

Acts 15 - Jerusalem Council; Council Decision Brought to Antioch; Paul & Barnabas Separate; Silas Joins Paul for His Second Missionary Journey

III. Outreach to the remote parts of the earth (Acts 13:1—28:31)

(2) Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)

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(A) Paul and Barnabas split (15:36-41)

1st Apostolic Council

Paul's first missionary was the primary event that changed the makeup of the Church from overwhelmingly Jewish to begin to include Gentiles. During this journey, Jewish rejection of the Gospel began to increase, but Gentiles began to get saved like crazy. A good example of what happened in just about every city Paul went is found in Acts 13:44-49.

So what began to happen to the Church, which began exclusively Jewish, is that Gentiles by the hundreds began coming into the Church. There arose a question about what to do with these Gentiles. Did they have to obey the Mosaic Law? Must they be circumcised?

This is probably what the apostles believed initially, because this had been the practice of Jews for over 1,500 years. In the prior dispensation (Law), Gentiles had to become Jewish proselytes and follow the Mosaic Law in order to serve God.

This question is what the Jerusalem Council considered in Acts 15: Did the Church need to follow the conversion process (becoming a proselyte) in order for Gentiles to join the church? Kingdom Now theologians misread the main question of this passage: The

question before the council is not whether Gentiles needed to do anything (obey the Law, be circumcised, etc.) to be saved. That question was resolved with Cornelius, and the subsequent meeting in Jerusalem (Jerusalem Council #1, Acts 10-11). The question before the apostles in Acts 15 not about what, if anything, Gentiles needed to do to be saved, it's what, if anything, they needed to join the Church. It wasn't a justification question, it was an ecclesiological question.

This council in Jerusalem falls between the first and second missionary journeys of Paul. On one hand, the Jerusalem Council became necessary because of what took place in the first missionary journey with the turning of many Gentiles to the acceptance of the Messiah, apart from the Law of Moses and circumcision. But, on the other hand, any further missionary activities by Paul, such as his second missionary journey, would have been impossible until this issue had been resolved once and for all. This is why we have the Jerusalem Council at this particular point in the Book of Acts.

Acts 15

(2) Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)

(A) Necessity of Paul and Barnabas to travel to Jerusalem (15:1-6)

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

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."

1 Then some men came down from Judea and started to teach the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the Law of Moses, you can't be saved."

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.

- The objections to the inclusion of Gentiles apart from circumcision continued to come from some within the Jerusalem Church

- "Some men" - these were Pharisees who were saved ("brothers") by faith alone in Christ alone, but they believed that all believers had to adhere to the Mosaic Law in order to grow in Christ or join the church. They were called Judaizers.

— These men were likely members of the same extremist group mentioned in 11:2, who challenged Peter about going into the home of an uncircumcised Gentile. They were united to insist that Gentiles adopt all of the Jewish practices. They wanted the church to grow by the same process as when proselytes entered Judaism: males must be circumcised, all must agree to keep all the Jewish covenant laws and conditions, which included all the traditions added by rabbis through the years.

— In the Bible, anyone who mixes faith with law is called a Pharisee. These Pharisees were all over the early church (Cf. Gal 2:4) and constantly come up in Acts. In the first Jerusalem

Council (Cf. 11:2), these Jewish believers "took issue with him" for leading a Gentile to Christ.

— In the NT, there are three types of Pharisees:

1. Justification Pharisees (Matt 5:20) - these Pharisees believed that faith alone in Christ alone was not enough. You have to have faith plus circumcision in order to be saved. These are the primary people that Paul was always arguing with.
2. Sanctification Pharisees (Gal 3:3) - they believed that a person was saved/justified by faith alone in Christ alone, but you have to go under the Mosaic Law in order to grow as a believer. This is who Paul is dealing with in his epistle to the Galatians, which he wrote right after returning from his first missionary journey.
3. Ecclesiological Pharisees (Acts 15) - this group believed a person is saved by faith alone in Christ alone, but had to adhere to the Mosaic Law (and be circumcised) in order to join the Church. Once a person was saved, they had to obey the Law including observing Jewish feast days, keeping the Sabbath, tithing, etc.

- "...came down from Judea" - these men traveled from Judea (Jerusalem area) to (Syrian) Antioch

- "...teaching" - *didaskō*, imperfect tense meaning they began to teach and they kept doing so; they set about teaching with determination.

- "...the brothers" - these Pharisees were saved people, who were teaching other saved people how to grow in their walk with Christ

— They had this belief because this had been the way things worked in Judaism since Mount Sinai. If you were a Gentile in the OT and wanted to follow the God of Israel, you would become a "proselyte" (a Gentile convert to Judaism) and put themselves under the Mosaic Law in order to grow in their faith.

— The most famous proselyte in the OT is Ruth. She was from Moab, but wanted to follow the God of Israel (Cf. Ruth 1:16). These Pharisees believed that things would continue after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ as it had for the past 1500 years.

- "...be saved" - *sōzō*, refers to second tense salvation, saved from the power of sin

— The issue in this chapter, as noted in the introduction above, was not whether or not Gentiles could be saved/justified. That was the question in Acts 11 and was resolved there.

— The issue at this Council meeting was whether Gentiles had to be circumcised and go under the Mosaic Law in order to "operate" as a believer, in order to join the church.

2 And after Paul and Barnabas had a **heated argument** and debate with them, *the brothers* determined that Paul and Barnabas and **some others of them should go up to Jerusalem** to the **apostles** and **elders** concerning this issue.

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.

2 Paul and Barnabas had quite a dispute and argument with them. So Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to confer with the apostles and elders about this question.

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.

- Paul and Barnabas, fresh off their first missionary journey where they saw multitudes of Gentiles saved, would not allow these Gentiles to be brow-beaten by self-appointed "guardians of orthodoxy"

- "...heated argument" - *stasis*, an uproar; an insurrection. The implication is that these Judaizers caused a great deal of strife, which broke up the beautiful unity in the Church of Antioch (Cf. 11:19-30). The apostles needed to settle this issue to preserve truth and unity.

- "...some others of them" - to counter this dissension, the brethren decided to send a leadership delegation—Paul and Barnabas and "certain others" (Titus, an uncircumcised Greek, Gal 2:1-5)—to Jerusalem to lodge an inquiry

— These men accompanied Paul and Barnabas no doubt to protect them from accusations of distorting the facts

- "...should go up to Jerusalem" - travel from Antioch to Jerusalem

- Two categories of leaders of the Jerusalem Church:

- "...apostles" - the Twelve, who were with Christ from the beginning (except Matthias). It was important to consult with the apostles on this matter since the church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Cf. Eph 2:20).

- "...elders" - the leaders who would replace the apostles once the apostles died. These were qualified, godly men whom God raised up as the next generation of leadership, once the apostles died off.

3 Therefore, after 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 they were bringing great joy to all the brothers *and sisters*.

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.

3 They were sent on their way by the church, and as they were going through Phoenicia and Samaria they told of the conversion of the gentiles and brought great joy to all the brothers.

