

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

UNDER THE EXALTED CHRIST, THE GOSPEL BEGINS TO SPREAD

THE ACTS

† THE BOOK OF ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRIES, Associated

An overview of the Book of Acts, by Given O. Blakely

ACTS 5:31-32

"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Lesson #65

COMMENTARY ON: 15:13-21

DEALING WITH TEACHERS OF CIRCUMCISION, #2

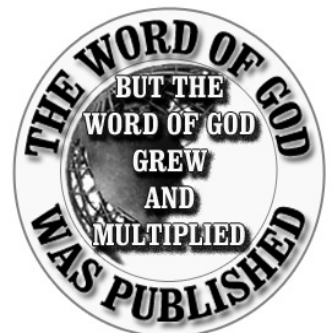
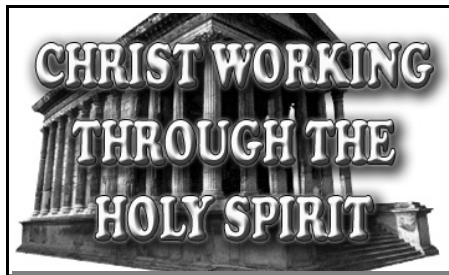
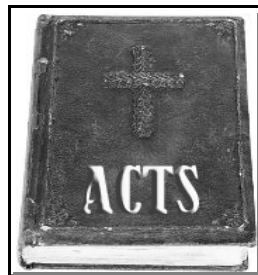
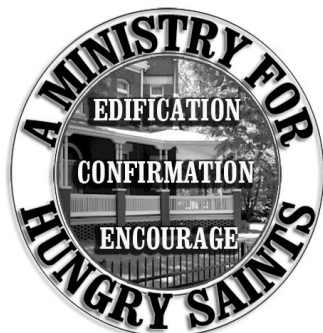
THE RESPONSE OF JAMES

After hearing the reports of Peter and Paul and Barnabas, the matter is seen clearly by James, a "pillar" in the Jerusalem church, even though he was not an apostle. He correlates what the Lord had done with what the Lord had promised He would do through the prophets. Not only does he perceive the whole matter, but he is able to articulate it in a manner that will "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," maintaining the proper focus, and yielding no ground to the flesh. This is a sterling example of how the Lord works in and through those who are yielded to Him. It also, as light is wont to do, illuminates the religious pretension of our time, which leads men to continually live with division without addressing it with the mind of Christ. There is much food for the soul in this report, and we all do well to take it into our hearts and muse upon the things that are made known, and the reasoning behind them.

ACTS 17:26-27

"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."

" . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

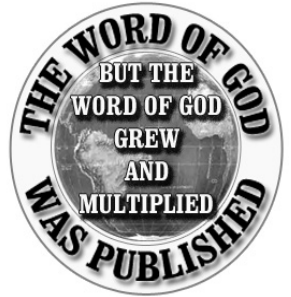


Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Book of Acts

Lesson Number 65



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

TRANSLATION LEGEND: ALT = Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED = Amplified Bible (1965), ASV = American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA = Douay-Rheims (1899), ERV = English Revised Version (1885), ESV = English Stand Version (2001), GNB = Good News (1966), GWN = God'S Word (1995), IE = International English, ISV = International Standard Version (1967), JPS = Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV = King James Version (1611), L.LITV = Literal Translation of the Bible ((1976), LIVING = Living Bible (1971), MKJV = Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD = Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB = New American Bible (2002), NASB = New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU = New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB = New International Bible, NIV = New International Version (1984), NJB = New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV = New King James Version (1979), NLT =New Living Translation (1996), NRSV = New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS = J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT = BISHOP'S New Testament (1595), RSV = Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK = JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster = The Webster Bible (1833),WEYMOUTH = Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS = William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE = Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE = Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT =Young's Literal Translation (1862).

THE INSPIRED RECORD OF HOW THE ENTHRONED CHRIST, BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKED THROUGH HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND GODLY MEN, TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, AND TO BRING EDIFICATION AND STABILITY TO MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.

----- Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----
LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT = Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, LEH = LEH Lexicon, GINGRICH = Gingrich Lexicon

DISCLAIMER: The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

DEALING WITH TEACHERS OF CIRCUMCISION, #2

THE RESPONSE OF JAMES

^{15:13} And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: ¹⁴ Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. ¹⁵ And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 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: 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. ¹⁸ Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. ¹⁹ Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: ²⁰ But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. ²¹ For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day." (Acts 11:13-21)

INTRODUCTION

After hearing the reports of Peter and Paul and Barnabas, the matter is seen clearly by James, a "pillar" in the Jerusalem church – even though he was not an apostle. He correlates what the Lord had done with what the Lord had promised He would do through the prophets. Not only does he perceive the whole matter, but he is able to articulate it in a manner that will "keep the unity

of the Spirit in the bond of peace," maintaining the proper focus, and yielding no ground to the flesh.

Right here is where the spiritually mature are separated from the novices and inexperienced in things pertaining to life and godliness. A satisfactory resolution of the problem taken up in Jerusalem could not be

achieved by education, natural aptitude, a pooling of analytical skills, or some other form of "the wisdom of men." Just as in the work of recovering those who have been overtaken in a fault, those involved in the solution must be "spiritual," or acquainted with, and discerning of, spiritual realities. On this matter Paul wrought, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, **ye which are**

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spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal 6:1). Other versions read, “you who have received the Spirit,”^{NRSV} “you who are of the Spirit,” and^{BBE} “you who are godly.”^{NLT} Most of the version s use the word “spiritual.” In this case, a “spiritual” person is one who thinks in concert with the Spirit, which thinking is directed by the Spirit. While the circumstances in our text differ slightly from those in Galatians, the principles remain the same. A position had been taken that stated circumcision and keeping the law of Moses was required for Gentile believers. **However devoted those advocates were to that position, it was wholly wrong.** Some had apparently sensed it, and therefore sought measures through which the facts of the matter could be discerned and substantiated.

This is a sterling example of how the Lord works in and through those who are yielded to Him. The disciples at Antioch did not pray for illumination. It appears as though they sensed that God had already spoken to this issue – it was just that they did not see it. They had the spiritual coinage required for the resolution of this challenge, and therefore they went about in a godly manner to find that coinage – like the woman who swept her house diligently for her lost

coin (Lk 15:8). Many professing Christians remain in the dark about critical matters, unable to determine what is right, simply because they have not pursued the truth as they ought. That, of course, can very well be a symptom of not receiving a love for the truth – a condition that will eventually, if not corrected, lead to “strong delusion” and consequent damnation (2 Thess 2:10-11). In order to produce sobriety among the saints, the Spirit has made known the priority of spiritual understanding, comprehension, and sound doctrine.

⇒ **THE TRANSFORMING EFFECTS OF SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE.** “And be not conformed to this world: but **be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom 12:2).

⇒ **THE MANDATE OF MATURE UNDERSTANDING.** “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, **but in understanding be men**” (1 Cor 14:20).

⇒ **THE OBJECTIVE OF BEING ABLE TO COMPREHEND.** “That He would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be **able to comprehend** with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:16-19).

⇒ **THE ALIENATING EFFECTS OF IGNORANCE.** “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth **walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding**

darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:17-18).

⇒ **THE DIVINE DEMAND TO HAVE UNDERSTANDING.** “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but **understanding what the will of the Lord is**” (Eph 5:17).

⇒ **A REVEALED OBJECTIVE.** “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be **filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding**” (Col 1:9).

THINGS TO BE PONDERED

If, prior to being in Christ, the state of alienation from God was produced BY being ignorant of Him, what can be said of extended and prolonged ignorance concerning His ways **after** we have come into Christ? What should be our view of preaching and teaching that does not produce spiritual understanding in those who receive it? What about theological schools that graduate people they say are to serve the Lord, yet remain in a state of fundamental ignorance concerning God, His will, and His great salvation? **How are we to assess a theological system that can be embraced, yet must be overcome to obtain a mature understanding?**

Precisely what can be said of a system of religious thought that causes the apostolic writings to actually sound strange? How does one go about justifying such a system? How can it be possible that a person can be converted by a doctrine that does not further a mature spiritual understanding? How can it be established that such a thing is even possible?

When Paul received news of the

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spiritual retrogression that was taking place in Corinth, he knew that something abnormal was taking place. **He knew that neither Christ Himself nor the Gospel that makes Him known contributes to such a condition.** He concluded that they had embraced “another Jesus,” “another gospel,” and “another Spirit” (2 Cor 11:4). When the Galatians began to embrace an erroneous view of salvation, Paul knew they had been taught something false, and that their teachers had bewitched them, turned them away from Christ, and induced a fall from grace (Gal 1:6-9; 3:1). When Jude wrote to the saints, he earnestly desired to speak of the “common salvation,” but he could not do so because of the teaching to which they were being subjected. Ungodly men had “crept in unawares” among them. They spoke of things concerning which they knew nothing, followed the way of Cain,

spiritual advancement (2 Thess 2:10-11).

THE IMPACT OF HERESIES

“Heresies” are more than wrong sayings or teachings – although they are surely that! “Heresies” are teachings that divide. The word “heresies” is a transliteration of the Greek word αἰρέσεις (hair-e-seis). The lexical meaning of the word is, “a body of men separating themselves from others and following their own tenets . . . dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims” ^{THAYER} “of a separatist group characterized by loyalty to a certain school of thought and practice,” ^{FRIEBERG} “religious party; division, faction; false party or teaching,” ^{UBS} and “division or group based upon different doctrinal opinions and/or loyalties and hence by implication in certain contexts an unjustified party or group.” ^{LOUW-NIDA}

Through the Spirit, Paul taught that there was an objective served by the introduction of heresies – a kind of appointed ministry that they have. “For

LIVED OUT IN OUR TEXT

These realities are being lived out in our text. **Because of the love of the truth and commitment to Jesus that was present in the church at Antioch, they were not thrown off course by the teachers from Judea.** Because of the spirit that prevailed among the disciples in Jerusalem, the misconception that was voiced by some former Pharisees – themselves believers – did not cause the disciples there to be misdirected. Nor, indeed, was it the occasion of starting a new group of disciples, or church, that championed the teaching of circumcision and the keeping of the Law.

What, then, has caused the staggering number of divisions within the professed church of our day? How can there be so many differing and contradicting schools of theological thought – bodies of teaching that are glaringly at odds with one another? How can these things be?

It is the direct result of spiritual infancy – and that is the most favorable view. One of the blessed conditions that is produced when men grow up into Christ is that they can no longer be pulled aside or caused to go astray by erroneous teachings. Paul said it this way: “. . . until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, **to a mature man**, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. **As a result**, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; **but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him**, who is the head, even Christ” ^{NASB} (Eph 4:13-15).

Paul goes on to say that the growth of reference results in the whole body edifying itself in love: “from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph 4:16). This “**building up**,” or “**edifying**,” ^{KJV} comes from the contribution of mature and insightful brethren. Jesus works through them to direct the thinking and reasoning of His people.

Because of the love of the truth and commitment to Jesus that was present in the church at Antioch, they were not thrown off course by the teachers from Judea. Because of the spirit that prevailed among the disciples in Jerusalem, the misconception that was voiced by some former Pharisees – themselves believers – did not cause the disciples there to be misdirected.

ran after the way of Balaam who prophesied for gain, spoke arrogantly, and flattered people (Jude 1:4,10-16).

