

ACTS CHAPTER 15 - THE CRUCIAL PROBLEM

One of the most difficult things for us to grasp:

Matthew 13:19 *When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.*

The “freeness” of God’s salvation: Grace.

Nothing can be added. (Blasphemy to try!)

Background: ***Galatians 2***

Peter sensitive because of Cornelius, etc. (***Acts 10-11***).

Act 10:28 *And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.*

Act 11:2 *And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, 3 Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.*

Apostles agreed that Peter to remain in Jerusalem to minister to the Jews

(When – before or after the council of Acts 15 ??)

Galatians 2:7-9 *But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; [8] (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) [9] 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.*

Peter visits Antioch, fellowships with the Gentiles there; withdraws when legalistic Jews visit from Jerusalem.

Galatians 2:11-14 *But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. [12] For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. [13] And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. [14] But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?*

Tensions mount; split threatened

(Antioch as the “parent” of Gentile Christianity, threatens to eclipse Jerusalem as the “mother” church...)

The influx of Gentiles into the Church produced a problem which had to be solved.

The mental background of the Jew was founded on the fact that he belonged to the chosen people.

Many of them believed that not only were the Jews the peculiar possession of God but also that God was the peculiar possession of the Jews.

Therefore, before a Gentile could become a member of the Christian Church it was necessary that he be circumcised and take upon himself the Law of Moses

The Gentile must first proselytize to Judaism before he became a Christian.

Others held a Gentile could and should be received into the Church as they were.

There was another related problem.

The strict Jew could have no fellowship with a Gentile.

He could not have him as guest nor be his guest.

He would not, as far as possible, even do business with him.

If Gentiles were to be allowed into the Church with out first becoming Jewish proselytes, how far could Jews and Gentiles associate in the course of the ordinary social life of the Church.

If the Gentiles did not become Jewish then the Jews would of necessity have to give up their Jewishness and traditions.

These had to be solved. The solution was not easy.

Vital issues in the Body TODAY....

- 1) Are the Gentiles under the Law?
- 2) What about the Messianic Kingdom?
The Restoration of Israel?
Christ ruling on David's throne in Jerusalem?
- 3) Is the church "spiritual Israel"?

The issue of whether God was finished with Israel was not the question ... Understanding God's timing is the problem.

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?*

cf. "Synagogue of Satan"

Rev. 2:9 *I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.*

Romans 2:28-29 *For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: [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.*

False Teachers continue to be an issue.

John 8:44 *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

As time went on certain of the Gentiles began to believe that just as the Judaizers rejected them unless they would become Jewish proselytes, they had replaced Israel and the Jews in God's plans and purposes.

Rom 11:25 *For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits;*

that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. 26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: 27 For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. 28 As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. 29 For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. 30 For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: 31 Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

The dispute is described - The "Judaizers" state their case

THE PROBLEM BECOMES ACUTE

Acts 15:1-5

"Some men came down from Judaea and tried to teach the brethren, 'If you are not circumcised according to the practice of Moses you cannot be saved.'

When Paul and Barnabas had a great dispute and argument with them, they arranged for Paul and Barnabas and some others to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders to get this question settled.

So they were sent on their way by the Church, and they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria telling the story of the conversion of the Gentiles; and they brought great joy to all the brethren.

When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the Church and the apostles and the elders and they told the story of all that God had done with them. But some men of the school of the Pharisees, who were converts, rose and said, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to enjoin them to keep the Law of Moses.'"

It was no accident that the most epoch-making things were happening in Antioch and that the gospel was being preached to Jew and Gentile alike and they were living together as brethren first.

To many Jews back in Jerusalem all this was unthinkable.

They were God's chosen people.

They were willing to accept that the Gentiles could come into the Church but only on the condition that first they became Jews.

If this attitude had prevailed,

Christianity would have become nothing other than a sect of Judaism.

The Law would still only its bondage over us – condemning us.

Jesus sacrifice would have lost its meaning and power...

Some of these narrower Jews came down to Antioch and tried to persuade the converts that they would lose everything unless they first accepted Judaism.