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.

- As Paul and Barnabas were traveling from Antioch to Jerusalem, they stopped at various churches and assemblies of believers and told them about what God had done during their first missionary journey, and how many Gentiles came to faith in Christ.

— This news brought great joy and encouragement to the believers because they saw a continuation of what had happened to them. Their point was that salvation had been granted to these Gentiles apart from circumcision.

4 When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church, the apostles, and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

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.

4 When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, the apostles, and the elders, and they reported everything that God had done through them.

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.

- Upon their arrival in Jerusalem, they were greeted by the apostles and elders, and they began to describe all that God had done through them during their first missionary journey

Four Meetings?

1. A public meeting, at which Paul recounted what God had done among the Gentiles (Acts 15:4)
2. Paul's private meeting with the leaders (Gal 2:2). Paul met with the leaders privately to keep out the "spies" (Gal 2:4) and to avoid any open disagreements that would only add fuel to the fire.
3. The public debate (v5; Gal 2:3-5)
4. The council session at which the matter was finally settled (v6-29)

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 keep the Law of Moses."

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."

5 But some believers from the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The gentiles must be circumcised and ordered to keep the Law of Moses."

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.

- Anytime the Lord is working or His people are celebrating His work, the Pharisees (legalists) seem to show up and rain on the parade
- "...who had believed" - these Pharisees were saved people, but they just had bad theology; they were born again, but they were legalists

6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

6 So the apostles and the elders met to look into this claim.

6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

- The Council meeting is convened by the apostles, and the decision will be binding upon the church because of the presence and authority of the apostles.

— Peter and the rest of the apostles were given the authority by Jesus Himself of "binding" and "loosing" (Matt 16:19; 18:18) which means to restrict behavior or allow behavior, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that were on par with Scripture.

— This is an authority only given to the Apostles (including Matthias and Paul), not to anyone else. A pastor today, no matter the size of his church, does not have the authority to make church-wide decisions that are on par with Scripture like the original Apostles did.

— The Roman Catholic church, as well as many Protestant denominations, like to hold meetings like the Jerusalem Council to make decisions that, they say, should affect all Christians. However, there are no longer apostles today, so all decisions made must be made based on what the Bible says, not what the pope, priests, bishops, pastors or elders today have to say.

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

The Jerusalem Council

In v7-12, Peter, Paul, and Barnabas speak of God's eternal plan, where He chose to include Gentiles as recipients of God's blessing through the gospel. James, the half-brother of Jesus and head of the Jerusalem Church at the time, explains the council's decision in v13-29.

James explains in v14 how Peter said, "God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name." The vocabulary chosen by James paints the picture of God surveying the Gentiles and based upon His scrutiny, He then selects out from the mass of Gentile humanity "a people for His name." In v15 James says, "with this the words of the Prophets agree." Amos 9 speaks of the Kingdom when Gentiles will be

saved. Then, by way of application, because of only one point of similarity, the salvation of the Gentiles, he applied this verse to their present situation. When he stated: *as it is written*, he was pointing out that the OT actually predicted the salvation of the Gentiles. The important thing to note is that James quotes an OT passage that speaks of Gentile salvation in the millennium. The implication is that if Gentiles are going to be saved as Gentiles, without converting to Judaism, in the millennium, then Gentiles do not need to convert to Judaism in order to be saved in the present Church Age. Since James spoke of prophets (plural), he indicates that more than once the prophets spoke of Gentile salvation, even though his example comes from Amos 9 (see Is 42:1; 49:4-5).

The prophets anticipated a future dealing with the Gentiles and so this present visitation of God to the Gentiles is not out of harmony with the divine attitude toward them. The quotation serves to voice God's approval of the present extension of salvation to the Gentiles although it is fulfilled by a future work among them.

Four reasons James asserted that Gentiles will be saved in the Millennium when Christ will return and rebuild David's fallen tent (restore the nation of Israel):

1. This fits the purpose of the council. If Gentiles will be saved in 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. 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 this sense James could say "After this."
3. This interpretation gives significance to the word "first" in v14. 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 millennial kingdom (Cf. Rom 11:12).
4. A number of prophets predicted Gentile salvation in the Millennium, as James stated in Acts 15:15 (e.g., Is 42:6; 60:3; Mal 1:11).

(B) Deliberations (15:7-21)

(a) Peter's speech (15:7-11)

7 After there had been **much debate**, **Peter** stood up and said to them, "Brothers, 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**."

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."

7 After a lengthy debate, Peter stood up and told them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days, God chose me to be the one among you through whom the gentiles would hear

the message of the gospel and believe.

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.

- "...much debate" - notice that there was a "debate" meaning both sides were able to present their arguments and evidence; one side wasn't muzzled, cancelled, or forbidden to speak. Everything was aired and out in the open.

- "...Peter" - Peter disappears from Acts in 11:17 (see notes there), but makes a brief appearance at this Jerusalem Council due to the important topics being debated

- "...in the early days " - about 10-12 years earlier. It was God who chose Peter among all Jewish believers to minister the gospel to the Gentiles, that they should believe.

— Peter makes it clear that it was God's choice, not his, that the Gentiles should hear the gospel. Peter's point was that God gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles as soon as they believed in Jesus Christ; they did nothing but "believe" and they received the sign of their acceptance by God, exactly the same way the Jews did at Pentecost.

- "...by my mouth" - Peter is referring back a few years to when God used him to lead Cornelius, the first Gentile, to Christ

- "...hear the word of the gospel and believe" - another example of the need for an unbeliever to "hear" the gospel in order to believe (see note: **The Gospel Is Necessary for Salvation** in Rom 1:16). If the gospel is not articulated to someone, they cannot get saved.

— This defeats the whole Social Gospel movement, which believes that Christians should do humanitarian work, service projects, give food to the needy, etc., but never gives them the gospel.

— There is obviously nothing wrong with humanitarian projects, giving food to the needy, etc., but if you never give them the "word of the gospel" all you're doing is sending people to hell on a full stomach. These types of good deeds should be used as a platform to give people the gospel.

— Mowing lawns, pulling weeds, doing home repairs, or giving someone food is NOT fulfilling the Great Commission

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

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

8 God, who knows everyone's heart, showed them he approved by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us.

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

- "...them" [2x] - the Gentiles
- "...giving them the Holy Spirit" - God's giving of the Holy Spirit to believing Gentiles was the key evidence of God's acceptance by grace through faith, apart from circumcision and works of the Law
- Peter used this same evidence twice before (10:44-48; 11:15-17)
- "...us" - the Jews
- The Spirit came into those uncircumcised Gentiles just as He did the circumcised Jews on the Day of Pentecost (2:4-12). The church had questioned Peter at that time, and it was determined to be right to accept the new believers without discrimination.

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

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

9 He made no distinction between them and us, because of their faith-cleansed hearts.

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

- "...no distinction" - when the Jews were saved at Pentecost, they received the Holy Spirit; likewise, when Cornelius (an uncircumcised Gentile) and his household were saved, they received the Holy Spirit just like the Jews did.