These very things could have taken place in the church at Antioch if they had responded to the Judaistic teachers as churches today respond to the erroneous doctrines to which they are subjected.

When those within the church give heed to what they are taught, yet remain in spiritual infancy, or regress to carnal ways of thinking, they have not been taught “the truth” as it “is in Jesus” (Eph 4:21). It simply is not possible to embrace the truth and find it failing to promote and maintain spiritual maturity. The truth is a sanctifying agent (John 17:17,19), and the love of it contributes to

there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you” (1 Cor 11:19). The Amplified Bible reads, “**For doubtless there have to be factions or parties among you in order that they who are genuine and of approved fitness may become evident and plainly recognized among you.**”

In our text, because of the love of the truth, purity of heart, and an acquaintance with Scripture, the heresy will be aborted, and all will come into accord. **It ought to be obvious that where this does not happen, a different kind of people are present.** In such a case, the heresies are embraced by those who are not genuine or approved. I realize this is a hard saying, but it is a revealed truth.

This process is being lived out in our text. Those who were more mature in Christ contributed their insights, bringing edification to the body, and enabling them to draw proper conclusions, thereby providing appropriate direction. First Peter spoke, then Paul and Barnabas spoke, and now James will speak. It is in this manner that the Lord directed the church.

AN ILLUMINATING TEXT

The text before us also, as light is designed to do, illuminates the religious pretension of our time, which leads men to continually live with division without

addressing it with the mind of Christ. Even though the Divine mandate is, *“that there be no divisions among you”* (1 Cor 1:10), some have taken an approach to divisions that actually allows them to continue. They talk, but without any satisfactory resolution concerning what divides them. **In this, they differ significantly from those in our text. Whatever they may have, it is not what the brethren in our text possessed.**

There is much food for the soul in this report, and we all do well to take it into our hearts and muse upon the things that are made known, and the reasoning

behind them. The manner of reasoning that is displayed by James gives us an index of what it means to *“comprehend.”* Comprehension does not always come by means of a special and independent revelation – as when Peter perceived Jesus was the Christ the Son of the Living God (Matt 16:16-17). Sometimes it is brought by means of a godly analysis, and the correlation of the reports of the works of God with what He has said.

This is the marvelous process that is reported in our text. It is obvious that this requires a submitted and godly mind and heart.

AFTER THEY HAD HELD THEIR PEACE, JAMES ANSWERED

“^{15:13} And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me . . .”

The entire tone of the Jerusalem assembly now changes. There *“had been much disputing,”* or *“debate,”*^{NASB} with various statements apparently being made that were intended to buttress contradicting views. In due time, the audience listened to the report and reasoning of Peter, and then to the testimony of Paul and Barnabas. They had all been involved in the conversion of Gentiles, and their involvement had been directed by the Lord. They did not deliver a scholastic presentation of the various meanings of words, contextual studies, and the likes. The quality of their presentation, and the response of the hearers, speak of the nature of that solemn assembly.

AFTER THEY HAD HELD THEIR PEACE

“And after they had held their peace . . .” Other versions read, *“after they had become silent,”*^{NKJV} *“after they had stopped speaking,”*^{NASB} *“when they had finished,”*^{NIV} *“when they had come to an end,”*^{BBE} *“after a time of silence,”*^{IE} and *“silence again followed their words.”*^{PHILLIPS}

Notice the orderliness of the assembly, fulfilling the Pauline word, *“Let all things be done decently and in order”* (1 Cor 14:40). All of the facts were

in, and a time of weighing and deliberation now took place. Although the words were not actually said, the spirit of

interested in the will of the Lord. **Godly sincerity will not divide people.** The love of the truth does not set men at variance

There was apparently nothing more that could profitably be said on either side of the question put before them: should the Gentiles be circumcised and keep the law of Moses? Those who are wise know when it is time to cease presenting arguments and begin to draw some sanctified conclusions.

Paul’s admonition to Timothy was present: *“Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things”* (2 Tim 2:7).

There was apparently nothing more that could profitably be said on either side of the question put before them: should the Gentiles be circumcised and keep the law of Moses? **Those who are wise know when it is time to cease presenting arguments and begin to draw some sanctified conclusions.**

When theological issues remain unsettled for years, even centuries, someone that is involved does **not** have an honest and good heart. Someone is **not** seeking the truth. Someone is **not**

with one another. The salvation of God does not promote contention among those who are participating in it.

What Has Been Said to This Point

What do the hearers have to work with? What words have they heard? Here are some of the things they will process in the realm of godly thought.

⇒ They had heard *“the things that God had done”* through Paul and Barnabas (15:4).

⇒ Certain former Pharisees had affirmed of the Gentiles, *“That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses”* (Acts 15:5).

- ⇨ Peter reminded them that God chose him to be the one through whom the Gentiles believed (15:7).
- ⇨ Peter reported that God gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles who heard him speak (15:8).
- ⇨ Peter said God purified the hearts of those Gentiles *“by faith”* (15:9).
- ⇨ Peter challenged the notion that they should put a yoke upon the neck of the Gentiles that neither they nor their fathers were able to bear (15:10).
- ⇨ Peter affirmed that the Jews would be saved *“through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,”* just as the Gentiles (15:11).
- ⇨ Barnabas and Paul declared *“what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them”* (15:12).

After a period of silence, it was apparent that no one had any further input into the matter at hand. James will now present his reasoning on the matter, speaking as a master of the assembly

who were from the sect of the Pharisees. They have heard the testimony of Peter. They have also heard the report of Paul and Barnabas. **Now, it is time for some godly conclusions to be drawn. There must be an exit from the room of controversy into the holy of holies, where sound conclusions can be reached.**

The word *“answered”* is translated from the Greek word ἀπεκρίθη. The word means *“to give an answer to a question proposed, to answer.”*^{THAYER} James, after weighing what had been said, gives an assessment of the situation. Technically, he is not an apostle –not one of the original twelve. It is assumed that the other ten (not counting Peter), were present, excluding James the brother of John, who had been martyred (Acts 12:2). This being true, it means that ¹John, one of the inner circle of disciples, was present (Matt 17:1; Mk 5:37), together with ²Andrew, ³Philip, ⁴Bartholomew, ⁵Thomas, ⁶Matthew, ⁷James the son of Alphaeus, ⁸Lebbaeus [surnamed Thaddeus], ⁹Simon the Canaanite, and ¹⁰Matthias [who replaced Judas] (Matt 10:22-4; Acts 1:26). Of *“the twelve apostles,”* only Peter, James, and John are mentioned in Scripture after Acts

Following John 21:25, we do not have a single word spoken, or deed done of any individual apostle except Peter and John. There are references to their joint activity (Acts 2:37,42,43; 4:33,35,36, 37; 5:2,12,18,29,34,40; 6:6; 8:1,14; 9:27; 11:1; 15:2,4,6,22,23,33; 16:4).

Now we have a critical issue being raised that pertains to the salvation of God. The apostles (we presume all of them) are present, and have heard the factual reports of the Lord’s working among the Gentiles. The report has not come from mere observers, but from those who were actually involved in the work. It is imperative that a decision be made concerning statements that had been made concerning salvation: *“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,”* and *“That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses”* (Acts 15:1,5). To this point, the critical decisions have come from the apostles (Acts 4:35; 6:2; 8:14). Further, it was **their “doctrine”** in which the early disciples continued (Acts 2:42). Now, with such a critical matter at stake, one of the twelve does not step forth, but James.

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JAMES

We know from Paul’s letter to the Galatians that this was *“James, the Lord’s brother”* (Gal 1:19), where Paul made some remarks about this conference. He was one of Jesus’ four half-brothers (James, Joses [Joseph], Simon, and Judas (Matt 13:55). He is the only one of them of whom specific things are reported, even though all of them eventually believed on Jesus (Acts 1:14), although well into His ministry, they did not (John 7:5). Paul states in his epistle to the Corinthians that the Lord’s *“brethren”* journeyed in their labors for Christ with their wives (1 Cor 9:5).

Paul also reports that the resurrected Christ made a special appearance to James: *“After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles”* (1 Cor 15:6-7). This man was of such significance, that he is classed with Peter and John, long

(Eccl 12:11). It will be apparent that the Lord Jesus, the *“Head of the body,”* is speaking through James.

JAMES ANSWERED

“James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me . . .” Other versions read, *“listen to me,”*^{NKJV} *“give ear to me,”*^{BBE} and *“hear what I have to say.”*^{CJB}

James draws the attention of the brethren to what he is going to say. They have heard the view of those believers

1:13, where the eleven are named. James is mentioned once more in reference to his martyrdom by Herod (Acts 12:2). Prior to James’ death, *“the twelve”* are mentioned in Acts 6:2 and 7:8. *“The apostles”* as a group, excluding Paul, are referenced in in numerous texts (Acts 1:2,37,42,43; 4:33,35,36,37; 5:2,12, 18,34, 40; 6:6; 8:1,14, 18; 9:27; 11:1; 14:4, 4; 15:2, 4,6,22, 23,33; 16:4; Rom 16:7; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19; 1 Thess 2:6; 2 Pet 3:2; Jude 1:17). The expression *“apostles,”* as including Paul, is also used (1 Cor 4:9; 15:9; Eph 2:20).

after James [the brother of John] had been martyred. Perhaps speaking of the very occasion chronicled in this text, Paul says of him, *“And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision”* (Gal 2:9). James sent brethren to Antioch to settle the dispute concerning circumcision (Gal 2:12). Paul later went to him, reporting of his ministry among the Gentiles (Acts 21:18-19). James even counseled Paul concerning his conduct among the Jewish believers, which counsel Paul received (Acts 21:20-26).

This is also the James who wrote the letter bearing his name (James 1:1). In his epistle, as in the records of his personal counsel, he did not refer to his fleshly relation through Mary to Jesus. In other words, he did not know Jesus *“after the flesh”* (2 Cor 5:16).

When we expose our minds to the words of James, we must see them as being the result of Divine tutelage. The Head of the body delivered this pertinent word to the church through someone who was not one of the twelve apostles, nor, so far as the inspired record is concerned, was he called to be one as was Paul. There are some who feel that the other apostles chose James, the Lord’s brother,

to take the place of James the brother of John, who was martyred. This is based upon a statement Paul made in Galatians 1:19: *“But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord’s brother”* (Gal 1:19). The arguments presented for this case are not weighty, and are too distracting to state at this time. That is because there is too much of man in them, and too little of God.

James here delivers a Divine perspective that apparently was not clear until this time. We know it was not apparent to the prophets and teachers in Antioch, and even Barnabas and Paul are not reported as having made this association. Had this been clear to them, there would have been no need to bring the question under consideration to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.

This is a circumstance that cannot be exploited by men who would have us believe they also have a word from the Lord – an additional word. **This is a work of God, and will eventually be recognized as such by those who are present.** This will now involve assessing what God has done, correlating it with what He has said. It is good for us to also recognize it in that way. In this text we have a confirmation that the Lord does not always work in a way that can be foreseen by men, or concluded from their awareness of the Scriptures.

