country for this blatant breaking of the moral law of God. ([Acts 15:13-35 The Jerusalem Council - Practice](#))

#### Related Resource:

- [The End of Absolutes: America's New Moral Code](#) - See this Barna Survey from 2016 (you will find some of the results shocking!) - "Christian morality is being ushered out of American social structures and off the cultural main stage, leaving a vacuum in its place—and the broader culture is attempting to fill the void. New research from Barna reveals growing concern about the moral condition of the nation, even as many American adults admit they are uncertain about how to determine right from wrong. So what do Americans believe? Is truth relative or absolute? And do Christians see truth and morality in radically different ways from the broader public, or are they equally influenced by the growing tide of secularism and religious skepticism?"

**Jack Andrews** gives some background - The Gentiles would often worship their idols in the temples of pagan gods. The temple priestesses were nothing more than prostitutes. They would partake in orgies, sexual immorality, fornication, and the like. (Jack Andrews Expository Studies)

**John Butler** wrote, "This directive...reminded the Gentiles that though the law was refuted as part of salvation, it did not mean they could live a lawless life regarding morals and manners. Grace does not open the door to lawlessness in conduct any more than freedom opens the door to irresponsible conduct."

**And from **fornication**** (Sexual Immorality) ([4202](#))(**porneia** from root verb **pernao** = to sell, **porneuo** = to play the harlot; **pornos** = male prostitute) originally referred to any excessive behavior or lack of restraint, but eventually became associated with sexual excess and indulgence, of every kind of extramarital, unlawful, or unnatural sexual intercourse. It refers to general sexual acts outside of legal marriage. Sex was often linked to pagan religious practice, with the idolatrous worship of false gods (TDNT) As alluded to above, loose morals were a continuous problem in the Greco-Roman world.

**Vincent** writes (quoting Meyer) on **fornication** that "The association of **fornication** with three things in themselves indifferent is to be explained from the then moral corruption of heathenism, by which fornication, regarded from of old with indulgence, and even with favor, nay, practised without shame even by philosophers, and surrounded by poets with all the tinsel of lasciviousness, had become in public opinion a thing really indifferent" (Meyer)."

**Paul** later used **apechomai** writing to the Gentiles in Thessalonica (who came out of idolatry) that "this is the will of God, your sanctification (holiness); that is, that you **abstain** (**apechomai** in [present tense](#) - see following note on **abstain** in 1 Pe 2:11+) from sexual immorality." (1 Th 4:3+) And then Paul commanded the saints at Thessalonica **abstain** (present imperative - continually, a clear call for them to depend on the Spirit for power to abstain) from every form of evil." (1 Th 5:22+)

**Peter** writing "to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pe 1:1+) exhorted them "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to **abstain** (**apechomai** in [present tense](#) - just try to accomplish that without the Spirit! see "[Paradoxical Principle of 100% Dependent and 100% Responsible](#)") from fleshly lusts which wage war ([present tense](#) - continually - believers get no "weekend passes" for this is a continual daily battle for our heart and mind) against the soul (sexual sin will corrupt our soul, even the soul of a believer. We are not talking about loss of salvation but loss of usefulness to God - see 2 Ti 2:21+)." (1 Peter 2:11+)

**Guzik** reasons that the "three commands (ED: THEY ARE NOT ACTUALLY GIVEN IN THE FORM OF COMMANDS IN THE GREEK) had to do with the eating habits of Gentile Christians. Though they were not bound under the Law of Moses, they were bound under the Law of Love. The Law of Love told them, "Don't unnecessarily antagonize your Jewish neighbors, both in and out of the church."

As **Wiersbe** says "It was simply a matter of not being a stumbling block to the weak or to the lost (Ro 14:13-21)."

**And from what is strangled and from blood - Strangled** (pniktos from pnigo = to choke) means choked to death and in this context refers to strangled meat, meaning the flesh of animals killed by strangling without shedding their blood. The Law of Moses prohibited the Israelites from eating of meat that had not been drained of blood (Lev 17:13, 14, Dt 12:16, 23), so the Gentiles were to refrain from this practice out of sensitivity and love for their Jewish brethren. Remember that "**Kosher**" meat is meat that comes from clean animals that have been killed properly so that the blood has been totally drained from the body.

**David Jeremiah** wrote, "It was considered a delicacy among pagans to strangle an animal and cook the meat without draining the blood. This was prohibited under Jewish law and, like meat sacrificed to idols, was still a cultural issue for Jews. So Gentiles were being asked not to create offense among their Jewish brethren by continuing this practice."

**Arnold** - The use of blood was common among the Gentiles. They drank blood often at their sacrifices and when making covenants

and compacts. Yet there is a higher reason for draining blood. The life is in the blood (Lev. 17:11, 12). Blood was given by God to sustain life and make atonement for sin. Eating or drinking blood would be very offensive to the Jewish Christian when it was a delicacy for the Gentiles. ([Acts 15:13-35 The Jerusalem Council - Practice](#))

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**Question - [What does the Bible say about eating food/meat that has been sacrificed to idols?](#)**

**Answer:** One of the struggles in the early church concerned meat which had been sacrificed to idols. Debates over what to eat might seem strange to most of us in modern society, but to the first-century believers, it was a subject of great consequence. As the apostles dealt with the issue, they gave instructions on several broader topics with application for today:

**Unity within the church.** In the early years of the church, as Gentile converts began joining Jewish believers in local fellowships, an issue arose concerning the eating of meat. Greco-Roman society was saturated with idol worship, and it was common for meat sold in the marketplace to have been consecrated as a sacrifice to false gods prior to its sale. The Jews would have nothing to do with such meat, wary of “unclean” food-handling practices and believing that to partake of consecrated meat was to give tacit approval of idol worship—kind of a “second-hand” idolatry. The Gentiles rejected the notion that such meat was tainted and held that they could eat meat sacrificed to idols without endorsing idolatry—they had not actually offered the sacrifice, after all. The matter was becoming a point of contention within the church.

The church in Syrian Antioch, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, struggled with this issue (Acts 15). The Jerusalem Council settled the matter by urging Gentile converts to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:29). This decision was made not to promote legalism but to keep peace within the church. Since eating meat offered to idols was a divisive issue—carrying the possibility of scandalizing fellow believers—abstinence was expedient. Compliance with the council’s directive assured that, at the next church potluck, a Jewish believer could eat the brisket he was served with confidence, knowing it had never been part of a sacrificial cow. And the Gentile believer could not be accused of participating in idol worship.

With its ruling, the Jerusalem Council affirmed the need for deference, or consideration for the scruples of others. The principle is one of self-denial; we should be willing to lay down our personal rights for the sake of maintaining unity in the body of Christ. Spiritual growth takes priority over personal preferences.

**Causing a weaker brother to sin.** In 1 Corinthians 8:4-13, Paul clarifies the teaching on this subject. First, he says that eating meat offered to an idol is not immoral, because “an idol is nothing at all.” An idol is an inanimate object. “Food,” he says, “does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.” The meat itself is amoral. However, there is more to consider, namely the **brother with a weak conscience**. Some believers, especially those with a background of idol worship, were still very sensitive concerning this issue and considered it morally wrong to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Under no circumstances, Paul says, should a believer encourage another believer to violate his conscience. To the pure, all things are pure (Titus 1:15), but to one with a weak conscience, meat taken from pagan temples was spiritually defiled. It would be better never to eat meat again than to cause a believer to sin against his conscience.

The “**weaker**” **brother** is not someone who simply objects to a certain practice, but one who is in danger of falling into sin.

To illustrate, let’s say there are two 1st-century Christians named Demetrius and Clement. Both are former idolaters, now saved by faith in Christ. Demetrius shuns everything to do with his old way of life, including the meat sold in the marketplace, because, for him, eating such meat would constitute a return to paganism. Clement avoids the temple and refuses to participate in the pagan festivals, but he has no problem eating the meat from the market. Clement understands (correctly) that an idol has no power to corrupt good meat, and, for him, eating such meat is a non-issue. Then one day, as both men are in the marketplace, Demetrius sees Clement eating meat that was sacrificed to idols. Demetrius is horrified, but Clement laughs it off and encourages Demetrius to eat some, too. When Demetrius hesitates, Clement cuts off a piece and hands it to him. Demetrius—emboldened by Clement’s confidence—eats the meat. **Biblically, both believers have sinned. Clement sinned by violating the conscience of a fellow believer. Demetrius sinned in that he essentially returned to idolatry—at least, that’s what his conscience is telling him.** More importantly, Demetrius is learning how to ignore his conscience—a very dangerous thing to learn.

The principle here is that the conscience of a weaker Christian is more important than individual freedom. Doing something “permitted” should never hinder the spiritual health of someone else.

**Maintaining a pure testimony.** In 1 Corinthians 10:25-32, Paul again emphasizes the believer’s liberty and what should limit that liberty. If you buy meat for your own use, don’t inquire where it came from; it doesn’t really matter whether it was sacrificed to an idol or not. “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1). However, if you are invited to dinner and someone there says, “This meat was offered to idols,” then graciously refrain from eating. Since your associate obviously considers the meat to be

“tainted” by the idols, do not eat it for his conscience’s sake—even though your own conscience is fine. The Christian glorifies God when he limits his freedom for the spiritual benefit of others.

**Compromise with the world.** In the letter to the church of Thyatira, Jesus rebukes them for tolerating a prophetess who “misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols” (Revelation 2:20). This is a different situation from what Paul was dealing with in Corinth. It seems that members of the church of Thyatira were partaking of the pagan “love feasts,” celebrated with gross immorality and feasting. These believers were not simply buying meat in the marketplace; they were actually attending idolatrous festivals and joining in the sin of the idolaters. (See verse 14 for a similar rebuke of the church of Pergamos.)

**Here is a summary of the Bible’s teaching on eating meat sacrificed to idols:**

Eating meat offered to an idol is not inherently wrong. Meat is not “defiled” because it was taken from a pagan sacrifice. God “richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 Timothy 6:17). However, some Christians consider meat offered to an idol to be defiled, and for them it is, since they must follow their conscience. Their scruples should be respected by other Christians with a stronger conscience. Love dictates that all Christians make allowances for their weaker brothers.

There are certain cultures today where idolatry is still practiced and where the specifics of the Bible’s teaching about sacrificial meat are still timely. For the rest of us, here are the principles which should govern our participation in the “gray areas” of life:

- 1) Having the “right” to do something does not mean we are free to do it in every circumstance, regardless of its effects on others.
- 2) The believer’s liberty in Christ can and should be voluntarily limited in order not to cause a weaker brother to sin by violating his conscience. Liberty is limited in love.
- 3) Maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of love may require a believer to give up his personal “right” to a thing. “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1).
- 4) We should avoid anything that would make a weak Christian think less of his faith or that would make an unsaved person feel more at ease in his sin. [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

**Acts 15:21 "For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."**

KJV Acts 15:21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

- **Sabbath** Acts 13:15,27; Nehemiah 8:1-12; Luke 4:16
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**MOSES READ ALOUD  
EVERY SABBATH**

**For (gar)** is a term of explanation. in this context explaining why James gave the Gentiles instructions that were in effect restrictions.

As alluded to above, since many of the Jews in the synagogues scattered throughout the Roman Empire would later become Christians, anything associated with idolatry or sexual impurity would be very repulsive to them. If the Gentiles voluntarily obeyed the instructions this would remove dietary scruples as an obstacle when presenting the Gospel to these Jews coming from a background steeped in Mosaic Law. These Jews of course would still have to by faith "jump" the "hurdle" of the Gospel truth that they could be saved independent of any merit attained by keeping the Law. In short, the Gentiles not giving these Jews a stumbling block would make it more likely that the Jews would understand that salvation was on the basis of faith alone in Christ alone.

**MacArthur** - To needlessly violate the Mosaic sanctions would destroy the church’s credibility with unbelieving Jews and also offend believing ones. It would be an abuse of the freedom in Christ believers enjoy.

**Constable** explains that "In the weekly synagogue Scripture readings, teachers of the Mosaic Law had stressed Jewish scruples regarding these matters for generations. Consequently the Jews regarded them as extremely important. If Gentile Christians disregarded the convictions of these Jews, they would only alienate those they hoped to bring to faith in Jesus Christ or to growth in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 8:13). James was not putting Gentile converts under the Mosaic Law by imposing these restrictions. He was urging them to limit their exercise of Christian liberty to make their witness to unsaved Jews more effective and their fellowship with saved

Jews more harmonious (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23)."

**Charles Ryrie** wrote that "If there was ever a good opportunity to say that the Gentiles were under the law this was it; for that would have settled the matter simply and quickly. But the apostles, who were Jews themselves, recognized that the law had no force any longer, and they did not try to impose it." (The End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:495 (July-September 1967):243. Cf. Mark 7:18-19; Luke 16:16; John 1:17; Acts 10:12; Rom 7:6; 10:4; 14:17; 1 Cor. 8:8; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 3:19, 23; 4:9-11; 5:1; 6:2; Col. 2:17; Heb. 7:12; 9:10)

**Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath** - **Moses** stands for the Pentateuch or Torah which was preached and read. In these settings the Jews whether believers or not, would be understandably sensitive to certain practices. Recall that the first place Paul would go to in a new Roman city would be to the Jewish Synagogue. **Synagogues** should have been (and frequently were) a place of teaching and proclamation of the Gospel (Mt 4:23, 9:35, 12:9, 13:54, Mk 6:2, Lk 4:15, 16, Lk 4:44, 6:6, 13:10, Jn 6:59, 18:20, Acts 9:20 = Paul immediately "began to proclaim Jesus," Acts 13:5 = Paul proclaimed "the word of God," Acts 14:1 = place Paul, et al, spoke and where "a large number of people believed," Acts 17:17, 18:4, 18:19, 19:8 = Paul, et al reasoned with various audiences in synagogues).

**Preach** (2784) (**kerusso** from **kerux/keryx** = a herald - one who acts as the medium of the authority of one who proclamation he makes; **kerugma** = the thing preached or the message) means to proclaim (publicly) or to herald or act as a public crier - the town official who would make a proclamation in a public gathering.

**Read** (314) (**anaginosko** from **aná** = emphatic, again + **ginosko** = know <> know again) literally to know again or to recognize again. It came to mean to distinguish between, to know accurately and then to read. In the NT **anaginosko** is only used with the meaning of to read (albeit once in a figurative sense of men "reading" the lives of the Corinthian saints as one would an actual written letter), especially referring to reading aloud and to public reading, as Luke describes in this passage.

**Synagogues** (4864) (**sunagoge** from **sunágo** = lead together, assemble or bring together) refers to a group of people "going with one another" (**sunago**) literally describes a bringing together or congregating in one place. Eventually, **sunagoge** came to mean the place where they congregated together. The word was used to designate the buildings other than the central Jewish temple where the Jews congregated for worship. Historically, the Synagogues originated in the Babylonian captivity after the 586 BC destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar and served as places of worship and instruction.

**Sabbath** (4521) (**sabbaton** from **shabath** - 07676 = to cease from work, intermission - see note on **shabath**) is the seventh day of the week, held sacred by the Jews (cf Mt 12:8; Mk 2:27f; Lk 6:7, 9; Jn 5:9f, 18; Acts 1:12; 13:27, 44)

**Acts 15:22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas--Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,**

KJV Acts 15:22 Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

- **Then it seemed good** Acts 15:23,25; 6:4,5; 2 Samuel 3:36; 2 Chronicles 30:4,12
- **to send** Acts 15:27; 8:14; 11:22
- **Barsabas** Acts 1:23
- **Silas** Acts 15:27,32,40; 16:19,25,29; 17:4,10,14; 18:5; 1 Th 1:1; 2 Th 1:1; 1 Pe 5:12 Silvanus
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## CHURCH CONSENSUS

**Consensus** means agreement in the judgment or opinion reached by a group as a whole, among **all** the people involved. **Consensus** is a group decision making process that seeks the consent of **all** participants. In the case of the Jerusalem Council they "succeeded" and I suggest it was because they had surrendered their individual rights to the Spirit of Christ Who is the One Who brings unity to the church! There can be no sweeter savor from saints ascending to the heart of God our Father than to see a church that is named "Consensus" so to speak! May the Spirit have His way in all of Christ's bodies around the world that they would all seek to be pleasing to the Father. Amen.

**In essentials unity,**

**in nonessentials liberty,  
in all things charity.**

This scene of **unity** of **polity** recalls the beautiful words of David in Ps 133:1

Behold, how good and how pleasant (delightful, agreeable) it is for brothers to dwell together in unity (Heb **-yachad** - one accord)!

**Ray Stedman** - So the first principle of guidance from God, especially in doctrinal matters, is that unanimous agreement marks the mind of the Spirit.

**Bock**: The key term in the letter is the repeated expression **"it seemed good"** (Acts 15:22, 25, 28), pointing to the judgment they have all reached.

**Longenecker** comments that ""When one considers the situation of the Jerusalem church in A.D. 49, the decision reached by the Jerusalem Christians must be considered one of the boldest and most magnanimous in the annals of church history. While still attempting to minister exclusively to the nation, the council refused to impede the progress of that other branch of the Christian mission whose every success meant further difficulty for them from within their own nation." (EBC)

**Then it seemed good** - This is a "A regular idiom at the beginning of decrees." (Robertson) **It seemed good** is the translation of one Greek verb (**dokeo** Acts 15:22, 25, 28, 34) which in this context means it seemed proper or best.

**To the apostles and the elders, with the whole church** - The key word here is **"whole"** from the Greek **holos** which is an adjective that gives us our English word **"whole"**. The Greek word **holos** speaks of all parts present and working as a whole, "the total being greater than the mere sum of the parts." (Hill). **Holos** speaks of *entirety*, with no parts missing, and is used to describe how a saint is to love God (**holos** is used 4 times) in Mark 12:30, loving Him with **all** of our being! The agreement described in this passage reflects God pleasing **"holistic harmony!"** (where "holistic" is derived from Greek "holos")" Of course we know that is not natural or humanly possible, but reflects the supernatural work of the Spirit on submitted souls. Paul alludes to this supernatural unity in his letter to the Ephesians writing "Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. (Eph 4:3-4NLT)

**A T Robertson** comments - "Apparently a vote was taken which was unanimous...It was a great victory. But James was a practical leader and he did not stop with speeches and a vote."

**To choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas** - This is all we know of **Judas called Barsabbas**, who clearly was a respected leader in the church at Jerusalem (**leading men among the brethren**). While the text does not state specifically, one can deduce from the importance of their assignment that they were dependable, reliable and trustworthy men, who were more than simply "mailmen" carrying the "mail" from Jerusalem!

Acts 15:27 explains that the purpose of sending **Judas called Barsabbas and Silas** was to "report the same things by word of mouth." In other words these men would verbally corroborate what was written in the letter. Good communication was critical in this sensitive issue so that there were no misunderstandings. **Judas called Barsabbas** ("son of Sabbath") is a distinctly Jewish name lending credence to Jewish believers, whereas **Silas** who was a Romans citizen (Acts 16:37) could speak from the Hellenistic or Gentile perspective.

**Herschel Ford** wrote, "While we know one Judas who betrayed Christ, here is one who was faithful to Christ and who was honored by the church. It is not the name which counts, it is what is in the heart."

**To choose** (1586) see discussion below of **eklego**

**Kent** explains the importance of **Judas** and **Silas** - This would alleviate any possible criticism that the results of the Council were unfairly reported by Paul. Of the two chosen from Jerusalem, Judas is not otherwise known to us. He has the same surname as Joseph Barsabbas, the other candidate with Matthias for the vacant apostleship (1:23), and it is commonly supposed they were brothers. Silas is apparently the same person who is called **Silvanus** in the epistles (2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Th 1:1; 2 Th. 1:1; 1 Pe 5:12).

**Spurgeon** - James summed up the evidence, and the brethren saw their way clear to a decision which was hearty and unanimous. Barnabas and Silas were sent to Antioch with a letter containing the opinion which had been so ably stated by James and supported by the whole body of disciples. Oh, that all disputes among Christians could be settled in such a manner!

**Silas** - This is the first mention of Silas in the Bible, but he pops several more times in Acts (All 13 uses in NT = Acts 15:22; Acts 15:27; Acts 15:32; Acts 15:34; Acts 15:40; Acts 16:19; Acts 16:25; Acts 16:29; Acts 17:4; Acts 17:10; Acts 17:14; Acts 17:15; Acts 18:5). Almost all authorities identify **Silas** with the name **"Silvanus"**, which is the Latin form of the same name that is Grecized in **Silas**. (BDAG). Here are the 4 occurrences of **Silvanus** - 2 Co. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:12.



**Silas/Silvanus** -Silas was a Hellenistic Jew before his conversion, and a Roman citizen like Paul (Acts 16:37). For some reason, he remained in Antioch, so that when Paul was looking for replacements for Barnabas and Mark, who had broken with him, Silas was available. On their three-year journey, he preached, was stoned, and was jailed with Paul. They made their way, with Timothy and Luke, through Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth. Silas found his niche in Corinth and remained there, preaching and teaching, after Paul departed for Ephesus. He may have helped compose Paul's letters to the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 2:1). Also called Silvanus, Silas later joined Peter in Rome and may have served as Peter's secretary and co-authored 1 Peter (1 Peter 5:12). Legend has him returning to Corinth, where he became the city's first bishop. He reportedly died in northern Greece.

**Leading men among the brethren** - In Acts 15:32 Luke records "Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message." They had the spiritual gift of prophecy and they utilized their gift! So they are men who know the Word and are able to proclaim the Word in a way that it has practical impact/applicational impact on those who hear. Judas and Silas had delivered the written word from the Jerusalem Council but now it was time for them to give the spoken word.

Note that the use of this same Greek word (*hegeomai*) in Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24 indicates that this word is not just a complimentary title. For example in Hebrews 13:7+ the writer encourages his Jewish readers to **Remember** (present imperative) **those who led you** (*hegeomai* in present tense), who spoke the word of God to you (cf Judas and Silas in Acts 15:32); and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith."

**Leading** (present tense) (2233)(*hegeomai* from **ago** = to lead, carry, bring) properly means "lead the way," and in this context describes those who are leaders in the church at Jerusalem. *Hegeomai* carries important responsibility and hence "casts a heavy vote" (i.e., influence) and deserves cooperation by those who are led (see three uses in Hebrews 13 = Heb 13:7, 17, 24, cf "chief speaker" in Acts 14:12). In secular Greek *hegeomai* was used to describe the pagan god *Hermes* as "the leader of the word." The second sense of *hegeomai* in the NT refers to what is displayed before ("led" before) the mind in priority position for important consideration and evaluation. Thayer says *hegeomai* "denotes a belief resting not on one's inner feelings or sentiment, but on the due consideration of external grounds, the weighing and comparing of facts." The idea is that *hegeomai* refers to the consideration or thought one has *in mind*, which determines how other thoughts or conclusions follow from it. In this sense, *hegeomai* pictures one giving careful thought to something and not making a quick decision. One can see how the second meaning of *hegeomai* would be reflected in the person who is designated a **leader**.

**THOUGHT** - If there was an important mission for the church, would you be selected? Could you be entrusted with leading others? Are you faithful to the Lord and His church? Judas and Silas had the notoriety in the church as being leaders of the church of Jesus Christ.

### Bob Utley on [Silas/Silvanus](#)

Silas, or Silvanus, was the man Paul chose to go with him on the second missionary journey after Barnabas and John Mark went back to Cyprus.