— There was absolutely zero difference between the way the Jews at Pentecost were saved and the way the Gentiles, beginning with Cornelius, were saved. Paul later talks about this in greater detail in Eph 2:15-16 as he develops the concept of the body of Christ (Cf. Gal 3:28).

Eph 2:15-16:

15 by abolishing in His flesh the hostility, *which is* the Law *composed of* commandments *expressed* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two one new person, *in this way* establishing peace;

16 and that He might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the hostility.

- "...them" - the Gentiles
- "...us" - the Jews
- "...cleansing their hearts" - alludes to the New Covenant, which is all about changing the heart (Cf. Jer 31:31-34)
- The New Covenant was given by God to Israel, but the Church is a partaker (not a take-overer) of this covenant. We participate (receive) some of the salvation-oriented promises of the New Covenant.
- This is why Paul is raising money for the suffering saints in Jerusalem (Cf. Rom 15), he says that Gentiles owe a debt to the Jews, although they are in unbelief, to bless them materially because we are beneficiaries spiritually of the New Covenant.

10 Since *this is the* case, why are you **putting God to the test** by placing upon the neck of **the disciples a yoke** which **neither our forefathers nor we have been able to bear**?

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?

10 So why do you test God by putting on the disciples' neck a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we could carry?

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?

- "...this" - since God made no distinction between Jews and Gentile salvation (v8-9)

- "...putting God to the test" - literally means to "try God's patience"; requiring Gentiles to become Jews before joining the Church would "test" God in that it would question the rightness of His action in giving the Spirit to Cornelius

- "...the disciples" - in this context, Gentile followers of Christ; it's used here in its generic form to simply refer to a believer

- "...a yoke" - *zygos*, refers to a burden or bondage; something that encumbers someone from getting where they want to go. The Mosaic Law was a "yoke" (Gal 5:1).

— When a Gentile became a Jewish proselyte, the Jew in charge of the ceremony said the Gentile now "took up the yoke of the kingdom of heaven" (Cf. Matt 23:4; Gal 5:1)

— Peter said this "yoke," the Mosaic Covenant, was an obligation that was both unbearable and unnecessary (Cf. Matt 11:29-30)

- "...neither our forefathers nor we have been able to bear" - Peter's point is that Israel in the OT committed at Sinai to follow all of God's laws, then proceeded to completely over-promise and under-deliver. They didn't obey anything, hardly ever. As you read the OT, all you see is disobedience to God's law, and the punishment/discipline that He meted out because of it.

— Since the time that God gave the Israelites the Mosaic Law, almost 1500 years before Peter's speech here, Israel rarely ever kept the Law. And those few times they did, it was only a short period of time before they would retreat back into idolatry or other sins.

— So Peter's reasoning here is...we've had the Law almost 1500 years...our forefathers had a horrendous track record of keeping the Law, and even ourselves, here today, have failed miserably...so where's the logic in telling these newly saved Gentiles that they have to obey the Law when we've stunk at doing so for almost 1500 years?

— And besides, Ps 147:19-20 tells us that the Mosaic Law was only for Israel, not for any other nation. So this is another reason why the Gentiles did not need to go under the Mosaic Law for their salvation, their sanctification, or in order to join the church.

Psalm 147:19-20:

19 He declares His words to **Jacob**, His statutes and His judgments to **Israel**.

20 **He has not dealt this way with any *other* nation;** And as for His judgments, **they have not known them.** Praise the LORD!

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

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

11 We certainly believe that it is through the grace of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, that we are saved, just as they are."

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

- "...in the same way as they also are" - by referring to Jews being saved in the same manner as the Gentiles, instead of vice versa, Peter repudiated any thought of Jewish superiority

— Clearly Peter had recovered from his lapse at Antioch (Gal 2:11-14)

- Why would we put them under a legal system that didn't save anyone, and that Jews historically have never been able to follow?

- Both Jews and Gentiles are saved in the exact same way: through the grace of Jesus Christ

- Notice that Peter does not mention water baptism being required for salvation. He simply says that Jews and Gentiles were both saved in the same way, not by keeping the Law or through water baptism, but by the grace of God.

- These are the last recorded words of Peter in Acts

To summarize Peter's argument: first, it was God's choice that the Gentiles should hear the gospel; secondly, He gave them the Holy Spirit without distinction and without discrimination, which was the evidence of their acceptance; and thirdly, the Law was an unbearable yoke upon the Jews, so why inflict it upon the Gentiles?

(b) Paul and Barnabas' speeches (15:12)

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

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.

12 The whole crowd was silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul tell about all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the gentiles.

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.

- "...Barnabas and Paul" - why this order when Paul is usually noted first? Because Barnabas was better known to this group (4:36-37; 11:22).
- After Peter finished giving his two cents, Paul and Barnabas began recounting for the apostles and elders how God had shown them unbelievable favor in bringing numerous Gentiles to Christ
 - This was the first time the gospel left the borders of Israel and went into Gentile territory, and God prospered them
 - They likely also described that in every city they entered, they first went to the Jewish synagogue to preach the gospel to the Jews, and most of the time they were thrown out. Then they went to the Gentiles, preached the gospel, and they were saved in droves.
 - In fact, Paul and Barnabas were so successful in preaching to the Gentiles that the Jews who had thrown them out of the synagogue got angry and began persecuting them, which is why they had to move from city to city.
 - Paul's point is that God would not have blessed and prospered this first missionary journey like He did if God did not want Gentiles to be saved

(c) James' speech (15:13-21)

- 13 After they stopped speaking, **James** responded, saying, "**Brothers**, listen to me.
- 13 After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me.
- 13 After Paul and Barnabas had finished speaking, James responded, "Brothers, listen to me:
- 13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:
 - "...James" - there are four "James" mentioned in the NT (Cf. 1:13-14):
 - James, the father of Judas (not Iscariot)
 - James, the son of Alphaeus
 - James, the son of Zebedee, brother of Apostle John
 - James, the half-brother of Christ, pastor/leader of the Jerusalem Church
 - It's unlikely that the James here is the father of Judas or James the son of Alphaeus, as both are relatively unknown and not often mentioned. It could not be James the son of Zebedee and brother of John because he was martyred (Cf. 12:2). So the only option remaining is James, the half-brother of Christ and the pastor of the church at Jerusalem.
 - There are also key similarities between James' speech here and the epistle of James, which demonstrates that this James is the James, half-brother of Christ
 - "...Brothers" - another clue that the dispute here is amongst believers, not between believers and unbelievers. Everyone in this room was a believer, wrestling with an ecclesiological (church) issue, not a justification (salvation, resolved in Acts 11) or sanctification (growth, resolved in Galatians) issue.

14 **Simeon** has described **how God first** concerned Himself about **taking a people for His name** from among the Gentiles.

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

14 Simeon has explained how God first showed his concern for the gentiles by taking from among them a people for his name.