Paul and Barnabas argued strongly against this and matters were at a deadlock.

Knowing what was at stake – Paul (a highly trained and respected Pharisee himself) and Barnabas would not concede to them.

An appeal must be made to Jerusalem, the headquarters of the Church, for a ruling.

The case which Paul and Barnabas put forward was simply the story of what had happened.

They were prepared to let the facts speak for themselves.

Their life of obedience and God's response to it was enough. There was no scheming or strategizing. God's response was their defense and case.

At Jerusalem certain of the Pharisees who had become Christians insisted that all converts must be circumcised and keep the Law.

The principle at stake was quite simple and completely fundamental.

Was the gift of God for a select few or for all the world?

If we possess it ourselves are we to look on it as a privilege and a gift or as a duty and a responsibility?

The problem meets us nowadays in precisely the same way

There still exist divisions between class and class,
between nation and nation,
between color and color.
Between church denomination and denomination

We fully realize the true meaning of Christianity only when all middle walls of partition are broken down.

1) Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

These 'religious' Jewish Christians are the ones we call the "Judaizers".

These were Christians from Judea, who were not content to keep their beliefs (and conscience) themselves but felt compelled to impose their "Standards" on other Christians as well.

They continued to teach that a Gentile may become a Christian but only after first becoming a Jew and submitting to all the Jewish rituals including circumcision.

They chased after, harassing, and working against Paul throughout his ministry among the Gentiles.

Their 'message' did not resonate among the Gentile converts so they stirred up the nonbelievers to create insurrections which forced the Roman authorities to get involved.

Paul and Barnabas respond to the teaching of these men from Judea

2) This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. 3) The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. 4) When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

Paul and Barnabas certainly had a great disagreement with the Judaizers and confronted them sternly.

Having seen God work so powerfully through the Gentiles they would not abandon that work easily.

Galatians 2:4-6 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: [5] To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. [6] But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me:

This is the heart of a true shepherd; a pastor:

to confront and dispute with those who insist on promoting false doctrines in the church.

Who determined that Paul and Barnabas should go to Jerusalem to determine this question?

We're not certain but it seems to have been the church leaders in Antioch.

They decide to send a delegation - Paul and Barnabas and "certain others" = Titus, an uncircumcised Greek.

As Paul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem, they find plenty of other Christians who are rejoicing at what God is doing among the Gentiles

(in contrast to the Judaizers).

First Apostolic Council : The Judaizers re-state their teaching

5) Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."

The Council was held in Jerusalem about 52 A.D., 20 years after the Ascension.

The council was not an authoritative, "governing" church body:

As far as we know, there had never been a 'Church Council' prior to this (unless you count the Apostles replacing Judas).

Paul was probably prepared to defy all 12 apostles and the whole Church of Jerusalem if they had disagreed with him!

Just forming and seating the Council would have been quite an undertaking.

Not just the Apostles but from the general Church believers at large. Never see the Apostles "running" the Church.

Many of these Judaizers were Christians who had been Pharisees, who were renowned for their high regard for and scrupulous observance of the law.

For a Pharisee to really be a Christian, it would take more than an acknowledgment that Jesus was Messiah;

he would have to forsake his attempts to justify himself by the keeping of the law

he would have to admit all his prior efforts at self righteousness were wrong and useless and

he would have to accept the work of Jesus as the sole basis of his justification.

IT IS THE SAME FOR US – WHEN OUR BELIEFS AND 'UNDERSTANDING' RUN CONTRARY TO THE TRUE GOSPEL AND REQUIRE ANYTHING TO BE ADDED OR REMOVED FROM THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, WE MUST ABANDON OUR PAST BELIEFS AND UNDERSTANDINGS...

Their teaching was not only that Gentiles must be circumcised, but that they must also submit to the entire Law of Moses if they are to be saved.

The issue was not just circumcision, it was only the representative issue.

Unlike today where circumcision is done largely for health reasons, then it was a necessity to be under the covenant of Abraham.

Imagine how they would have made a case from the Old Testament scriptures for their position...