- A. He is first mentioned in the Bible in Acts 15:22, where he is called a chief man among the brethren of the Jerusalem Church.
- B. He was also a prophet (cf. Acts 15:32).
- C. He was a Roman citizen like Paul (cf. Acts 16:37).
- D. He and Judas Barsabbas were sent to Antioch by the Jerusalem Church to inspect the situation (cf. Acts 15:22, 30–35).
- E. Paul mentions him in 2 Cor. 1:19 as a fellow gospel preacher.
- F. Later he is identified with Peter in writing 1 Peter. (cf. 1 Pet. 5:12).
- G. Both Paul and Peter call him Silvanus, while Luke calls him Silas (the Aramaic form of Saul). It is possible that Silas was his Jewish name and Silvanus his Latin name (cf. F. F. Bruce, Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free, p. 213).

**Acts 15:23 and they sent this letter by them, "The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.**

KJV Acts 15:23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:

NET Acts 15:23 They sent this letter with them: From the apostles and elders, your brothers, to the Gentile brothers and sisters in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, greetings!

- **The apostles** Acts 15:4,22
- **greetings** Acts 23:26; Romans 16:3-16; James 1:1; 2 John 1:3,13; 3 John 1:14
- **brethren** Acts 11:18; 14:27; 21:25
- **Syria** Acts 15:41; 18:18; 21:3; Galatians 1:21
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE GREETING OF THE LETTER FROM THE COUNCIL

**And they sent this letter by them** - Literally "they wrote by hand" which is an idiomatic way of saying they were sending a letter.

**THOUGHT** - Paul Apple makes a wonderful point in our texting happy, "high tech, low touch" world - "Verbal communication by letter is important – but look how they placed the priority on face-to-face communication – we must make sure we don't lose this emphasis in today's world of emailing and text messaging and tweeting – when you are together in person, the communication is so much more effective – how do you show someone you love them? Love letters are great – but they better bring back memories of love expressed in person or excite the anticipation of renewed face-to-face enjoyment – not enough to have a verbal relationship over the air waves."

**The apostles** ([ethnos](#)) and the **brethren who are elders** ([presbuteros](#)) - "This letter is the writing out of the judgment of James and apparently written by him as the President." (Robertson)

**To the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles** ([ethnos](#)) - Notice the significant play on words **brethren** to **brethren**. The point is that there are no racial distinctions in Christ (Read Gal 3:28+). **Brethren** ([adelphos](#)) in this context speaks of those of the same "new birth" and so they are fellow believers who happen to also be Gentiles. As Jack Andrews says "They were accepted in the beloved (Eph 1:6KJV) and they were accepted by the beloved!"

Mention of the locations "**Syria and Cilicia**" indicate that Luke does not record all significant missionary work and church planting that had taken place among the Gentiles in these regions.

**Robertson** - The inquiry had been sent to the apostles and elders (Acts 15:2+) though the whole church joined in the welcome (Acts 15:4+ = "they were received by the **church** and the **apostles** and the **elders**") and in the decision (Acts 15:22). The **apostles** and **elders** send the epistle, but call themselves "brothers to brothers," *Fratres Fratibus Salutem* (Brethren salute brethren). "**The brethren**" (tois adelphois) addressed (dative case) are of the **Gentiles** (ex ethnōn) and those in **Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia**, because they were immediately involved. But the decision of this Conference was meant for Gentile Christians everywhere (Acts 16:4+). (Word Pictures in the New Testament)

**Swindoll** makes the point that "It appears that by this time the churches in Galatia, where Paul and Barnabas had ministered on the first missionary journey, were struggling with this issue as well (cf. Gal. 1:6+; Gal 2:3-4+), but Paul already had written a strong letter (**ED**: Epistle of Galatians - date is debatable) upholding the doctrine of grace." (Ibid)

**DATING GALATIANS** - "The problem in dating Galatians centers around the relationship of the letter to the Jerusalem Conference (c. A.D. 49-50), since both were concerned with the question of circumcision and Gentile salvation. Since Paul does not mention the decision of the Conference, some feel that Galatians must have been written in A.D. 48-49, after the first missionary journey and just prior to the Conference. The major difficulty with that date is that it leaves very little time for the events discussed to transpire. Others date the letter A.D. 55-57, several years after the Jerusalem Conference. This is based on the presupposition that Galatians 2:1-10 is a reference to the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15). This view assumes that Paul does not mention the apostles' decision on circumcision because he is arguing that his doctrine is from God, not from men." (Believer's Study Bible)

**MacArthur** - In Galatians 2, Paul described his visit to the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 (see Gal 2:1), so he must have written Galatians after that event. Since most scholars date the Jerusalem Council about A.D. 49, the most likely date for Galatians is shortly thereafter.

**Greetings** (5463) ([chairo](#)) means to be "cheer" full, calmly happy or well-off. **Chairo** implies and imparts joy. **Chairo** was used in greetings (welcome, good day, hail to you, I am glad to see you) in the imperative mood implying a wish for well being or happiness to the recipient (Mt 26:49). **Chairo** is used in the introduction to a letter (Acts 15:23; 23:26; James 1:1). **Chairo** is translated "**Hail!**" several times in the Gospels (Mt 26:49, 27:29, Mk 15:18, Lk 1:27).

It is interesting that **chairo** literally means to **rejoice** (here is in present tense - "continually rejoice"), which is exactly what the Gentiles did when the the letter was read to them, for "they **rejoiced** (also **chairo**) because of its encouragement." (Acts 15:31+)

**Vincent on greetings** - It occurs nowhere else in the salutation of a New Testament epistle save in the Epistle of James 1:1. The ordinary Greek salutation, hail! welcome! Also used at parting: **joy be with you**. Compare the same expression in the letter from the church at Jerusalem, Acts 15:23; one of the very few peculiarities of style which connect this epistle with the **James** of the Acts. It does not occur in the address of any other of the Apostolic Epistles.. It appears in the letter of Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:26).

**Cilicia** used 8x in NT - Acts 6:9; Acts 15:23; Acts 15:41; Acts 21:39; Acts 22:3; Acts 23:34; Acts 27:5; Gal. 1:21.

See [this map](#) (from **Holman Bible Atlas** copyrighted © 1998 B&H Publishing Group, used by permission, all rights reserved) of the **Roman province of Cilicia** which is in the right lower corner of modern day Turkey and is the site of the city of **Tarsus**. Recall that after his conversion Luke records in Acts 9:28-30+ that Saul (Paul) "was with them (Who? Acts 9:27+), moving about freely **in Jerusalem**, speaking out boldly (indicative of his being Spirit filled - Acts 9:17+, cf Acts 4:31+) in the name of the Lord. And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic [**Hellenistes** - Jews]; but they were attempting to put him to death. But when the brethren learned of it, **they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus**." In his letter to the Galatians Paul described this same episode adding that "Then (apparently after 3 years in Arabia - Gal 1:18+) I went into the regions of Syria and **Cilicia**." (Gal 1:21+)

In Acts 22:3 Paul testified "I am a Jew, born in **Tarsus** (5x in NT = Acts 9:11; Acts 9:30; Acts 11:25; Acts 21:39; Acts 22:) **of Cilicia**, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today." So Saul/Paul was not only born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but he was "sovereignly sent" back to Tarsus (because of the threat in Jerusalem which God allowed) after his conversion to Christianity. The ESV Timeline estimates that Saul ministered for some 8 years (some say 10 years) in Syria, Tarsus, and Cilicia from 37 AD to 45 AD. The Scripture is silent about this period of his life, but the fact that the letter from the Jerusalem Council is being carried indicates that Gentiles were evangelized and presumably had formed churches in those regions. By deduction there is little doubt that the origin of those Gentile brethren fellowships was the fruit of Paul's ministry during his 8-10 year "divine exile" in Tarsus, the capital of Syria.

**Acts 15:24 "Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls,**

KJV Acts 15:24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, [[saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:]] (Bracketed text only in Textus Receptus not Nestle-Aland)

- **some of our number** Jeremiah 23:16; Galatians 2:4; 5:4,12; 2 Timothy 2:14; Titus 1:10,11; 1 John 2:19
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **A DELEGATION OF DEADLY DECEIVERS**

A **delegation** refers to a group chosen to represent others. In this context, this **delegation** did not represent the larger group of Jewish believers in the church at Jerusalem. These Judaizers had as their goal to deliberately deceive the Gentile believers and turn them from the grace way to the law way, a "highway" which leads straight to hell! These Judaizers recall the piercing words of Jesus who declared "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, **you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves**." (Mt 23:15)

**Since** (because)(1894)(**epeidē** from **epí** = "on, fitting" + **ei** = "if", which assumes the premise is factual + **dē** = "indeed") which assumes what precedes is factual (in this case some of their number...) and emphasizes what follows is valid. **Epeide** means as indeed, as now, spoken in the NT only of a ground or motive, meaning since indeed, since now, because now, inasmuch as. Regardless of how **epeidē** is translated, it carries this twofold sense: the reader should assume what precedes is factual (emphatically true); and therefore embrace what should ("must") follow as its necessary (corresponding) conclusion.

**We have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction- We have heard** is a bit of an understatement! This in effect is an "apology" to the Gentile believers for the disturbance caused by the deceivers claiming to be sent out by the church at Jerusalem. "**Our number**" identifies the men in Acts 15:1 as from the Jerusalem church, but they were not sent as an official envoy,

but went to Antioch of their own volition and with their own Judaistic agenda! The word for "no" is the Greek word (ou) signifying that the Judaizers had received absolutely no instructions or orders from the leaders of the church at Jerusalem. In short, these Judaizers had absolutely no authority to teach their doctrines devoid of grace and laden with legalism! Beware, for their [ilk](#) still [lurk](#) about, looking for unwary victims, especially in grace enabled churches!

As **Jack Andrews** says "Not everyone that goes out from the church is endorsed by the church!"

**John Phillips** adds that these self-motivated "snakes" "had neither the backing of the Bible nor of the brethren. The apostles and leading elders of the church in Jerusalem wanted it known that they not only had no part in that legalistic teaching, but they disassociated themselves from it altogether." (Exploring Acts)

**Instruction** (1291) (**diastello** from **dia** = [asunder](#), intensifies + **stello** = to send) means to send through referring to giving an explicit command that is unambiguously, unmistakably clear. It means to draw asunder, to distinguish, to set forth distinctly, to command. **Diastello** is a stronger verb than [entellomai](#) (to command) as we see for example in Mk 7:36 where Jesus "gave them orders not to tell anyone (that He had healed a deaf man)." **BDAG** - to "define or express in no uncertain terms what one must do" and so to give strict orders (Heb 12:20). When **diastello** is followed by a negative it means to prohibit or forbid (Mt 16:20, Mark 5:43; 7:36; 8:15; 9:9; ). It is used 8x in the NT only in the middle voice

The idea in Ac 15:24 is, 'we gave no express injunction on the points which these Judaizers have raised'"

**Vincent** on **diastello** - The word originally means to put asunder; hence, to distinguish, and so of a commandment or injunction, to distinguish and emphasize it. Therefore implying express orders, and so always in the New Testament, where it is almost uniformly rendered charge. The idea here is, then, "we gave no express injunction on the points which these Judaizers have raised."

**Diastello** - 8x in NT command(1), gave...orders(3), gave...instruction(1), giving orders(1), ordered(1).

Matt. 16:20; Mk. 5:43; Mk. 7:36; Mk. 8:15; Mk. 9:9; Acts 15:24; Heb. 12:20

**Diastello** in the Septuagint -

Gen. 25:23; Gen. 30:28; Gen. 30:35; Gen. 30:40; Lev. 5:4; Lev. 10:10; Lev. 11:47; Lev. 16:26; Lev. 22:21; Num. 8:14; Num. 16:9; Num. 35:11; Deut. 10:8; Deut. 19:2; Deut. 19:7; Deut. 29:21; Jos. 20:7; Jdg. 1:19; Ruth 1:17; 1 Sam. 3:1; 1 Ki. 8:12; 2 Ki. 2:11; 1 Chr. 23:13; 2 Chr. 19:10; 2 Chr. 23:18; Ezr. 8:24; Ezr. 10:8; Ezr. 10:11; Ezr. 10:16; Neh. 8:8; Ps. 66:14; Ps. 68:14; Ps. 106:33; Jer. 22:14; Ezek. 3:18; Ezek. 3:19; Ezek. 3:20; Ezek. 3:21; Ezek. 22:26; Ezek. 24:14; Ezek. 39:14; Ezek. 42:20; Hos. 13:15; Mic. 5:8; Nah. 1:12; Mal. 3:11;

**Robertson** on **have disturbed** - What a picture of turmoil in the church in Antioch, words, words, words. Aorist tense of the common verb *tarassō*, to agitate, to make the heart palpitate (John 14:1, 27 = "*heart be troubled*") (Ibid)

**Have disturbed** (troubled, stirred up) (5015) (**tarasso**) literally means to put in motion, to shake back and forth and therefore to agitate and stir up (like the pool in John 5:4,7, Lxx = Ezek 32:2, 13, Isa 51:15). **Tarasso** is used twice in Acts 17 to describe the Jews (YES AGAIN THE JEWS!) who were stirring up the crowds against **Paul and Silas** (Acts 17:4; see Acts 17:8, 13+). In his letter to the Galatians Paul used *tarasso* (again of the Judaizers) writing "there are some who are **disturbing** you and want to distort the gospel of Christ" (Gal 1:7+) and "the one who is **disturbing** you will bear his judgment, whoever he is." (Gal 5:10+). And so it is clear that the goal of the Judaizers was not to educate the Gentiles but to "**distort** ([metastrepho](#) = to turn something to its opposite state, i.e., try to turn grace to law!) the Gospel of Christ!"

**Andrews** adds that in this verse *tarasso* "is a present participle in the Greek language which tells that the church was still disturbed over this false teaching. The words of the false teachers had a negative impact on the church at Antioch. It caused them trouble! Legalism and false teaching will always be a burden to true believers."

**Tarasso** is a strong verb and is used figuratively in this passage and describes a setting in motion of what needs to remain still or at ease. The picture of "move back-and-forth" indicates that the instruction had upset what was previously settled making the hearers restless and filled with anxious thoughts. The hearers had been thrown so to speak in a state of needlessly vacillating between emotions and hence were experiencing restless agitation. In sum, *tarasso* pictures the minds of the Gentiles who heard the false teaching of the Judaizers as being stirred up and agitated. The passive voice is always used in the NT with a negative meaning as in this present passage where it conveys the sense of emotional disturbance or inner turmoil, so that those who had heard this "**instruction**" were unsettled, thrown into confusion.

**THOUGHT** - Beloved child of God, this is one of the effects of false teaching. If you ever hear a sermon, read a book, hear a teaching that disturbs your soul deep down, then you need to consider that the instruction may not be sound (healthy) doctrine that edifies your mind and strengthens your soul (and remember the Spirit of Truth indwells you! cf Jn 14:17, 15:26, 16:13, Ro 8:9), but unbiblical teaching that instead of building up, tears

down and instead of increasing your faith, causes you to begin to have doubts and fears. That is not the effect of the Holy Word! (cf Ro 10:17) And just because these "instructors" appear to have gravitas and an air of erudition, pay heed to your response (cf 1 Jn 2:20+, 1 Jn 2:27+, 1 Cor 2:12, Heb 5:14+), and remember Paul's clear warning to the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:29-31+).

**With their words** - Specifically the words "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." (Acts 15:1+) This is a good reminder for all of us. Our words can be very disturbing to others. In the context of spiritual matters this can be especially true and can disturb the faith of others. (Acts 15)

The **KJV** translates as **subverting** which is not a bad translation for our English word **Subversion** refers to a process by which the values and principles of a system in place, are contradicted or reversed." In this case the intent of the Judaizers into contradict and reverse the Gospel of Grace!

**Unsettling** (present tense = continually)(384)(**anaskeuazo** from **aná** = back + **skeuázō** = to prepare, make ready from **skeuos** = a vessel, utensil, implement) is used only here (not in Septuagint) and literally means to pack up baggage, to tear down, or to dismantle. In other words it describes a process of packing up instead of making ready in order to remove. Figuratively in the present context it means to cause inward distress, to upset, to subvert, to overthrow or to unsettle.

**Vincent on disturbed** - Originally, it means to pack up baggage, and so to carry away; hence, to dismantle or disfigure. So Thucydides (4:116) relates that **Brasidas** captured Lecythus, and then pulled it down and dismantled it (*anaskeusas*). From this comes the more general meaning to lay waste, or ravage. The idea here is that of turning the minds of the Gentile converts upside down; throwing them into confusion like a dismantled house.

**Andrews** adds that **anaskeuazo** "was used to speak of going bankrupt or a military force plundering a town. It is always unsettling to be under financial strain and to have to declare bankruptcy. How would the occupants of the city feel when a military force comes in and takes over and removes everything they have? It is unsettling! False teachers never bring peace because they reject the Prince of Peace and they serve the divisive devil!"

In short, **anaskeuazo** in this passage gives us a vivid picture of people with false (*scrambled*) theology trying to "re-arrange" or "scramble" the theology of the Gentile believers! It is fascinating that in one papyrus, **anaskeuazō** means "go bankrupt" which is exactly what the Judaizers are attempting to do to the saints - bring about "spiritual bankruptcy!" This reminds me of Paul's warning to young Timothy

**Retain** (present imperative) the standard (**hupotuposis**) of sound (**hugiaino** gives us "hygienic" ~ spiritually healthy) words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. **Guard** (**aurist imperative** - Do this now! It is urgent!), (NOW PAUL EXPLAINS HOW IT IS POSSIBLE TO "GUARD THE TREASURE" OF THE GOSPEL) through the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you. (2 Ti 1:13-14+)

**Your souls** (**psuche**) - Many versions translate this as "your minds" (NET, ESV; CSB has "your hearts"), but **psuche** is more literally not your minds or your hearts, but **your souls**, your innermost being. In fact in Mark 12:30 Jesus describes how we are to love God declaring "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART (**kardia**), AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL (**psuche**), AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND (**dianoia**), AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH (**ischus**).<sup>1</sup> I like what **C. S. Lewis** said - "You don't have a soul. You *are* a soul. You *have* a body." Our soul is "the point of contact between man's bodily and spiritual nature" (Green). It is "the inner life of man, equivalent to the ego, person, or personality" (DN TT).

What a stark contrast we see between the truth teachers and the false teachers, for earlier Luke had recorded when as Paul and Barnabas re-traced their journey they were "strengthening the **souls** of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22+). The Words of Truth result in strengthening of the saint's souls, but the words of untruth, half truth or overt lies are disturbing and unsettle one's souls.

**THOUGHT** - O, how we need preachers today who will have one passion, one desire, one aim, that by holding fast to the faithful Word (Titus 1:9+), they might effectively, efficiently, energetically edify and equip the saints with Bible Truth that stabilizes and strengthens their souls, yea, even the Holy Words of life that are then used by the Holy Spirit to transform the hearer more and more into the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18+) and cause the hearers to "grow in respect to their salvation" (1 Peter 2:2+) and to continually "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." (2 Peter 3:18+) (If you need some encouragement and/or motivation, bookmark and listen to some of Dr Steven Lawson's messages at Onepassion ministry! I know your time is limited, so I especially recommend the following "triad" of talks - [Energetic Students](#), [Expository Preachers](#), [Effective Evangelists](#))

**Everett F. Harrison:** The council accomplished five important things:

1. The gospel of divine grace was reaffirmed.
2. The unity of the church was safeguarded.
3. The evangelism of the Gentiles could proceed without hindrance. Most of Paul's churches were founded after the council and they were Gentile churches.
4. The Gentile churches that had already been established were given encouragement (Acts 16:4-5).
5. The future of the church as a whole was guaranteed.

**Acts 15:25 it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,**

KJV Acts 15:25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

NET Acts 15:25 we have unanimously decided to choose men to send to you along with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul,

- **it seemed good to us** Acts 15:28; Matthew 11:26; Luke 1:3
- **having become of one mind** Acts 15:6; 1:14; 2:1,46; 1 Corinthians 1:10
- **to send** Acts 15:22,27
- **our beloved Barnabas and Paul** Romans 16:12; Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7,9; Philemon 1:16; 2 Peter 3:15 Acts 15:2,35; Galatians 2:9
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## A UNANIMOUS DECISION

**Unanimous** is a great word to describe the decision of the Jerusalem Council for it means in complete agreement or acting together as a single undiversified whole. Even the **etymology** of the word is beautiful for it derives from Latin **ūnanimus** in turn composed of **ūnus**, = one + **animus** = mind. This is a perfect description of the great Greek word **homothumadon** described below.

**It seemed good to us - It seemed good** is the translation of one Greek verb ([dokeo](#) cf similar use in Acts 15:22, 25, 28, 34) which in this context means it seemed proper or best. Assuming that James is writing the letter, he is speaking for all the church, which he signifies with the pronoun "**us**."

**Having become of one mind** - The verb for **having become** (ginomai - aorist middle participle) means to come into existence. The picture in essence is that their unity of spirit came into existence supernaturally wrought by the Holy Spirit, for in Acts 15:28 Luke adds the phrase "**it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us**" So as these Jewish believers came together and discussed their differences, the Spirit so worked in their hearts so that they collectively came to or were "birthed" into a unanimous decision, a clear consensus! Glory to God!

**One mind** is a wonderful word and is a 'key word' in the book of Acts for 10 of the 11 NT uses are in this book. And as alluded to above, surely this "one mind" is (1) a reflection of the supernatural work of the Spirit in Spirit filled men and women and (2) is also undoubtedly one of the "keys" explaining why the early church had such an **indomitable** spirit as they forged a path of Gospel light into the spiritual darkness and depravity that dominated the Gentile world. O, to be part of a church where "**Homothumadon**" could be written over the doorway as you entered the sanctuary! I fear we may have to await our transport to glory, but one can always plead with God to send Spirit wrought, Christ exalting revival to His church in our increasingly darkening day! Send it Lord, for Thy Name's sake. Amen.

**Homothumadon** in NT- Acts 1:14; Acts 2:46; Acts 4:24; Acts 5:12; Acts 7:57; Acts 8:6; Acts 12:20; Acts 15:25; Acts 18:12; Acts 19:29. Ro 15:6

**One mind** (3661) (**homothumadon/homothymadon** from a combination of **homos** = same + **thumos/thymos** = temperament or mind) means with one mind, unity of mind, with one purpose, with unanimous consent, of one accord. In a word it means together (Webster says "**together**" means "in company, in union, in the same place, in the same time, in concert, as the allies made war upon France together.") One lexicon says **homothumadon** means "to be of one soul." It speaks of an action agreed upon unanimously (with one impulse) or by common consent. **Homothumadon** was frequently used in secular settings to describe the unanimity of a

synod, of creditors, of a husband and wife, of brothers (TLNT, Moulton and Milligan)

**To select men to send to you** - As alluded to earlier, the church at Jerusalem did not just send a formal letter, but they sent faces with the letter, a pattern of communication which is becoming less common in our hi tech, low touch society. Many times folks don't even hear the other person's voice, but instead receive a voiceless text message and even that is often not written out in full sentences.

**To select** (repeats Acts 15:22)(1586)(eklego) means literally to select out of a selection which signifies a very deliberate choice, a true "heart preference," with a definite outcome in mind. This verb is always in the [middle voice](#), which is reflexive and in plain language speaks of the personal involvement of the one who makes the choice. This is the very word Paul uses to describe how God "**chose** ([eklego](#)) us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him." (Eph 1:4). Peter used this same verb in Acts 15:7+ "you know that in the early days God **made a choice** among you."