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

- "Simeon" - an Aramaic form of Peter's Hebrew name, Simon

- "...how God first" - James recapped Peter's testimony (v7-11) before the council, about how Gentile evangelism was first begun by Peter, then carried on by Paul

— God, through Peter, visited the Gentiles for the purpose of opening the door of salvation to them (Cf. Matt 16:19). Paul led the majority of Gentile evangelism after Cornelius was saved.

- "...taking" - *lambanō*, "to take for oneself for the purpose of carrying away." It's a reference to the Rapture, and indicates it will take place before the 70th Week of Daniel begins.

- "...a people for His name" - the vocabulary chosen by James paints the picture of God surveying the Gentiles, and based upon His scrutiny, He then selects out from the mass of Gentile humanity: "a people for His name."

— God is working out His plan: Israel, His covenant people, had been set aside nationally because of their rejection of the Messiah, and God is now taking out a people, Jew and Gentile, to constitute this "new man," the Church of God.

— God has always had a "people for His name" among the Jews (the Jewish Remnant); now He will also have "a people" among the Gentiles (a Gentile Remnant)

James explained how the decision of the council at Jerusalem was an outworking of God's purpose for this age. God's plan for history relates to the past ages with Israel and to Israel's role in the coming age (the millennium), but the current Church Age will center around the Gentiles. After the Church Age is concluded, the Lord will return, and 'rebuild the tabernacle of David' (v16), i.e. the nation of Israel. This OT reference is from Amos 9:11-12. During the Tribulation, the Lord will work to convert the nation of Israel to Himself, ending with the Second Coming and the millennial reign of Christ. God's plans for history will come to pass just as He ordained. [Thomas Ice]

15 The words of the Prophets **agree** with this, just as it is written:

15 With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,

15 This agrees with the words of the prophets. As it is written,

15 And to this agree the words of the prophets;

- To backup his statement that this was God's plan all along, James quotes Amos 9:11-12...

- "...agree" - *symphōneō*, supports, harmonizes, suitable; James reminded the audience that the OT prophets supported the salvation of Gentiles apart from Judaism. What Peter said was "in harmony" with what the OT prophets said (Cf. Is 42:1; 49:4-5).

— Note that James did not say the salvation of Gentiles *then* was the *fulfillment* of these prophecies; he said the prophets' predictions of future Gentile salvation *harmonized* with the present salvation of Gentiles apart from Judaism (Cf. 2:16).

— *Symphōneō* is where we get the English word "symphony." The word *symphōneō* is much different than the Greek word for "fulfilled" [*plēroō*] (Cf. 1:16). Why does this matter?

— It matters because amillennialism teaches that we are in the kingdom now/today in spiritual form, and they use this verse to argue in favor of that belief, interpreting the word *symphōneō* in the same way you would interpret "fulfilled" [*plēroō*].

— The problem is, James does not say that this prophecy (v16-18, Cf. Amos 9:11-12) is being "fulfilled," he says that the prophets "spoke as one" on this issue.

— What do the Prophets "agree" about? What all of the OT prophets agree on is that when the future millennial kingdom comes, believing Gentiles will be full citizens of that kingdom, just like the Jews.

— What James is actually doing here is using an OT passage about the future millennial kingdom to explain a pattern of God. Then he uses it to reason that if Gentiles are being saved now, in the exact same way that Jews are being saved, and both are filled with the Holy Spirit, and if Gentiles will one day be full citizens in the millennial kingdom, then why would we (the apostles) force the Gentiles to do something now to join the church that Jews don't have to do to join the church?

- This verse, coincidentally, is one of the great "war zones" in the Bible. Reformed Theology, which believes and teaches Replacement Theology, interprets "agree" in this verse as "fulfilled." To get to this interpretation, you have to completely disregard the different Greek words for each of these words, and then read into the text what you need it to say in order to support your amillennial belief system.

— Kim Riddlebarger, an amillennialist, says the following about this verse:

James saw the prophecy as fulfilled in Christ's resurrection and exaltation and in the reconstitution of his disciples as the new Israel. The presence of both Jew and Gentile in the church was proof that the prophecy of Amos had been fulfilled. David's fallen tent had been rebuilt by Christ. In Amos's prophecy, 'after this' indicated that the prophecy referred to what God would do for Israel after the exile. When James applied this prophecy to the church, was he spiritualizing an OT text? Or was James reading

the OT through a Christ-centered lens typical of the greater light of the messianic age?

— About the dispensational view of this passage (see notes), Riddlebarger says:

If this is true, when Paul and Barnabas sought guidance for a concern that was immediate to them (Should Gentile converts be circumcised to join the church?), James responded by pointing to a future millennium thousands of years distant.

— Yes, exactly. God didn't speak to anyone in this council, as He had multiple times elsewhere in Acts, both before and after this council meeting. Since God was silent on this groundbreaking issue, James went to the OT (Hebrew Bible) for guidance, identified Amos 9:11-12 (among others), and used the Amos passage to analogically reason that if Gentiles would be full-fledged citizens of the kingdom, as Gentiles and not as proselytized Jews, then it made sense for the council to allow Gentiles to become members of the church without circumcision or going under the Mosaic Law.

— The Bible often gives us a prophecy of an event in the future, then describes how that event, which has not yet come to pass, should affect our lives today. Probably the best example is 2 Peter 3:10-11:

The Prophetic Event

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be discovered.

The Present Application

11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

— The Prophetic Event described in v10 will occur after the Tribulation and millennial kingdom, so it is a minimum of 1007 years future.

— The Present Application is that because of this event, at least 1007 years future to right now, will take place, how it should affect my daily life today.

— So it is not unreasonable or out of the norm for the Holy Spirit to inspire and a biblical author to write about an prophetic event far into the future, then get a present-day application from that future event.

— So when Riddlebarger or other amillennialists say that the future cannot inform the present, they are dumping on to you an assumption or presupposition that isn't present in, or arguable from, Scripture.

— Contrary to Kingdom Now theology, the budding salvation of Gentiles did not *fulfill* Amos 9:11-12, they merely "agreed" with the words of the prophets, specifically Amos (but included others)

— The present inclusion of Gentiles in the Church is consistent with God's promise to Israel through Amos (Rom 16:25; Eph 3:9). The present salvation of Gentiles apart from Judaism

does not contradict anything Amos said about future Gentile blessing.

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

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,

16 "'After this, I will come back and set up David's fallen tent again. I will restore its ruined places and set it up again

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 THINGS" - James introduced his quotation from Amos to show the time period in history that Amos was referring to: the time after the present world witness, when Christ will return at the Second Coming to setup the millennial kingdom.

— James drops the phrase "In that day" from his quotation of Amos 9:11, and adds here: "After this I will return..."