ASSESSING GOD’S WORK AT THE HOUSE OF CORNELIUS

Assessments of this event: *“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. . . . For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter”* (Acts 10:44,46)

- ◆ The Holy Spirit fell on them who heard the Word (10:44). – *Luke*
- ◆ They received the Holy Spirit as did the disciples on Pentecost (10:47). – *Peter*
- ◆ The Spirit fell on them as on the disciples at the beginning (11:15). – *Peter*
- ◆ Peter remembered the promise of Jesus that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (11:16). – *Peter*
- ◆ God gave them the same gift as He did the disciples (11:17a). – *Peter*
- ◆ They had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ (11:17b). – *Peter*
- ◆ God granted them repentance unto life (11:18). – *disciples*
- ◆ God gave them the Holy Spirit, as He did the disciples (15:7). – *Peter*
- ◆ God bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit as He did the disciples (15:8). – *Peter*
- ◆ God purified their hearts by faith (15:9). *Peter*
- ◆ They were saved by the grace of God (15:11). – *Peter*
- ◆ God visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name (15:14). – *James*
- ◆ These were people, who from the Gentiles, are turned to God (15:19) – *James*

Sometimes, the only way to obtain this kind of understanding is to be present when the facts are presented.

GOD VISITED THE GENTILES

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

Throughout the years, I have both read and heard numerous explanations of what took place at the house of Cornelius. **I must admit that most of them appear to have been biased, and few of them dealt with what has been said in Scripture of that occasion.** For some, who are inclined toward an institutional way of thinking, the whole text is very difficult. However, the Holy Spirit has provided several statements made concerning the reports that were given – statements that enable those

with an honest and good heart to form a proper concept of what was done at that time. Of course, the Lord has no interest in buttressing the doctrines of men, and will not even provide information in the shadowy haze of the positions of men.

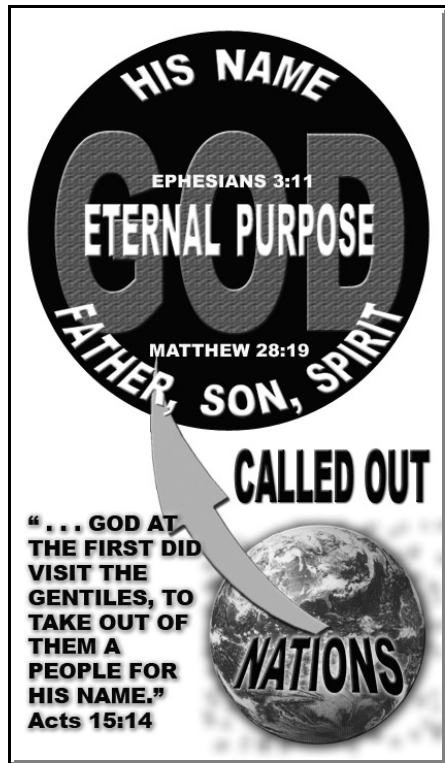
Here James, after hearing the reports of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, will assess the facts, then make a statement of the case. He will correlate it with the Word of God, and bring an abrupt end to the controversy. **He will not reason as a man, but as one who thinks in concert with God.** He has no mind to take sides on the issue, but rather to direct the brethren to think properly, and with due

regard for what the Lord is doing through Jesus Christ.

GOD VISITED THE GENTILES

“Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles” Other versions read, *“concerned Himself about . . . the Gentiles,”*^{NASB} *“showed His concern by,”*^{NIV} *“looked favorably upon the Gentiles,”*^{NRSV} *“God was first pleased,”*^{BBE} *“began to show His concern,”*^{CJB} *“first intervened,”*^{CSB} *“first visited,”*^{DARBY} *“began to elect,”*^{MRD} *“arranged to enlist,”*^{NJB} *“did look after,”*^{YLT} *“for the first time God accepted,”*^{IE} *“first looked graciously on,”*^{WEYMOUTH} and *“first graciously visited.”*^{WILLIAMS}

Some of the versions so dilute the text with scholasticism that one hardly knows what is being said. When we read “concerned Himself about,” showed His concern for,” and “looked favorably upon,” there is a kind of aloofness that is depicted with no aggressive corresponding action. The word from



which “visit” is translated can have a variety of meanings depending on the context. Lexically, and as used here, the word means, “to look upon or after, to inspect, examine with the eyes, in order to see how he is,” THAYER and “visit, come to help.” FRIBERG The Greek word can mean to look upon, examine, inspect, etc – but that is not its meaning here. Here, the point is not God merely looking or considering the Gentiles, but showing up among them. This was not an expression of concern, but of purpose and Divine determination. In other words, this text is describing what God did, not what He thought – even though what He did was driven by His thoughts.

Peter declared what God had done. Paul and Barnabas also affirmed what the Lord had done. Now James gives an obviously inspired and discerning assessment of what the Lord

was doing at the house of Cornelius, and among the Gentiles to whom Paul and Barnabas had preached.

TO TAKE OUT OF THEM

“ . . . to take out of them . . . ”

Other versions read, “taking from among the Gentiles,” NASB “taking from the Gentiles,” NIV “take out of the nations,” DARBY “taking from non-Jewish people” GWN “to elect a people . . . from among the Gentiles,” MRD “acquiring from among the Gentiles,” NAB “select from among the Gentiles,” NET “to enlist a people . . . out of the Gentiles,” NJB and “receive of the Gentiles.” PNT

James will make an observation that has not been made to this point – God taking a people for Himself out of the masses of people. Peter alludes to this Divine activity in His first epistle: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). Here, an even stronger word is spoken – as compared with “called out,” James says “take out.” The “call” is the means, and “take out” is the accomplished objective.

This activity is presented in other ways in Scripture – depicting salvation as something God Himself does. We are involved in the process, but only as recipients, and are in no way initiators.

⇨ **WASHED, SANCTIFIED, AND JUSTIFIED.** “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).

⇨ **QUICKENED, OR MADE ALIVE.** “And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1).

⇨ **SALVATION DEPICTED AS BEING APPREHENDED.** “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:12).

⇨ **MADE MEET, OR QUALIFIED.** “Giving

thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12).

⇨ **DELIVERED AND TRANSLATED.** “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col 1:13).

⇨ **DELIVERED FROM THE WRATH TO COME.** “And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10).

⇨ **SAVED AND CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE.** “Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim 1:9).

⇨ **SAVED US.** “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5).

⇨ **BEGAT US WITH HIS WORD ACCORDING TO HIS OWN WILL.** “Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (James 1:18).

⇨ **WASHED AND MADE KINGS AND PRIESTS.** “. . . Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:5-6).

Try as you may, you cannot trace the initiation and accomplishment of these marvelous realities to the activities of men. They are too grand for men to achieve. They require power that men do not possess. They are eternal in nature, and thus absolutely beyond the scope of human aptitude. They require the overthrow of “the prince of this world,” who has victimized and dominated every

person who has lived, with the solitary exception of Jesus of Nazareth.

You would think that this perspective of salvation would be constantly held before the saints, and always on the lips of those who speak in the name of Christ. However, who among us does not know that this is not the case at all. Nearly everyone I know that has come to perceive these things, including myself, had to overcome their former way of thinking to do so. However, this will not be the case in our text.

The World Is Not the Ultimate Place

It ought to be apparent that the world – “*this present evil world*” (Gal 1:4) – is not the ultimate place! Furthermore, being among the people is not the ultimate objective of redemption. Not only have we been delivered from the domain of the world, we have been delivered from its culture as well – “*the Gentiles*,” or “*the nations*.”

A PEOPLE FOR HIS NAME

“... a people for His name.”
Other versions read, “a people for Himself,”^{NIV} “a people to bear His name,”^{CJB} “a people unto His name,”^{GENEVA} “those who would honor His name,”^{GWN} “people His name,”^{TNT} “a people to bring honor to His name,”^{LIVING} “made them His own people,”^{IE} “a People to be called by His name,”^{WEYMOUTH} and “a people [to bear and honor] His name.”^{AMPLIFIED}

For what purpose did the Lord take a people from among the Gentiles? What is He achieving by such a thing? Is mere separation the point – to make the people different from others, which is actually accomplished. It ought to be obvious that it is **not** to make the world a better place to live, because the deliverance is from the world itself.

James concludes, and rightly so, that the people are taken out of the peoples (nations or Gentiles) **for God Himself**. They are intended to be His habitation (Eph 2:22), as well as workers together with Him (2 Cor 6:1). **He does not take the people out in order to identify with them in their objectives, but in order for them to become identified with His objective.** While there is sense in which He is identifying with them (“*I will be their God*”), the more

fundamental identity is, “*and they shall be My people*” (Jer 31:33), or “*shall be unto Me a people*” (Heb 8:10). Their chief inheritance is God Himself. As it is written, “*And if children, then heirs; heirs of God...*” (Rom 8:17).

In one brief sentence, James encapsulated the very essence of salvation – man’s identity with the Living God! Ponder the many statements that are made concerning this matter.

⇒ **RECONCILED TO GOD.** “*For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life*” (Rom 5:10).

⇒ **COMING TO GOD.** “*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them*” (Heb 7:25).

⇒ **KINGS AND PRIESTS UNTO GOD.** “*And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen*” (Rev 1:5-6).

In the last analysis, our relationship with one another either confirms or denies the validity of a claim to be associated with God, which is the primary relationship

⇒ **ALIVE UNTO GOD.** “*Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Rom 6:11).

⇒ **FRUIT UNTO GOD.** “*Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God*” (Rom 7:4).

⇒ **BODIES PRESENTED TO GOD.** “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service*” (Rom 12:1).

⇒ **LIVING UNTO GOD.** “*For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God*” (Gal 2:19).

⇒ **A HABITATION OF GOD.** “*In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit*” (Eph 2:22).

While there are critical relationships to be maintained between the saved and their peers, they are not the fundamental ones, nor are they the emphasis. **In the last analysis, our relationship with one another either confirms or denies the validity of a claim to be associated with God,** which is the primary relationship (1 John 2:10; 1 John 4:8,20).

Today there are a staggering number of professed “ministries” that major on life in this world. Some make marriage and the home their emphasis. Others choose to focus on national or political identity. Still others throw all of their resources into the correction of social ills or circumstances. There are also those who major on the recovery of wayward youth, or the recovery of people from debilitating enslavement to sins of indulgence. None of these things are wrong of themselves. **All of them are wrong as a spiritual focus.**

I know of no text of Scripture, or doctrinal insinuation, that speaks of any revealed work of God **focusing** on a

Men have no right to shift the emphasis of salvation to something that makes identity with the Living God secondary. That ought to be abundantly apparent. However, all too often it is a rare consideration.

segment of society: married, widows, youth, drunkards, drug addicts, the homeless, ghettos, etc. This by no means suggests it is proper to neglect such people, or to engage in an effort to bring help and hope to them. **I am speaking about Divine intention, and of the clear revelation of that intention.** I am saying that if our primary objectives in matters pertaining to the Christ differ from those that are of God, they cannot be proper. If our fundamental aim is to correct a temporal condition, we are missing the

mark. There is nothing in the Scriptures, either by doctrine or example, concerning making such things **primary**, or neglecting the Word of God or the saints of God to accomplish them. **Throughout Scriptural history, when the saints were strong, and people were living unto God, such things were addressed with God-glorifying wisdom** (Acts 6:1-3; 11:29; Rom 15:26). However, they were never allowed to be the **focus** of attention.