**With our beloved Barnabas and Paul** - These two were clearly admired and respected by the Jerusalem church. This description reminds me of the old song "They will know we are Christians by our love" for one another. These missionaries were much loved by the Church at Jerusalem. What a contrast with their arrival in which there were strong differences of opinion. Again, do we not see the supernatural effect of the Holy Spirit, Who Alone can bring about agape love among those who initially were at odds! As the apostle John wrote "Beloved, let us love (present tense = only possible as we daily depend on the Spirit's enablement) one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." (1 John 4:7+) (1 Cor 16:22)

### [We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord](#)

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord  
And we pray that our unity will one day be restored  
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love  
Yeah they'll know we are Christians by our love

We will work with each other, we will work side by side  
We will work with each other, we will work side by side  
And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride  
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love  
Yeah, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

**Beloved** (27)([agapetos](#) from [agapao](#) = to love, [agape](#) = unconditional love, spiritual fruit borne by Spirit - Gal 5:22+) means beloved, dear, very much loved. **Agapetos** describes the love of another, this love being called out of the "giver's" heart by the preciousness of the recipient of the love (in this case Barnabas and Paul). **Agapetos** is used only of Christians as united (by covenant, the New Covenant) with God and with each other in love.

**Vincent - Barnabas and Paul.** Here, as in Acts 15:12, Barnabas is named first, contrary to the practice of Luke since Acts 13:9. Barnabas was the elder and better known, and in the church at Jerusalem his name would naturally precede Paul's. The use of the Greek salutation, and this order of the names, are two undesigned coincidences going to attest the genuineness of this first document preserved to us from the Acts of the primitive church.

## Acts 15:26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

KJV Acts 15:26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

NET Acts 15:26 who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- **have risked their lives** Acts 13:50; 14:19; Judges 5:18; 1 Corinthians 15:30; 2 Corinthians 11:23-27; Philippians 2:29,30
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL RISKY BUSINESS!

**Men who** - To whom does this refer -- Barnabas and Paul or Judas and Silas? The nearest reference to **men who** is to **Barnabas and Paul** (see technical note below)

**NET Note on men who** - Greek "**men who**"; but this can be misleading because in English the referent could be understood to be the men sent along with Barnabas and Paul rather than Barnabas and Paul themselves. This option does not exist in the Greek

original, however, since anthropois is dative and must agree with "Barnabas and Paul," while andras is accusative. By omitting the word "**men**" from the translation here (See NET translation above), it is clear in English that the phrase refers to the immediately preceding nouns "Barnabas and Paul."

**Have risked their lives** - This proclamation of the Gospel could potentially result in literal death of one's self (cf stoning of Paul Acts 14:19+, Acts 13:50+, Herod's execution of James Acts 12:1,2+). As Andrews says "What a testimony of the faith and the faithfulness of God's servants!"

**Have risked** (3860) (**paradidomi**) literally means to give over one into the power of another and in this case is might be read more literally that they were men who had "handed over their lives" or "given up their lives." I like that better than "**have risked**" because the latter does not convey the same idea. In other words, Paul and Barnabas were men who were willing to die for the Name above all names. They had surrendered their lives **TO** Christ and were now willing to surrender their lives **FOR** Christ if that was necessary! The tense is **perfect** indicating that this was a decision they had made and it had permanent effect. The **active voice** indicates it was their volitional choice to hand over their lives. What an incredible picture of dedication to the cause of the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**For the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ**- **Lord** (**kurios**) is the the possessor, owner, master, the supreme one, one who is sovereign and possesses absolute authority, absolute ownership and uncontested power. Notice Luke uses the full title of Jesus. Notice also the little possessive pronoun **our** which indicates these men's sense of personal possession of Jesus. Yes, ultimately, He is their (and our) Possessor (cf Titus 2:14+, 1 Pe 2:9+), but by virtue of their union and oneness with Christ, they also possess Him. As **Charles Hodges** wrote "To possess Christ, to be in Him, is the sum of all blessedness" (Commentary on Ephesians)

**THOUGHT** - What an awesome truth to ponder! **Our Lord**, the One Who created the Heavens and the Earth and even now daily upholds it (Heb 1:3), the One in Whom " all things hold together." (Col 1:17-18). This mighty God is **our Lord**! O, to begin to even get a slight inkling of His infinite worth, majesty, glory and and power and to think that as frail men and women crippled by the fall can lay claim to a relationship with Him! Are you living your life as if He is your **Lord**, your Master?

He is their **Lord**, their Master, their Owner, their Possessor, their Supreme Sovereign. Paul and Barnabas acknowledge they were no longer their own, but that they had been bought with a price and were committing to glorifying God in their body (1 Cor 6:19-20+). Later in Acts Paul declared

"And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. 24 "But **I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself** (or "worth anything to myself"), so that I may finish my course (a task or function involving continuity, serious, effort, and possibly obligation) and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. 25 "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. (Acts 20:22-25+)

**Name** (3686) (**onoma**) means that by which something or someone is called or known. Thus a name constitutes the distinctive designation of a person or thing. However in antiquity the **name** meant more than it does today. We use a **name** as little more than a distinguishing mark or label to differentiate one person from another. But in the ancient world the **name** signified not only the person's identity but the inherent character of the person designated by the name. Stated another way, in ancient times, one's whole character (title, reputation, person) was implied in the **name**. For example, in John 1:12 to "believe in His **Name**" (cf Jn 3:18, 20:31, 1Jn 3:23) is to believe (with a belief that results in a new, "circumcised" heart) in all Jesus is and all He has accomplished to effect our eternal redemption (Heb 9:12).

Luke's uses of **onoma** in combination with **Jesus** in Acts -

Acts 2:38 Acts 3:6 Acts 3:16 Acts 4:10 Acts 4:18 Acts 4:30 Acts 5:40 Acts 8:12 Acts 8:16 Acts 9:27 Acts 10:48 Acts 15:26 Acts 16:18 Acts 19:5 Acts 19:13 Acts 19:17 Acts 21:13 Acts 26:9

**Jack Andrews** poses a pithy personal question - Are we risking our lives for the name of Jesus Christ? Are we willing to lay our lives down for the name that is above every name? It cost the 1<sup>st</sup> century church to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and to confess His name! May we have that same resolve to:

- love His name,
- serve His name,
- honor His name,
- preach in His name,



- teach in His name,
- live in His name,
- give in His name,
- and never be ashamed of His name!

**Acts 15:27 "Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth."**

KJV Acts 15:27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.

NET Acts 15:27 Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas who will tell you these things themselves in person.

NLT Acts 15:27 We are sending Judas and Silas to confirm what we have decided concerning your question.

- **Judas** 2 John 1:12; 3 John 1:13-14
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## PERSONAL CORROBORATION FACE TO FACE

**Corroboration** means confirmation that some fact or statement is true through the use of documentary evidence. It means to add proof to an account, statement, idea, etc. with new information, in this case in the form of the verbal, face to face, personal witness of **Judas and Silas**.

**Therefore** - Term of conclusion. Based upon their Spirit "birthed" oneness of mind leading to their selection of church representatives.

**We have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things**- In other words, in addition to the witness of Barnabas and Paul, Judas and Silas would be two more witnesses from the home church in Jerusalem who would vouch for the authenticity and explain the necessity for the written instructions.

**Robertson** - Judas and Silas are specifically endorsed (perfect active indicative of apostellō) as bearers of the epistle who will also verbally confirm the contents of the letter.

**Ray Stedman** - People learn best by having truth presented in a two-fold way: Through the eye gate, and through the ear gate. These men were sent to expound the letter that was written, and to make it perfectly clear. Some people learn better through reading, some through hearing.

**Report** (declare, tell, announce, proclaim) (518)(**apaggello** from **apó** = from + **aggéllō** = tell, declare from **aggelos** = messenger ["angel"], one who speaks in place of one who has sent him) means to bring a message from any person or place. **Judas and Silas** were to continually (**present tense**) bring the report from the Jerusalem Council telling the Gentiles what had transpire.

**Luke's** uses of **apaggello** in Acts -

Acts 4:23; Acts 5:22; Acts 5:25; Acts 11:13; Acts 12:14; Acts 12:17; Acts 15:27; Acts 16:36; Acts 16:38; Acts 17:30; Acts 22:26; Acts 23:16; Acts 23:17; Acts 23:19; Acts 26:20; Acts 28:21; 1 Co. 14:25; 1 Thess. 1:9; Heb. 2:12; 1 Jn. 1:2; 1 Jn. 1:3

**By word of mouth** - In other words as alluded to above, the communication is not just on paper (or papyrus) but in person, eyeball to eyeball so to speak. This is always a wise practice when difficult decisions need to be communicated.

**John** alludes to the value of a **face to face** meeting writing...

Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak **face to face**, so that your joy may be made full. (2 John 1:12)

**Comment** - Fullness of joy is exactly the reaction of the congregation in Antioch when they heard the report from Jerusalem (Acts 15:31+), that they were **Free from the Law, O happy condition** ([listen to hymn "ONCE FOR ALL" by Philip Bliss](#) [see bio of [Philip Bliss](#) who died at the young age of 38] which he penned after meditating on Hebrews 10:10+). Of course this does not mean they could now live lawless lives (aka [antinomianism](#)), but that their salvation in Christ was fully sufficient and precluded the

need to legalistically keep the Law to add to the finished word of Christ (Jn 19:30+). They (and we) were now under (the transforming power of) grace not under (the enslaving power of) law (Ro 6:14+). The Law was now internal, being written on their (and our) hearts (Hebrews 8:10+) and the indwelling Spirit would provide the power to obey the law of love (Gal 5:14+) out of love, not legalism (cf Ro 8:13+). The lost man thinks that *freedom* is the right to do anything he desires in order to please himself, but *true freedom* in the New Covenant with Christ is the power to do what we should, doing so to please our Father in Heaven! Indeed, **oh, happy condition!**

#### [Free from the law—oh, happy condition!](#)

Jesus hath bled, and there is remission;  
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,  
Christ hath redeemed us once for all.

*Once for all—oh, sinner, receive it;  
Once for all—oh, doubter, believe it;  
Cling to the cross, the burden will fall,  
Christ hath redeemed us once for all.*

2 There on the cross your burden upbearing,  
Thorns on His brow your Savior is wearing;  
Never again your sin need appall,  
You have been pardoned once for all.

3 Now we are free—there's no condemnation;  
Jesus provides a perfect salvation:  
"Come unto Me," oh, hear His sweet call,  
Come, and He saves us once for all.

4 Children of God—oh, glorious calling,  
Surely His grace will keep us from falling;  
Passing from death to life at His call,  
Blessed salvation once for all.

I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak **face to face**.(3 John 1:13-14)

### Acts 15:28 "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials:

KJV Acts 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

- **it seemed** Acts 15:25, Mal 2:7 John 16:13; Lk 1:3, 1 Corinthians 7:25,40; 14:37; 1 Thessalonians 4:8; 1 Peter 1:12
- **Holy Spirit** - Mt 3:16, Acts 15:8. Mt 12:32. Acts 5:32, 8:29 Jn 16:13, 14. 1 Co 7:40.
- **To us** - Acts 15:19
- **greater** Acts 15:10 Matthew 11:30; 23:4; Revelation 2:24
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE GUIDANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

**For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit -It seemed good** is the translation of one Greek verb ([dokeo](#) cf similar use in Acts 15:22, 25, 28, 34) which in this context means it seemed proper or best. Note the proper order - first **the Holy Spirit** (Whose role is to guide and lead believers) and then **us**. Although this is the first mention of the Spirit in the context of the decision reached by the Jerusalem Council, there is no doubt that the Spirit was working in the background, orchestrating the unanimity of the leadership and members of the church at Jerusalem. Too often we think that we must have "signs and wonders" as indications of the Spirit working in a body, but here is an even greater sign and wonder of bringing about a unified body!

**THOUGHT** - Do you want to know how to detect whether a church is Spirit filled and Spirit energized? Look for harmony prevailing among the members who gladly respond to do His will. See related discussion of [A Spirit](#)

## [Filled Church.](#)

Jesus had promised His disciples that the **Holy Spirit** would be their Guide...

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. (John 16:13)

**THOUGHT** - Is He your Guide, your light enabling you to avoid the spiritual snares and pitfalls of the ever increasing spiritual darkness of this present evil age (Gal 1:4+), a world that is controlled by the evil one (1 John 5:19+)? See a [short excursus](#) below.

**Jack Andrews** on the Holy Spirit's role - "The Holy Spirit resided over the proceedings in the church. He had His will and His way. The Holy Spirit leads His church as we submit to Him, seek Him, are sensitive to Him, and surrender to Him to do His will. (ED: DOES THAT DESCRIBE YOUR CHURCH?) The Holy Spirit of God was the source of this teaching as the church came together in once accord and discerned the will of the Lord."

**John Phillips** adds that "The Holy Spirit had overruled all the disputing, all the discussion, all the declarations, all the details of the conference ...He had engineered the whole thing to settle once and for all the questions of faith, freedom, and fellowship in the church." (Exploring Acts)

**Robertson** - Definite claim that the church in this action had the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That fact was plain to the church from what had taken place in Caesarea and in this campaign of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:8). Jesus had promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). Even so the church deliberated carefully before deciding. What a blessing it would be if this were always true! But even so the Judaizers are only silenced for the present, not convinced and only waiting for a better day to start over again.

**And to us** - In Acts 15:25 Luke wrote "**it seemed good to us, having become of one mind** (see above on [homothumadon](#))."

**To lay upon you no greater burden** - **Robertson** has an interesting explanation of what **burden** means - The restrictions named did constitute some burden (cf. Matthew 20:12), for the old word *baros* means weight or heaviness. Morality itself is a restraint upon one's impulses as is all law a prohibition against license.

This **burden** is bearable under grace through faith in dramatic contrast to the yoke Peter described in Acts 15:19 "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" Jesus describes His yoke in Mt 11:30 explaining "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

A [burden](#) in English is generally thought of as an onerous or difficult concern, a serious or difficult responsibility that you have to deal with and to burden someone is to weigh them down with a load.

**Burden** (922)([baros](#)) literally refers to a weight (a heavy weight), burden, trouble, load. In Classic Greek *baros* refers to a weight or heaviness and then a burden. In the NT **baros** is used only figuratively meaning something pressing on one physically or emotionally either in a bad or good sense. The picture is of a person perpetually carrying an additional weight.

**Than these essentials** - Referring to the 4 main points of the letter to the Gentile disciples.

**Swindoll** on **burden** and **essentials** - Any decision to give up a freedom for the greater good of all is **aburden**. Nevertheless, the council, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, considered these burdens "**essential**" (*epanagkes*), something compulsory. The council felt compelled by the Holy Spirit and therefore felt led to exercise its authority to likewise compel the Gentile believers. Nevertheless, the provisions were not essential for salvation, but for unity (Ibid)

**Essentials** (1876)(*epanagkes* from *epi* = intensively + *anagke* = necessity) is best described as an adverb of necessity. Out of compulsion. It refers to that which is necessary in connection with the decrees from the Jerusalem Council.

**Synonyms** include inevitable, obligatory, crucial, necessary, key, vital, indispensable, needed, required, called for, requisite, important, all-important, vitally important, of the utmost importance, of great consequence, of the essence, critical, life-and-death, imperative, mandatory, compulsory, obligatory, compelling, urgent, pressing, burning, acute, paramount, preeminent, high-priority, significant, consequential. There are four **essentials**, but circumcision and keeping the whole Mosaic law are not included among them.

**Gilbrant** on **epanagkes** - The Oxyrhynchus Papyri illustrate well the way this adverb is used. For example, the officials of the village of Takona pledged to repay the seed corn borrowed from Flavius Apion in these words: "We will pay back without fail (*epanankes*) the same amount of corn . . ." (see Moulton-Milligan).(Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

**Robertson** on **these essentials** - This old adverb (from *epi* and *anagkē*) means on compulsion, of necessity. Here only in the N.T.

For discussion of these items see on Acts 15:20-21. In comparison with the freedom won this "burden" is light and not to be regarded as a compromise in spite of the arguments of Lightfoot and Ramsay. It was such a concession as any converted Gentile would be glad to make even if "things strangled" be included. This "necessity" was not a matter of salvation but only for fellowship between Jews and Gentiles. The Judaizers made the law of Moses essential to salvation (Acts 15:16).

**G Campbell Morgan** - Here we have another instance of that glorious and remarkable consciousness of co-operation between the Church and the Holy Spirit which characterized these early days. It is not merely the fact of it which is arresting, but the keen sense of it, which these disciples knew. These words occur in the midst of what we may term the official apostolic document sent to the Gentile Christians concerning the trouble which had arisen about circumcision. The decisions embodied in that document were arrived at after much discussion, not, we may gather, without some heat. Yet at last they came to such findings as they did, certain that they had the mind of the Spirit; and they said so, naturally and simply. These words constitute the real seal of authority upon the document. How seldom we find anything akin to this in modern documents of the Church. This may be accounted for by the fact that we have a wholesome dread of anything in the nature of unwarranted dogmatism; but the absence of the note leaves something lacking in our documents. If we are not sure that it is so, it would be nigh unto blasphemy to use the words; but such unsureness should drive us to heart-searching as to the cause of it. It is as possible for us to know the mind of the Spirit as it was for these men. If we do not, why not? (Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible)

## APPLICATION: A SHORT EXCURSUS ON BEING LED BY THE SPIRIT

Even as the Church in Jerusalem was led by the Spirit, the same promise is given to all the sons and daughters of God, primarily in two parallel Pauline passages...

For all who are **being led** ([present tense](#) = continually; [passive voice](#) = surrendering to His leadership) by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Ro 8:14<sup>±</sup>)

But if you are **led** ([present tense](#) = continually; [passive voice](#) = surrendering to His leadership) by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. (Gal 5:18<sup>±</sup>)

**THOUGHT** - Are you being led by the Spirit or are you doing the "leading" in your life? Notice that if you are not to some degree being led by the Spirit, the Romans passage should lead you to even question whether you are a son of God, for leadership by the Spirit is a characteristic of all God's children. Notice both passages use the [passive voice](#) which signifies the effect of leading comes from an outside Source, obviously in context the Holy Spirit, and yet His leading is not always our experience for we can grieve (Eph 4:30) or quench (1 Th 5:19) His "still small voice" (1 Ki 19:12) by failure or refusal to confess our sin including the sin of refusing to allow Him to lead us. Passive voice does not mean we play no role in His leading. Indeed, the Spirit will not force Himself on us. Our part is in faith (trust in His leading) and love we need to yield to Him daily, receiving our new filling (Eph 5:18), so that we might be enabled to walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:16<sup>+</sup>) during the rest of the day. While a [morning quiet time](#) is not a commandment and should NEVER become a legalistic burden (see the ever present danger of falling into legalism even in its most subtle, seemingly "innocent" forms), it is reasonable to assume that if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Mt 6:33) the first thing **in the morning** (Ps 5:3, Ps 55:17, Ps 59:16, Ps 88:13, Ps 90:14, Ps 92:2, Ps 119:147, Ps 143:8, be imitators of Jesus - cf 1 Cor 11:1 and Mk 1:35, 6:46, Lk 4:42<sup>+</sup>, Lk 6:12<sup>+</sup>), presenting ourselves to God as a living and holy sacrifice (Ro 12:1), discerning His will (Ro 12:2), we are much more likely to be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit in the way of righteousness and truth in the remainder of the day. Does that make sense? If so, can I ask you under grace "Is your [quiet time](#) too quiet these days?"

**James Montgomery Boice** adds (commenting on Gal 5:18<sup>+</sup>) that "Paul reminds the Galatians that, though he is now talking of the need to live a godly life, he is not therefore reverting to legalism. Life by the Spirit is neither legalism or license—or a middle way between them. It is a life of **faith and love that allows a person to be led by the Spirit**"

**John Witmer** writes "Usually, a child walks with his parent in a certain passive mode. He allows the parent to lead, and he follows without argument but also with complete trust. Wherever his father or mother goes, he follows along with complete obedience. Only when the spirit of rebellion raises its ugly head does the child balk at being led. This is a perfect analogy for the Christian experience. Trust in God

subdues the attitude of defiance and rebellion. "Where He leads we will follow!" How does Spirit leading work? Carnality means being governed by one's own lusts and sinful attitudes and impulses. The Spirit works within, directing the inclinations and aiding the believer in overcoming the tug of the old man. To be "led" by the Spirit means more than to be guided by Him; though, to be sure, the Spirit is also truly the Guide of the child of God (John 16:13). According to Galatians 5:18, the enslaving power of the law has been broken for all those who are being "led" by the Spirit. This shows that this leadership the Spirit provides implies more than simply a "pointing out the right way." Merely showing the right direction does not help the Christian. **When the Holy Spirit leads believers, He becomes the controlling influence in their lives.** He remains within until He has brought all of the children of God to glory. **Being led by the Holy Spirit implies that one allows himself to be led.** This is a great mystery—this interrelation of these two factors—the believers' responsibility in his own Christian walk and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Paul's own Spirit-inspired statement cannot be added to: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13). (Twenty-First Century Commentary)

**Geoffrey Thomas** has some thoughts on how the Spirit leads us - When we talk about being "led by the Spirit," we are not speaking of special and extraordinary promptings, insights, deliverances, hunches, and feelings. We are talking about how the Spirit helps us break sinful habits and guides us down the path of good works and service. When we consider other people to be better than ourselves, we are being led by the Spirit. When we bear the burden of the weak, we are being led by the Spirit. When a husband loves his wife as Christ loves the church, he is being led by the Spirit. When a wife respects her husband, she is being led by the Spirit. When we are ready to give an answer to anyone who asks us the reason for our hope, we are being led by the Spirit. When we present out bodies as a living sacrifice to God, we are being led by the Spirit. When we clothe ourselves in the armor of God, we are being led by the Spirit. That is how He leads us. (His book *The Holy Spirit* - See link to a related sermon below)

[Gotquestions](#) says "He (THE SPIRIT) is the ultimate Guide, going before, leading the way, removing obstructions, opening the understanding, and making all things plain and clear. He leads in the way we should go in all spiritual things. Without such Guide, we would be apt to fall into error.

#### Related Resources:

- [What does it mean to be led by the Spirit?](#) John MacArthur
- [Walking by the Spirit](#) John MacArthur
- [The Spirit-Led Are the Sons of God](#) John Piper
- [How Do We Walk by the Spirit?](#) John Piper
- [Being Led by the Spirit - Romans 8:14](#) - Geoff Thomas (2 illustrations of being led below)

In 1961, over half a century ago, I crossed the Atlantic in a German cargo boat from Liverpool. The journey took 11 days and I got to know the ship, the chief engineer and some of the crew well; we four passengers had lunch with the Captain each day. When we got to Chesapeake Bay in Virginia a boat came alongside us and on board came the young American pilot who navigated the ship the twenty miles through the Bay to our dock in Norfolk. We arrived without any mishaps because we had a pilot who knew the dangers of rocks and shallow water, where they were located, and what was the safest route to our moorings. We had someone to lead our ship to safety.

Again, when American pioneers traveled west 150 years ago they crossed the continent on wagon trains and they forded rivers and went through deserts and blizzards and the Rocky Mountains; they faced hostile Indians and outlaws. How indispensable was the role of the experienced wagon master leading them to their appointed destination. Again, imagine that you are climbing a mountain and a thick mist falls; how crucial to have a guide who knows that peak like the back of his hand. He knows the path and where the dangers lie, and he is leading you. (HOW MUCH MORE VITAL IS IT TO HAVE THE SPIRIT LEADING US WHEN THE "DENSE FOG" SETS IN SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING!)

**Acts 15:29 that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."**

KJV Acts 15:29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

NLT Acts 15:29 You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well. Farewell."