Israel has always been God's chosen people,

Israel was God's chosen vessel to keep and show God's Word and plans.

If it was God's plan and instruction to Israel, it is God's plan and instruction to the gentiles too.

The Gentiles must become part of Israel if they want to be part of God's covenant people.

The Jerusalem council: Peter speaks to the issue in the midst of great dispute

Acts 15:6-12

"The apostles and elders met together to investigate this question. After a great deal of discussion Peter stood up and said, 'Brethren, you know that in the early days God made his choice among us, so that through my mouth the Gentiles should hear the good news and believe. And God, who knows men's hearts, bore his own witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he had done to us too. He made no distinction between us and them for he purified their hearts by faith. So why do you now tempt God by placing on the necks of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we had the strength to bear? But it is through the grace of Jesus Christ that we believe that we have been saved in exactly the same way as they too have been.' The whole assembly was silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told the story of all the signs and wonders God had done amongst the heathen through them."

Answering the stricter among the Jews, Peter reminded them how he himself had been responsible for the reception of Cornelius into the Church some 10 years before this.

The proof that he had acted rightly was that God had granted his Holy Spirit to these very Gentiles who had been received.

As far as the Law's claims went they might have been ceremonially unclean; but God had by his Spirit cleansed their hearts.

The attempt to obey the Law's multifarious commands and so to earn salvation was a losing battle which left every man in default.

There was only one way--the acceptance of the free gift of the grace of God in an act of self-surrendering faith.

Peter went right to the heart of the question.

In this whole dispute the deepest of principles was involved.

Can a man earn the favor of God?

Or must he admit his own helplessness and be ready in humble faith to accept what the grace of God gives?

In effect, the Jewish party said, "Religion means earning God's favor by keeping the Law."

Peter said, "Religion consists in casting ourselves on the grace of God."

Here is implicit the difference between a religion of works and a religion of grace.

Peace will never come to a man until he realizes that he can never put God in his debt; and that all he can do is take what God in his grace gives.

The paradox of Christianity is that the way to victory is through surrender; and the way to power is through admitting one's own helplessness.

6) The apostles and elders met to consider this question. 7) After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. 8) God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9) He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. 10) Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? 11) No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

Perhaps this sort of public "trial" of doctrine would be beneficial in many cases today.

Peter, as one of the leading apostles, stands up to make his opinion known on the matter, speaking after there had been much discussion, debate and dispute.

Peter begins recounting the work that God had already done, "A good while ago": about 13 years before.

These Gentiles were saved, they weren't circumcised, and this had been happening for years.

If these Gentiles were already saved—why would they have to be circumcised?

He makes the point that God had fully received the Gentiles apart from their being circumcised, so why shouldn't the church?

Again note change in Peter since being filled with the Spirit;

in the Gospels, he only opened his mouth to change feet...

Peter was truly inspired by the Holy Spirit when he observed that the law was a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.

"If they are not saved by grace alone and are subject to the law, then so are we who are Jews by birth and we have been a failure and keeping it for 3.000 years – it is our condemning judge."

Paul makes the same argument in Galatians; if we are not saved by the law, why would we return to it as the principle by which we live?

Peter concludes with the observation that it is by grace that all are saved - both Jew and Gentile - not by any conformity to the law.

GRACE – God's Riches At Christ's Expense

Peter turns the challenge and question back around to the Jews:

"We shall be saved, even as they"

(These are the last recorded words of Peter recorded in Acts).

"We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they are."

Paul and Barnabas give testimony of their experience among the Gentiles, supporting Peter's assertion that a true work of God is taking place among them

12) The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

Notice that here it is "Barnabas and Paul,"

Barnabas is better known and longer known to this group.

In their eyes he is the senior between them. Paul lets him front the issue.