Men have no right to shift the emphasis of salvation to something that makes identity with the Living God secondary. That ought to be abundantly apparent. However, all too often it is a rare consideration. This, of course, is why the modern church has become spiritually weak. **It is its emphasis that has birthed its condition.** That emphasis does not present identity with God as being primary.

God did not visit the nations to take out a people in order to reform the world. Rather, He did so to gather a people for Himself. He did not take them out to address the ills of a world, which is destined to be destroyed, or to resolve all of its problems. **He took them out in order to walk and work with Himself – a condition extending into eternity, and “the ages to come.”** It is serious beyond comprehension to adopt a view of the work of God that obscures this fact by fastening our attention on the here and now.

THIS AGREES WITH THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS

¹⁵ And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 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 . . . ”

James now fastens down securely what he has proclaimed. He is like a wise man who uses words as “nails,” “fastening” them like “masters of assemblies” (Eccl 12:11). He handles “aright” the word of God, confirming that it fully supports that what has been reported is nothing less than the work of God. **It ought to here be stated that if what men teach concerning salvation is not supported by the prophets, it cannot possibly be true.** Paul himself said of his preaching, “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22). Were this practice to be strictly followed in our time, it would eliminate a staggering percentage of what is being preached

concerning the salvation of God.

TO THIS AGREE THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS

“And to this agree the words of the prophets . . .” Other versions read, “with this the words of the prophets agree,”^{NKJV} “the words of the prophets are in agreement with this,”^{NIV} “the words of the Prophets are in complete harmony with this,”^{CJB} “with this the words of the prophets accord,”^{MRD} “is entirely in harmony with the words of the prophets,”^{NJB} “agrees with what the prophets predicted,”^{LIVING} “this is in harmony with the language of the Prophets,”^{WEYMOUTH} “with this the predictions of the prophets agree,”^{AMPLIFIED} and “This is in full agreement with what the prophets wrote.”^{PHILLIPS}

And what is it that is in full accord with what the prophets said? It is this word: “God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name” (Acts 15:14). Peter said that God put no difference between the Jew and the Gentile, “purifying their hearts

by faith” (15:9).

It is evident in this text that, while the prophets did serve their generation, that is not all they did. They spoke and wrote in such a manner as to enable those in the ages that followed them to recognize the working of God in “the day of salvation.”

I WILL RETURN AND BUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID

“ . . . as it is written, ¹⁶ After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David . . .” Other versions read, “return and rebuild the tabernacle of David,”^{NKJV} “return and rebuild David’s . . . tent,”^{NIV} “return and rebuild the dwelling of David,”^{NRSV} “I will come back, and will put up the tent of David,”^{BBE} “I will return. I will set up David’s fallen tent again,”^{GWN} “I shall return and rebuild the fallen hut of David,”^{NJB} “I will return and renew the . . . contract with David,”^{LIVING} “I will build David’s house again,”^{IE} and “I will come back, and will rebuild the house of David.”^{AMPLIFIED}

The prophecy of reference is found in Amos 9:11-12: *"In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by My name, saith the LORD that doeth this"* (Amos 9:11-12).

The "tabernacle" of David, according to the promise delivered to Him, was actually a "house," or family: *"And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the LORD telleth thee that He will make thee an house"* (2 Sam 7:11). David said of that promise, *"For thou, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath*

David's lineage would possess **"the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen which"** were called by God's name. Knowing that Jesus is the One who had been raised up to sit on David's throne, as Peter declared on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:30-37), **James reasons that the acceptance of the Gentiles, as reported by Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, is actually the household of David being enlarged to include them.** His house was being rebuilt, but would be significantly larger.

Through Isaiah, God declared that restoring Israel to Himself would be accomplished through Christ, **but that this was too small to justify the atonement that was achieved by Jesus.** Here is what he said, **"It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel: I will also make You a light of the nations So**

What looked like spiritual shambles would be rebuilt – and, as Hosea foretold, the latter house would have greater glory than the former one. *"The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts"* (Hag 2:9). Haggai was speaking of the rebuilding of the Temple by Zeubbabel, but his words contained more than that. Ultimately, this referred to the *"greater glory"* of the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:9,10).

Which Is Fallen Down

This refers to David's kingly lineage and the occupation of his throne. For nearly five hundred years it was vacant, and there appeared no hope on the horizon until Jesus appeared, who was the real *"Son of David"* (Matt 1:1). Clarifying the whole matter, the glorified Christ told John that He was not only the *"Root,"* or Source, of David, but His *"Offspring,"* or Son, as well: *"I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star"* (Rev 22:16).

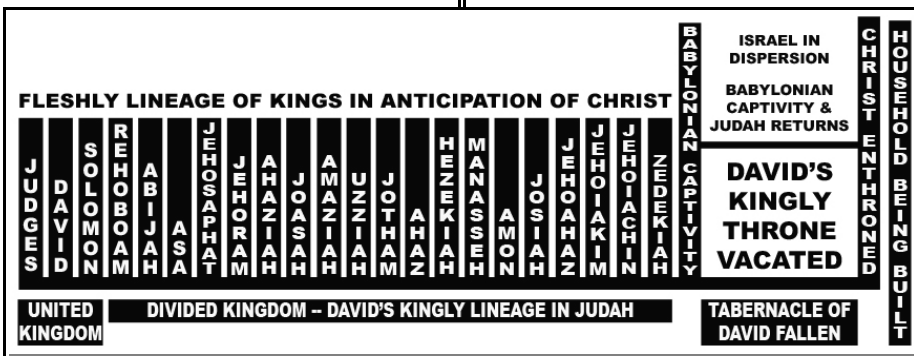
Until Jesus was born, David's Messianic house looked as though it could never be raised up again. Several generations passed without any significant person appearing in Israel who had an clear connection with David. His promised house appeared to have fallen down, never to be rebuilt.

I Will Build the Ruins Again

So far as David's kingly lineage was concerned, it lay in *"ruins,"* like Jerusalem and its walls did during the days of Nehemiah (Neh 2:3,13). **However, God is a great Builder and Restorer,** and He committed Himself to the reestablishment of David's throne, raising it up, so to speak, from the ashes of defeat and neglect.

I Will Set It Up

According to the prophecy of Amos, the rebuilt house would first involve the Jews themselves. **Then they would possess "the remnant of the heathen."** **In other words, the Jews would be the first to be blessed, and would extend the blessing out to the Gentiles.**



thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee"(2 Sam 7:27).

The promise God made to David, to build him a house, appeared to have been vacated. The last king in the Davidic lineage was Zedekiah, whose reign was interrupted by the commencement of the Babylonian captivity. From that time until this very day, no one has reigned as an earthly king upon David's throne. His kingly progeny appears to have disappeared, and his tabernacle, or house, fallen down to the ground.

However, through Amos, the promise God had made to David was revived. Although it was stated in somewhat vague language, James was given to see what it meant. Amos said

that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth"^{NASB} (Isa 49:6). This word – a Divine word – is destructive of much erroneous theology. **There is a strain of thinking afoot in the Christian world that states Jesus would have died for the sins of the world, even if only one person was saved as a result. This is not only pure folklore, but reproaches the God of heaven.** It reflects upon His eternal purpose, His Divine power, and the effectiveness of Christ's death. Those who speak so glibly cannot even conceive of the rebuilding of David's house after it had fallen down.

I WILL BUILD THE RUINS AND SET IT UP

"... which is fallen down: and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up..."

This, of course, is precisely what happened. According to His promise, God extended His salvation *“to the Jew first,”* taking the first fruits from their field. **The feast of Pentecost, on which the New Covenant was inaugurated, was a feast of first fruits, because the first loaves made from the new grain were offered unto the Lord at that time** (Ex 23:16; Lev 23:16-20; Num 28:26-31). It only lasted for one day, as compared to the other main feasts, which lasted for several days.

The first fruits of the Jews – not the final harvest – were reaped on the day of Pentecost [the feast of first fruits], with three thousand souls gladly receiving the Word, being baptized, and added to the church by the Lord Himself (Acts 2:41). **Thus the house of salvation had been raised up, and was initially inhabited and made ready for extensive occupancy.** For some time the house continued to be populated with growing numbers of Jews (Acts 2:47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7).

It was necessary for this to take place before salvation could be offered to the Gentiles. The Jews were like husbandmen who must first be partaker of the fruits (2 Tim 2:6). To them had been given the field of preparation: *“to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen”* (Rom 9:4-5). The “fountain” of salvation was thus *“opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness”* (Zech 13:1).

According to the promise, they must first have the promise fulfilled to them, for the promise was *“also”* [in addition to the Jews] to those who were afar off – the Gentiles (Acts 2:39). This postulated the initial priority of the Jews. **The remaining harvest of the Jews has not yet taken place, but it is as sure as the harvesting of the first fruits, and the Gentiles as well** (Isa 19:24-25; 54:4-19; 55:3; Jer 32:37-38; Ezek 37:21-28; Hos 2:14-19; Zech 12:10; Rom 11:18).

In salvation, the Gentiles are

occupying a dwelling belonging to Israel. The Jews’ abode has been enlarged for their occupancy, as declared in Isaiah 54:1-3. Paul referred to this as the Gentiles being grafted into the Jewish olive tree, **among the Jewish branches** (Rom 11:17-32). In that remarkable passage Paul reasons on the affiliation of Gentile believers with the Jews.

⇨ Gentile believers were grafted in **their tree “among them”**(11:17a).

fathers,” to whom the promises were made. This is because *“the gifts and calling of God are without repentance”*(11:28-29).

⇨ Just as the Gentiles have obtained mercy through the unbelief of the Jews, so through the mercy extended to the Gentiles, **the Jews will obtain mercy.** This is all by Divine intent (11:30-32).

Those who teach that the Jews have been forever cast off contradict the very word of God. He has specifically addressed the matter of them being cut off, and of its duration.

⇨ With the Jews, the Gentiles *“partake of the root and fatness”* of **their “olive tree”**(11:17b).

⇨ It is the **Jewish “root”** that bears the Gentile believers (11:18).

⇨ If the Jews do not abide in unbelief, they will be grafted in again, to **their own tree** – yes, God is able to do this (11:23).

⇨ If, contrary to nature, the wild and uncultured Gentiles were grafted into the olive tree, God is able to again graft in its **natural branches** into **their own** olive tree (11:24)

⇨ Israel’s present blindness is only **in part**, and only unto *“the fulness of the Gentiles be come in”*(11:25).

⇨ All Israel **will be saved.** *“The Deliverer will come out of Zion and turn ungodliness from **Jacob**”* – a term not applied to the church(11:26).

⇨ God’s **covenant** to Israel is to *“take away their sins”*(11:27).