- **abstain** Acts 15:20; 21:25; Leviticus 17:14; Romans 14:14,15,20,21; 1 Corinthians 10:18-20; Revelation 2:14,20
- **if you keep** 2 Corinthians 11:9; 1 Timothy 5:22; James 1:27; 1 John 5:21; Jude 1:20,21,24
- **Farewell** Acts 18:21; 23:30; Luke 9:61; 2 Corinthians 13:11
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## EXPLANATION OF THE ESSENTIALS FOR GENTILE BELIEVERS

**Swindoll** comments that "The church leaders did, however, feel compelled by the Holy Spirit to **'burden'**" (Acts 15:28) the Gentile believers with two necessities ("ESSENTIALS"): do not offend Jewish sensibilities—which find idols and blood-tainted meat especially repugnant—and abstain from sexual immorality."

**Andrews** summarize it "These things are the concessions that the Gentiles would make to be in close fellowship with the Jews. The Jews also came to a major concession recognizing the doctrine of grace and receiving the Gentiles into the fellowship of God's people. The Jews were not to trouble the Gentiles and the Gentiles were not to trouble the Jews!....So the letter concludes with an exhortation to the Gentile believers to keep themselves from idolatry, immorality, and impurity. The Lord's people are a holy people and we all would do well to keep ourselves from idolatry, immorality, and impurities. Let us endeavor to live holy lives that are well pleasing to the Lord Jesus! (Jack Andrews Expository Studies – Understanding Acts)

**David Jeremiah** wrote, "This letter accomplished two things. It solidified the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone, and it established the importance of Christians caring about how we influence other people so that nothing we do will get in the way of our testimony for Jesus Christ. We are not free to do whatever we *want* because we are under grace. Rather we are empowered by grace (ED: DISPENSED BY THE SPIRIT OF GRACE - Heb 10:29) to do what we *ought* in terms of building up the body by serving one another."

**That you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication - [see comments](#)** on Acts 15:20. There are some slight differences in the word order and in the actual wording but the substance of the two passages is the same. Acts 15:20 says "**contaminated by idols**" so clearly the meat (et al things) sacrificed to idols are considered "**contaminated.**"

**Vincent - Blood.** Because in the blood was the animal's life, and it was the blood that was consecrated to make atonement. See Ge 9:6; Lev. 17:10–14; Deut. 12:23, 24. The Gentiles had no scruples about eating blood; on the contrary, it was a special delicacy. The heathen were accustomed to drink blood mingled with wine at their sacrifices.

**Sacrificed to idols** (1494)(**eidolothutos** from **eidolon** = idol + **thuo** = to sacrifice) is an adjective describing the meat of animals which have been sacrificed to idols. The Rabbinic words for **eidolothutos** "are זְבִיחַ מֵתִים, sacrifice to the dead, and תְּקִירָת צְבוֹנוֹת יִמְלִי'ם, sacrifice in honour of unreal entities." **Eidolothutos** "refers to sacrificial meat, part of which was burned on the altar, part was eaten at a solemn meal in the temple, and part was sold in the market for home use." (BDAG) Note that the stem *-thutos* means "sacrifice" referring to an animal sacrificially killed and thereby implies meat is **the things** sacrificed to idols.

**Swindoll** explains that as part of the pagan Gentile worship "an animal was brought before a priest to be sacrificed. Only parts of the animal were burned—usually the legs, fat, and internal organs. The leftovers—usually the best pieces of meat—were often consumed among the participants at a festive meal, taken home to enjoy in private, or sold in public marketplaces. This posed a problem for believers, because when they ate as invited guests at a person's home or bought meat at the marketplace, chances were good that some of it came from an animal sacrificed in the worship of a false god. In that worship, consuming the meat sacrificed to the idol was the same as participating in the worship of the idol. (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – 1 & 2 Corinthians)

**Eidolothutos** - 9x in 9v - Acts 15:29; Acts 21:25; 1 Co. 8:1; 1 Co. 8:4; 1 Co. 8:7; 1 Co. 8:10; 1 Co. 10:19; Rev. 2:14; Rev. 2:20. The only other use is in 4 Macc 5:2, with no uses in the non-apocryphal Septuagint. Notice that eidolothutos is found 4x in 1 Cor 8:1-13

**TDNT** note on **eidolothutos** - Jews were forbidden to eat flesh sacrificed to idols. They were also forbidden to trade in it. It defiled like a corpse if one came into contact with it in an enclosed space. To force a Jew to eat it was to enforce apostasy. The reference was not to the flesh which went into the temple, but to that which came out. The strict prohibition reflects the resolute resistance of Judaism to any kind of religious syncretism. Its basis, namely, that the flesh is offered to the dead or to unreal entities, shows that it is primarily religious. It rests on a strict application of the first commandment and not on superstition, fear of spirits

etc. Paul will allow the enjoyment of εἰδωλόθυτον apart from the cultic act itself (1 Cor 10:14–22) and so long as it does not violate the law of love (1 Cor 8:1–13). In this connection he appeals (1 Cor 10:26) to Pa. 24:1. He can take this attitude only because faith has overcome Jewish legalism from within. In the apostolic decree of Acts 15:29; 21:25, and in Rev. 2:14, 20, we do not have full freedom from legalism (ED: NOT SURE IF FULLY AGREE WITH THAT BASED ON STATEMENTS LIKE John 8:32, 36, Acts 10:15. Ro 6:14 clearly states we "are not under law but under grace."). Among the Nicolaitans the desire to eat meat sacrificed to idols is an expression of Libertinism, i.e., of complete renunciation of any commitment to the will of God, as may be seen from their general licentiousness. The same is probably true of Paul's opponents at Corinth.

#### Some NT uses of **eidolothutos**

Rev 2:14 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat **things sacrificed to idols**, and to commit acts of immorality.

[Garland comments](#) - This message was mainly to Gentile converts at Pergamum since Judaism prohibited this practice (Nu. 25:2; Ps. 106:28; Da 1:8+). The church at Pergamum was integrated into the culture, rather than being set apart. "Christians] were expected to pay their "dues" to trade guilds by attending annual dinners held in honor of the guilds' patron deities. Homage to the emperor as divine was included along with worship of such local deities." (Beale) **The dietary restrictions imposed upon Gentiles by the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:20, 15:29) were out of concern for retaining Gentile fellowship with Jewish believers.** Paul allows such meat sacrificed to idols to be eaten (1 Cor. 8:7; 10:18-33), **but only when it does not cause offense to brothers** Here the issue was one of **compromising the witness of the church within the pagan culture** and partaking of pagan practices which were associated with such banquets. These dinners included the eating of meat sacrificed to idols as well as licentious behavior. ([See also Garland's comments](#) on the use of **eidolothutos** in Rev 2:20 Jesus' address to the Church at Thyatira).

(1 Co. 8:1) Now concerning **things sacrificed to idols**, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant ("puffs up"), but love edifies ("builds up").

**Comment** - Paul's begins his explanation of food sacrificed to idols by stating that Christian behavior is based on love not on knowledge. The trouble is that some of the believers knew they had freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols (they knew 1 Cor 6:12), but they had become arrogant and were not loving toward those who were not as comfortable eating meat sacrificed to idols. I love what Swindoll says writing that "**Knowledge is a God-given window into reality through which we can view life, but if it is not controlled by edifying love (agapē) it can become a dangerous weapon that destroys rather than builds.**" Wow! I find that statement very convicting as a teacher of God's Word!

**Guzik** - The meat offered on pagan altars was usually divided into three portions. One portion was burnt in honor of the god, one portion was given to the worshipper to take home and eat, and the third portion was given to the priest. If the priest didn't want to eat his portion, he sold it at the temple restaurant or meat market. The meat served and sold at the temple was generally cheaper....The issue raised many questions for the Corinthian Christians: Can we eat meat purchased at the temple meat market? What if we are served meat purchased at the temple meat market when we are guests in someone's home? Can a Christian eat at the restaurant at the pagan temple?

(1 Co. 8:4) Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.

**Comment** - Paul's point is that believers know idols are man-made vain relics and thus eating meat offered to these "nothings" is inconsequential. Meat cannot be made evil by so-called gods that do not even exist.

(1 Co. 8:7) However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

**Comment** - The problem arises in that not all believers have this mature knowledge and have become so used to idolatry that when they ate meat that had been offered to an idol, their weak conscience was defiled. So Paul is asking the believers who know an idol is nothing to remember that not everyone has this mature knowledge. Their "weak conscience" is actually a paradoxical statement, because their problem is that their conscience "overworks," causing them to be easily defiled or feel unclean because

they eat idol meat. Their conscience is "weak" in the sense that it is wrongly informed, and it is making a judgment based upon the impression that they really is something to an idol. Here is where the believers with the correct knowledge of how to approach idol meat might try to tell the weaker brethren that they are wrong and not do so with a spirit of love but with an arrogant, prideful spirit. So you can see the problem that would result in the fellowship between the weak and the strong group.

(1 Co. 8:10) For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened (LITERALLY "BUILT UP") to eat **things sacrificed to idols**?

**NET Note** - "It is used ironically here: The weak person is "built up" to commit what he regards as sin."

In other words the stronger believer's misuse of his liberty (to eat at the temple restaurant) was (stated with biting irony) "building others up" towards sin. And the next verse (1 Cor 8:11) continues Paul's argument that some of the weaker believers would be stirred up to fall back into old sins and the "doorway" so to speak would be their returning to the eating of **things sacrificed to idols**.

**If you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well**- The verb **keep yourselves free from** is basically another way of saying "if you abstain." Louw-Nida has "if you keep yourselves from doing these things, you will do well." These were all things Gentiles could observe without compromising their freedom in Christ. Note carefully that the letter says "**you will do well**," not that "**you will be saved!**" As Paul stated later in Romans, these Gentile believers (and all believers) were no longer under (the enslaving power of the) law but under (the transforming, liberating power) of grace. (Ro 6:14). In other words, grace signifies freedom from the requirements of the Law, and yet even as the decrees underscore grace does not mean we can live as if there were no laws. In short believers cannot live [licentiously](#).

**Swindoll** adds that "grace does not declare moral standards wrong or even inferior. As Timothy Keller notes, "Luther so persistently expounded—'We are saved by faith alone, but not by faith which is alone.' (**ED**: E.G., COMPARE Eph 2:8-9 with Eph 2:10) That is, we are saved, not by anything we do, but by grace. Yet if we have truly understood and believed the Gospel, it will change what we do and how we live." Not the least of those changes will be an increasing hatred of idols and a deepening love for others." (Acts - Swindoll's Living Insights).

**J Vernon McGee** - That is the report. That is all they have to say to them. Gentile believers are not required to meet any of the demands of the Mosaic system, but they are to exercise courtesy to those who do—especially in the area of meats offered to idols, and of course they are not to commit fornication.

**Keep...free** (present tense with reflexive pronoun heautou)([1301](#))(**diatero** from **dia** - through + **tereo** - watch over, guard) means to keep carefully and in this passage **diatero** speaks of moral abstinence, to keep oneself free from, or to wholly abstain from or avoid something (blood, things strangled, fornication). The only other NT use of diatero is in Lk 2:51 describing Mary's reaction to the boy Jesus continuing in subjection to she and Joseph. Luke then says "His mother **treasured** (diatero) all these things in her heart," which gives us a good picture of what the Gentile believers were to do - they were to remember them, think about them, never let them get away from their mind. As **Phillips** says "That was the kind of diligent keeping of the injunctions that was expected of the Gentiles in the church. Love for the conscience of another brother could demand no less." (Exploring Acts)

**You will do** ([4238](#))(**prasso**) means doing something as a regular practice or as a routine habit, and is distinguished from [poieo](#) which means "to do" which focuses on the end achievement of the action. In contrast **prasso** focuses on the process or habitual effort to arrive at the end/achievement, and so refers more to the course of conduct, in this case conduct concordant with the points in the letter from the Jerusalem Council.

The letter to the Gentiles is found in Acts 15:23-29, beginning with "**greetings**" and ending with "**farewell**."

**Farewell** ([4517](#))(**rhonnumi** prob. from **rhoomai** = to move with speed) means to strengthen (passive voice here = be strengthened). Be in good health or a wish of health and happiness, equivalent to our good-bye. "Such health, strength, and well-being would doubtless include that related to a person's spiritual life and relationship with Christ and the saints." (Gilbrant) In the Textus Receptus **rhonnumi** is found in Acts 15:29, Acts 23:30 (latter not in Nestle-Aland text). BDAG - "Gr-Roman letters generally included at the beginning inquiries about a recipient's health and at the conclusion a wish for the recipient's well-being. The latter formulation was frequently expressed with the verb rhonnumi in the perf. pass. imperative)."

**Gilbrant** - In classical Greek the word rhōnumi is found as early as the Fifth Century B.C. It appears most frequently in the passive voice meaning "strengthen" or "have strength or might" (*Liddell-Scott*). As well it can mean "to be eager or enthusiastic" and "to be in good health." Similarly, it appears as the usual way of ending a letter where it means "farewell" (*ibid.*). (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

**Robertson** on **farewell** - Perfect passive imperative (A COMMAND) of rhōnumi, to make strong. Common at the close of letters.



**Charles Swindoll** has some introductory comments on 1 Cor 8:1-13 that are applicable to the instructions to the Gentile believers Acts 15, specifically the instructions from the council that were given to help "keep the peace" between Jewish and Gentile believers -

I've never completely understood vegetarians. I certainly have nothing against them. In fact, it looks like Adam, Eve, and the other people who lived prior to Noah's Flood ate only fruits, vegetables, and grains (Ge 1:29-30; 9:3). If people want to go retro and leave the beef and chicken to me and other carnivores, I'm fine with that. But once in a while, I run into a hyperherbivore. Judgmental as any sour-faced legalist, those fanatics not only avoid all meat and animal products, but they also want to force their personal opinions on everybody they meet. Their opinions go beyond eschewing meat for health reasons; they believe it's morally wrong for anybody to eat meat. Period. This question about whether we should eat meat may seem irrelevant to us today. Those who would judge us for biting into a big, juicy burger are few and far between. But what about those who judge us for drinking champagne at a New Year's Eve party? Or trick-or-treating on Halloween? Or going to a movie, dancing, playing Xbox, or listening to secular music? **All of these things find their way onto different people's lists of Christian "no-nos."** The hot issue in the Corinthian church wasn't whether to go to movies, play video games, or drink sparkling champagne. Instead, they fretted about the appropriateness of eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. I don't know of any Christian vegetarian who opposes eating meat because it might have been offered to a goddess of fertility or a god of wine. Yet the principle Paul employed to settle this question is just as applicable to the debated practices and "gray" areas of our day as it was to this issue in Corinth. (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – 1 & 2 Corinthians)

**Acts 15:30 So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.**

KJV Acts 15:30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:

- **and** Acts 6:2; 21:22
- **delivered** Acts 16:4; 23:33
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **DISMISSED TO CARRY THE "SNAIL MAIL"**

**So when they were sent away** - **Snail mail** and **smail** (from snail + mail) — named after the snail with its slow speed — is a retronym that refers to letters and missives carried by conventional postal delivery services. The phrase refers to the lag-time between dispatch of a letter and its receipt, versus the virtually instantaneous dispatch and delivery of its electronic equivalent, email.

**Sent away** (630)(**apoluo** from **apó** = away from + **luo** = to loose or release) is used often of sending a person or a group away from someone (Mt 14:15, 22, 23, 32, etc). One of the sad uses of this verb is to describe divorce of a marital partner, releasing them (Mt 1:19, 5:31,32, 19:7-9; Mk 10:2-12; Lk 16:18 cf God's heart on divorce = Mal 2:16+).

**They went down to Antioch** - When one leaves Jerusalem, the phrase "**went down**" is usually used because of the elevation of Jerusalem (in this case Antioch of Syria is at 220 ft elevation and Jerusalem at 2,474 ft).

**And having gathered the congregation together** - The letter was not just for the leaders of the church at Antioch but for the entire church. The scene would have been like we frequently see on television news where they make a sudden announcement "We have breaking news!" This letter was "breaking news" for it was good news that the gospel is received by grace through faith in Jesus plus nothing - not circumcision, not keeping the Law, etc. And in contrast to the ever increasing tendency for the news casters to give us "fake news," this news from Jerusalem was not fake! This message was clear. Below is an illustration of a what happens when a message is not clear or is not interpreted clearly...

Illustration: There was no question about the authority of J. Edgar Hoover in the FBI. Almost all those who

worked under Hoover always tried to be on the lookout for ways to impress their powerful boss. A young FBI agent was put in charge of the FBI's supply department. In an effort to cut some costs and impress his boss, he reduced the size of the office memo paper. One of the new memo sheets soon ended up on Hoover's desk. Hoover took one look at it, determined that he didn't like the size of the margins on the paper, and quickly scribbled on the memo, "Watch the Borders!" The memo was passed on through the office. For the next six weeks, it was extremely difficult to enter the United States by road from either Mexico or Canada. The FBI was watching the borders. Why was the FBI watching the borders? They thought they had received a warning from their chief. But they hadn't. They had misinterpreted a note on a memo sheet about the paper. **We better make sure we are clear on our message and we are clear with our message!** (Jack Andrews Expository Studies)

**Having gathered together** (assembled)(4863)([sunago](#) from [sun](#) = with + [ago](#) = to lead) means literally to lead together. In the present passage the idea is to bring or call together (cf Mt 22:10; 25:32; Mk 2:2; 7:1; Jn 11:47; 18:2; Acts 13:44; 14:27; 1 Cor 5:4).

**Luke's** uses of **sunago** in Acts - Acts 4:5; Acts 4:26; Acts 4:27; Acts 4:31; Acts 11:26; Acts 13:44; Acts 14:27; Acts 15:6; Acts 15:30; Acts 20:7; Acts 20:8

**Congregation** (4128)([plethos](#) from [pletho](#) = to fill - gives us English "[plethora](#)") means fullness or magnitude. In classic Greek it had the basic meaning of multitude and in Acts usually means a quantity of people. Vine says it refers to "a large company, a multitude."

**Luke's** uses of **plethos** in Acts -

Acts 2:6; Acts 4:32; Acts 5:14; Acts 5:16; Acts 6:2; Acts 6:5; Acts 14:1; Acts 14:4; Acts 15:12; Acts 15:30; Acts 19:9; Acts 21:36; Acts 23:7; Acts 25:24; Acts 28:3

**They delivered the letter** - The letter is formally delivered, their mission accomplished.

**Delivered** (1929)([epididomi](#) from [epi](#) = upon + [didomi](#) = to give) means to give forth as from oneself upon or to another, to transfer, to hand over, to deliver over as to put into one's hands as the scroll of Isaiah "was handed to" Jesus in His first synagogue sermon (Lk 4:17 referring to Isa 61:1-2). In the last Passover ("first communion") Jesus "took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them." (Lk 24:30) In (Acts 27:15) they gave the ship into the strong wind and here conveys the sense of giving in to a superior power or force.

**Gilbrant** on **epididomi** - in classical writings has the meanings of "give, bestow" (often in a positive sense) as well as "hand over, deliver, offer (in a bribe)." In other circumstances the idea behind epididōmi was intransitive (lacking an object). Here it could mean "increase, advance" (see Liddell-Scott).

**Epididomi** - 9x in 9v - delivered(1), gave(1), gave way(1), give(4), giving(1), handed(1).

Matt. 7:9; Matt. 7:10; Lk. 4:17; Lk. 11:11; Lk. 11:12; Lk. 24:30; Lk. 24:42; Acts 15:30; Acts 27:15

**Epididomi** in the Septuagint - Gen. 31:49; Gen. 49:21; 1 Sam. 14:13; Est. 9:11; Amos 4:1;

**Letter** (1992)([epistole](#) from [epi](#) = to + [stello](#) = send) refers to an epistle. Bartlett (quoted by W E Vine) explains the difference between an "epistle" and a "letter" - "A broad line is to be drawn between the letter and the epistle. The one is essentially a spontaneous product dominated throughout by the image of the reader, his sympathies and interests, instinct also with the writer's own soul: it is virtually one half of an imaginary dialogue, the suppressed responses of the other party shaping the course of what is actually written ...; the other has a general aim, addressing all and sundry whom it may concern: it is like a public speech and looks towards publication"

NT uses of **epistole** -

Acts 9:2; Acts 15:30; Acts 22:5; Acts 23:25; Acts 23:33; Rom. 16:22; 1 Co. 5:9; 1 Co. 16:3; 2 Co. 3:1; 2 Co. 3:2; 2 Co. 3:3; 2 Co. 7:8; 2 Co. 10:9; 2 Co. 10:10; 2 Co. 10:11; Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 2 Thess. 3:14; 2 Thess. 3:17; 2 Pet. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:16

**Related Resource:**

- Holman Bible Dictionary [Letter Form and Function](#)
- Hastings Bible Dictionary - [Epistle](#)

**Acts 15:31 When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.**

KJV Acts 15:31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

- **they rejoiced** Acts 15:1,10; 16:5; Galatians 2:4,5; 5:1; Philippians 3:3
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## READING AND REJOICING

**When they had read it** - The idea of course is that they **read** the letter aloud. **They** is plural so possibly each of the 4 men who delivered the letter read it.

**Read** (314)([anaginosko](#) from **aná** = emphatic, again + **ginosko** = know <> know again) literally to know again or to recognize again. It came to mean to distinguish between, to know accurately and then to read, especially referring to reading aloud and to public reading as in Acts 15:31. 1 Th 5:27 commands us to publicly read the Word of God aloud. (Compare Dt 31:10-13; Jer 5:20, 11:6, 36:6-8; Col 4:16; Ex 19:7, 24:7; Josh 8:34,35; 2 Ki 23:2; 2 Chr 34:18,30; Neh 8:2-5,18; Jer 36:10-16). **Anaginosko** compared to gnōsis, 'knowledge,' is that which leads up to knowledge; consequently, it is reading (or hearing it read) and studying to acquire a knowledge of something.

**They rejoiced because of its encouragement** - The congregation (a mixture of Jewish and Gentile believers) was filled with joy by the encouraging words of the letter.

**Robertson** comments that "They burst into exultant joy showing clearly that they did not consider it a weak compromise, but a glorious victory of Gentile liberty."

**They rejoiced** (5463)([chairō](#)) means that these Gentile believers were filled with cheer, in a state of happiness and well being. Clearly the "burden" of the "essentials" (Acts 15:28+) mentioned in the letter did not disturb their joy. As noted above chairō was used as the greeting (Acts 15:23+) of the letter, and in a sense served almost like an exhortative greeting "Rejoice," which is exactly what they did.

**Chairō** in Acts - Acts 5:41; Acts 8:39; Acts 11:23; Acts 13:48; Acts 15:23; Acts 15:31; Acts 23:26

**Because of its encouragement** - (See [Philip Bliss' hymn above](#) for related comments) As seen in discussion of the meaning of paraklesis (below) encouragement is something that is best done when one is close beside, given as a personal word of comfort. This is a good lesson for all of us -- emails and text can comfort and encourage to be sure, but taking time to come beside the person is the most effective way.

**THOUGHT** - Did you realize that God sends you a love letter every day? It is of course His holy Word. And reading it brings encouragement (among many other benefits). Are you daily in God's Word, so His Word might get into you? (cf Jesus' word in Mt 4:4, Lk 4:4+, read Dt 32:46-47). As one pastor said "We ought to celebrate every time we open up God's love letter to us."

