

ACTS 15:8-21

Introduction:

Peter stands up to give his perspective on the **issue** of the debate. Now, we will see why Acts 10 (Cornelius) happened. It was to assist Paul right here in Acts 15.

Peter says: (his last act in the book of Acts).

A.

Acts 15:7-10 - And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. Acts 15:8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us; Acts 15:9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Acts 15:10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

1. Peter reminds all the leaders about Acts 10 and their questioning him as to **why** he had gone to a Gentile. Remember how he was sovereignly sent there by Almighty God to Cornelius' house? He did not **want** to do that, but who was he that he should try to withstand God?

*They could not deny the fact that God was working among the Gentiles. To top it off, **it was their own leader** (Peter) who was sent to the Gentiles and was told that the Gentiles were accepted now.

2. Peter continues by stating God's approval on the Gentiles, **without the Law**, by pouring the Holy Spirit on them **as He had done with the Jews** (Acts 2). Peter says the Gentiles also were God's children, being purified **in their hearts by faith**. **Now**, there was **no** difference between the Gentiles and Jews because for both of them, it takes **faith** - faith in **Christ**.
 - a. **Saying there is no difference between them, Peter is showing a **full** acceptance of the Gentiles, as Paul had argued and defended in their private meetings.
 - b. Peter reminds them all that the Law was a yoke, a burden that was so heavy that even their fathers were **not** able to bear it. Peter then says, so why put that Law burden upon these Gentiles who were following Paul's message of **not** circumcision of the flesh - **but circumcision of the heart by faith!**

Romans 2:28-29 - For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: Rom. 2:29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Colossians 2:11-12 - In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Col. 2:12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

Romans 4:9-10 - *Cometh* this blessedness then upon the circumcision *only*, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. Rom. 4:10 How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

- c. For the Little Flock Messiah Law Church to **insist** on Law for the Gentiles, going opposite of God's revealed will, would ensure their **own** condemnation. In fact, it would be wrong for the Gentile believers to **accept** the Law's yoke.

Galatians 5:1 - Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and **be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.**

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

1. Peter makes a startling statement here! Even though he did not understand **all** of Paul's message (it was hard for him to comprehend), he did recognize that God had begun something **new** under Paul's apostleship. He did know, that from now on, the Jews had to come to Christ under the **same** conditions as the Gentiles!

Note: Peter does not say: "They shall be saved even as we", but that "we (Jews) shall be saved even as they" (Gentiles). What a turnaround. Jews were no longer saved by believing the Kingdom gospel. **Now** all have to believe in Christ's-Paul's gospel (D.B.R.) to be saved.

2. Peter surely recognized the fact that the Gentiles were not coming to Christ as **required** under the Law of Moses - circumcision and keeping the Law. Peter must have realized that God had begun a new dispensation under Paul, and in that one you are saved by **grace** through faith.

C. 1. Barnabas and Paul are given the floor and they **explain** how signs and wonders accompanied **their**

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

new ministry (at that time).

*Remember:

I Corinthians 1:22a - For the Jews require a sign,

II Corinthians 12:12 - Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

2. Through all of this, Paul stayed restrained because the great need at this moment was recognition from the Jewish believers of his **God**-given ministry to the Gentiles. It was not absolutely necessary, but helpful to remove the Jewish brethren from trying to put grace believers under Law. Thus, it would **remove** the tension between the Jerusalem Church and Antioch Church.

****It was** absolutely necessary to have these events in scripture so that we can see how the transitional **change** from Israel to the Body took place. Understanding this gives us the ability to interpret the Word correctly.

In Acts 15:13-21, James gives his decision.

D. 1. This is James, the son of Mary - mother of Jesus, and half-brother of Jesus, who did not become a

Acts 15:13 - And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men *and* brethren, hearken unto me:

believer until **after** Christ's resurrection.

Matthew 13:55-57 - Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? Matt. 13:56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this *man* all these things? Matt. 13:57 And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.

John 7:5 - For neither did his brethren believe in him.

I Corinthians 15:7 - After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

Acts 1:14 - These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

2. *This special appearance of Christ after His resurrection to James apparently resulted in James' conversion. Perhaps it was because of this appearance of Christ to James that his position among the Jewish believers had become strong.

E.