⇨ Presently, concerning the Gospel, the Jews are enemies **for the sake of the Gentiles**, thus giving them an opportunity to be saved. However, concerning God’s election, they remain *“beloved”* for the sake of *“the*

The salvation of the Gentiles is within the context of the salvation promised to the Jews. Their salvation is not one that replaced the salvation promised to Jacob, but is an **extension** of it. The Gentiles have been **added** to the Jews, they do not replace them (Isa 2:2-5; 11:10; 42:1,6; 49:6,22-23; 54:3; 60:3,5,11; 66:12,19; Jer 16:19; Mal 1:11).

Even apostolic doctrine teaches that Gentile believers have **been joined to the Jews**, now forming *“one body”* and a *“new man,”* being built *“together”* for a *“habitation of God through the Spirit”* (Eph 2:13-22). Even the New Covenant, which is the basis of our salvation, was promised to be made *“with the house of Israel”* (Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:10). The promise of the Holy Spirit that is offered to the Gentiles – *“those who are afar off”* – **was given to the Jews** (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:39).

Those who teach that the Jews have been forever cast off contradict the very word of God. He has specifically addressed the matter of them being cut off, and of its duration.

⇨ This statement was made immediately following the promise of the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34) we enjoy in Christ. *“Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of*

the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar: The LORD of hosts is his name: **If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me for ever. Thus saith the LORD: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD**" (Jer 31:35-37).

⇨ Based on a prophecy made by Isaiah (Isa 1:9), Paul reasons that Israel has **NOT** been altogether cut off, else they would have been like Sodom.

"And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrah" (Rom 9:29).

⇨ God promised Israel He would **not** made "a full end" of them (Jer 5:18; 46:28).

⇨ Jesus said Jerusalem would be "trodden down of the Gentiles, **until** the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24).

⇨ Paul said the blindness of Israel, which is "in part," would be "**until** the fulness of the Gentiles [the full number ^{NIV}] be come in" (Rom 11:25).

The Reasoning of James
James now reasons that the Gentiles' conversion is in accordance with the promises of God and His declared purpose. His reasoning requires that the Jews be the ones to whom the promises were initially made, and that the Gentiles are partakers of their benefits. Such reasoning would be wholly erroneous if the promises were ever depicted as being withdrawn from the Israelites. If the promises no longer belong to them, they would also be withdrawn from the Gentiles as well, for they have been partakers with the Jews. If this is not the case, God's gifts and callings are **not** without repentance.

THAT THE RESIDUE OF MEN MIGHT SEEK AFTER THE LORD

" 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."

James has seen the Divine rationale behind the acceptance of the Gentiles **WITHOUT** a requirement for them being circumcised. He sees that the issue is not what the Gentiles are supposed to do, but whether or not they have been accepted by God, or are included in the canopy of salvation. With the expertise of the master of an assembly, he is weaving a tapestry of truth with Scripture, rightly dividing it, or handling it aright (2 Tim 2:15). Keep in mind, he is **not** an apostle, and that the same Jesus who chose and commissioned the apostles is now speaking through him. His appointed prominence is confirmed by the risen Christ's special appearance to him.

THE RESIDUE OF MEN

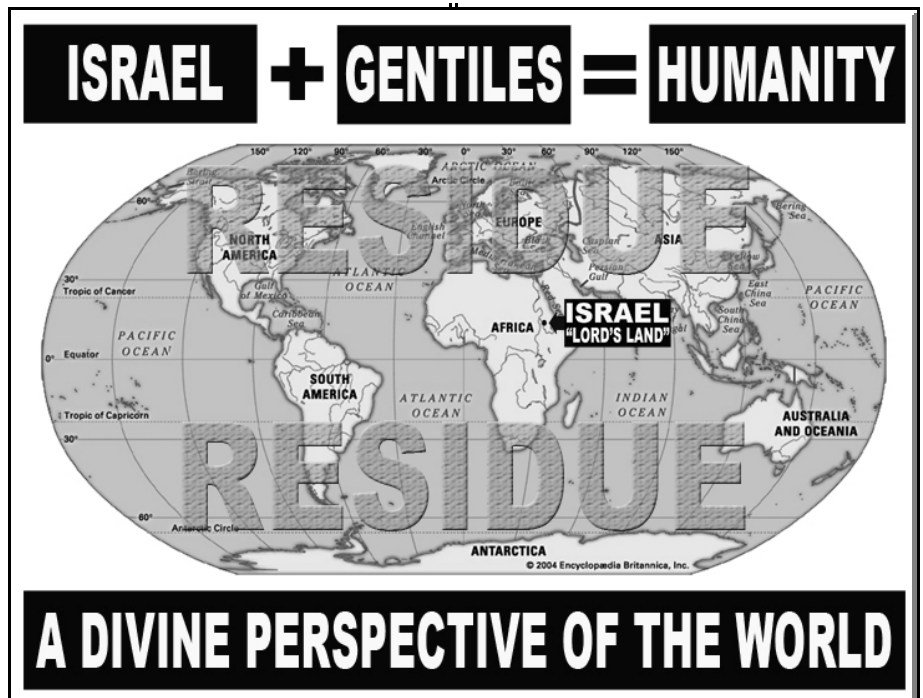
"That the residue of men might seek after the Lord . . ." Other versions read, "the rest of mankind," ^{NKJV} "the remnant of men," ^{NIV} "all other peoples," ^{NRSV} "the rest of man," ^{RSV} "those who are left of mankind," ^{BBE} "the survivors of all the people," ^{GWN} "Gentiles," ^{LIVING} and "other men," ^{WYCLIFFE} "the remaining

peoples," ^{ALT} "other nations," ^{CEV} and "the rest of the human race." ^{GNB}

The word "residue" is translated from a word that has the following lexical meaning: "left, remaining," ^{THAYER} "the rest," ^{UBS} "pertaining to the part of a whole which remains or continues, and thus constitutes the rest of the whole .

rest, remaining, what remains," ^{LOUW-NIDA} and "remnant, rest of the people." ^{LEH}

Amos' prophecy referred to "the remnant of Edom **and of all the heathen,**" or, the offspring of Esau (who had some knowledge of God), and the rest of the world (Amos 9:11). **Here we are provided**



with a Divine perspective of the human race. God gives it through Amos, His prophet, and James now ratifies it under the administration of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God.

The Divine Perspective of Humanity
Here, in both Amos and the words

LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto Himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth” (Deut 14:2).

⇨ *“And the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be His peculiar people, as He hath promised thee, and that*

It deals a devastating blow to the philosophical notion that God sees everyone alike. The mass of mankind – the Gentiles, of non-Jews – are viewed as “the residue” of humanity; the remnant, the remaining part, the rest of the people, and everyone else.

of James, we have the Divine perspective of humanity. It deals a devastating blow to the philosophical notion that God sees everyone alike. The mass of mankind – the Gentiles, of non-Jews – are viewed as “the residue” of humanity; the remnant, the remaining part, the rest of the people, and everyone else. They are not the main people, but the “rest of the men.”^{RSV} They are not the most important people but “other peoples.”^{NRSV} They are not the primary nations, but the “other nations.”^{CEV}

This should take no person by surprise, or be abrasive to their thinking. God has spoken concerning this matter – this matter of flesh-and-blood people.

⇨ *“For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth”* (Deut 7:6).

⇨ *“Thou shalt be blessed above all people: there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle”* (Deut 7:14).

⇨ *“Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and He chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day”* (Deut 10:15).

⇨ *“For thou art an holy people unto the*

thou shouldest keep all His commandments; and to make thee high above all nations which He hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honor; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the LORD thy God, as he hath spoken” (Deut 26:18-19).

⇨ *“For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto Himself, and Israel for His peculiar treasure”* (Psa 135:4).

⇨ *“For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life”* (Isa 43:3-4).

Paul describes the Jews as those “who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever.”^{NASB} (Rom 9:4-5). Presently, he affirms, they are “enemies” for the sake of the Gentiles – that is, in order that he Gentiles may be included in their promises. However, when it comes to the determination God has made concerning them as a people, “they are beloved for the father’s sakes” (Rom 11:28).

Moses affirmed that the peoples of the world were divided and apportioned their inheritance in consideration of the children of Israel. During his valedictory address he said, “Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will show thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee. When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the LORD’S portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance” (Deut 32:8-9). Other versions read, “He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel,”^{NKJV} “He had the limits of the peoples marked out, keeping in mind the number of the children of Israel,”^{BBE} “He assigned the boundaries of peoples according to Israel’s population,”^{CJB} “He appointed the bounds of people according to the number of the children of Israel,”^{GENEVA} and “He set the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the Israelites.”^{AMPLIFIED} In other words, by Divine intention, the land of Israel was established as the crossroads of the world, and remains so to this very day.

Some versions, reflecting the spurious theology of their translators do not refer to “the children of Israel.” Instead, they read as follows: “according to the number of the gods,”^{NRSV} “according to the number of the sons of God,”^{RSV} “according to the number of the angels of God,”^{SEPTUAGINT} “according to the number of the heavenly assembly,”^{NET} “according to the number of the children of God,”^{NJB} “He gave to each of them a supervising angel.”^{LIVING} These all represent a departure from the standard translations, and totally ignore the verse that follows: “For the LORD’S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance” (Deut 32:9).

It is clear, therefore, that when it comes to the consideration of men as flesh and blood, all Gentiles are a remnant, even though they are the majority. This reflects the manner in which God assesses people. Those who belong to Him are reckoned as the majority, and the remaining as a remnant, or the residue. Employing this

manner of reasoning, Paul wrote of the vast majority of Israelites who did not believe the Gospel. *“What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. For **what if some did not believe?** shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?”* (Rom 3:1-3). Even though well into the first century, the majority of the Jews had not believed the Gospel, Paul said, *“they have not **all** obeyed the Gospel”* (Rom 10:16) – language that, to men, suggests that most did. Of those Jews who did **not** believe Paul said, *“some of the branches were broken off”* (Rom 11:17).

The point of the text is that those who embrace the truth of God are counted as the majority before Him. Everyone else falls into the category of “residue” or “remnant.” Of course, if God really does see all men alike, love them all the same, and regard them all as equals, this kind of language is foolish and grossly misleading.

THE GENTILES, UPON WHOM MY NAME IS CALLED

“ . . . and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called . . . ” Other versions read, *“all the Gentiles who are called by My name,”*^{NKJV} *“all the Gentiles who bear My name,”*^{NIV} *“over whom My name has been called,”*^{NRSV} *“on whom My name is named,”*^{BBE} *“on whom My name is invoked,”*^{DARBY} *“over whom My name is spoken,”*^{GWN} *“who are called by My name,”*^{NAB} *“I have called to be My own,”*^{NET} *“who bear My name,”*^{NIB} *“once called Mine,”*^{NJB} *“all those I have called to be Mine,”*^{NLT} *“all those marked by My name,”*^{LIVING} *“My name has been called upon them,”*^{ALT} *“be My chosen ones,”*^{CEV} *“over whom My name is spoken,”*^{GW} and *“on whom has been on-called the name of Me on them.”*^{INTERLINEAR}

This text does not refer to the Gentiles who have called upon the name of the Lord. It rather refers to them – *“the residue”* – as those **over whom the name of the Lord has been called or spoken**. This is referring to something very unique. It does **not** say “among whom My name has been called upon,” but *“upon whom My name has been called.”*

The word “upon” is translated from the Greek word ἐφ’, which means “upon,” referring to *“the Gentiles”* – **not to something they do, but to something that is done upon them**. The phrase *“whom my name is called”* is translated from the Greek word ἐπικέκληται, which, as used here, means “upon whom the name has been invoked (to indicate that the persons involved belong to the one named),”^{GINGRICH} “to put a name upon, to surname.”^{THAYER}

instructed Peter to respond to the inspired directive of Cornelius. It also called for Barnabas and Saul to be separated for a work that involved preaching to the Gentiles.