— "In that day" in Amos 9:11 provides the timing that the Lord will rebuild the fallen tabernacle of David, which is within a millennial context (compare to Amos 9:13-15)

- "...I will return" - James was telling the council, which was primarily Jewish, that after the present Church Age is complete, then the Lord will "return" and fulfill His promises to Israel

— This provides a clear outline for history...the current Church Age followed by fulfillment of the Davidic promises to Israel in the messianic kingdom

— Thus, "After this" is after the fullness of the Gentiles. After this, two things happen:

1. Blindness is relieved from Israel
2. The return of Jesus Christ

- "...REBUILD" [2x] - Amos used poetic language for the house and throne of David, describing it as a broken down hut, having no power. The promise was that it would be restored, built again. The picture was of a desolate, fallen, torn-down tent of David, but God would rebuild it.

— They knew it would soon be destroyed (Matt 24:2; Luke 19:41-44), but James used a prophecy from Amos that was already 800 years old to show the Temple will be rebuilt when the Lord has finished with the Church.

— After that the Gentiles who will have missed the Rapture will have one final chance to be saved as well. This settled the issue of Israel's future.

- "...TABERNACLE OF DAVID" - the nation of Israel, specifically the Davidic throne, kingdom and dynasty during the messianic kingdom.

— By no possible stretch of the plain meaning of the passage can the "tabernacle of David" be equivalent to the NT Church. The prophecy concerns the rebuilding of that which was fallen down. The "ruins" are to be rebuilt "as in the day of old."

— Equating “tabernacle of David” with the Church completely misunderstands or ignores the mystery nature of the Church; the Church is nowhere found in the OT. There is no way Amos could be prophesying of the Church Age in the OT, as he had no idea what the Church Age was.

— 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. There are other reasons:

1. The eschatological context of Amos 9 is against this view
2. It would be unlikely to say that the Church was in a state of “having fallen down”
3. It is inconceivable that the Church could ever be called the “dynasty of David,” or, for that matter, any kind of dynasty

— Is 16:5 states that a King from the household of David will sit on a throne inside the tent of David, and will execute mercy, judgment and righteousness

— See note: **Tabernacle of David** in Amos 9:11.

- “...RUINS” - the Davidic dynasty is currently in “ruins” because Israel rejected the Messiah, her King

So why does James quote from Amos 9? He’s not using it to teach that we’re in the kingdom now or that Jesus is sitting on David’s throne; he’s using it as an analogy because God did not directly speak by vision/dream or audible voice (as He did numerous other times in Acts) in regards to the question before the council. So the apostles consulted prior revelation, the OT/Hebrew Bible, under the influence of the Holy Spirit in order to understand God’s will in this situation.

So James’ point is this: according to Amos, when the millennial kingdom is setup, Gentiles will be full partakers in it. And if they will be full partakers in the kingdom, why shouldn’t they be full partakers now? In the kingdom, Gentiles will not be converted into Jews; instead they will be in the kingdom as Gentiles. This allowed James to conclude that if God had a program for Gentiles in the future kingdom, there was no reason to deny that God could include Gentiles as Gentiles in the Church. Thus, the issue was settled—the Gentiles did not need to be circumcised and bring themselves under the Mosaic Law in order to participate in the Church. See [The Coming Kingdom 64. Is Jesus Reigning from David's Throne? - Part 11 \(Acts 15:14-21\)](#).

17 SO THAT **THE REST OF MANKIND** MAY SEEK THE LORD, **AND ALL THE GENTILES** WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME;’

17 So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, And all the Gentiles who are called by My name;’

17 so that the rest of the people may search for the Lord, including all the gentiles who are called by my name,' declares the Lord. 'He is the one who has been doing these things

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" - includes Gentiles

- "...AND" - better translated "even" (in the exegetical use of this conjunction). This is the reason the Lord will rebuild the house of David: Gentile salvation.

— This was the purpose of God from the beginning. God always intended to allow for Gentile salvation, and now He finally made that a reality.

- "...ALL THE GENTILES" - another reference to Gentiles. James is showing through this quote that there will be Gentile believers at this time (in the kingdom), thus he concluded that Gentiles are not required to become Jewish proselytes by circumcision in order to join the church.

— In the kingdom, Gentiles would not be proselytized into Judaism, but instead they would be in the kingdom as Gentiles. This allowed James to conclude that if God had a program for the Gentiles as Gentiles in the millennial kingdom, there was no reason to deny that God would include Gentiles as Gentiles in the church.

— Thus, the issue was settled: Gentiles did not need to be circumcised and put themselves under the Mosaic Law in order to participate in the church. Rather, apart from the Law, through faith alone in Christ alone, they are equal participants with believing Jews in the church.

- James' logic here, taken from this passage in Amos (but agreed upon by all the prophets) was that if Gentiles would be full-fledged citizens of the millennial kingdom, then what is the reason we should now allow them into the church now?

— James has to reason analogically from the OT (Hebrew Bible) because there was no direct revelation from God (a dream or vision) regarding this issue

18 SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS known from **long ago**.

18 Says the Lord, who makes these things known from long ago.

18 that have been known from long ago.'

18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

- Quoted from Is 45:21

- James added this quote from Isaiah to add authority to the Amos prophecy

- "...long ago" - *aion*, from all eternity

In James' quote of Amos, he does not change Amos' meaning one iota. James is reading and interpreting Amos 9:11-12 in the context in which Amos wrote. Amos said, and James was in agreement, that when the future millennial kingdom comes, Gentiles will be full-

fledged citizens of that kingdom. So James reads Amos' writings in context, then analogically applies it to the question at hand. Based on what Amos said, and not just Amos by all the other prophets "agree" as well, Gentiles will be full-fledged citizens of the messianic kingdom. Since this is the case, why not allow the Gentiles to become part of the church now? If believing Gentiles will be co-equal citizens with believing Jews in the kingdom, why shouldn't they be co-equal citizens of the church now?

James is essentially reasoning analogically from the millennial kingdom back to the church age that if the Gentiles are allowed by God into the kingdom, they should be allowed into the church now. If God's pattern is to include all believers, Jews and Gentiles, in the kingdom in the future, it would logically be God's will to include all believers, both Jews and Gentiles, in the church now.

James is not arguing that the kingdom had begun in spiritual form. He is respecting the original intent and context of Amos 9, and is just using it here by way of analogy.

These few verses answer several important theological questions. They show the New Covenant did not *replace* the Old Covenant, but merely *interrupted* it. They prove God didn't intend for the Church to replace Israel in His plan forever, He just set Israel aside temporarily so the door of salvation could be opened to the Gentiles. In Is 49:6 the Father said to the Son: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

With the added insight from Rom 11:25 we can also confirm that Israel and the Church are like oil and water in that they don't mix. For one to be here the other has to be gone. The two systems are theologically incompatible. You can't have a system of faith evidenced by obedience to the Law complete with daily animal sacrifices functioning beside a system of grace through faith alone with no other requirement than to believe in the one He has sent (John 6:29).

Therefore the Church is not the next dot on a straight line from Creation to Eternity. It's a giant right hand turn that takes believers to a unique and exclusive destiny that no other believers will share, and allows the Lord to fulfill His promises to Israel at the same time. We tend to think the only reason for the Rapture is to get the Church out of the way of the end times judgments. But this shows us there's another reason why the Church can't be on Earth during any of Daniel's 70th Week: we have to leave so Israel can come back to God.