**J Vernon McGee** - There is consolation and comfort in the gospel; there is nothing but condemnation in the Law. The Law condemns. The Law is a mirror. When I look in it, I say, "Oh, McGee, you are ugly! You have fallen short of the glory of God." But the gospel says, "Come on to God. He wants to receive you. He will save you by His grace." It is a comfort, you see. (See related topic - The Purpose of the Law)

**Encouragement** (3874)([paraklesis](#) from **parakaléo** = beseech <> **pará** = side of + **kaléo** = call) refers to calling to one's side or one's aid which can be for the purpose of providing solace, comfort, consolation, exhortation, encouragement. It is the idea of an "intimate call." We do well to recall that **paraklēsís** is a general responsibility (and privilege) for all believers and a special grace-endowment ("spiritual gift") the Holy Spirit bestows on some believers (cf. Ro 12:8). But all Spirit filled believers are enabled to be dispensers of encouragement (see note below). Have you encouraged any saints this week? Have you recently sent your pastor, you Bible teacher, your elder a note? Snail mail is still a wonderful way to do this - email is quick but seems a bit "cooler" than a hand written note. Try it, he will like it! And remember Hebrews 3:13+.

Luke's uses of **paraklesis** in Acts - Acts 4:36 = Barnabas "Son of Encouragement"; Acts 9:31; Acts 13:15; Acts 15:31

(Acts 9:31+) -So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the **comfort** of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase. (NOTE SOURCE OF THE **PARAKLESIS** - THE **PARACLETE** - [parakletos](#)! It would seem logical therefore that Spirit filled saints are more likely to be encouraging saints!)

**Spurgeon** - And a great comfort it was, for the saints were confirmed in their freedom from the Jewish yoke, those who troubled

them were silenced, and the Gentiles were still further encouraged to receive the gospel. The Antioch Christians had done well to seek a settlement of a vexed question

Ye Gentile sinners, ne'er forget  
The wormwood and the gall;  
Go—spread your trophies at his feet,  
And crown Him Lord of all.

[\(Listen to the great old hymn\)](#)

### Acts 15:32 Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.

KJV Acts 15:32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

- **being** Acts 2:17,18; 11:23,27; 13:1; Matthew 23:34; Luke 11:49; Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:28,29; 1 Corinthians 14:3,29,32; Ephesians 3:5; 4:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:20
- **encouraged** Acts 2:40; 11:23; 14:22; 18:23; 20:2; Romans 12:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:11; 4:1; 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 Timothy 2:1; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 2:6-15; 1 Peter 5:1,12
- **and strengthened** Acts 15:41; Isaiah 35:3,4; Daniel 11:1; 1 Corinthians 1:8; Ephesians 4:12,13; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 1 Peter 5:10
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

**Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves** - Earlier Luke told us of prophets in the local church at Antioch writing "Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, **prophets** and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul." (Acts 13:1) **Judas and Silas** were **prophets** in the same sense as these men.

**Prophets** (4396)(**prophetes** from **próphemi** = literally to tell beforehand from **pró** = before + **phemí** = speak) is primarily a forth-teller or one who speaks God's message, declaring the mind of God, by calling the people to the authority and sufficiency of God's truth. **A T Robertson** says "The main thing is for the **prophet** to have a message from God which he is willing to tell at whatever cost to himself."

In another note **Robertson** writes "As well as Paul and Barnabas and like Agabus (Acts 11:27-30), for-speakers for Christ who justify the commendation in the letter (Acts 15:27) "with many words, "with much talk," and no doubt with kindly words concerning the part played at the Conference by Paul and Barnabas."

**Luke's** uses of **prophetes** in Acts - some refer to the OT prophets and some to prophets in the early church as in our present passage.

Acts 2:16; Acts 2:30; Acts 3:18; Acts 3:21; Acts 3:22; Acts 3:23; Acts 3:24; Acts 3:25; Acts 7:37; Acts 7:42; Acts 7:48; Acts 7:52; Acts 8:28; Acts 8:30; Acts 8:34; Acts 10:43; Acts 11:27; Acts 13:1; Acts 13:15; Acts 13:20; Acts 13:27; Acts 13:40; Acts 15:15; Acts 15:32; Acts 21:10; Acts 24:14; Acts 26:22; Acts 26:27; Acts 28:23; Acts 28:25

In Acts 15:27 the letter had given a preview of "coming attractions" stating "we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth." And now the prophets are going to proclaim the Word. And notice the effect of their proclamation. The church was encouraged (comforted, exhorted, implored) and strengthened (surely referring to the faith).

**Larkin** writes that **Judas and Silas** "enter into a lengthy ministry of pastoral exhortation, to encourage and strengthen the brothers. They repair the Judaizers' damage (Acts 15:24) and enable the saints, in matters of the gospel, to re-lay a firm foundation (episterizo - compare Acts 14:22)." (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series - Acts)

**Encouraged** (3870)(**parakaleo**) means literally call beside or near and so means "up close and personal" as we might say today. The primary sense of parakaleo in the NT is to urge someone to take some action, especially some ethical course of action. The

exact nuance (exhort, comfort, implore, admonish, warn, build up, etc) varies depending on the context but all these senses of parakaleo retain the core meaning of urging from close beside. Sometimes the word means convey the idea of comfort, sometimes of exhortation but always at the root there is the idea of enabling a person to meet some difficult situation with confidence and with gallantry.

**Kent Hughes** illustrates the root idea of **parakaleo** "to come alongside and encourage" with the following example - I see this exemplified every time my church has a roller skating party, and the parents put their little ones on skates for the first time. Mom and Dad skate with their child, holding on to his or her hands, sometimes with the child's feet on the ground and sometimes in the air. But all the time the parents are alongside **encouraging**...[exhortation] is a wonderful gift, and we are to place it at Christ's feet and be willing to be worn out in its use.

**Robertson** - It was a glorious time with no Judaizers to disturb their fellowship as in Acts 15:1-3.

**Ray Stedman** on **encouraged** and **strengthened** - This is what you do between the occasions of extraordinary activity in the Spirit-filled life. You give yourself to the most fundamental and basic activity of Christianity, the knowledge and understanding of the Word of God, the learning of the word. That is always in order, always in season. (The Way God Guides)

**Strengthened** (1991)(**episterizo** from **epí** = intensifies + **sterizo** = strengthen, support) means literally to place firmly upon. The root verb (histemi) means to stand. The idea of the prefix **epi-** is to give additional (*epi*) strength and so to make more firm.

**BDAG** - "to cause someone to become stronger or more firm -- in our literature of believers in connection with their commitment and resolve to remain true, especially in the face of troubles:"

As **Andrews** says "This (episterizo) is a great word picture for the support and under girding of the church by the message of the gospel." (Ibid)

God's Spirit used a **lengthy message** from **Judas and Silas** to encourage the saints, supporting them, "propping them up," giving them truth to enable their belief to become stronger in turn shoring up their commitment and their resolve to remain true to Jesus and His Gospel, especially in the face of troubles which were sure to come even as they had just experienced with the Judaizers attack on truth.

Spiritual strengthening of hearts and souls of believers is by the Word of God and the Spirit of God. The root verb **sterizo** is the very word Jesus spoke to Peter, knowing that his faith would falter, declaring "I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again (**epistrepho**), **strengthen** (sterizo in the **aorist imperative** = Don't delay! Do it now!) your brothers." (Lk 22:32+) (Compare similar uses of sterizo - Acts 18:23 = "**strengthening** all the disciples"; Ro 1:11; 1 Th 3:12-13 = "**establish** your hearts"; 2 Th 2:16-17 = "**strengthen** your hearts"; 2 Th. 3:3 = "the Lord is faithful, and He will **strengthen** and protect you"; Jas. 5:8 = "You too be patient; **strengthen** your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near"; 1 Pe 5:10 = "od of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, **confirm**, strengthen (sthenoo) and establish (themeloo) you"; 2 Pet. 1:12 "**have been established** in the truth"; Rev. 3:2 "Wake up, and **strengthen** (**aorist imperative**) the things that remain."

It is notable that all three NT uses of this verb are in the context of the formative days of the Church, when the believers would be in most need of stabilization of the their faith...

In Acts 14:22+ we read that Paul and Barnabas were "**strengthening** the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

And as the Second Missionary journey begins we read that Paul "was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, **strengthening** the churches. (Acts 15:41)

**THOUGHT** - These uses of **episterizo** beg the question of every pastor and elder - Are you proclaiming messages and teaching Bible truths that strengthen and stabilize the souls of the believers (2 Ti 4:2+) or do you messages merely tickle the ears of the hearers (2 Ti 4:3-4+)? All of us (leaders and laity in the local body) need to remember the awesome day is on each of our appointment calendars when we must "appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Cor 5:10+). May we all heed John's warnings - "Now, little children, **abide** (**meno** in the **present imperative** - habitually as your lifestyle) in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." (1 John 2:28+) and "**Watch** (**blepo** in the **present imperative** - habitually as your lifestyle) yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward." (2 John 8)

**The brethren with a lengthy message** - Literally with "many words" or much discourse which is in addition to the written letter which they received as "**encouragement**" ([paraklesis](#)). We might say they were "long winded!" There was no 30 minute cut-off!

**THOUGHT** - Beloved, I recently heard of a Bible based church that [castigated](#) their pastor for going over 30 minutes! (He preached 36 minutes!) Shame on those who took this tacky tactic! When being first in line at our favorite Sunday brunch (or whatever is our empty excuse) becomes more important than being fed the Word of God from God through His prophets, then the Body of Christ is in a sad state and in desperate need of revival!

**John Phillips** wrote, "For these men to be around a large group of Christians still excited about their salvation, still enthusiastic about winning souls and world missions, and still woefully ignorant, comparatively, of all the majesty and meaning of the Scriptures must have been revolutionary. Any preacher knows how refreshing it is to get in with a group of young Christians eager to learn, after being around an older and more established group where a great deal of the dynamism has been lost and where truth is taken for granted, either to be yawned at or argued about." (Exploring Acts)

As **Andrews** says "That exactly where many churches are today! The truth is either *yawned at or argued about!* God help us to love the word of God, listen to the word of God, and live out the word of God!" (Ibid)

**Acts 15:33 After they had spent time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out.**

KJV Acts 15:33 And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

NIV Acts 15:33 After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them.

NLT Acts 15:33 They stayed for a while, and then the believers sent them back to the church in Jerusalem with a blessing of peace

- **they were sent away from the brethren** Acts 16:36; Genesis 26:29; Exodus 4:18; 1 Corinthians 16:11; Hebrews 11:31; 2 John 1:10
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## DISSENSION ENDS IN PEACE

Acts 15:1-2 begins with **great dissension** in the church, but because of Spirit filled men coming to a wise, unanimous decision, the chapter ends **in peace** and harmony among the believers, Jewish and Gentile.

**After they had spent time there - They** refers to **Judas and Silas**. Luke does not tell us how much time they spent in Antioch, but clearly it was sufficient time to allow them to address any questions or concerns the church members might have had about the letter.

**Jack Andrews** remarks that "They planned to stay there for some time to continue to worship with and work with the church at Antioch. It is good to find a true church that you love to be with and minister in. The preacher's were not looking for another church to go. They were not praying "God get me out of here!" They wanted to stay there longer." (Jack Andrews Expository Studies – Understanding Acts)

**They were sent away from the brethren in peace - Peace** was used as a greeting or farewell corresponding to the Hebrew word shalom - "peace to you". And so very likely they sent them on their way with the common Jewish word "[Shalom](#)," which means more than just "**peace**" but includes a wish for good health, well-being and harmony both within and without, wholeness, peace, health, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, fullness, rest, harmony; the absence of agitation or discord, a state of calm without anxiety or stress. All of those aspects of peace are inherent in the word "Shalom."

**Peace** (1515)([eirene](#) from verb **eiro** = to join or bind together that which has been separated) literally pictures the binding or joining together again of that which had been separated or divided and thus setting at one again. It pictures a wholeness with all essential parts joined together (think of a married couple at peace!). Today we might say eirene is depicted by the common expression of "having it all together". It follows that peace is the opposite of division or dissension. Peace as a state of concord and harmony is the

opposite of war.

**To those who had sent them out** - Back to the church at Jerusalem.

**Sent** (649)(**apostello** from **apo** = from, away from + **stello** = to withdraw from, avoid) means to send off, to send forth, to send out. But the meaning of **apostello** is more than just to send because it means "to send off on a commission to do something as one's personal representative, with credentials furnished" (Wuest)

#### Acts 15:34 [*But it seemed good to Silas to remain there*].

KJV Acts 15:34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

- **it seemed good** Acts 11:25,26; 18:27; 1 Corinthians 16:12
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Note that early Greek manuscripts do not have this verse. One suggestion (and that is all it is) is that a scribe added it later to explain the choice of Silas in Acts 15:40. One additional argument that this verse is authentic is that the previous verse says "they were sent away" which would support Judas and Silas sent back to Jerusalem.

The **NET Note** adds that "The verse is almost certainly not a part of the original text of Acts, but was added to harmonize with the statement about Silas in v. 40.

**Robertson** adds an interesting thought that this verse "is clearly an addition to help explain the fact that Silas is back in Antioch in Acts 15:40. But the "**some days**" of Acts 15:36 afforded abundant time for him to return from Jerusalem. He and Judas went first to Jerusalem to make a report of their mission."

**Robertson** does have a viable point because the 300 mile journey from Antioch in Syria would take about 10 day trip (+/- 10 days because a person can log 20-30 miles per day on foot). Thus it is conceivable that **Silas** traveled back to Jerusalem with **Judas**, but later returned to Antioch. Whether this is even a possible explanation depends on how long Luke's phrase in Acts 15:36 **after some days** refers to. We'll ask Silas when we see him in glory!

**Kent** - Verse 34 is found in the Western text, and also in the Byzantine, but does not appear in the manuscripts usually regarded as most reliable. Apparently it was thought that Silas had to be retained in Antioch in order to accompany Paul on the next journey, in plain contradiction of verse 33. There is no problem, however, if we understand a reasonable period of time between the events of verses 33 and 40, sufficient for Paul to send for Silas before the next journey.

**But** - Term of contrast. This contrast marks a turning point in the ministry of Silas and of Paul.

**It seemed good to Silas to remain there.** - **It seemed good** is the translation of one Greek verb ([dokeo](#) cf similar use in Acts 15:22, 25, 28, 34) which in this context means it seemed proper or best. I realize this verse may not be in the earliest Greek manuscripts, but even with that caveat one cannot help but believe that Silas was a Spirit filled man who was sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. And so instead of returning to Jerusalem, he chose to **remain** in Antioch. God's subsequent use of him would confirm that Silas had made the correct choice.

#### Acts 15:35 **But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord.**

KJV Acts 15:35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

- **stayed** Acts 13:1; 14:28
- **teaching** Acts 28:31; Matthew 28:19,20; Colossians 1:28; 1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 4:2
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### 'BIBLIOCENTRIC' TEACHING AND PREACHING

Antioch was what we might today call a "Bible church," in the sense that the **teaching and preaching** was "Bibliocentric." If this

pattern was good for this ancient church which was so mightily used by God, is it not surely true that this same pattern of Bible centered preaching and teaching would transform a sleepy social gathering into a mighty instrument in the hands of God that His Spirit would use for making disciples and spreading the Gospel globally? That's a rhetorical question of course. Can I hear an "Amen?"

**But - Term of contrast.** The contrast is with Acts 15:33 where they sent back Judas and Silas.

**Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch teaching and preaching with many others also** - Once again we see Paul redeeming the time (Eph 5:16), knowing his life was but a breath, a vapor, etc. We should all do likewise. Notice the distinction between teaching and preaching.

**Preaching will bring us out of the world,  
But teaching brings the world out of us!**

**Stedman** writes "do not miss the last four words: **"with many others also."** In that congregation there were many, beside the four men mentioned here, who had gifts of teaching and preaching. They exercised them there in Antioch and in all the area around. In our congregation there are many of you who have the gift of teaching and the gift of preaching (proclaiming the truth, telling it abroad and appealing to the will -- as opposed to teaching, which instructs the mind). And you should be exercising these gifts here, just as they did in Antioch, because this is the secret of the multiplication of the church. As they did this in Antioch the word was spreading all through the surrounding region." (The Way God Guides)

**William Larkin** makes an excellent point writing that "As living organisms are able to rejuvenate themselves when damaged, so the Spirit of God can and will repair the wreckage of hurt feelings, strained relations and wrong thinking brought to the body of Christ by the infiltration of false teaching. What it takes is a church willing to take the time, expend the human resources and make the effort to do the repair work." (Ibid)

**Stayed** (tarried)(1304)(**diatribo** from **dia** = through or intensifier + **tribo** = to wear, to spend) literally means to rub away or through, and in the NT is used only figuratively meaning to spend or pass time. See all Luke's uses of **diatribo** in Acts - Acts 12:19; 14:3; 14:28; 15:35; 16:12; 20:6; 25:6; 25:14.

**Teaching** (**present tense** - continually)(1321)(**didasko** from **dáo**= know or teach; English = didactic) means to provide instruction or information in a formal or informal setting, focusing on content, with the express purpose of discovering the truth through systematic teaching or systematic training. And remember that The Holy Spirit is always the One Who really teaches spiritual truths which have eternal impact (cf Jn 16:8-13, 1 Jn 2:20,27). The teacher should strive to teach others by what the Holy Spirit personally taught the teacher. God calls each of us to be continuously committed to learning from Him, so we can also teach others. Paul and Barnabas and other unnamed men were such Spirit energized, Word centered teachers.

**MacArthur** points out that **didasko** was "used to refer to a choir director who trains a choir over a long period of rehearsals until they are able to perform....(and so) It is the ability to pass on truth in a systematic progression so that someone receives it, implements it, and a change of behavior takes place."

**THOUGHT** - You can mark it down - In Scripture to **teach** means to pass on the truth about the Word of God, the God of the Word and the faith of the saints, with the goal of influencing the understanding and stimulating obedience to the truth taught and resultant Spirit energized transformation and Christ-likeness. The essence of a disciple in fact is that he or she is a learner. The teacher teaches and the disciple hears and processes what is heard so that this truth affects his or her innermost being (their heart, not just their head - transformation not just information). Ultimately the purpose of **didasko** is to shape the will of the one taught into conformity with the will of God as revealed in the Bible.

**Luke's** uses of **didasko** in Acts -

Acts 1:1; Acts 4:2; Acts 4:18; Acts 5:21; Acts 5:25; Acts 5:28; Acts 5:42; Acts 11:26; Acts 15:1; Acts 15:35;  
Acts 18:11; Acts 18:25; Acts 20:20; Acts 21:21; Acts 21:28; Acts 28:31

**Preaching** (the gospel, good news)(2097)(**euaggelizo/euangelizo** from **eu** = good, well + **aggéllō** = proclaim, tell; related to noun **aggelos** = messenger) in the **present tense** indicates they were continually announcing the good message, *gospelizing* the complete message of God's good news. Here is the point -- preaching the Gospel is not just done to win the lost (which is what many saints believe is the full work of the Gospel), but to enable the disciple to grow in grace (as the Spirit transforms using the Word preached - 2 Cor 3:18, especially the liberating Gospel truths in Romans 6-8). As someone has well said "When the effect of the Gospel is all important in the church, the force of the Gospel is unstoppable in the world." Amen!

**Luke's** uses of **euaggelizo** in Acts



Acts 5:42; Acts 8:4; Acts 8:12; Acts 8:25; Acts 8:35; Acts 8:40; Acts 10:36; Acts 11:20; Acts 13:32; Acts 14:7;  
Acts 14:15; Acts 14:21; Acts 15:35; Acts 16:10; Acts 17:18

**The word of the Lord** - This is what we should always teach and preach, but there is been a definite drift away from this pattern in many modern churches in America. Note it says the **word of the Lord**, not the agenda of the pastor, the stories of the pastor, the social concerns of the pastor, etc.

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Comment by **Pastor Jack Andrews** on Acts 15:35 - Did Silas, Paul, and Barnabas like the food, friends, and fellowship in Antioch? That wasn't the reason they stayed on in Antioch. There was a work to do in Antioch. The church was growing, the church was glowing, and the church was going with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The issue of salvation had been settled, the disciples needed instruction, and the mission needed fulfilling. Disciple's always needs instructing and the mission always needs fulfilling. The Bible tells us that Silas stayed in Antioch along with Paul and Barnabas so that **they could teach and preach the word of the Lord**. Luke tells us that many others were there as well. God provides for His church those called to teach and preach His word so that His church can be strengthened, challenged. Preachers and teachers preach and teach so that the church can be edified, sinners can be evangelized, and the Savior can be glorified. The devil is always at work **distracting** the church, **discouraging** the church, and **detouring** the church from its main mission. The devil will raise up false teachers, legalists, and liberals to stifle the work of the church. John G. Butler wrote, "Evil wants to stop progress of the work of God. **So evil causes all kinds of trouble in the church to keep the pastor and people occupied with the trouble instead of being able to concentrate on proclaiming the Word of God.**" May we learn to stay focused on the task at hand and faithful to the work that He has called us to! (Ibid)

**John MacArthur** wrote, "The reading of the letter and the report of the delegation evoked **four responses from the assembled believers**.

1. The **first** was celebration: they rejoiced...
2. The **second** response was consolation, because of the letter's encouragement...
3. A **third** response was confirmation, as Judas and Silas... strengthened the brethren...
4. The **final** response was continuation... Paul and Barnabas picked up where they had left off and continued their ministry of teaching and preaching... the word of the Lord."

**Acts 15:36 After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."**

KJV Acts 15:36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

- **Let us return.** Acts 7:23; Exodus 4:18; Jeremiah 23:2; Matthew 25:36,43
- **in every city** Acts 13:4,13,14,51; 14:1,6,21,24,25
- **and see** Ro 1:11; 2 Cor 11:28; Php 1:27; 1 Th 2:17,18; 3:6,10,11; 2 Ti 1:4
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **HORTATION TO CONTINUE THE GREAT ADVENTURE**

[Hortation](#) describes a strong urging giving or strong encouragement urging to some course of conduct or action. Stated another way hortatory is a person that pleads or strongly requests someone to take a particular action. Paul is clearly speaking a hortatory word to Barnabas in this passage. In short, Paul is "[hot to trot](#)," ready and eager to engage in an activity, ready to move out and move on. Time is "wasting."

**Paul's Second Missionary Journey** (Acts 15:36-18:22) as we begin this journey Paul sets out from Antioch Acts 15:36-40 to Syria Acts 15:41 and Cilicia Acts 15:41 (Go to Acts 16 Commentary for continuation).

**Guzik** - Paul had the heart of both an obstetrician (bringing people into the body of Christ) and a pediatrician (growing people up in the body of Christ).

**David Jeremiah** adds, "It was not Paul's heart to win people to Christ and then allow them to struggle on their own. He was a spiritual pediatrician as well as an obstetrician! He wanted to return and make sure the new believers they had left behind were growing in the Lord and being built up in their faith."

**After some days** - Again Luke does not tell us - is this weeks or several months? However we can be certain that in their teaching and preaching they were making disciples or learners and this takes some time.