Acts 15:14-18 - Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. Acts 15:15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, Acts 15:16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: Acts 15:17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Acts 15:18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

1. In verse 14, James refers back to Simeon, Peter's connection with Cornelius, and God saving Gentiles. He is defending Peter's statement to them in his truth about the gospel (15:11). To "visit" means to leave home to spend some time with someone else, but always with the intent of returning home. Here, God has left His house (Israel) and gone to some others for a time (Gentiles), to take out a people for His name (Body of Christ-a new agency).
2. In verse 15, James shows it was not in opposition to the prophets, who stated Gentiles could be saved. That Gentiles could be saved was in harmony with the Kingdom-Prophecy Program and Paul's new ministry to the Gentiles.
 - * What about Israel, where did they now stand? James tells them in verse 16 that the new Pauline
 - * ministry will not destroy, nor invalidate, the Prophetic Program.
3. It is when Christ returns to earth, when the new program is over, and God deals with Israel as a nation again, that God will rebuild the tabernacle (after the Tribulation-going into the Kingdom).
 - * Hey, God's reaching out to the Gentiles in this new way is not going to change God's purpose and prophecy for Messiah to return to build up Israel, to establish His Kingdom, and through that Kingdom go out and minister to the Gentiles to glorify His name.
4. The rebuilding of the tabernacle of David is Israel's hope and their promise from God.

Amos 9:9-11 - For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as *corn* is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth. Amos 9:10 All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us. Amos 9:11 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:

Acts 1:5-8 - For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. Acts 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? Acts 1:7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: 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.

- a. *There is a difference between the tabernacle and the temple. The tabernacle was a building of skins with the glory of God put in it. It later was replaced by Solomon's temple, the permanent building.
- b. But since God's presence had left the Temple because of Israel's apostasy, in early Acts God took His glory and His power and He placed it in a tabernacle-body of skin, the Little Flock of believing Jews having the glory of God in them. Nobody then saw the glory of God except through them. God's glory was so intense in them that: Acts 5:12-13 - [And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. Acts 5:13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.]
- c. So James here again confirms that God's covenant and prophetic promises to them will be fulfilled. James is showing that prophecy has not been destroyed, but only interrupted (Rom. 9-11). What Amos had prophesied will happen. They just needed to add some things to the list that Amos had back there. They needed to add God's unexpected visit to the Gentiles. Then after that, Christ is still going to return!

**I believe what Paul taught in the Jewish synagogues during Acts is found in Romans 9-11. There it teaches that Israel is His chosen people and land, but God has temporarily delayed His purpose with Israel. He is now doing a new thing called the Dispensation-Gospel of Grace.

5. In verse 17, James states that even after it is all done (the Tribulation is over, judgment of the nations, and the Kingdom is set up), there will be Gentiles. These Gentiles are not going to become Jews by being circumcised. Circumcised Israel will remain separate and distinct from the Gentiles.

*So if, in the Kingdom, Gentiles are saved apart from circumcision, then surely they can be saved today without circumcision. Do not put any Jewish restrictions onto the Gentiles who are turning to God.

6. In verse 18, James acknowledges that God knows what He is doing. Just because He didn't tell someone about it doesn't mean He doesn't know what He is doing! Evidently James learned something from Paul. He came to understand, somewhat, how the mystery program and his prophetic program harmonized - fit together.

Isaiah 46:9-10 - Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me, Isa. 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

- a. Paul says it like this:
Ephesians 1:9, 11 - Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: Eph. 1:11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

Titus 1:2-3 - In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; Titus 1:3 But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour;

Romans 16:25-26 - 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 mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, Rom. 16:26 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:

Ephesians 3:3-5 - How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Eph. 3:4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Eph. 3:5 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;

- b. James seemingly is convinced by Paul and now sees the **big** picture. God knows what He is doing. He hasn't destroyed or negated prophecy, but the two programs harmonize like a symphony going on here. Neither one **destroys** the other, but only that a sovereign God is working out two different programs that will, in the end, be wonderful for both!

* James gives his conclusion and his sentence on the issue of circumcision being for salvation or not needed (in verses 19-21).

F.

Acts 15:19-21 - Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: Acts 15:20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. Acts 15:21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

1. As a judge-leader of the Jerusalem Church, after the facts had been presented from both sides, James gave his decision based upon the facts. Based upon the **evidence** of a change in the program, this is how they were going to treat the Gentiles.
- a. First, we are not going to try to put them under **our** program.
- b. Second, there are a few things the Gentiles could do in light of the change - not that Gentiles have to be in subjection to Israel, but out of **consideration** and **courtesy** of the Jewish people. It is a good thing if you do it to not offend the Jews.

Note: Acts 15:28-29 - For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; Acts 15:29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

*These things were important to the Jews as being obedient to God.

2. Gentiles were to be in liberty and not under the Law. But they were not to be a stumbling block to faithful Jews. For the Jews' sake, Paul was asked (**not** commanded) to make a few concessions based on the law of **love!** This would encourage better fellowship between Jew and Gentile believers.

*Paul gives us this example in **real** life practice:

1 Corinthians 9:19-21 - For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. 1Cor. 9:20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; 1Cor. 9:21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

**His oath is in Acts 21:22-26.