God called His own name over the Gentiles, dispelling the powers of darkness so they could no longer hold them captive. That call is what loosed the angels for their work of intervention, and

It was a Divine initiative that resulted in Cornelius and the Gentiles in Asia hearing the Gospel. Heaven directed Cornelius to call for Peter. It also instructed Peter to respond to the inspired directive of Cornelius. It also called for Barnabas and Saul to be separated for a work that involved preaching to the Gentiles.

The refers to a Divine activity which is also spoken of in this way: *“I am sought of them that asked not for Me: I am found of them that sought Me not: **I said, Behold Me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by My name”*** (Isa 65:1). Paul referred to this very text in accounting for the inclusion of the Gentiles in salvation: *“But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, **I was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me”*** (Rom 10:19-20).

Isaiah also spoke of the coming of the Gentiles independently of a diligent quest: *“He will lift up a banner to the nations from afar, And will whistle to them from the end of the earth: **Surely they shall come with speed, swiftly”***^{NKJV} (Isa 5:26). This expression equates to the statements *“**He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles”*** (Acts 14:27), and *“**God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name”*** (Acts 15:14).

It was a Divine initiative that resulted in Cornelius and the Gentiles in Asia hearing the Gospel. Heaven directed Cornelius to call for Peter. It also

the Spirit for giving His direction.

WHO DOTH THESE THINGS

“ . . . , saith the Lord who doeth all these things.” Other versions read, *“Says the Lord who does all these things,”*^{NKJV} *“Thus says the Lord who accomplishes these things,”*^{NAB} *“saith the Lord, who is doing all these things,”*^{YLT} *“And He is the One who does all these things,”*^{IE} and *“He is the one who has been doing these things.”*^{ISV}

The point is that the things that have been reported are the works of the Lord, not merely human activity. That includes not only the response of the Gentiles to the Gospel, but the means by which that response was provoked. Jonah was precisely correct when he said, *“Salvation is of the Lord”* (Jonah 2:9).

- ⇨ If men hear the Gospel, it is because God has “sent” a “preacher” to them (Rom 10:14).
- ⇨ If they are convinced of the guilt of sin, of the righteousness of Christ, and of the judgment of Satan, it is because the Holy Spirit has convinced them (John 16:8-11).
- ⇨ If their heart is receptive to the message, it is because God has

“opened” their heart (Acts 16:14).

⇒ If they repent, it is because God has “granted them repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18), because Jesus has been exalted to give repentance (Acts 5:31).

⇒ If they believe, it is because it was “given” to them to do so (Phil 1:29).

⇒ If they can insightfully “say that Jesus is Lord,” it is “by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3).

All of these things are evidence of **Divine visitation**: i.e. “God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name” (Acts 15:14). This was a Divine initiative, not a human quest. James saw this clearly. Do you?

KNOWN UNTO GOD ARE ALL OF HIS WORKS

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

Other versions read, “Known to God from eternity are all His works,”^{NKJV} “says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old,”^{NASB} “. . . the Lord who does these things that have been known for ages,”^{NIV} “Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago,”^{NRSV} “says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old,”^{RSV} “says the Lord, who has made these things clear from the earliest times,”^{BBE} “All this has been known for ages,”^{CJB} “known from eternity,”^{DARBY} “To the Lord was his own work known from the beginning of the world,”^{DOUAY} “who maketh these things known from the beginning of the world,”^{ERV} “From the beginning of the world, God knoweth all his works,”^{GENEVA} “He is the one who will do these things that have always been known!”^{GWN} “known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,”^{PNT} “Known from the ages to God are all His works,”^{YLT} “Who reveals His plans made from the beginning,”^{LIVING} “These things have been known from the beginning of time,”^{IE} “who has been making these things known from ages long past,”^{WEYMOUTH} “that have always been known,”^{ISV} and “who has been making this known from the beginning of the world.”^{AMPLIFIED}

As you can see, the various translations present two distinct thoughts – and they are contradictory of one another.

⇒ The first is that the works of God have been known to Himself from the very beginning.

⇒ The second is that He has been making them known from the very beginning.

Here is a confirmation of the fact that those who handle the Word of God, particularly in the translation of it, must have an understanding of Scripture. **The second thought presented by the various versions – namely that God has been making His works known from the beginning – is an inexcusable contradiction of several express statements of Scripture.** God has NOT been making known His works from the foundation of the works – particularly the ones regarding His great salvation,

mystery, **which was kept secret since the world began**, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:25-26).

⇒ “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even **the hidden wisdom**, which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (1 Cor 2:7).

The second thought presented by the various versions – namely that God has been making His works known from the beginning – is an inexcusable contradiction of several express statements of Scripture.

which is the point of pour text.

Paul states that God is now making known His purposes that were previously **not** made known:

⇒ “Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God: **even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations**, but now is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:25-27).

⇒ “Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the

⇒ “How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ). **Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men**, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph 3:3-5).

⇒ “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, **but is NOW made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ**, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim 1:9-10).

⇒ “In hope of eternal life, which God,

that cannot lie, **promised before the world began; but hath in due times manifested His word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior**" (Titus 1:3).

Speaking of this salvation, Jesus Himself said, **"For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them"** (Matt 13:17; Lk 10:24).

The point of the text is that God was doing was what He had always purposed to do, and that the purpose had **not** been revealed, as it is **now** that Christ is mediating the New Covenant. This, of course, in in strict keeping with God's nature, for He **"works all things according to the counsel of His will"**^{NKJV}

(Eph 1:11).

The opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles was not God's reaction to the Jews rejection of Christ. He provided some indication that He was going to lift up His hand to the Gentiles, accepting them as His own. However, this was not at all clear, or revealed, else it would not have been necessary to it known to the early church.

Even though Israel had been given all of the things related to identity with God (Rom 9:4-5), this did not mean that God would never look with favor upon the Gentiles, or call them to Himself. He had always purposed to bring them into His family. Provision for their inclusion was found in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. **Therefore, in the acceptance of the Gentiles, God was acting in perfect**

accord with both His character and His purpose.

This has been confirmed by the manner in which the Gentiles received the Gospel. It is also seen in the signs that accompanied their acceptance. And to this, add the fact that there was no demand made for them to be circumcised. Although those who preached to them were filled with the Spirit, He did not direct them to say one syllable about the necessity of circumcision to the Gentiles.

Now, with James, as with Paul and Barnabas, this was clear proof that circumcision was not a requirement to be saved. Nor, indeed, was it necessary to keep the law of Moses in order to be saved. God's works proved this to be true, for He confirmed their acceptance without requiring them to be circumcised.

TROUBLE THEM NOT

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

Now that James has assessed the situation, weighing the facts and correlating them with the Word of God, he provides a word of wisdom. **Men are to act upon their decisions and not allow them to remain idle.**

opinion,^{PHILLIPS} *"I am judging,*^{INTERLINEAR} and *"I don't think we should."*^{CEV}

I must say that I have a growing disdain for *dubbed down* and simplistic language being imposed upon the text of Scripture. Our text is an occasion during which both the thrust and the view of the church will be altered, bringing it more into accord with the Lord. They are not

the first place. Any person who imagines that the Holy Spirit of God would allow human opinion to be recorded as a decisive and binding thought has really taken leave of their senses. **There are versions of Scripture that culture a mind-set that is at variance with the Word and purpose of God.** They tend to obscure pivotal matters, such as that which concerns our text. James was a manifest *"pillar"* of the church in Jerusalem (Gal 2:9). You may be sure it was not because of his opinions!

The word that James delivers – his *"sentence"* – is an expression of his insight – insight that was the result of the illumination of the Spirit and consequent discernment. If this was not the case, the Spirit would have not have left the matter here, but would have produced a more credible witness. The men who came down from Judea gave their opinion – that men had to be circumcised after the manner of Moses to be saved (15:1). **Their words were challenged.** In Jerusalem, certain believers who were formerly Pharisees gave their opinion, that the Gentiles were required to be circumcised and keep the

Now that James has assessed the situation, weighing the facts and correlating them with the Word of God, he provides a word of wisdom. Men are to act upon their decisions and not allow them to remain idle.

MY SENTENCE IS

"Wherefore my sentence is . . ."
Other versions read, *"I judge that,"*^{NKJV} *"it is my judgment,"*^{NASB} *"I have reached the decision,"*^{NRSV} *"for this reason my decision is,"*^{BBE} *"my opinion is,"*^{CJB} *"I judge,"*^{DOUAY} *"I've decided,"*^{GWN} *"I say unto you,"*^{MRD} *"I conclude,"*^{NET} *"my verdict is,"*^{NJB} *"I think,"*^{IE} *"I am firmly of the*

dealing with matters of mere human opinion, but with an issue that has to do with what is required to be saved. Language like *"my opinion is,"*^{CJB} *"I've decided,"*^{GWN} *"I think,"*^{IE}, and *"I am firmly of the opinion,"*^{PHILLIPS} have too much of the flesh in them. **They do not carry the message of our text to a generation that is weak on thinking in**

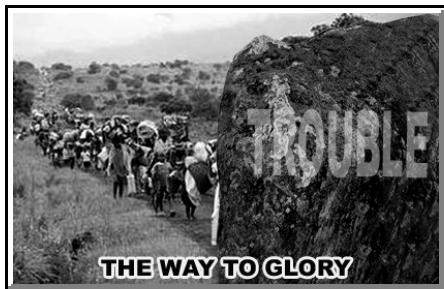
law of Moses. **Their words were also challenged.** The words of James were not challenged – and there were apostles and elders present.

Oh, the bane of weak language. Thinking does not necessarily involve a decision. The word “*opinion*” has too much flesh in it. There is a higher form of reasoning than mere opinion. As it is used here, the Greek word translated “*my sentence is*” (κρίνω) means, “to determine, resolve, decree, to judge . . . of those who act the part of judges or arbiters in matters of common life, or pass judgment on the deeds and words of others, to rule, govern, to preside over with the power of giving judicial decisions,” THAYER and “to come to a conclusion in the process of thinking and thus to be in a position to make a decision - 'to come to a conclusion, to decide.” LOUW-NIDA

James does not bring the problem to himself, musing upon it as though it belonged to him, then rendering a personal opinion on the matter. **He rather sheds the light of Scripture and spiritual understanding upon it.** This meeting was not convened to obtain the opinion of certain dignitaries in Jerusalem. The brethren in Antioch were dealing with a problem that had to do with salvation – and that is **not** something concerning which opinions or private views are of value.