I love **Spurgeon's** comment - An active spirit will not long be at rest. Love to Jesus sets a man at work for His cause, and leads him to stir up others, as Paul did Barnabas. (**ED**: God grant by His Spirit that this daily mindset would be true of you and me for the glory of the Lamb. Amen)

**Ray Stedman** on **Paul's** exhortation to **Barnabas** - There is no vision, no angelic call. There is no lightning, no special word of the Spirit in the inner heart. There is simply the responsible concern of Paul and Barnabas for the people whom they had led to Christ. They remembered all those Gentiles who had come to Christ in the cities of Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, and they said to one another, "We have a responsibility to help them grow in grace. They do not yet know the whole counsel of God; there are truths that they must understand, without which they will be lacking in their Christian experience. Let us go and see how they are, and impart these truths to them." That is a perfectly proper leading of the Holy Spirit. God does not want to give orders to you about everything you do. He is not interested in robots. He does not want automatons who must wait for some special feeling before they act. Once you discover the power by which to act -- the life of Jesus within, ready to respond to the choice of your will -- then the initiative lies with you. You can do what lies on your heart to do. Do what you want to do, and the Spirit of God will be with you in it. This is what we see here, and Paul teaches it in Philippians where he says, "Work out your own solutions with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you, both to will [to choose] and to do of his good pleasure..." (Philippians 2:12b-13). So do not wait, move out! Don't wait for some particular invitation to come. If you sense an opportunity to show responsible concern for another, move into it, and God will be with you in it." (The Way God Guides)

**Larkin** writes "Part of St. Patrick's benediction, "May the wind be always at your back," well suits the experience of the Pauline missionary band at the beginning of its second journey. The wind is, of course, the wind of the Spirit, and it blows in some surprising directions." (Ibid)

**Jack Arnold** - The second missionary journey had, as its original motivation, the edification of the saints, not evangelism. Paul had a pastor's heart and wanted his converts in Christ to grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ. Like a devoted mother, he cared for his spiritual children. "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth" (3 John 4). For the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas received a call from the Holy Spirit and were appointed to this task by the local church at Antioch, but for the second missionary journey, God placed a strong burden on Paul's heart, a divine impulse to move out for God based on his concern for the saints. There was no vision, no Spirit directed call, no angelic appearance and no providential circumstances. There was only the deep concern of Paul and then Barnabas for the people whom they had led to Christ. They apparently could not shake this divine urging and they moved out for Christ to confirm the saints. Once we have discerned that we have a divine urging from God, we must not wait. We must move out in faith and God will be with us in the matter and give us further clarification of His will.

**Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord"** Now we see the two names reversed as Paul takes the initiative in this suggestion.

And keep in mind that Paul and Barnabas clearly had a close relationship for became Paul's advocate during a time when other believers felt threatened by their former persecutor (Read Acts 9:26-28). When Saul's life was threatened in Jerusalem, he had to depart for his hometown of Tarsus in Cilicia where he ministered for many years, some think as long as a decade. It was Barnabas who journeyed to Tarsus to locate Saul and bring him back to teach at Antioch (Acts 11:25-26).

**Let us return** (1994)(**epistrepho** from **epí** = motion toward + **strepho** = turn quite around or reverse) means literally to turn about or turn toward and so to return . Most of Luke's uses of **epistrepho** in Acts are figurative and describe a turning to the Lord (conversion). In fact **epistrepho** is used in this same chapter by James who declared "it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles." (Acts 15:19+). In a sense then Paul makes a play on words, exhorting Barnabas that they "**return**" to visit those who had "**turned**" (to God).

**Luke's** uses of **epistrepho** in Acts -

Acts 3:19; Acts 9:35; Acts 9:40; Acts 11:21; Acts 14:15; Acts 15:19; Acts 15:36; Acts 16:18; Acts 26:18; Acts 26:20; Acts 28:27

## **DESIRE TO VISIT AND GIVE CARING OVERSIGHT**

As discussed below, Paul's desire and purpose was not just to make a casual **visit**, but was to demonstrate concern and spiritual aid for the new believers in Christ.

**Larkin** - The plan of the second missionary journey is follow-up nurture, then further outreach. Paul is not one to "dip and drop" his converts (Talbert 1984:68). He suggests to Barnabas that they *visit* (denoting caring oversight). (Ibid)

**Visit** (1980)(**episkeptomai** from **epí** = upon, intensifying + **skopeo** = give attention to) literally means to look upon, to examine closely, to inspect, to examine the state of affairs of something, to look after or to oversee. **In other words Paul used a verb that meant more than just making a social call.** As **Hiebert** says "In classical Greek, it (episkeptomai) was commonly used of visiting the sick, whether by a doctor or a friend.' In Jewish usage, it commonly denoted to visit with the aim of caring for and supplying the needs of those visited (Job 2:11; Jer. 23:2; Ezek. 34:11; Zech. 11:16; Mt. 25:36, 43). The term implies concern and personal contact with the needy." **Episkeptomai** depicts one going to see another with the intent of rendering help. For example in Luke's opening chapter this verb is used twice ""Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For **He has visited** us (ALLUDING TO THE FATHER'S SENDING OF HIS SON) and accomplished redemption for His people...Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high **will visit** us (AGAIN ALLUDING TO THE MESSIAH) (Lk 1:68, 78+)

Luke used **episkeptomai** in this same chapter ([verse 14](#)) quoting James declaration that "Simeon has related how God first **concerned** (episkeptomai) Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name." Indeed, in the Septuagint **episkeptomai** speaks of a visitation from God, most often a visitation for good (e.g., Ge 21:1-2 fulfilling His promise of a son to Sarah and Abraham, a son who was in the line of Messiah and indeed a type or shadow of His Son to come who would render help to His people. Cf use in Ex 3:16, 4:31 of God's concern for Israel in slavery in Egypt. See use in Lxx of Ps 8:5 = "care for him")

All of the NT uses of **episkeptomai** - Mt 25:36; Mt 25:43; Lk 1:68; Lk 1:78; Lk 7:16; Acts 6:3; Acts 7:23; Acts 15:14; Acts 15:36; Heb 2:6; Jas 1:27.

**Proclaimed** (2605)(**kataggello** from **kata** = an intensifier, down + **aggelos** = messenger from **aggello** = to declare, report) literally means to announce plainly, clearly, openly, publicly and loudly! It was used of solemn religious messages. The preposition **kata** means down so this verb pictures getting the message "down" to where the listeners really understood it. **Kataggello** is used by Paul in Col 1:28+ where he says "We **proclaim** ([present tense](#)) Him ("Christ in you" - Col 1:27), admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." The goal of the proclamation is that men and women might be maturing in their faith, looking more and more like Christ, yea, even "smelling" more like Him among the saved and lost (see 2 Cor 2:14-16).

Note that both **euangelizo** and **kataggello** both have at their root the work **aggelos** which means messenger and is transliterated as angel, a heavenly messenger dispatched by God to take to mankind a message. These missionaries (and you and I) were God's "angels" so to speak bringing a heavenly message of life to a dying race of men!

**Luke's uses of kataggello in Acts** -

Acts 3:24; Acts 4:2; Acts 13:5; Acts 13:38; Acts 15:36; Acts 16:17; Acts 16:21; Acts 17:3; Acts 17:13; Acts 17:23; Acts 26:23;

**In every city** - The Greek preposition **kata** has the force of **city by city**.

**Robertson** - The precariousness of the life of new converts in pagan lands is shown in all of Paul's Epistles (Furneaux). So he wanted to go city by city

**And see how they are** - "How they have it." Paul like a father is concerned to know of the spiritual condition of those "children" with whom he has played a part in seeing birthed into the Kingdom of God. He wants to assure that they are growing "the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." (2 Peter 3:18)

**THOUGHT** - This should be the concern of all of us who God has privileged to lead others to Christ - to be concerned (and visit them) regarding their growth in Christ-likeness. Have you followed up with your "spiritual children?"

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**Application:** Too often in the modern day church we concern ourselves with the physical condition of brothers and sisters than we do about their spiritual condition. People can leave the church, fall by the wayside, give up on the Lord and we never seek to reclaim them. As someone has said, "We spend more time trying to pray sick saints out of heaven than lost sinners out of hell." This applies to us right now! Look at our weekly prayer list and the physical needs of others far outweigh the spiritual needs. Don't misunderstand me—we do and need to continue to care about the whole person and that means their physical well being.

- But if a person is getting alone physically and is spiritually sick and slumbering
- then that person is in need of immediate emergency help! (Jack Andrews Expository Studies)

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## Learning From The Past

Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. —2 Timothy 4:11

Acts 15:36-41

We all have some regrets about the past and try to forget our sins and mistakes. We feel a lot like the Peanuts comic strip character Linus, who said, "Maybe we should think only about today." Charlie Brown disagreed, "No, that's giving up. I'm still hoping yesterday will get better."

We know that we can't change what happened yesterday. But we can learn from yesterday's sins and mistakes, and with God's help we can use that knowledge to make a better tomorrow.

That's what John Mark did. He had started on a missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas, but when they entered Asia Minor he abandoned them and went back home (Acts 13:13; 15:38). We're not told why he left, but the apostle Paul saw it as a shameful desertion.

Later, Mark became a co-worker with Barnabas (15:39). We don't know the details, but at some point Mark must have changed and reconciled with Paul (Colossians 4:10-11). When Paul was in prison awaiting execution, he asked Timothy to come and to bring Mark with him. He indicated that Mark was "useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11).

We cannot erase yesterday, but we can learn from it. When we take our sins and mistakes to the Lord and seek His help, we can be better today and tomorrow.

By Herbert Vander Lugt

For Further Study

How do we know that God forgives us? (1 John 1:9-2:1).

Read the online version of the booklet [When We Don't Measure Up](#)

### Acts 15:37 Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also.

KJV Acts 15:37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

- John 12:12,25; 13:5,13; Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1:24
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## BARNABAS IS "BOUND AND DETERMINED!"

**Barnabas** is bent on or "[bound and determined](#)" to take John...Mark on mission! Webster defines the phrase "bound and determined" as "having a very strong feeling that one is going to do something and not allow anyone or anything to get in the way - very determined." And remember the nickname for Barnabas is "Son of Encouragement," (Acts 4:36+) and how better encourage John Mark than to offer to take him along!

**Warren Wiersbe** wrote, "That Barnabas would champion John Mark is certainly no surprise. He and Mark were cousins, and the family ties would be strong. But even more, Barnabas was the kind of man who eagerly tried to help others, which is why the early church named him 'son of encouragement.'"

**Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also** - Barnabas clearly agreed with Paul's exhortation to return to the mission field. However, his desire to take along Mark would lead to a schism between these two great saints.

**Robertson on Barnabas wanted** - Barnabas willed, wished and stuck to it."

The NAS may be a bit weak translating it as "**wanted**" and the KJV a bit more on point by translating it as "**determined**" because the picture is of Barnabas deliberating and deciding on taking John Mark. Furthermore "wanted" is in the [imperfect tense](#) speaking of Barnabas' insistence in taking John Mark. It is interesting that the [imperfect tense](#) is also used in the next verse of Paul **insisting**. One gets the picture of Barnabas "**wanting**" and Paul countering with "**insisting**!"

**Wanted** (intended) ([1014](#))([boulomai](#)) refers to a settled desire, one born of or springing from **reason** and not from **emotion**. To will,

to wish, to will deliberately, to intend, to have a purpose, to be minded. **Boulomai** underlines the preset determined intention which drives one's planning, wishing, resolving. In contrast, the verb [thelo](#) focuses on the desire ("wishfulness") behind making an offer. **Boulomai** expresses also the inward predisposition and bent from which active volition proceeds.

All of Luke's uses of **boulomai** -

Lk. 10:22; Lk. 22:42; Acts 5:28; Acts 5:33; Acts 12:4; Acts 15:37; Acts 17:20; Acts 18:15; Acts 18:27; Acts 19:30; Acts 22:30; Acts 23:28; Acts 25:20; Acts 25:22; Acts 27:43; Acts 28:18;

**Take...along** [\(4838\)](#) see below on [sumparalambano](#)

**Jack Andrews** - We have all at one time or another been like John Mark. We've been in a place where we needed someone to come alongside of us and give us another chance, to challenge us to be godly, to love us and lift us up! Thank God for Barnabas! He didn't give up on John Mark. John Mark proved himself faithful in the long run. Because of the patience of Barnabas, the mentoring by Barnabas, and the faith of Barnabas John Mark flourished. John Mark became useful to not only Barnabas, but also to Paul as well. A poem I found describes Mark well:

Oh, the bitter shame and sorrow that a time could ever be when I proudly said of Jesus, 'All of self and none of Thee.'

Yet He found me—I beheld Him bleeding on the cruel tree, and my wistful heart said faintly 'Some of self and some of Thee.'

Day by day His tender mercies healing, helpful, full and free brought me lower, while I whispered, 'Less of self and more of Thee.'

Higher than the highest heavens, deeper than the deepest sea. 'Lord, Thy love as last has conquered, none of self and all of Thee.'

(Jack Andrews Expository Studies – Understanding Acts - Volume 4)

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**ILLUSTRATION** - n New Year's Day, 1929, Georgia Tech played the University of California in the Rose Bowl. In that game a man named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for California. Somehow, he became confused and started running 65 yards in the wrong direction. One of his teammates, Ben Lorn, outdistanced him and downed him just before he scored for the opposing team. When California attempted to punt, Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety which was the ultimate margin of victory. That strange play came in the first half, and everyone who was watching the game was asking the same question: "What will Coach Nibbs Price do with Roy Riegels in the second half?" The men filed off the field and went into the dressing room. They sat down on the benches and on the floor, all but Riegels. He put his blanket around his shoulders, sat down in a corner, put his face in his hands and cried like a baby.

If you have played football, you know that a coach usually has a great deal to say to his team during half time. That day Coach Price was quiet. No doubt he was trying to decide what to do with Riegels. Then the timekeeper came in and announced that there were three minutes before playing time. Coach Price looked at the team and said simply, "Men, the same team that played the first half will start the second." The players got up and started out, all but Riegels. He did not budge. The coach looked back and called to him again; still he didn't move. Coach Price went over to where Riegels sat and said, "Roy, didn't you hear me? The same team that played the first half will start the second. Then Roy Riegels looked up and his cheeks were wet with a strong man's tears. "Coach," he said, "I can't do it to save my life. I've ruined you, I've ruined the University of California, I've ruined myself. I couldn't face that crowd in the stadium to save my life." Then Coach Price reached out and put his hand on Riegel's shoulder and said to him: "Roy, get up and go on back; the game is only half over." And Roy Riegels went back, and those Tech men will tell you that they have never seen a man play football as Roy Riegels played that second half.

If we fail, my friends, God always gives us a second chance if we repent. We must remember there is always a second half, the game isn't over.

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## Helping With Hurdles

Two are better than one . . . . For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. —Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Today's Scripture: Acts 15:36-41

When my daughter Debbie was a little girl, she took ballet lessons. One dance exercise involved jumping over a rolled-up gym mat. Debbie's first attempt resulted in her bouncing off this hurdle. For a moment she sat on the floor stunned, and then she began to cry.

Immediately, I darted out to help her up and spoke soothing words to her. Then, holding her hand, I ran with her until she successfully jumped over the rolled-up mat. Debbie needed my encouragement to clear that hurdle.

While working with Paul on his first missionary journey, John Mark faced a major hurdle of his own: Things got tough on the trip, and he quit. When Barnabas tried to re-enlist Mark for Paul's second journey, it created conflict. Barnabas wanted to give him a second chance, but Paul saw him as a liability. Ultimately, they parted ways, and Barnabas took Mark with him on his journey (Acts 15:36-39).

The Bible is silent about John Mark's response when Barnabas helped him over his ministry hurdle. However, he must have proven himself, because Paul later wrote that John Mark "is useful to me for ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11).

When we see a believer struggling with an apparent failure, we should provide help. Can you think of someone who needs your help to clear a hurdle? By Dennis Fisher ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, I want to show the kindness of Your heart today. Please show me who I can help and in what way. I want my words and deeds to convey Your love. Amen.

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## Resolution

The contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. —Acts 15:39

Today's Scripture: Acts 15:36-41

In May 1884, two young parents disagreed about what middle name to give their newborn son. The mom preferred Solomon; the dad, Shippe—both family names. Because John and Martha couldn't agree, they compromised on "S." Thus Harry S. Truman would become the only US president with an initial for a middle name.

Over 120 years later, we still know about this conflict—but we also know that a reasonable resolution was reached.

In the New Testament, we read about another disagreement that has lived on in history. This one was between two missionaries: Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15). Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them on a trip to check on some churches they had helped previously (v.37). But Paul did not trust Mark because of an earlier incident (v.38). Paul and Barnabas disagreed so sharply that they parted ways (v.39).

We still read about this argument 2,000 years later. What's important is not that it lived on in history, but that it didn't leave permanent relationship scars. Paul apparently reconciled with Barnabas, and in his final days asked for Mark to be with him because "he is useful to me for ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11).

Arguments happen. But let's make sure they are resolved. Grudges are a burden too heavy to carry. By Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Arguments can lead to grudges,  
Which, if left, will cause a rift;  
But if we bring resolution,  
Our relationships won't drift.  
—Sper

**Acts 15:38 But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.**

KJV Acts 15:38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

CSB Acts 15:38 But Paul did not think it appropriate to take along this man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone on with them to the work.

ESV Acts 15:38 But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia

and had not gone with them to the work.

NET Acts 15:38 but Paul insisted that they should not take along this one who had left them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work.

NIV Acts 15:38 but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.

NLT Acts 15:38 But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in their work.

- **who** Acts 13:13; Ps 78:9; Proverbs 25:19; Luke 9:61; 14:27-34; James 1:8
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## FROM DESIRE TO DISSENSION

**But** (de) - Definite **term of contrast** marking a "change of direction" from Barnabas' desire to Paul's desension.

**Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along** - **Kept insisting** is in the [imperfect tense](#) which vividly transports us into the scene like a "fly on the wall" (so to speak) for this tense pictures Paul over and over, again and again arguing with Barnabas "Not him! No way! Not him!" The Greek is a bit more "derogatory" (if you will) for him is literally "that one," (touton) and **Marvin Vincent** adds that "It **marks** him (ED: NOTE THE PUN - JOHN MARK) very strongly, and is an emphatic position at the end of the sentence.

**Robertson** - Literally, "But Paul kept on deeming it wise not to be taking along with them this one."

**Insisting** (thought best - ESV)(515)(**axioo** from **axios** = of weight) means basically to think meet or right and has several nuances - (1) make worthy (2 Th 1:11); (2) think of as worthy, consider worthy or deserving (and act accordingly) - BDAG - "to consider suitable for requital or for receipt of someth." (Lk. 7:7; 1 Ti 5:17; Heb. 3:3; 10:29); (3) think fitting to do something, prefer, regard as right to do (Acts 15:38); (4) want, request, desire (Acts 13:42; 28:22)

The idea of **axioo** in the present passage is to deem or hold an opinion and so Paul was of the opinion they should not take John Mark along. He kept holding (and surely expressing) his opinion over and over!

**Zodhiates** - To esteem, count or reckon worthy or deserving (Luke 7:7; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 3:3; 10:29; Sept.: Gen. 31:28); to think fit, suitable or proper (Acts 15:38 [cf. 28:22]); to count worthy or fit, to account or accept as worthy (2 Thess. 1:11); to desire, wish, hence demand (Sept.: Esth. 4:8; Dan. 1:8; 2:16, 23). (Complete Word Study Dictionary)

**TDNT** - Epictetus describes the calling, position and destiny of man as "being regarded as worthy of a post by Zeus"

**Gilbrant** notes that "**Axiōō** has a multiplicity of meanings in classical Greek; however, the underlying concept is that of "considering worthy, deserving." This can be used in either a positive sense (e.g., deserving of reward) or negative (e.g., deserving of punishment) (Liddell-Scott). Other shades of definition include "to expect" (because one considers oneself "worthy"); "to expect" (because one considers it right), hence "to ask, request"; or in a more technical sense it concerns "making a claim," or "holding an opinion" (ibid.)." (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

**Axioo** - 7x in 7v - consider...worthy(1), considered worthy(1), count...worthy(1), counted worthy(1), deserve(1), desire(1), insisting(1).

Lk. 7:7 = "I did not even **consider** myself **worthy** to come to You"; Acts 15:38; Acts 28:22 = "we **desire** to hear from you"; 2 Th 1:11 = "our God will **count you worthy** of your calling"; 1 Tim. 5:17 = "The elders who rule well are **to be considered worthy** of double honor,"; Heb. 3:3 = Jesus "has **been counted worthy** of more glory than Moses"; Heb. 10:29 = "How much severer punishment do you think he **will deserve**..."

**Axioo** in the Septuagint -

Gen. 31:28; Num. 22:16; Est. 4:8; Est. 5:6; Est. 7:8; Est. 8:3; Est. 9:12; Isa. 33:7; Jer. 7:16; Jer. 11:14; Dan. 1:8; Dan. 2:16; Dan. 2:23; Dan. 2:49; Dan. 3:30; Dan. 4:33; Dan. 6:5; Dan. 6:7; Dan. 6:8; Dan. 6:11; Dan. 6:12;

**Take...along** (4838)(**sumparalambano** from **sun/syn** = together [speaks of intimacy] + **paralambano** = to take to, to join to oneself from **para** = alongside, beside + **lambano** = to take, receive) means to take along with oneself as a companion on a journey. It is fascinating that this verb is used only 4x in Scripture and 3 are used in reference to John Mark. The first use was in a "positive" sense, Luke recording " And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, **taking along** with

them John, who was also called Mark." (Acts 12:25+)

**Who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work-** Recall the context in Acts 13:13+ "Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left ([apochoreo](#) - moved away from) them and returned ([hupostrepho](#)) to Jerusalem."

**Spurgeon** writes that Paul "would not go out a second time with a faint-hearted deserter, and he was right. Barnabas, believing that John Mark was penitent for what he had done, and would henceforth be faithful, wished to give him another opportunity; and he was right. Now, since these two brethren had each right on his side, neither of them could yield the point without violating his honest judgment, and we do not therefore wonder that the contention grew hot. The Holy Spirit is very considerate in thus recording the difficulties which occurred even among inspired men. How can we expect always to see eye to eye, when Paul and Barnabas differed?)

**Departed** (deserted = CSB, NLT, withdrawn = ESV) (868) ([aphistemi](#) from **apo** = separation of one thing from another + **histemi** = stand root of English = [apostasy](#), apostasize) literally means to stand off from means to withdraw, to stand off, to forsake, to depart from or to remove oneself from. To apostatize or to fall away from. To withdraw from a place, an association or a relationship.

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**Illustration:** In a Dennis the Menace cartoon, Dennis was sulking in the corner during his timeout. He muttered what so many people believe about their own problems, Dennis said, "It's not my fault that everything is my fault!" The missionaries ran into a major problem! Who was at fault? Who was right? Who was wrong?

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**ILLUSTRATION** - Someone gave the great analogy of the Carpenter's tools that held a conference with Brother Hammer presiding over the conference. During the conference several suggested that he leave the meeting because he was way too loud.

- Bro. Hammer replied, "If I have to leave the shop, Brother Screw must go also. You have to turn him around and around again and again to get him to accomplish anything."
- Bro. Screw spoke up, "If you wish, I'll leave, but Bro. Plane must leave too. All his work is on the surface and his efforts have no depth at all."
- Bro. Plane retorted, "Bro. Rule will also have to withdraw, for he is always measuring folks as though he were the only one who is right."
- Then Bro. Rule complained about Bro. Sandpaper. He said, "You ought to leave too because you are so rough and always rubbing people the wrong way."

Then in the midst of the conference the Carpenter from Nazareth walked in and started to work. He put His apron on and went to the work bench to construct a pulpit from which to proclaim the Gospel. He used the hammer, screw, plane, rule, sandpaper, and all the other tools. After the day's work when the pulpit was finished, Bro. Saw rose and remarked, "Brethren, I observe that all of us are workers together with the Lord." It is always awesome to see the church of God work together for the glory of God! But that is not always the case.

Sometimes there are:

- disputes that arise,
- divisions that occur,
- separations that happen,
- and departures that take place.