Conclusion: Concerning the Gentiles

19 Therefore, it is my judgment that we do not **cause trouble** for those from the Gentiles who are turning to God,

19 Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,

19 "Therefore, I have decided that we should not trouble these gentiles who are turning to God.

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

- James delivers his resolution for adoption by the council...

- "...cause trouble" - this is how God views those who place unnecessary hurdles in the path of those who want to walk with Him. This is what the Pharisees were famous for. Paul called those who do this as people who are "disturbing you" (Gal 1:6-7).

— We are saved by faith alone in Christ alone. We grow in Christ by faith alone in Christ alone, as described in Scripture alone. If anyone who teaches something beyond that is "causing trouble" or causing a "disturbance" in your life and in your walk with Christ.

20 **but** that we write to them that they **abstain from things contaminated by idols**, from **acts of sexual immorality**, from **what has been strangled**, and **from blood**.

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.

20 Instead, we should write to them to keep away from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from anything strangled, and from blood.

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

- "but" - this is where James seems to contradict himself from what he said in v19. He basically said that anyone who puts something in the way of a person to come to Christ for salvation, or grow in their faith once they come to Christ, is a "troublemaker". But now he lists four things that this Council should write to Gentiles that they should do. So which is it James?

— What we have to understand is that James is not contradicting what he says in v19. All of the NT writers agreed that you don't have to keep the Mosaic Law to be saved. They also agree that you don't have to keep the Mosaic Law in order to grow in your walk with Christ (Cf. Gal 3:3). And they also agree (in this passage) that you don't have to keep the Mosaic Law in order to join the church.

— However, what we need to understand—and this is James' viewpoint here—is that there may be times that someone may put themselves under the Mosaic Law—not for justification, not for sanctification, not in order to join the church—but in order to not be an offense to the Jews.

— What James is saying here is clearly stated by Paul in 1 Cor 9:19-23:

19 For though I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may gain more.

20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might gain Jews; to those who are under the Law, *I became* as *one* under the Law, though not being under the Law myself, so that I might gain those who are under the Law;

21 to those who are without the Law, *I became* as one without the Law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might gain those who are without the Law.

22 To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak; I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some.

— Paul was a great example of someone who did whatever necessary to spread the gospel and minister to people, even if that meant that he temporarily put himself under the Mosaic Law. He did not do this to obtain justification or sanctification but so that he would not offend those he was trying to reach with the gospel. It's hard to evangelize someone that you are at the same time offending.

- "...abstain from things contaminated by idols" - prohibited by the Mosaic Law (Ex 34:15). Paul later said in 1 Cor 8 that if you as a believer want to eat food sacrificed to idols, you go right ahead. But, don't do it in the presence of another believer who has a weaker understanding and may be offended or stumble in their faith by seeing you do that.

— At this point, many Jews were coming to Christ out of Judaism, and eating meat sacrificed to idols would have sidetracked or shipwrecked their faith. It would have offended them. So the Council here, through James, is requesting that Gentiles do not do this—not because it was a sin, but so they would not be offending the sensibilities of fellow believers who had strong feelings about this.

- "...acts of sexual immorality" - the second thing James requests that Gentiles abstain from is fornication (sexual immorality). This was prohibited in the Mosaic Law in Lev 18.

— This prohibition is not like that of not eating foods sacrificed to idols. Paul later said doing that was ok, as long as doing so wouldn't offend (stumble) another believer (Cf. 1 Cor 8). However, nowhere in the NT does it say fornication/sexual immorality is ok. It never is. Thus, it is something prohibited by both the Mosaic Law (OT) and the Law of Christ (NT).

- "...from what has been strangled" - this was prohibited in Lev 17:13.

- "...from blood" - this was prohibited in Lev 17:10-12. This was also prohibited all the way back in the Noahic Covenant (Cf. Gen 9:3-4).

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

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

21 After all, Moses has had people to proclaim him in every city for generations, and on every Sabbath his books are read aloud in the synagogues."

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

- In the weekly synagogue Scripture readings, teachers of the Law had stressed Jewish scruples regarding these matters for generations (over 1500 years); consequently, the Jews regarded them as extremely important, even offensive.

— If Gentile believers disregarded the convictions of these Jews, they would stumble new Jewish believers in Christ, or those they hoped to bring to faith in Christ or to grow and mature in their walk (Cf. 1 Cor 8:13).

(C) Resolution (15:22-35)

(a) Antioch delegation: Paul, Barnabas, and Silas (15:22)

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 who was called Barsabbas**, and **Silas**, leading men among the brothers,

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,

22 Then the apostles, the elders, and the whole church decided to choose some of their men to send with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch. These were Judas, who was called Barsabbas, and Silas, who were leaders among the brothers.

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:

- "...apostles" - who had authority over the universal church

- "...elders" - who had authority over the Church of Jerusalem; these were being groomed by the apostles to take over after the apostles died.

- "...the whole church" - the congregation in general. The whole church made the decision to send Judas and Silas to Antioch, along with Paul and Barnabas, to witness the validity of their report.

- "...Judas who was called Barsabbas" - his name means "Son of the Sabbath"; he is nowhere else mentioned in Scripture, and we know nothing about this man. But he was evidently highly thought of by the Jerusalem church, apostles, and elders since he was selected to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Antioch.

— He may have been the brother of Joseph Barsabbas (Cf. 1:23)

- "...Silas" - Silas was his Hebrew name; his Roman name was Silvanus. He became Paul's companion, in place of Barnabas, on his second missionary journey (Cf. 15:40; 16:19,25,29; 17:4,10,14-15; 18:5).

— He is also mentioned in several epistles (Cf. 2 Cor 11:9; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; 1 Peter 5:12). According to 15:32, he had the gift of prophecy.

— Both Judas and Silas were chief men among the brethren in the Jerusalem church. This gave them authoritative standing for what they had to say to the church of Antioch.

(b) Letter (15:23-29)

23 and they sent this letter with them: "The apostles and the **brothers** who are elders, to the brothers *and sisters* in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles: Greetings.

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.

23 They wrote this letter for them to deliver: "From: The apostles and the elders, your brothers To: Their gentile brothers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Greetings.

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:

- It was the apostles and elders, with the agreement of the entire church, who authored this letter to the church of Antioch

- "...brothers" - the fact that the Jerusalem believers address the Gentiles in Antioch as "brethren" shows they had been accepted as fellow believers

24 Since we have heard that **some of our number to whom we gave no instruction** have confused you by *their* teaching, **upsetting your souls,**

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,

24 We have heard that some men, coming from us without instructions from us, have said things to trouble you and have unsettled you.

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:

- "...some of our number" - refers to the men described in v1-2, who traveled to Antioch from Judea and began teaching other believers that in order to grow in Christ, they had to adhere to the Mosaic Law. They were called Judaizers. See notes on v1-2.