THAT WE TROUBLE NOT THEM

“ . . . that we trouble not them. . . ” Other versions read, “*not make it difficult,*” NIV “*put trouble in the way,*” BBE “*put obstacles in the way,*” CJB “*cause difficulties,*” CSB “*be disquieted,*” DOUAY “*crush those,*” MRD “*cause extra difficulty,*” NET “*making things more difficult,*” NJB “*inflicting unexpected annoyance,*” WEYMOUTH and “*put obstacles in the way of and annoy and disturb.*” AMPLIFIED



Notice how James describes the

teaching with which they are dealing – namely, that the Gentiles should be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. **The imposition of this teaching was a troubling and inhibiting requirement placed on the Gentiles.** It was an obstacle in their path, hindering them on their way to glory. It was a gigantic rock thrown into their course. It was of such magnitude, that they would not be able to get to their destination unless it was removed. It would not merely slow their progress, but stop it altogether.

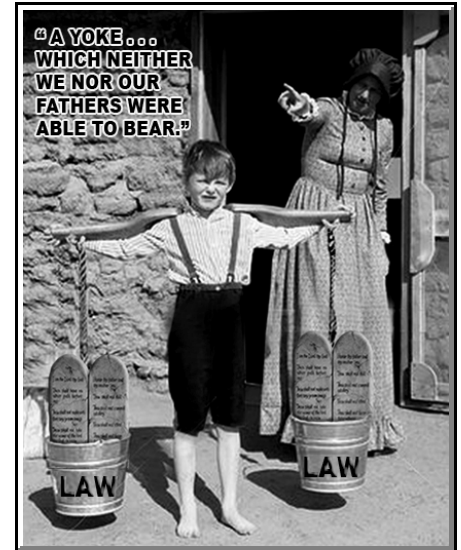
Troubling Religion

There is a form of religion that is troubling to the soul. It is like an imposing obstacle on the path to glory, and a heavy yoke that makes travel difficult and life cumbersome. It appears innocent on the surface, and the proponents of the approach claim to be seeking the welfare of men in the name of the Lord. In our text, those who were seeking to impose the Law upon the Gentiles were not like the factionists of our day. We know this is the case because they were assuaged after the reasoning of James. However, had their heresy not been addressed, they probably would have hindered many souls, and become more firmly fixed in faulty their persuasion.

You see how the brethren contended with those who brought this teaching to Antioch from Judaea (15:2). Then, after an entourage from Antioch was sent to Jerusalem, others espoused the same view, and they too confronted opposition from the brethren (15:5-7). They were seeking to impose the burden of the Law upon the newly converted Gentiles. However, it was one that they themselves were unable to bear.

Many within the professed church are also imposing burdens of religious regimentation on the people. They do not impose the Law of Moses, which is really the only Law that could be imposed, were such an imposition required. These new merchants of law invent their own rules, then place them upon men, telling the people they are effective to restrain the flesh. Some even boast that they are in harmony with the Scriptures, even though they must admit they are not found in them. These human laws teach men to live artificially – contrary to their basic desires. **What they do not see is**

that wayward men do not need more rules. What they need is a new heart – the kind on which the laws of God are written. Then a minimum of rules for living is required. This also is confirmed in our text.



WHICH FROM THE GENTILES HAVE TURNED TO GOD

“ . . . which from among the Gentiles are turned to God . . . ” Other versions read, “*are turning,*” NKJV/NASB/NIV/NRSV and “*are converted to God.*” DOUAY

TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE SAME THING



Previously, James said that God “*did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name*” (15:14). Peter said that God had made a choice among them that through him the Gentiles “*should hear the word of the Gospel and believe*” (15:7). He also said that God put no difference between the Jews and the Gentiles, “*purifying their hearts by faith*” (15:9). All of these are referring to the same thing: the acceptance of the Gentiles – looking at it from differing perspectives.

⇒ **Objective – DIVINE INITIATIVE:** God visiting the Gentiles. This was seen

The expression “turn to the Lord” denotes a condition in which the Lord captures the attention of the individual. It is accompanied by an unwavering desire to do the will of the Lord, and is frequently accompanied by inquiries concerning what the people should do.

in the calling of Peter to go to Cornelius, and the calling of Barnabas and Saul to go to Asia.

- ⇒ **Objective – DIVINE OBJECTIVE:** To take out a people for His name. The aim of God was not merely to present an opportunity, but to garner a people for Himself.
- ⇒ **Objective – DIVINE ACCOMPLISHMENT:** Purifying their hearts by faith. More was involved that the preaching of the messengers and the hearing of their subjects.
- ⇒ **Subjective – THEIR RESPONSE:** hear and believe the Gospel. Their

unreserved and zealous response was owing to the presence of the Lord.

- ⇒ **Subjective – THEIR FOCUS:** Turn to God. They turned to God because they were keenly aware of Him – and He is “invisible.” They experienced what insightful Jews prayed: “Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved” (Psa 80:3,7,18; 85:4). For the Jews, turning to the Lord was a restoration. For the Gentiles, it was an initial turning.

The expression “turn to the Lord” denotes a condition in which the Lord captures the attention of the individual.

It is accompanied by an unwavering desire to do the will of the Lord, and is frequently accompanied by inquiries concerning what the people should do (Acts 2:37; 8:36; 9:6; 16:30).

This is the factor that is missing in much of the professed Christianity of our day. People have not turned to the Lord, and therefore are not on the initiative to please Him. To address this uncomely dilemma, pretentious preachers and teachers attempt to motivate the people to consider the Lord. Sometimes they resort to a kind of salesmanship that is designed to move the people to be a part of their church. Some more polished pretenders adjust the external environment, supposing to make it more conducive to thoughtful consideration – like lowering the lights, moving the little children to another area, and seeking to touch the hearts of the people with stories and various illustrations from contemporary life. However, notwithstanding the commonness of such approaches in our time, you will find nothing remotely resembling them in the book of Acts. That is an account of God working among men. It is an effectual work that finds the people heartily turning to the Lord.

BUT THAT WE WRITE UNTO THEM

“²⁰ But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.²¹ For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.”

Being wise in the ways of the Lord, and a “pillar” in the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:9), James knew that new converts cannot simply be left to themselves – particularly when they are in a heathen society. This is one reason why Paul and those with him made a practice of ordaining elders in the churches – men who would ensure the proper direction and nourishment of the saints (Acts 14:23; Tit 1:5). This is also why Paul wrote epistles to Gentile churches (Romans, Corinthians,

Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians). John did the same, as directed by Jesus, in writing to the churches in Asia (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea – Rev 1:11).

James gives his inspired counsel, understanding the nature of spiritual life in its beginning stages, and the corrupt environment in which believers are to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

WRITE TO THEM

“But that we write unto them . . .”

Other versions read, “give them orders,”^{BBE} “write them a letter,”^{CJB} “send unto them,”^{GENEVA} “let word be sent to them,”^{MRD} “write and tell them,”^{NLT} and “send word to them in writing.”^{AMPLIFIED}

In addition to personal preaching and teaching, writing is a way in which the Lord has ordained that His will and works be made known to people.

- ⇒ When Israel defeated the Amalekites, God told Moses, “Write this for a memorial in a book” (Ex 17:14).
- ⇒ After God had given the entirety of the Law, He told Moses, “Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel” (Ex 34:27).
- ⇒ Because of the hardness of the hearts of the Israelites, God spoke of them writing His Law: “And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates” (Deut 6:9).

- ⇨ In Nehemiah's day, when the people made a covenant to serve the Lord, they wrote it down: *"And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it"* (Neh 9:38).
- ⇨ When God gave revelations to Isaiah, He told him to **"write"** them down (Isa 8:1; 30:8).
- ⇨ When God revealed things to Jeremiah, He told him, **"Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book"** (Jer 30:2).
- ⇨ After revealing the details of a temple, God told Ezekiel, **"write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them"** (Ezek 43:11).
- ⇨ After giving a vision to Habbakuk the Lord said, **"Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it"** (Hab 2:2).
- ⇨ After John had been given the Revelation he was told, **"Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter"** (Rev 1:19).

The Gospels report Jesus referring eighteen times to what was *"written"* (Matt 4:4,7,10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24,31; Mk 7:6; 9:12,13; 14:21,27; Lk 4:4,8; 7:27; 19:46; 24:46; John 6:45). The epistles contain the word *"written"* thirty-three times (Rom 1:15; 2:24; 3:4,10; 4:17; 8:36; 9:13,33; 10:15; 11:8,26; 12:19; 14:11; 15:3,9,21; 1 Cor 1:19,31; 2:9; 3:19; 9:9; 10:7; 14:21; 15:45; 2 Cor 4:13; 8:15; 9:9; Gal 3:10,13; 4:22,27; Heb 10:7; 1 Pet 1:16).

When a thought is *"written,"* it is, so to speak, embalmed in print. Because of this, among thoughtful men, extensive consideration precedes writing down a thought. **Many words that are spoken freely would never be said if it was known that they were going to be written down.** Of course, it is to be questioned if words that ought not be written should be spoken at all.

There is something else here that

is of interest. It is that the Gentiles, particularly in Antioch, were far from being mere novices. When the apostles heard that the city of Samaria had turned to the Lord, they sent Peter and John there (Acts 8:14). When a large number of people first believed in Antioch, the brethren in Jerusalem *"sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch"* (Acts 11:22). This time, however, because of the controversy that had risen over circumcision and the keeping of the Law, they sent a letter with certain brethren.

Concerning the first people who came to Antioch, saying that the believers could not be saved unless they were circumcised, there is no record of whether or not they remained there. However, now some representatives from Jerusalem would accompany Paul,

that has been polluted by being offered to idols,^{AMPLIFIED} and *"ceremonial pollution of the idols,"*^{INTERLINEAR}

While the versions vary widely in their representation of this verse, there is no need for such a circumstance. The meaning of the phrase is clearly stated in verse twenty-nine: *"abstain from meats offered to idols."* Other versions read *"things offered,"*^{NKJV} *"things sacrificed,"*^{NASB} *"food sacrificed,"*^{NIV} and *"what has been sacrificed."*^{NRSV} Verse twenty views the effect of the idol upon **what was offered to it** – pollution, or defilement. Verse twenty-nine stresses **what was offered**, or presented to the idol. It is understood that the reference is to animal sacrifices, as expressed in Exodus 34:15: *"For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: Lest thou make*

What is false pollutes whatever is offered to it. That includes images, that are idols. It also includes ideas that are idolatrous – like covetousness, "which is idolatry" (Col 3:5). Just as the image of a god pollutes what is offered to it, so whatever is offered to the idol of self-gratification is polluted by that false idea.

Barnabas, and those with them. They would be bringing a letter of instruction with them, with all of the ones returning being privy to the reports and discussion that preceded the writing of the letter. That circumstance confirms how seriously the early church took the dissemination of false doctrine.

ABSTAIN FROM POLLUTION OF IDOLS

" . . . that they abstain from pollutions of idols . . ." Other versions read, *"things polluted by idols,"*^{NKJV} *"contaminated by idols,"*^{NASB} *"foods polluted by idols,"*^{NIV} *"things offered to false gods,"*^{BBE} *"filthiness of idols,"*^{GENEVA} *"defilement of a sacrifice [to idols],"*^{MRD} *"food offered to idols,"*^{NLT} *"filthiness of images,"*^{TNT} *"meat sacrificed to idols,"*^{LIVING} *"things polluted by connection with idolatry,"*^{WEYMOUTH} *"everything that is contaminated by idols,"*^{WILLIAMS} *"anything*

a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice" (Ex 34:14-15). When the children of Israel sinned with the Moabites, they became involved in eating what was offered to their false gods: *"And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods"* (Num 25:2).