Even among the most sincere and faithful servants of God there are times that troubles arise. Sometimes disciples cannot agree on who will serve and where they will serve. (The Jack Andrews Expository Studies – Understanding Acts - Volume 4)

**Acts 15:39 And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.**

KJV Acts 15:39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

- **such a sharp disagreement** Acts 15:2; 6:1; Psalms 106:33; 119:96; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 7:18-21; James 3:2



- **and sailed** Acts 4:36; 11:20; 13:4-12; 27:4
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## SHARP DISAGREEMENT LEADS TO SEPARATION

They could not come together so they came apart!

Sadly contentious communication often leads to separations between believers. And do not use this text as a [proof-text](#) to excuse Christian quarreling!

**Brian Harbour** says that "These three elements—personality, 'who's in charge;' policy, 'how things are done' and pride, 'who gets the credit' -are at the heart of conflict in the church."

**Jack Andrews** notes that "The whole church had come together on the issue of salvation, but the missionaries couldn't come together on who would serve." (Ibid)

**Swindoll** - A disagreement is a collision, an ideological crash that occurs when two different personalities drive their agendas along the same issue from opposing directions. That's not to say that all disagreements occur because one person is wrong and the other right. Sometimes both parties of a conflict are correct yet cannot agree. Consequently, a resolution becomes especially difficult because both people see the issue correctly, just from different points of view. The solution requires clear, objective, respectful, and patient communication and may result in compromise or an amicable separation. Yet, because we are fallen creatures, disagreements can be occasions for Christians to mistreat and hurt each other, even for pillars of the Christian faith such as Paul and Barnabas. Although there is evidence these two missionaries reconciled later, and the goals and methods of both were vindicated in church history, Luke indicates their clash was painful at the time. (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – Acts)

**And there occurred such a sharp disagreement** - Literally "There happened a sharp disagreement." The had a "sharp argument, sharp difference of opinion." (Louw-Nida). Paul's good idea suddenly leads to a sharp argument. Has this ever happened to you? You offered what you thought was a good proposal, only to find that you had unearthed a veritable "can of worms"?

**Sharp disagreement** (provocation, contention, irritation) [\(3948\)](#)(**paroxusmos** from **para** = besides, near + **oxuno** = literally to sharpen, figuratively to incite or irritate) is a strong word which literally means to sharpen and figuratively speaks of a sharpening of one's mind or incitement to some action. Depending on the context, **paroxusmos** can have either a positive or negative meaning. In a positive sense, which is virtually the antithesis of the sense here in Acts the writer of Hebrews says "let us consider how to **stimulate** (paroxusmos) one another to love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24+) and of course refers to a rousing of one to activity by incitement or encouragement. In a negative sense as in Acts 15:39 paroxusmos refers to a state of irritation, a sharp disagreement, a "bristly" argument or a provocation between Paul and Barnabas.

This Greek word paroxusmos is related to our English **paroxysm** which describes a sudden uncontrollable attack or violent expression of something, including a violent disagreement. Luke uses the verb form [paroxuno](#) in Acts 17:16 writing "Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit **was being provoked** ([paroxuno](#)) within him as he was observing the city full of idols." It is somewhat ironic that Paul uses [paroxuno](#) in 1 Cor 13:5+ to describe **love** as "**not provoked** ([paroxuno](#))." But here in Acts 15:39 both men were "**provoked**" suggesting that **love** was not "in the air" so to speak!

We get some sense of the meaning of **paroxusmos** for it is used twice in the Septuagint. In Deuteronomy 29:28 (a prophecy of future judgment on Israel) Moses describes how the "LORD uprooted them (Israel) from their land in anger and in fury and in great **wrath** (Lxx = paroxusmos), and cast them into another land (10 Northern tribes to Assyria in 722 BC, 2 Southern tribes to Babylon in 586 BC), as it is this day." In Jeremiah 32:37+ which is the [antithesis](#) of Dt 29:28, God gives them a prophetic promise (yet to be fulfilled) "Behold, I will gather them out of all the lands to which I have driven them in My anger, in My wrath and in great **indignation** (Lxx = paroxusmos); and I will bring them back to this place and make them dwell in safety (during the Millennium)."

**Swindoll** adds that "Classical Greek medical writers use the word (paroxusmos) to describe a sudden, violent spasm, such as a body-racking cough or an epileptic seizure. The air grew thick with passion as each man convulsed with fiery emotion in response to the other." (Ibid)

**Pritchard** writing on **paroxusmos** says "This particular word means a violent, hostile, angry, harsh, sharp, bitter disagreement. It's not as if Barnabas said, "Well, I would like to take Mark." "I'm not sure that's a good idea." "But he's such a fine boy." "But he left us." "Let's pray about it." No! They weren't that nice about it. In fact, the verb is in the imperfect tense, which mean a continual quarrel—unending, unyielding, ongoing, heated, intense, deep disagreement between them. Their argument was continual and it was contentious. They didn't just argue once and then let it go. They argued over and over again. And the more they argued, the angrier

they got. Because Barnabas knew he was right. And Paul knew he was right. That does raise the question, doesn't it, who is right here? Was Barnabas right or was Paul?" ([When Christians Disagree](#))

**That** (hoste) means "for this reason," and in this case the reason they separated is clear - they were have a "paroxysm"!

**M R DeHaan** said "There is nothing quite so sad as to see two servants of God, after laboring together, facing trials and suffering, come to a misunderstanding over a personality or minor difference of opinion and break up and go their separate ways."

**Gene Getz** - Paul knew they would face the same kind of difficult circumstances, perhaps even worse. He was also well aware that persecution and suffering were going to be an ongoing part of his ministry, wherever he went, among both Jews and Gentiles. The Lord had made this very clear in Damascus following his conversion (Acts 9:16). To Paul, common sense dictated this would not be a wise decision. Barnabas refused to give in and Paul became even more adamant about his own position. They both bristled and exchanged some very heated words....Luke wrote "that they parted company" (15:39). More literally, these two giants in the faith became very irritated with each other because neither would concede. (Men of Character)

Of course, we know from Paul's last written communication that he and John Mark had reconciled for some 16 years later (dates are only approximate) Paul tells Timothy "Only Luke is with me. Pick up **Mark** and **bring** (command) him with you, for he is **useful** ([euchrestos](#) = very profitable, helpful, beneficial same word he used in 2 Ti 2:21+) to me for service." (2 Ti 4:11+, see also Col 4:10+ and Philemon 1:24). How interesting that at the end of his "journey" Paul describes him in a similar way just as Luke had described him at the beginning of their first missionary journey when he wrote that Paul and Barnabas "also had John as their **helper** ([huperetes](#) = an "under-rower" and so an assistant)." (Acts 13:5+)

**They separated** ([673](#))(**apochorizo** from **apo** = from + **chorizo** = to separate) means to part from, split up, move apart, part company, go one's own way. In the only other NT John records "The sky was **split apart** like a scroll when it is rolled up." (Rev 6:14+). Given this use of apochorizo in Rev 6:14, one might say that the words "**they separated**" is somewhat of a "tame" (weak) translation, for the picture is of these two great men being torn asunder (cf "the sky" in Rev 6:14) signifying a total break at that point in their relationship.

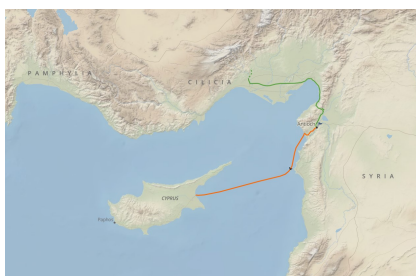
**John MacArthur** writes in in Rev 6:14 **apochorizo** describes "an apocalyptic disaster, the Heavens departed. So when they departed, they departed. There wasn't a lot of love there. They were a little bit bitter, and they blasted off in two directions and Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus."

As **Ray Pritchard** says "They were so angry that when they left, they didn't just part company, but their friendship at that point was torn apart. That's how deep their convictions were. As far as we can tell from this text, when Barnabas went one way and Paul the other, they evidently left unreconciled. Nothing in the text indicates that they got on their knees and prayed together. Maybe they did, but I don't see it. All I see is a sharp disagreement and a separation. There's no happy ending in this text. At this point it's important for us to review the biblical teaching on unity. I find it interesting that Paul—the man who didn't want to take John Mark—writes more about the unity of the church than any other man in the New Testament."

#### Related Resource:

- [When Christians Disagree](#) Ray Pritchard's sermon based on the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas

**One another** - This is a frequent phrase in Paul's epistles usually in a positive sense and speaking of the unity of believers - e.g. "Be devoted to **one another** in brotherly love; give preference to **one another** in honor...be of the same mind toward **one another**...love **one another**", etc (Ro 12:10, 16, Ro 13:8)



--- Paul and Silas to Cilicia  
--- Barnabas and John to Cyprus  
Click to Enlarge

**And Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus** - It is as if Barnabas sailed off into the sunset (so to speak) as this is the last mention of this great man in the book of Acts. Recall that Cyprus (see [Salamis](#)) was the first site visited on the first missionary journey and was a place that John Mark had visited (see Acts 13:5+).

**THOUGHT** - "Many of us would have dropped out of ministry had it not been for a gracious Barnabas who was willing to give us another chance after we failed." (Constable)

**Jack Andrews** makes the point that "the missionaries continued on in their missionary work. The differences, dissension, and division didn't halt the missionary work. It is important for us to learn that when we are hurt, when we disagree with a brother or sister, when we fail to come together that we do not pack it in and give up. We must continue on with the work of Jesus Christ. We must stay focused on the work of Jesus Christ and faithful to the work of Jesus Christ." (Ibid)

**Swindoll** has an interesting comment - Barnabas took John Mark with him and "sailed away to Cyprus" (Acts 15:39). Either Barnabas departed for home, taking Mark with him, or he intended to follow the same itinerary as the first missionary journey. We don't know which for certain. Luke doesn't include anything more about Barnabas or his travels after this. Later, Paul wrote of Barnabas in positive, present-tense terms, suggesting that he continued to conduct a ministry well known enough for Paul to use him as an illustration with the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 9:6).(Ibid)

**A T Robertson** - No one can rightly blame Barnabas for giving his cousin John Mark a second chance nor Paul for fearing to risk him again. One's judgment may go with Paul, but one's heart goes with Barnabas...Paul and Barnabas parted in anger and both in sorrow. Paul owed more to Barnabas than to any other man. Barnabas was leaving the greatest spirit of the time and of all times.

**Took...with** (3880)([paralambano](#) from [para](#) = beside + [lambano](#) = appropriate, receive) means take to oneself into close association, which is a good description of Barnabas taking John Mark right beside himself, "[under his wing](#)" so to speak. Remember Barnabas was a natural (supernatural) encourager, and here he expresses it by his actions.

**Sailed away** (1602)([ekpleo](#) from [ek](#) = out + [pleo](#) = to sail) means to sail out, to weigh anchor, to sail away from a port of harbor, depart by ship and only used literally in the NT (Acts 15:39, 18:18, 20:6). Liddell-Scott means a figurative use in secular Greek meaning to be out of one's senses.

**Ray Pritchard** - Let's run the clock ahead about 10 years. How does **Paul** feel about **Barnabas** now? We only have one hint. In 1 Cor. 9:6 he mentions Barnabas as a fellow apostle and a fellow worker in the cause of Jesus Christ. Ten years pass from the time of the argument and Paul is able to look at Barnabas and say, "My friend, my fellow apostle, my partner, my co-worker." Something had happened to bring about reconciliation and healing. (from [When Christians Disagree](#))

**Spurgeon** - There was no help for it but to part. Barnabas went one way with his nephew, and Paul another with Silas. Mark turned out well, and so justified the opinion of Barnabas, but Paul could not foresee that, and is not to be condemned for acting upon the general rule that he who puts his hand to the plough and looks back has proved himself unworthy. This separation, though painful in its cause, was a most excellent thing. There was no need for two such men to be together, they were each able to lead the way alone, and by their doing so double good was accomplished.

**R. Kent Hughes** points out that "Nowhere in the account does it say that the two prayed and that it seemed good to them and the Holy Spirit for Mark to remain or for the two of them to double their ministry by going in different directions. The omission of a harmonious conclusion indicates the unstated but undeniable failure of two of the greatest souls the church has ever known."

**Ray Stedman** comments that "Many have said, "Which of these men was right?" There have been a lot of disagreements over that, so that many people have had "sharp disagreement" over whether Paul or Barnabas was right! But that is really not the point. Both of these men were right. One was looking at the work and the other at the person. As Paul looked at the work he was perfectly right to say, "We don't want somebody who is apt to cop out on us." That is exactly what he said. And he probably quoted the words of Jesus, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62) That is right. Christian service is demanding, and those who undertake it should be prepared to go through with it and stick with it to the end, for God's cause is injured by those who quit in the middle. On the other hand, Barnabas, though I am sure he would have agreed as to the importance of the work, was looking at the young man. He knew Mark was gifted. Sure, he had failed, but who doesn't? Who of us does not need a second chance, does not need to have a forgiving spirit exercised toward us, and the opportunity to try again? So Barnabas was willing to give Mark a second chance. This indicates a very normal and proper procedure by which we may know the mind of the Spirit. There are times when there are differences of viewpoint which require a separation. The will of God was that Barnabas should take Mark and go to Cyprus, because Cyprus, his birthplace, had not been visited since the churches there had been founded. And it was the will of God for Paul to take Silas and go into Syria and Cilicia, because the churches there needed his particular ministry. But it was not the will of God that they should be sharp in their contention. Their quarreling was not right. It was the will of God to separate; it was not the will of God to quarrel. There are times when the Spirit of God does lead Christians to go separate ways. But they should do so with joy and with an agreeable understanding that the mind of the Spirit has been expressed in their divergent viewpoints. ([Reference](#))

**ILLUSTRATION** - It has been said that Leonardo da Vinci experienced a sharp disagreement with a fellow painter just before he

began his work on The Last Supper. Out of anger he determined to use the face of that man as the face of Judas Iscariot, and thus express his resentment for how he had been treated. Having done so, he commenced to painting the face of Jesus, but could make no progress. No inspiration came. Finally he confronted and confessed the sin of resentment in his heart and repainted the face of Judas. The inspiration then came for the face of Christ. The point is that we cannot paint the features of Jesus into our lives while painting others with the colors of anger and resentment.

**ILLUSTRATION** - Leslie Flynn wrote a book titled, Great Church Fights. I have never seen a copy of it, but the title makes me want to read it. I did read a story that he tells in it of two porcupines in the freezing north woods that huddled together to keep warm. But when they got close, their quills pricked each other and they had to move apart. They needed each other for the warmth, but they needed each other with their sharp quills. Church members often are like those porcupines: we need each other, but we needle each other! As Vance Havner observed, there are many “porcupine” Christians—they have their good points, but you can’t get near them! We all know that we are called to love one another. It doesn’t sound very spiritual to admit that there are Christians that we just don’t like. Their personalities grate on mine. The way that they do things is always counter to the way I do things, which of course is the right way! You cannot get involved in serving the Lord through the local church for very long before you run into someone whose personality clashes with yours. (Steven Cole)

**ILLUSTRATION** - Robert Morgan pastor of a church in Nashville, Tennessee shared the following story. There was a crisis arose in the church he pastored where two members hit an impasse and the results were not improving. In preparation for a capital campaign, Claude wanted to decorate the tables with small pine seedlings in cups so people could plant them at home and always be reminded of this time in the life of their church. His idea didn’t mesh with Anne’s more elegant thoughts about the diner’s decor. When Morgan heard the conflict had escalated after Claude lost his temper and spoke harshly to Anne, he told Claude an apology was necessary.

Claude said, “I did! I did apologize. It didn’t do any good.” Morgan said, “What did you say?”

Claude said, “I told her I was sorry.”

Morgan, a bit confused, then inquired further, “You did?”

With a rising voice Claude said, “Yes, I told her I was sorry she was acting so immaturely.”

Pastor Morgan tried to smooth things over and they ended up putting the seedlings in elegant pots for the big dinner, but **both families ended up leaving the church.**

We are fussing and fighting on major issues in the church today! God have mercy on us.

#### Acts 15:40 But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.

KJV Acts 15:40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

- **But Paul chose Silas and left** Acts 15:22,32; 16:1-3
- **being committed by the brethren** Acts 13:3; 14:26; 20:32; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 2 Timothy 4:22; Titus 3:15; 2 John 1:10,11
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### PAUL AND SILAS COMMISSIONED

**But** - Term of contrast. Two friends with many shared experiences on the first missionary journey part ways with the result that *division* turns into *multiplication*.

**Paul chose Silas and left** - As discussed above Silas was originally sent from Jerusalem to help testify to the Gentiles about the letter from the Jerusalem Council. Paul had opportunity to observe Silas' gifts (prophet) and his ability to speak (see Acts 15:32+). It is worth noting that neither Barnabas nor Paul felt it was appropriate to set off alone – they both understood that partnership in the Gospel ministry is essential.

Assuming **Silas** returned to Jerusalem (as one of the **they** that "had spent time...**they** were sent away" in Acts 15:33), this would

mean that Silas traveled roughly 900 miles, from Jerusalem to Antioch, from Antioch returning to Jerusalem and from Jerusalem back to Antioch! Needless to say he was undoubtedly in good shape and ready for the arduous journey into Cilicia and beyond into the mountainous regions of Turkey. We can only propose that Luke did not describe Silas' return to Jerusalem and then his summons to Antioch probably by Paul.

**Guzik** summarizes why Paul may have chosen Silas (Silvanus)...

- Silas was recognized as one of the leading men among the brethren (Acts 15:22).
- Silas was a prophet (Acts 15:32).
- Silas was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37).
- Silas probably spoke Greek (comparing Acts 15:22 and Acts 15:32).
- Silas wrote out one of Peter's letters (1 Peter 5:12) and maybe some of Paul's (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:1).

In a similar comment **John MacArthur** wrote, "(Silas) was in every respect a suitable man for missionary work. As a prophet, he was adept at proclaiming and teaching the Word. As a Jew, he had entrance into the synagogues. As a Roman citizen, he enjoyed the same protection and benefits as did Paul. And his status as a respected leader of the Jerusalem church reinforced Paul's teaching that Gentile salvation was solely by grace."

**John Phillips** on their commission by the brethren (i.e., by the local church) - "(Paul) never set himself up as a freelance missionary. Though called and commissioned by the Lord, he did not act in isolation and independence from his brethren. All Christian workers need the support, fellowship, and prayers of the church." (Exploring Acts)

**Being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord**- This was not stated by Luke to be the case with Barnabas, which has led some to infer that the church at Antioch took Paul's side in the dispute. That's possible but the added statement of "**the grace of the Lord**," would lead me to question that conclusion. The verb **committed** can also mean being handed over into the power of someone or something, in this case the power of God's grace.

**THOUGHT** - O, for all of us to live daily, as "handed over" to the transforming, sustaining power of God's grace! And if we are involved in the work of the Lord (and in some way we all are) we need to depend of the sufficient supply of **the grace of the Lord**.

The blessing of this second sending by the church at Antioch is similar to the first sending described by Luke who upon their return from the mission field to their home church wrote...

"From there (Seaport at [Attalia](#)) they sailed to Antioch, from which they **had been commended** (same word as "committed" - [paradidomi](#)) to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished (HOW DID THEY ACCOMPLISH IT? BY THE GRACE OF GOD! - cf 1 Cor 15:10+, 2 Cor 12:9+, 2 Cor 12:10+)." (Acts 14:26+)

**Being committed** () ([3860](#))([paradidomi](#) from **para** = alongside, beside, to the side of, over to + **didomi** = to give) conveys the basic meaning of to give over from one's hand to someone or something, especially to give over to the power of another. Recall that this same verb was used in Acts 15:26+ to describe how the two missionaries (Paul and Barnabas) had **risked** (committed) their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Luke's uses of **paradidomi** in Acts -

Acts 3:13; Acts 6:14; Acts 7:42; Acts 8:3; Acts 12:4; Acts 14:26; Acts 15:26; Acts 15:40; Acts 16:4; Acts 21:11;  
Acts 22:4; Acts 27:1; Acts 28:17;

**Acts 15:41 And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.**

KJV Acts 15:41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

- **through** Acts 15:23; 18:18; 21:3; Galatians 1:21
- **Strengthening the churches** Acts 15:32; 16:4,5
- [Acts 15 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## STRENGTHENING THE SOULS OF THE DISCIPLES

**And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia** - Interesting that the text says "he" and not "they" so clearly Paul was the primary one giving exhortation and encouragement.

**THOUGHT** - Paul did not simply travel through an area but always "redeemed the time." (Eph 5:16) This is a good pattern for all of us beloved, that we might have such an eternal perspective in our routine days that we do not miss God's opportunities for us to redeem! Grant this would be true Father to all who read this note, for the sake of Thy Son. Amen.

**Swindoll** - Paul wanted to follow up with the churches in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch, especially after their scrape with the circumcision controversy. To get there, he traveled north through Syria and Cilicia to Tarsus, stopping to "strengthen" churches along the way (15:41). He then passed through the Taurus Mountains via the Cilician Gates, an engineered pass to Derbe on the high plateau of Anatolia." (Ibid)

**Strengthening the churches** - They were (so to speak) [shoring up](#) (supporting by placing against something solid or rigid - in this case the eternal, immutable Word of God) the faith of the Gentile believers (and undoubtedly explaining the Jerusalem Council's letter). This seems to be Paul's practice as when he re-traced his first missionary journey we read that he and Barnabas were "**strengthening** (same verb [episterizo](#)) the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22+)

In Acts 18:23+ Luke uses the related verb [sterizo](#) (some Greek manuscripts use [episterizo](#)) writing that Paul "having spent some time there, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening ([present tense](#)) all (NOTE PAUL'S HEART WAS FOR THE ENTIRE CHURCH - ALL) the disciples."

**Strengthening** (1991)([episterizo](#) from **epí** = intensifies + [sterizo](#) = strengthen, support) means literally to place firmly upon. The root verb (histemi) means to stand.

In spiritual matters God used Paul to encourage the saints but ultimately it is the God of all grace Who strengthens us by His Word (cp Acts 15:32+) and His Spirit (cf Jn 6:63). The [present tense](#) indicates this was Paul's continual activity to encourage the brethren to be firm in their commitment to Christ. As he encouraged them with the Word of Truth, the Spirit would use the Word causing them to grow stronger and more firm in their faith and in their commitment to Christ and at the same time giving them increased resolve to hold fast to the Word, especially when facing adverse circumstances and difficulties.

**Swindoll** sums up this great schism of two great saints - That's the tragedy of an unreconciled argument or an unresolved conflict. Even when both sides are right, both sides lose! Paul, of course, put together a stellar team of missionaries and conducted a ministry so profound it changed the world. His letters comprise one third of the New Testament Scriptures. Barnabas, however, was right about John Mark. The young man eventually won the trust of Peter (1 Pet. 5:13) and penned the Gospel bearing his name. Paul later added Mark to his evangelistic team (Col. 4:10) and even acknowledged him as "useful to me for service" (2 Tim. 4:11), a high compliment from the demanding apostle." (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – Acts)

**John G. Butler** said, "If you do not strengthen a church in the faith, you will soon not have a church. We need more of this strengthening work in our churches today. Many churches are very weak in the faith because they have never been taught well the Word of God." Butler makes a good point for the ONLY thing that will strengthen the brethren is the Word of God, not small group fellowships, not common social causes, not more lively music (which sadly is moving away from the doctrinally rich hymns), etc.

**THOUGHT** - This last section of Acts 15 begs the question - HOW DO YOU HANDLE CONFLICT? Church conflicts are always lurking on the horizon, since in the final analysis we are all saved sinners, not sinless sinners (albeit we should sin less!)