- "...to whom we gave no instruction" - these Judaizers went from Judea to Antioch on their own, not sent by the Jerusalem church, in order to cause a disruption and push their false doctrine on the church of Antioch.

— This is how you can recognize false teaching—it adds to or subtracts from apostolic teaching

- "...upsetting your souls" - the result of their false teaching was that they were subverting the souls of the Gentile believers; the picture is one of "total havoc" caused by the activity of the Judaizers among the Gentile believers. This is what false doctrine does...it causes confusion and disturbs (upsets) the soul (Cf. 2 Tim 2:18). In this case, the false doctrine was legalism.

— Paul speaks directly against legalism (Cf. Gal 1:6-7). We must always be on the lookout and protect ourselves against false doctrine, including legalism. This includes people who want to add some requirement to justification, sanctification, or church membership that the Bible doesn't require.

— Once you place yourself under these types of false teachings, it's a short-circuit to your spiritual growth. False doctrine is lethal. In the NT, false doctrine is analogized to cancer and gangrene. So in the same way that cancer and gangrene are deleterious to our physical health, legalism and false doctrine are deleterious to our spiritual health.

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

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

25 So we have unanimously decided to choose men and send them to you with our dear Barnabas and Paul,

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

- "...Barnabas and Paul" - only time Barnabas is mentioned first when coupled with Paul. This is likely because Barnabas was better-known by the Jerusalem church than Paul.

26 men who have **risked their lives** for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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

26 who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah.

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

- Further commendation of Barnabas and Paul, based on the fact that they risked their lives to preach the gospel

- "...risked their lives" - remember Paul was stoned and left for dead (Cf. 14:19-20)

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

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

27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas to tell you the same things by word of mouth.

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

- Judas and Silas (v22) were also sent with Barnabas and Paul in order to fit the pattern of God that a matter be confirmed by two or three witnesses (Cf. Deut 17:6; 19:15; 1 Tim 5:19).

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

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

28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to place on you any burden but these essential requirements:

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 good to the Holy Spirit" - verbiage that really means that the apostles and elders sought the mind of God on this subject. They didn't operate out of their own wisdom, but from God's revealed Word.

— At that point in time, they did not have any NT books. Thus, they used the OT as their basis, and reasoned their decision from the OT.

- "...and to us" - there was consensus among the apostles, elders, and the church on the final decision of the Council.

- "...lay upon you no greater burden" - this is what legalism does: it lays upon the believer a burden that God never meant for us to carry. Adherence to the Mosaic Law to become part of the church was laying upon Gentiles a burden that God never intended them to carry (Cf. 1 John 5:3).

— Jesus taught against the burden of legalism in Matt 11:28-30 when He said that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Legalism is neither easy nor light.

29 that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from *acts of sexual immorality*; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."

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."

29 to keep away from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from anything strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you avoid these things, you will do well. Goodbye."

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.

- See note on v20 about these abstentions.

- These abstentions, inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit, were not a basis for salvation, but rather a basis for fellowship between Gentile and Jewish believers.

- This list is used by Jehovah Witnesses as a doctrine against blood transfusions

(c) Ministry in Antioch (15:30-35)

30 So when they were sent away, they **went down to Antioch**; and after gathering the congregation together, they delivered the letter.

30 So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.

30 So the men were sent on their way and arrived in Antioch. They gathered the congregation together and delivered the letter.

30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:

- "...went down to Antioch" - Antioch is directly north of Jerusalem, but Luke understood that throughout Scripture, regardless of the direction one is traveling, they always travel "up" to Jerusalem and "down" from Jerusalem.

— There are actually 15 psalms that are called the Psalms of Ascent (Ps 120-134) because they were sung as people ascended to Jerusalem for the various feast days to worship the Lord.

31 When **they** had read it, **they** rejoiced because of its encouragement.

31 When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.

31 When the people read it, they were pleased with how the letter encouraged them.

31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

- "...they" - Paul and Barnabas

- "...they" - the church in Antioch

- The reason the church "rejoiced" at the reading of the Council's decision is because it took the Gentiles out of legalistic bondage.

— In v19 it says that this teaching (that you had to go under Mosaic Law to join the church) would cause "trouble" for Gentiles who were turning to Christ. In v24 it says the Gentiles were "confused" by this teaching and that it "upset their souls."

— Anytime that someone, even a "church" or denomination, tries to put a believer under something that God doesn't put them under places a burden on the believer without giving

them the power to fulfill the burden. God doesn't empower people to fulfill burdens that He never gave them in the first place.

— What God does is when He places a burden upon you, He gives you the power to fulfill it. That's why 1 John 5:3 says that the commandments of Christ are not burdensome, and Jesus said that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matt 11:30).

— When you're walking with the Lord, you have the power from Him to do what He asks you to do. But when you're under a man-made burden that God never intended us to bear, God doesn't supply the power to remove ourselves from under that obligation.

— So this is why the church in Antioch was rejoicing—they were encouraged that God did not put them under the burden of the Mosaic Law in order to join the church and grow in their walk with Christ (Cf. John 8:32,36; 2 Cor 3:17; Gal 5:1).

32 Judas and Silas, also being **prophets** themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brothers *and sisters* with a lengthy message.

32 Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.

32 Then Judas and Silas, who were also prophets, said a lot to encourage and strengthen the brothers.

32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

- "...prophets" - during this time period (before the biblical canon was complete), prophets received direct revelation from God (Cf. 1 Cor 14:3,26). When you heard from a prophet during this time period, he was there as a source of encouragement to the body of Christ. This is what Judas and Silas were doing here for these Gentiles.

33 After they had spent time *there*, they were sent away from the brothers *and sisters* in peace to those who had sent them out.

33 After they had spent time *there*, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out.

33 After staying there for some time, they were sent back with a greeting from the brothers to those who had sent them.

33 And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

34 [But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.]

34 [But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.]

34 But it seemed good to Silas to remain there, and Judas went back alone.

34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

- The NASB includes the brackets on this verse, indicating that this verse was not included in the earliest manuscripts.

— It's likely that this verse was inserted after Luke wrote in order to explain how Silas could leave with Paul from Antioch on his second missionary journey (v40). Apparently some time after leaving with Judas to return to Jerusalem, Silas went back to Antioch to accompany Paul.

35 But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

35 But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord.

35 Both Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch to teach and proclaim the word of the Lord, as did many others.

35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

- Paul and Barnabas, after reading the decision of the Jerusalem Council, stayed in Antioch teaching and preaching. They were building up the church at Antioch because that was the "sending church" for Paul's missionary journeys.

— Throughout Acts, priority is always given to the teaching and preaching of God's Word in the local church (Cf. 2:42; 1 Tim 3:15).

- This ministry included Peter (Cf. Gal 2:11). The confrontation between Peter and Paul (Cf. Gal 2:11-21) occurred sometime during this period. The reason for this confrontation was likely the fact that the Judaizers did not accept the decision of the Jerusalem Council.