The Fact of Pollution

What is false pollutes whatever is offered to it. That includes images, that are idols. It also includes ideas that are idolatrous – like covetousness, *"which is idolatry"* (Col 3:5). Just as the image of a god pollutes what is offered to it, so whatever is offered to the idol of self-

gratification is polluted by that false idea. This approach has become very fashionable in our religious world – the appeal to self gratification, pleasure, security in this world, etc. **Anything that is done with a preeminent regard for self becomes defiled by that aberrant desire.**

Paul's Instruction to the Corinthians

This prohibition may appear to contradict the teaching of Paul to the Corinthians. *“As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him”* (1 Cor 8:6). He went on to say that the person eating meat that had been offered to idols was not necessarily defiled by it: *“But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse”* (1 Cor 8:8). He even told the brethren to eat what was *“sold in the shambles* (meat market), *asking no question for conscience sake”* (1 Cor 10:25).

the brethren were to be mindful of it. *“But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. **Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge:** for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled . . . some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame”* (1 Cor 8:6-7; 15:34). The same condition probably existed in other churches, where people had turned from idols to serve the living God, yet their conscience was not yet mature.

Two Circumstances Are Addressed

This requirement would address two circumstances.

- ⇨ The new believer who did not yet know that idols were not really gods, but only images that could not see, speak, hear, smell, handle, or walk (Psa 115:4-7). Such a person was to avoid the ingestion of anything that was offered to idols, for it would awaken his conscience concerning that idol.
- ⇨ There also were those who **did** possess the knowledge of God, and

him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend” (1 Cor 8:10-13). Eating in an idol's temple suggests that the *“shambles,”* or meat market, was part of the idol's temple. The meat was sold in something similar to our restaurants.

This is an example of abstaining *“from all appearance of evil”* (1 Thess 5:22). In our text, the idea is not that the person who sees your action considers what you are doing to be evil. Rather, it is that the one who beholds your conduct personally has a corrupt view of what you are doing, thinking that you are serving someone other than the God and Father or our Lord Jesus Christ. The service of idols may be evil to you, but it is not to him, and therefore he misinterprets what you do as being obeisance to another God.

ABSTAIN FROM FORNICATION

“and from fornication . . .” Other versions read, *“sexual immorality,”* ^{NKJV} *“unchastity,”* ^{RSV} *“evil desires of the body,”* ^{BBE} *“sexual sins,”* ^{GWN} *“whoredom,”* ^{MRD} *“unlawful marriage,”* ^{NAB} *“illicit marriages,”* ^{NJB} *“lewdness,”* ^{WEB} *“any kind of sexual sin,”* ^{IE} and *“all sexual impurity.”* ^{AMPLIFIED}

The word *“abstain”* means to *“go away from, depart.”* ^{THAYER} **It involves the personal responsibility to stay away from something.** The reason for such a prohibition is that to follow some things, you must leave Jesus – leave His Person, His presence, and His protection. Fornication is such a transgression. **A person must blot Christ from his/her mind, and place the flesh on the throne of the heart in order to commit it.** It is never innocent, never inadvertent, and **always** with deliberate and aggressive intention.

It is unfortunate that the word *“fornication”* has lost much of its meaning in our time. Through his subtlety Satan has corrupted vocabulary

However, more was involved in the matter than mere eating. In this, there was the matter of the conscience. In Corinth, for example, everyone in the church did not discern the fact of a single God – the true God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was, Paul said, shameful that such a condition could exist in the church – but it did exist, and the brethren were to be mindful of it.

However, more was involved in the matter than mere eating. In this, there was the matter of the conscience. **In Corinth, for example, everyone in the church did not discern the fact of a single God – the true God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was, Paul said, shameful that such a condition could exist in the church – but it did exist, and**

were fully aware that eating meat did not affect one's relationship to God. However, they were to be mindful of the brethren who lacked this knowledge. Paul spoke of this manner of life to the Corinthians: *“For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of*

to dull the seriousness of transgression. In my judgment, men should have left this word alone, and the preachers and teachers so defined it that whenever it was spoken Divine associations were summoned into the mind.

Fornication has to do with the gratification of fleshly lusts outside of the bounds of marriage. It involves the prostituting of the body, which is *“for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body”* (1 Cor 6:13). In the Grecian and Roman cultures, sins of this sort were committed in the name of religion. Now they are committed for purely self-interests and fleshly gratification. Speaking of this category of sins the Spirit says, *“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints”* (Eph 5:3). Other versions read, *“must not be even a hint,”*^{NIV} and *“must not even be mentioned among you.”*^{NRSV} Yet, they have become quite common in church circles, even among professed Christian leaders. **No person can afford to ignore this warning, for it is attended by eternal consequences.** Ponder what is said of fornicators. *“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind”* (1 Cor 6:9). *“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication . . . they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God”* (Gal 5:19-21).

ABSTAIN FROM THINGS STRANGLED AND FROM BLOOD

“. . . and from things strangled, and from blood.” Other versions read, *“the flesh of animals put to death in ways against the law,”*^{BBE} *“unbled meat,”*^{LIVING} and *“meat killed by strangling.”*^{WEYMOUTH}

The word *“strangled”* is translated from a word meaning, *“choked; of animals killed by strangling, so that the blood is not drained from them,”*^{THAYER} Prior to the Law, during the time commencing with Noah after the flood, God prohibited the eating of an animal whose blood had not been drained. *“But flesh **with** the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat”* (Gen 9:4). The NIV reads, *“But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it”* (Gen 9:4). Jews, because they

were a people illuminated by God, could not eat any animal that *“died of itself”* (Deut 14:21).

Confirming that it was the blood that was not to be ingested, the prohibitions include the eating of blood. This ban also started with Noah (Gen 9:4). It was codified in the Law: *“Moreover ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or of beast, in any of your dwellings”* (Lev 7:26). The

Both of the prohibitions concerning blood were enacted prior to the giving of the Law, and were therefore not confined to the Law.

reason this was personally offensive to God, is stated in Leviticus 17:10-11: *“And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For **the life of the flesh is in the blood:** and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for **it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul”*** (Lev 17:11).

The Law specified that when an animal was slain for food, its blood was to be poured out upon the ground: *“Only ye shall not eat the blood; ye shall pour it upon the earth as water”* (Deut 12:16).

Were These Instructions Compulsory?

Some are of the opinion that these prohibitions, particularly the last two, were given only with the intention of not offending Jewish believers. **However, this clashes sharply with the whole intention of this conference, which was to deal with things said to be required for salvation.** It is incredulous to imagine that these brethren wrote a letter to the Gentiles that really had nothing to do with salvation, but only reflected the necessity of being mindful of the Jewish brethren.

Under the Law, blood was not allowed to be ingested because it was associated with life and atonement (Lev

17:11). It seems to me that this is still the case – except the atoning blood is now that of Jesus Christ. This law assists in protecting men from developing casual and self-centered attitudes concerning the means by which they have been redeemed to God. If this is not the case, and the Gentile believers were merely being told to be mindful of their Jewish brethren, it seems to me that a different view would have been taken concerning circumcision. In such a case, they would

have been admonished to honor the practice of circumcision to appease their Jewish brethren, yet know in their hearts that it was not related to their salvation.

Both of the prohibitions concerning blood were enacted prior to the giving of the Law, and were therefore not confined to the Law. Those who know that they have been redeemed *“to God”* with blood – even *“the precious blood of Christ”* (1 Pet 1:19; Rev 5:9) – should have no difficulty understanding this. Any practice that minimizes the significance of blood cannot be proper.

THERE ARE THOSE WHO PREACH MOSES

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

Some have said this verse buttresses the supposition that the Gentiles were only being admonished in order that they might get along with the Jews. **However, this conference was called in reference to the Jew’s attitude toward the Gentiles, and not vice versa.** The sense of this text is that the Jews already knew of these prohibitions, for they were read regularly every Sabbath day. These were not rules that required special instruction to the Jews.

It is true that there is a sense in

which the ceremonial law was not removed at once from the Jewish mind – at least that is what appears to be the case later, when James said to Paul, “many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law” (Acts 21:20). **However, this**

conference was convened to determine the necessity of circumcision and the keeping of the Law to be saved – not how the Gentiles were to respond to Jewish believers. Besides this, the record of the church in Antioch suggests that they were meeting apart from the local

synagogue (Acts 11:26; 13:1; 14:27; 15:3). I conclude, therefore, that this verse is referring to the Jews already being familiar with the restrictions that are now specified to the Gentiles. They required no further knowledge of these restrictions.

CONCLUSION

In this text, the priority of the church – those who are in Christ Jesus – is once again established. **Incorrect doctrine among the saints – particularly as it regards the matter of salvation – cannot be tolerated.** In our text, something was introduced to the brethren in Antioch that had not been included in the preaching they had heard, and to which they had responded. They were told that they could not be saved unless they were circumcised. Even though those who made this demand were from Judaea, their words were challenged by Paul and Barnabas. After extensive disputation, when it was apparent that the matter could not be settled in Antioch, some trusted brethren were sent with Paul and Barnabas to take up the matter with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

Even when they arrive in Jerusalem, some of the believers who were formerly Pharisees, and experts in Scripture, affirmed that it was necessary for the converted Gentiles to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. Now, that was two witnesses, and would

have settled the matter for a novice. In our time, the leaders would have obliged the people by starting two groups – those who practiced circumcision and kept the law of Moses, and those who did not. After all, that would have allowed every person to honor their own conscience, keeping peace. **However, this is not at all the way these men addressed the subject.**

If Paul is referring to this occasion in the book of Galatians, there was pressure put on him to have Titus circumcised. He said of that occasion: *“But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: and that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you”* (Gal 2:3-5).

The strength with which Paul writes of this occasion is most arresting.

⇨ The circumcision of Titus was

demanding by “*false brethren unawares brought in.*”

⇨ Those “*false brethren*” came to “*spy out*” the liberty which the Gentile believers had experienced in Christ Jesus.

⇨ Paul and company did not submit to these men for so much as a single hour.

I see a glaring absence in our day of this kind of commitment to doctrinal purity. Too many charlatans are being given access to the body of Christ. A kind of theology is being promoted that does not enable the people to sense the presence of error, and to question its promotion. In my judgment, this condition exists because a kind of marriage has been promoted between the nominal church and the world. It has adopted the world’s manners and preferences, and has allowed them to filter into their assemblies. This has caused the people to be anaesthetized, so that they cannot detect doctrinal error and propensities to legalism.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 11/21/08. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The Sixty-sixth lesson will cover verses 22 through 31 of the fifteenth chapter: “A LETTER IS PREPARED AND DELIVERED.” Following James insightful remarks, there was unanimity among the brethren – not fleshly consensus, but spiritual insight; the “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” A special letter of instruction was prepared for the Gentile converts. It would not impose upon them more than they were able to bear, but would specify some necessary instructions. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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