**Churches** (1577)([ekklesia](#) from **ek** = out + **klesis** = a calling, verb = **kaleo** = to call) literally means called out and as commonly used in the Greco-Roman vernacular referred to citizens who were *called out* from their homes to be publicly assembled or gathered to discuss or carry out affairs of state. **Wuest** writes that "The word **assembly** is a good one-word translation of **ekklesia**."

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**Charles Swindoll** gives good advice on "**Relationship Rescue**"

My observation of the friendship shared by Paul and Barnabas and the dispute that ended their association suggests three guidelines for anyone hoping to avoid a similar fate.

**First**, when involved in a dispute, pray for the ability to see both sides rather than just your own. Good common sense says that

seeing the other's point of view in a dispute will help tremendously. Unfortunately, in the heat of battle, common sense becomes a lot less common. What we want overshadows what we know to be right. Our rights have been violated and we want justice, or our viewpoint has been ignored and we want to be heard, or our standards have been compromised and we want excellence. When our own well-being is threatened, thinking about the welfare of another—especially our opponent—feels like self-destruction. Because our natural response is self-preservation, we need supernatural help to say, "I really want to see your point of view." Pray for this yourself and have others pray on your behalf. Years after his partnership with Barnabas ended, Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). I can't help but think Paul looked back on how he had responded to conflict and regretted his conduct.

**Second**, when both sides of an issue have reasonable support, seek a wise compromise. At one time in my own ministry, the word "compromise" bordered on heresy. As I grew older and wiser, I began to see more shades than pitch black and pristine white. I learned to distinguish between essential matters for which I would give my life and nonessentials that leave room for negotiation. Today, I see this passage very differently than I did as a younger man. As I examine the issues involved in the dispute between Paul and Barnabas, I don't see any doctrinal points at stake. Paul and Barnabas could have found a reasonable compromise, or even decided to part ways without a hint of bitterness or hard feelings, but neither would relent.

**Third**, if a conflict persists, don't give up, stay at it. We live in a fight-or-flight world. A broad range of choices, increased mobility, and declining value on relationships all have contributed to a society that says, "If you don't get your way, get out." Rather than doing the difficult work of seeing another's point of view, rather than bearing the discomfort of compromise, rather than seeking the greater good of all, we leave, hoping to find what we want somewhere else. Don't like the way things are done at church? Go to another. Don't like how your marriage turned out? Divorce and start over. Tragically, the choice to leave often occurs shortly before the solution God has prepared can present itself. Stay at it. Don't give up on a resolution when the conflict goes on longer than you expected. Don't sacrifice the relationship when you've run out of options. That's when you need to trust the Lord to solve the problem on your behalf. Maintaining the relationship through the difficulty then becomes a matter of faith. If you stay at it and trust Him to accomplish what you cannot, He will be faithful. Even if the other party makes reconciliation impossible, God will honor your faithfulness.

Having said all that, I admit that times will come when a conflict simply refuses to be resolved, when no possible solution can be found and agreed upon. On such rare occasions, the best response is an amicable parting of ways. (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – Acts)

## **Acts 15:36-41 When Christians Disagree**

### **Ray Pritchard Acts 15:36-41**

We Christians disagree a lot, sometimes about the craziest things. I don't know if you know it or not, but Christians have been disagreeing with each other since the very beginning. It goes all the way back to the days of the New Testament. When you read Romans and I Corinthians, you discover that Christians were disagreeing on things like eating meat offered to idols, on whether or not to observe the Sabbath Day, on whether to eat meat or be a vegetarian, on whether to drink wine or whether you should not drink wine. In the centuries since then we can summarize the situation by saying that Christians have disagreed on every possible point on which you can disagree and still be a Christian. No matter what issue comes to mind, if you look around the world you'll find some Christians somewhere who disagree about it. Consider the situation in Oak Park: There are 55 different churches in this one village. Across America there are four hundred major denominations. There are 36 different kinds of Baptists and over a dozen varieties of Methodists. So what's a person to do? When you come to those areas where Christians disagree, how can you make up your mind what's right and what's wrong for your life? How do you find God's will in areas where Christians often disagree?

**An Ancient Quarrel** - In order to help us answer that question, let's study the record of an ancient quarrel between two old friends. Acts 15:36-41 is the story of the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. They had just finished a very successful missionary journey in which God had given them great results. Now they are preparing to go out on their second journey together. We pick up the story in verse thirty-six: "Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back to all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work." That's a reference to an incident that took place on that first missionary journey. Three of them had gone out together—Paul, Barnabas and Barnabas' young cousin John Mark. In their travels they came to Pamphylia. They were in a difficult place, a mountainous region. Suddenly John Mark left them. He flaked out, he dropped out, he quit, he went back, he couldn't take it. No one knows exactly what the reason was, but he came so far and then he said "I'm not going any farther, I'm leaving." And so he deserted Paul and Barnabas and went back.

When the time came for the second trip Barnabas said, "Let's give him a second chance. Maybe he did drop out, but he deserves a second chance." But Paul says, "Forget it. We're not taking him." So they argued over whether to take John Mark with them on the second trip. We pick up the story in verse thirty-nine: They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

**Using this passage as a base, I want to share with you seven principles that will help us think clearly in areas where Christians disagree. These seven principles will help us think about how we should react to each other. They will help us know how we can begin to work out the will of God for our lives personally.**

**Principle # 1: Though all Christians worship the same Lord we don't always agree on every point.**

If you've been around the evangelical church very long, you know that we disagree about almost everything. Recently I made a list of some of the things that Christians disagree about:

- The movies: Should we go or not?
- Drinking wine
- Watching TV
- Eating out on Sunday
- Playing cards
- The King James Version
- Men wearing beards
- Women wearing pants
- Divorced men serving as ushers
- Home schooling
- Mixed swimming {we used to call it mixed bathing}
- Fishing on Sunday
- Women wearing pants to church
- Smoking
- Cooking with wine
- Playing guitars in church
- Rock music
- Christian rock music
- Christian rock music in church
- Long hair on men
- Short hair on women
- Women working outside the home
- Birth control
- Should we let our kids go to the high school prom?
- Women ushers
- Working in a bar where liquor is served
- Christian schools versus public schools
- Speaking in tongues
- R-rated movies
- Boycotting K-Mart
- Sex education
- Rush Limbaugh
- The ecumenical movement
- Playing the saxophone in church (I found that one in a book. When I read that, I thought to myself, "That is a good question." I've never seen anybody play the saxophone in church. I'm not sure if its OK or not!)
- Halloween
- Christians in politics, how far should we go?
- Sunday night services
- True Christians in liberal churches, should they stay as a testimony or should they come to an evangelical church?
- Seeker services
- Communion: How often? once a day? twice a day? once a week? twice a week? once a month? twice a month? once a quarter? once a year?
- Christian counseling



- Christian psychology
- Christian psychiatry
- Twelve-step programs
- Faith-Promise Giving
- Women wearing makeup
- Clapping in church
- Traditional worship versus contemporary worship: which one pleases God more?

Two observations about that long list: Number one, all of those are genuine issues about which there is genuine heart-felt disagreement in the greater body of Christ. The fact that you found part of that list funny just means that some of those things don't bother you, but there are genuine, born-again, Spirit-filled Christians in other places who are deeply concerned about every item on that list.

The second observation is this: There is disagreement on some of those points even here at this church. For instance, as you read the different items, you probably said to yourself, "Well, that's silly ... I can't believe anyone worries about that ... There's nothing wrong with \_\_\_\_\_." If we took ten people and asked each one to make a list of the things that are silly and the things that are wrong, the ten people could do it but those ten lists would be completely different. We wouldn't even agree among ourselves on the silly stuff and the wrong stuff.

**Principle # 2: On issues of deep personal conviction, our disagreements will sometimes be very sharp.**

Let's go back to the text. Verse 39 tells us that Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement. The Greek text uses a word from which we get the English word paroxysm, which means a violent disagreement. This particular word means a violent, hostile, angry, harsh, sharp, bitter disagreement. It's not as if Barnabas said, "Well, I would like to take Mark." "I'm not sure that's a good idea." "But he's such a fine boy." "But he left us." "Let's pray about it." No! They weren't that nice about it. In fact, the verb is in the imperfect tense, which mean a continual quarrel—unending, unyielding, ongoing, heated, intense, deep disagreement between them. Their argument was continual and it was contentious. They didn't just argue once and then let it go. They argued over and over again. And the more they argued, the angrier they got. Because Barnabas knew he was right. And Paul knew he was right. That does raise the question, doesn't it, who is right here? Was Barnabas right or was Paul?

**Paul Looked at the Ministry** - After studying the matter, I think you can make a good case either way. I believe Paul was thinking about the ministry. He had the big picture in mind. He was thinking about the fact that they were about to leave on a missionary trip. This was no Sunday School picnic. They were going into uncharted territory for the Gospel. They were going into mountainous regions. They were going into places where they would face death every day. They would face opposition, persecution, hardship, and sickness. Paul knew that there was no place for a quitter on a trip like that. He may have remembered the words of Jesus Christ, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the Kingdom of God." Paul had his thoughts on the people he was trying to reach. In Paul's mind he couldn't take the risk of having John Mark walk out on him again. He needed someone he could depend on 100%. That's what I mean when I say that Paul was looking at the ministry.

**Barnabas Looked at the Man** - Barnabas was looking at the man. We know that John Mark was his cousin, which means there family issues to consider. As they say, blood is thicker than water. When Barnabas looked at his young cousin, he said "We serve a God of grace. He is the God of the second chance. Our God never gives up on anybody." Barnabas saw real potential in his young cousin, who had turned away when things got rough. He said, "Paul, maybe you've written this guy off, but I'm not writing him off because God has not written him off. I believe in him even though he has failed. And I want to give him another chance."

So who was right? You tell me. Who do you think was right? Do you think it was Paul or Barnabas? A great case can be made either way. Sharp disagreements in church history have arisen over who was right in this argument. Every commentator has his own opinion about this. On Barnabas' side you've got G. Campbell Morgan and Lloyd Ogilvie; on Paul's side you've got F. F. Bruce and R.H. Lenski. So who do you think was right? Your answer tells us a whole lot more about you than about this text of Scripture. I don't think the Bible clearly tells us who's right or wrong here. But everybody has an opinion. If you're people-oriented, you'll probably move toward Barnabas. If you're task-oriented and you want to get the job done, you may move toward Paul. The Bible doesn't clearly say who was right. What it does say is that on this issue, there was a very sharp, almost violent controversy that went on for a long time.

### **Principle # 3: Separation may ultimately be preferable to continual disagreement.**

When they couldn't agree, only one solution was left: They split and went in separate directions. So Barnabas took Mark and sailed west to Cypress while Paul took Silas (and later picked up Timothy) and went north into Asia Minor. Verse 39 says they "parted company." That's a weak translation. The word in Greek means "to part asunder." It means a total break at that point in the relationship. They were so angry that when they left, they didn't just part company, but their friendship at that point was torn apart. That's how deep their convictions were. As far as we can tell from this text, when Barnabas went one way and Paul the other, they evidently left unreconciled. Nothing in the text indicates that they got on their knees and prayed together. Maybe they did, but I don't see it. All I see is a sharp disagreement and a separation. There's no happy ending in this text.

At this point it's important for us to review the biblical teaching on unity. I find it interesting that Paul—the man who didn't want to take John Mark—writes more about the unity of the church than any other man in the New Testament. Do you remember what he says?

- Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Eph. 4:3.
- Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Romans 12:10
- Live in harmony with one another. Romans 12:16
- If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:18

All those verses came from the pen of Apostle Paul. I find that phrase in Romans 12:18 very interesting: "If it is possible." Sometimes outward unity isn't possible. This story shows us that fact. This is a hard word to realize, one that we're not used to hearing in these days, but it is truth that is clearly taught in the Word of God. Sometimes separation may ultimately be preferable to continual, unending quarreling and disagreement. If Paul and Barnabas couldn't agree, then perhaps we won't always agree either. The command to unity is always there. Sometimes we will have to obey it separately.

In that light this text is helpful because it is so searingly honest about two men and their disagreement. Isn't it interesting that Luke includes this in the Book of Acts? He could have skipped over it. He could have glossed over the whole ugly affair. He could have skipped the disagreement and said that Paul went north while Barnabas went west and we never would have known why. So this text is very honest. It's also very comforting. Why? Because it tells us that men of the Bible were not angels. They were men with human passions, with strong feelings and with strong convictions.

### **Principle # 4: God's word is sometimes advanced through disagreement.**

Let's do a simple before and after analysis:

Before <> After

Two men <> Five men

One team <> Two teams

One place <> Two places

Before the trouble, you have two men (Paul, Barnabus) on one team going to one place. After the argument is over, you have five men (Paul, Silas, Timothy, Barnabus, John Mark) in two teams going to two different places. From two in one place to five in two places, thus the Gospel is now being spread by more people in more places than ever before. That happens as a result of this sharp, strong personal disagreement. Write over this story Romans 8:28. For we know that all things—even our sharp disagreements—work together for good for those who love God. This does not justify anger or bitterness, but it does illustrate the biblical principal that God is able to make the wrath of men praise him. This should not surprise us because throughout history, the church has often grown through disagreement. Each year we celebrate Reformation Sunday at the end of October. How did the reformation start? It started over a disagreement about justification by faith. The record is clear. Martin Luther never intended to start a new church. He truly meant to reform the existing church. But when they booted him out, he established churches based on the teaching of justification by faith, and from that beginning the Gospel spread to the ends of the earth.

I'm not in favor of church splits. But God is able to use disagreements to advance the cause of Christ. Calvary Memorial Church is proof of that fact. Seventy-nine years ago this church was started by some people who were members of mainline churches in Oak Park. They felt that the Bible was not really being taught and the

Gospel was not really being preached, so they wanted a Bible-preaching, Gospel-centered church in this town. They didn't march in the streets or picket the liberal churches, they just determined to start a new church. The result is Calvary Memorial Church. We're here because someone disagreed with what was going on in other churches. Separation—as painful as it may be—sometimes can be used for the advancement of the Gospel.

**God Uses the Worst** - Let me make a personal application at this point. The Holy Spirit often uses conflict, disagreement and disappointment to reveal God's will to you. God is able to work through even the most painful experiences of life not only to bless you, but to prepare you and to enable you to move on to the place where he wants you to be. I have seen that principle at work in my own life. Some years ago I came to a moment of serious disagreement with two Christian brothers. Months of pressure culminated in a late-night meeting that almost ended in blows. Awful things were said, unkind words spoken, harsh judgments made, friendships broken. When it was over, I went through a painful period of facing my own sin and failure. Months later, God used that terrible moment to pry me loose from one place and set my feet going in a new direction. God is able to use the worst parts of life to show us his will. Nothing is wasted with our Heavenly Father. His delays do not mean denial and his detours are not dead ends. Out of the ashes of defeat we hear the voice of God. When the battle is over, when tempers have cooled, when our anger is gone, we hear the voice of the Lord saying, "Now follow me and I will be your guide." God's work is sometimes advanced through our human disagreement.

**Principle # 5: If we must separate from one another, let us do so with respect, not with rancor.**

Rancor means anger or bitterness. I think if there is any place to criticize Paul and Barnabas, it's right here. It seems to me that perhaps they went too far in their disagreement. It's not a sin to disagree. We don't have to agree on everything. You want a saxophone here on Sunday morning? Fine! That's Ok. Want to go fishing? Go fishing. Want to wear pants, grow a beard, home school your kids, go right ahead. We don't have to agree on every detail. But listen carefully. There is something called disagreeing agreeably. We can disagree without being disagreeable. If there is any mistake that Paul and Barnabas made, it's that they may have crossed the line from strong disagreement into something that got very, very, very personal. **Ray Stedman** has some very helpful words we need to hear:

There are indeed times when the spirit of God leads Christians to go separate ways. Sometimes he leads us to go in different ways. But they should do so with joy and an agreeable understanding that the mind of their spirit has been expressed in a divergent viewpoint.

**Our danger is that not only will we disagree and separate, but that we'll cross the line from justifiable disagreement to anger and bitterness.**

**Three Warning Signs - Let me give you three warning signs that you've crossed that line.**

**Number one:** When the issue becomes a controlling passion of your life. You've crossed the line when all you do is lie awake at night thinking about that saxophone on Sunday morning. You wake up and you can just hear that saxophone blaring "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" and it bothers you. And that's all you can think about, it's all you can talk about during the day. You've gone too far when whatever the issue is becomes the controlling passion in your life. If arguing about gambling is your issue, you've gone too far when that becomes the controlling passion of your life. If arguing about home schooling, public schooling, or private schooling becomes your controlling passion, if that's all you can think about, all you can talk about, you want to argue about it all the time, you've gone too far.

**Number two:** When you've started thinking about revenge against those who have hurt you. Perhaps you want to get even so you begin to spread rumors or tell stories or twist facts in order to make someone else look bad. At that point you've gone way over the line.

**Number three:** When you begin to attack the person and not the problem. Attacking the problem means studying the issue, sorting out the good and bad points, thinking through other ways of looking at things, and so on. Attacking the person means losing your temper, questioning motives, and using intimidation to get your own way. When it gets personal, you've gone too far.

So if you have to disagree—and sometimes we do, and if we have to go our separate ways— and sometimes we do, then let us disagree agreeably. With respect and not rancor and not go across the line.

**Principle # 6: In Christ our ultimate goal should be eventual reconciliation and the restoration of friendship.**

This doesn't come very easy. I know exactly what I'm talking about from personal experience, I can tell you

that it's not easy. But I think that's what the Christian gospel is all about. Back to the story in Acts 16. They go their separate ways. Paul goes north, Barnabas goes west and ultimately goes south, they separate, and as far as we know they don't meet again for years and years and years. It's not like they saw each other the next weekend. They left and were separated for many years. So years pass, tempers cool down, a new perspective comes, they begin to see things in a different light, and the Holy Spirit does his healing work. Let's run the clock ahead about 10 years. How does Paul feel about Barnabas now? We only have one hint. In 1 Cor. 9:6 he mentions Barnabas as a fellow apostle and a fellow worker in the cause of Jesus Christ. Ten years pass from the time of the argument and Paul is able to look at Barnabas and say, "My friend, my fellow apostle, my partner, my co-worker." Something had happened to bring about reconciliation and healing.

**A Quitter Becomes A Trusted Friend** - What about John Mark? Paul thought he was a quitter, a loser, a flake, a drop-out, a failure. Did Paul ever change his opinion? Two passages of scripture answer that question. Fifteen years have passed and Paul is imprisoned in Rome. At the end of his letter to the Colossians, he adds these telling words: "My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas." John Mark and Paul are not only friends, but now that Paul is in prison, who's there taking care of him? That quitter, John Mark. Three more years pass. Paul is in jail for the last time. Shortly, he will be put to death. From his prison cell in Rome, he writes to his young friend Timothy. These are his last words in Scripture. In II Timothy 4, Paul talks about the fact that so many people have left him—Demas has forsaken me. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. "Get Mark and bring him with you because he is helpful to me in my ministry." (4:11) In his last days Paul wanted John Mark by his side. What a change from his earlier opinion. Once Paul didn't want anything to do with him because he was a loser, but at the end of his life, Paul says, "Bring him to me. I need him. I need to see him." Brothers and sisters, that's what the Gospel of Jesus Christ can do. Sometimes our disagreements seem so deep that we think that we are separated forever. But even though we disagree, we're still in the family of God. Because we're still in the family of God, there's always the possibility of reconciliation, of healing and of fellowship. Jesus Christ makes the difference.

**A Split of a Split of a Split**- Most of you have read the works of Francis Schaeffer, probably the greatest evangelical apologist of the last generation. But you may not know his religious background. He came from a split of a split of a split. He came out of a sliver of the Presbyterian church that is so small few people have heard of it. He came out of the most separated part of the Presbyterian church of the 30s and 40s. He was the man God used to make the gospel relevant to millions of people. Along with his longer books, he wrote a little book called "The Mark of the Christian." He argues that love must be the mark of the Christian. That's the label we must wear in all our relationships. From that book I learned a truth: The world is not looking for outward unity, but outward love. We'll disagree on a thousand issues. That's Ok as long as we love each other. If we disagree, we can disagree agreeably and so demonstrate that we are still part of God's great family of forgiveness. If we must disagree, even if we must separate, we must disagree with respect and not with rancor. How do you do that? The only thing I can tell you is that you've got to forget the past. If you keep bringing up the past there can be no reconciliation. I think the way that Paul and Barnabas and John Mark reconciled is that when they got together, they said, "No rehashing of the past." There is no point in rehashing issues that have already been settled. As long as you live in the past, you're going to be fighting in the past. You're going to be separated in the present because of things in the past. You have to forget the things of the past before healing can take place

**Principle # 7: In all things, our rules should be hold your convictions firmly yet graciously knowing that God may lead someone else differently than he has led you.**

What an important truth for the family of God. Hold onto your convictions but do it graciously. Romans 14:5 says "each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." If you want a beard, hold onto that. Do you like your pastors clean-shaven? Fine! Hold onto that. If you're a homeschooler, be fully convinced. Do you prefer the public schools? That's okay. What about Christian schools? Great! Nothing I am saying implies that you shouldn't have convictions. You should. But that's only part of it. Romans 15:5 offers the other side of the coin. "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." So hold onto your convictions but do it in a loving fashion. Hold onto what you believe and at the same time work and pray for a spirit of unity so that together with the people with whom we disagree, with one heart and one voice and one mind we can glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's a lot easier to preach this thing than to do it. This is very difficult to do but it doesn't matter. It must be the

way we live. Hold onto your convictions. Don't ever be ashamed of what you believe. Don't back down from them. But hold them graciously. Understand that God may possibly work with somebody else a little differently than he works with you. We're different and that's okay. We don't agree on everything and that's okay. Sometimes in the family of God we're going to disagree strongly and that's okay. Sometimes we're going to disagree to the point that we can't even work together any more. That's okay too. Sometimes we're going to go our separate ways and that's okay. Because there's really only one commandment when you boil it all down. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35) Only one thing is not okay: Not loving one another. No matter how much or how deeply or how passionately we may disagree, we must still love one another.

**Five Steps to Follow Let me give you five steps for discovering God's will in doubtful areas where Christians disagree:**

- **Number one: Pray for guidance.**
- **Number two: Search the Scriptures to see what God has said.**
- **Number three: Seek Godly counsel.**
- **Number four: Ask God to give you specific direction.**
- **Number five: Cheerfully do whatever God tells you to do.**

Don't grumble when other people see things differently. Do what God has told you to do and let God worry about those other people. That brings me back to the original question: Who was right—Paul or Barnabas? I don't think the Bible really answers that question. But I'm glad about that. So many of our arguments end up the same way. When it's all over, you're not totally sure who's right. Even after you study both sides, you can see some points here and some points there.

Pillow Talk - In his book *Prophecy in the Ring*, Dr. Robert Lightner tells about a custom Japanese parents use when their children are fighting with one another. They bring each child into the room and put a pillow on the table. The child is angry and upset. The child puts his hands on the pillow and says, "I am right and my friend is wrong." The child then moves to the other side of the pillow, puts his hands on it and says, "My friend is right and I am wrong." The child then places his hands on the third side of the pillow, saying, "Both of us are right and both of us are wrong." As he places his hands on the final side, very thoughtfully he says, "I am partly right and my friend is partly right."

When we get to Heaven and look back on so many of the issues that have divided us, we will say the same thing. We were partly right and our friends were partly right. Between now and then, there are going to be plenty of disagreements in the church. That's the price we pay for being human. But we have the opportunity to deal with our disagreements honestly and graciously because we know Jesus Christ. He makes the difference.

What do you do when Christians disagree? Hold your convictions but hold the