C. Second missionary journey (15:36—18:22)

(A) Paul and Barnabas split (15:36-41)

36 After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's return and visit the brothers *and sisters* in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, *and see how they are.*"

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.*"

36 A few days later, Paul told Barnabas, "Let's go back and visit the brothers in every town where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they're doing."

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.

- Here we see Paul's ministry philosophy: to return to the churches he planted on his first missionary journey, a little over one year earlier, to check in on how they are doing.

— Most missionaries today don't think they are successful unless they are covering new ground, getting the gospel to a new unreached people-group. Paul is a little more

sophisticated than that. He's not just interested in conversions, he's interested in discipleship.

— Contrary to what most churches and Christians think, the Great Commission is not to get the gospel everywhere, to make as many conversions to Christ as possible. The Great Commission is to "make disciples" by "teaching them" all things (the whole counsel of God).

— When we focus on evangelism and not discipleship, it's similar to bringing a newborn baby home from the hospital, setting them on the couch, and telling them to help themselves to a ham sandwich in the fridge if they get hungry. Doing this is not only mean, it's child abuse and neglect.

— This is what many churches are doing today through their focus on evangelism and their lack of focus on discipleship. Paul focused on both. He didn't sacrifice evangelism for the sake of discipleship, or sacrifice discipleship for the sake of evangelism.

— Paul was evidently worried that false teaching would infiltrate the church, just as it had in his home church of Antioch (Cf. v1-2). And indeed false teachings were infiltrating the church in the region of Galatia (central Turkey) (Cf. Gal 1:6-7).

— In Gal 4:19, writing to these churches that he planted and now wanted to revisit (the epistle to the Galatians was written after Paul's first missionary journey, but before his second missionary journey), that he was "again in labor until Christ is formed" in them. He was "in labor" with them the first time when they initially came to Christ (evangelistic labor), and then he was "in labor" with them again (discipleship) until they began to make progress in second tense salvation (sanctification).

— Remember, during Paul's first missionary journey, after planting the churches, on his return trip home he re-visited those churches that he had just planted to begin the discipleship process. After returning home, he wrote the epistles of Galatians to them to strengthen them in their faith and address false teaching that had come into their churches. And now, a little over a year later, he wants to go visit some of these churches again to further strengthen them.

37 Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also.

37 Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also.

37 Barnabas wanted to take along John, who was called Mark,

37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

- Barnabas wanted to take Mark, who initially accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but when they arrived in the city of Perga in Pamphylia (southern Turkey), he left them and returned to Jerusalem (Cf. 13:13).

— Mark was a cousin to Barnabas (Cf. Col 4:10), so it's likely that Barnabas wanted to bring him along on the second missionary journey to give him another chance, and because he

was family.

38 But Paul was of the opinion that they should not take along with them this man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

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.

38 but Paul did not think it was right to take along the man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and who had not gone with them into the work.

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.

- Paul's response to Barnabas' suggestion to bring along Mark was, "No way Jose!"

— He reasoned that if Mark deserted us on the first missionary journey, what would prevent him from doing the same thing on the second missionary journey?

— Sometimes nepotism within the church causes problems. Pastors or those in authority are eager to hire or promote family members without necessarily looking at their qualifications or character.

— Paul may have been thinking about Jesus' teaching in Luke 16:10: he who is faithful in a little thing is faithful also in much.

39 Now it turned into such a **sharp disagreement** that they **separated** from one another, and **Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.**

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.

39 The disagreement was so sharp that they parted ways. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus,

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;

- "...sharp disagreement" - *paroxysmos*, it appears that Barnabas, whose name means "son of consolation" lost his temper during a lengthy discussion. He stuck to his belief that Mark should accompany them, and when Paul refused to agree, Barnabas took Mark and left.

- "...separated" - *apochōrīsthēnai*, to sever

- Notice that there was no slander between Paul and Barnabas. Both men loved the Lord equally, and were equally devoted to serving Him. They did have a very sharp disagreement over whether or not Mark should accompany them, but that was what their disagreement was limited to. The result of the disagreement was that they both went their separate ways.

— Many commentators view this disagreement and separation as a disaster for the gospel, but that's not the case. God allowed this disagreement to happen in order to glorify Himself through two different, separate missionary teams. He also used it to elevate Silas.

— And the story of Paul and Barnabas has a happy ending. It appears that the rift between them had healed by the time of Paul's third missionary journey (where he wrote 1 Corinthians) because in 1 Cor 9:6 he mentions Barnabas.

— In Col 4:10, Paul mentions both Barnabas and Mark, which shows that fellowship between them had not been completely severed and was eventually restored.

— And Paul was also reconciled with Mark, which is evident from 2 Tim 4:11, where Paul told Timothy to bring Mark with him when he travel to visit Paul in Rome because Mark was "useful to me for service." Mark actually visited Paul in Rome during his first Roman imprisonment (Cf. Col 4:10; Philemon 24).

- "...Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus" - this is the last we hear of Barnabas and Mark in Acts. Luke will focus on Paul and Silas during their second and third missionary journeys, and Paul's trials and subsequent trip to Rome.

— This doesn't mean that the ministry of Barnabas and Mark in Cyprus was unimportant, it just didn't fit Luke's purpose for writing to Theophilus. Luke focused on two apostles, Peter and Paul, and described their ministries to both Jews and Gentiles.

40 But Paul chose Silas, and left after being entrusted by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.

40 But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.

40 while Paul chose Silas and left after the brothers had entrusted him to the grace of the Lord.

40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

- Silas now takes over for Barnabas in Paul's second missionary journey. This fact is why v34 was likely added later by a scribe because v33 states that Silas had departed Antioch headed home to Jerusalem.

41 And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

41 And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

41 He went through Syria and Cilicia and strengthened the churches.

41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

- "...strengthening the churches" - fulfilling both their stated mission (Cf. v36) as well as the Great Commission of making disciples. This demonstrates Paul's ministry philosophy (see note on v36).

— Notice that Luke doesn't say Paul and Silas went out evangelizing and making new converts, although no doubt Paul was an evangelist. But Paul never thought his job was finished once he planted a church or led someone to Christ.

— The importance of discipleship, of teaching believers about how to progress in second tense salvation, is critical. This teaching is prevalent throughout Scripture:

Matt 4:4: But He answered and said, "**It is written: 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT COMES OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'**"

Acts 2:42: They were **continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching** and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 20:26-27: For I did not shrink from **declaring to you the whole purpose of God.**

1 Tim 3:15: but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one should act in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, **the pillar and support of the truth.**

2 Tim 3:16-17: All Scripture is inspired by God and **beneficial for teaching**, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man *or woman* of God may be **fully capable, equipped for every good work.**

— Dan Wallace, a well-known Greek scholar, says about 2 Timothy (a pastoral epistle):

By my count, there are 27 explicit commands (imperatives) given in the body of this letter. In 27 words, Paul tells pastors what to focus on. You have to be blind to miss the thrust of Paul's instructions here, because 18 of those commands—fully two-thirds—have to do with the ministry (preaching and teaching) of the Word.