THE LEADERSHIP OF JAMES: James, the brother of Jesus, speaks to the issue, supporting what Peter and Paul had said

Acts 15:13-21

"After they had been silent James replied, `Brothers, listen to me. Symeon has told you how God first made provision for the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name, With this the words of the prophets agree, as it stands written, `After these things I will return and I will build again the tabernacle of David which has fallen. I will build its ruins again, and again I will set it upright, so that the rest of mankind will seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by my name'--this is what the Lord says, making these things known from the beginning of the world. Therefore for my part, it is my judgment that we stop making things difficult for the Gentiles who turn to God, but that we send them a letter to

**keep themselves from the contaminations offered to idols,
from fornication,
from things strangled and
from blood.**

For Moses from of old has those who proclaim his teaching in every city, for his works are read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

The issue remained hanging in the balance; until James spoke.

. (There are four different Jameses.)

He, the Lord's half brother, was now recognized the leader of the Jerusalem church.

His leadership was not a formal office; it was a moral leadership conceded to him because he was an outstanding man.

Jesus had specially and privately appeared to James following the resurrection.

1 Cor. 15:7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

He was a pillar of the Church; the one to whom the others would go for counsel and advice.

Galatians 1:19 But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

His knees were said to be as hard as a camel's because he knelt in prayer so often and so long.

He was so good a man that he was called James the Just.

Further, he himself was a rigorous observer of the Law.

If he should come down on the side of salvation by grace alone, then all was well.

To make things easier James suggested certain regulations that Gentiles ought to keep.

These 'concessions' were established more for the sake of the Jews and their beliefs – an effort to not harm their conscience – when associating with the new Gentile believers, than out of legal necessity for the Gentiles themselves.

The new gentile converts must abstain from the contamination of idols.

The Gentiles must serve God alone – none other. All other gods must be abandoned.

One of the great problems of the early Church was that of meat offered to idols.

Paul deals with it at length in ***1 Cor.8-9.***

When a heathen sacrificed in a temple, often only a small part of the meat was sacrificed.

Most of the rest was given back to him to make a feast for his friends, often in the temple precincts, sometimes in his own house.

The priests received the remainder which was then sold for ordinary purposes.

Some would later teach and believe that no Christian must risk pollution by eating such meat if it had been offered to an idol – as it would be and offense and abomination their Jewish brothers in Christ.

They must abstain from fornication.

It has been said that chastity was the only completely new virtue that Christianity brought into the world.

In an impure world the Christian had to be pure.

They must abstain from things strangled and from blood.

To the Jew the blood was the life and the life belonged to God alone. They so argued because when the blood flowed away life ebbed away too.

Therefore all Jewish meat was killed and treated in such a way that the blood was drained off.

The heathen practice of not draining the blood from a slaughtered animal was obnoxious to the strict Jew.

So was the method of killing by strangulation.

So the Gentile is ordered to eat only meat prepared in the Jewish way in deference to his Jewish brothers in Christ.

Had these simple regulations not been observed there could have been no fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians;

By observing these 'restrictions' the last barrier between them was destroyed.

It was not that these were necessary for Salvation but were concessions to insure the full fellowship among the believers.

Within the Church the principle was established that Jew and Gentile were one.

The 'stronger' surrendered freedoms that were his for the sake of his 'weaker' brethren.

Paul would make the point clearly when writing to the church at Corinth.

The stronger must defer to the weaker brother so as not to impede the weaker brother maturing in the Lord and to not render the stronger brother's ability to disciple the weaker ineffective.

1 Cor. 8:4-13 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. [5] For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) [6] 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. [7] 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. [8] 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. [9] But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. [10] For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the

idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; [11] And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? [12] But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. [13] Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

Rom 15:1-7 We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. 3 For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. 4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. 5 Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: 6 That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

1Co 9:19-23 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. 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; 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. 22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

Romans 14:19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

1 Cor. 10:24 Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.

1 Cor. 10:33 Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

1 Cor. 11:1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

1 Cor. 13:5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

Philip. 2:4-5 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. [5] Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

Titus 2:9-10 Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; [10] Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

13) When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. 14) Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. 15) The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

16) "after this I will return
and rebuild David's fallen tent.

Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,

17) that the remnant of men may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who bear my name,

says the Lord, who does these things'

18) that have been known for ages.

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

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

14] fullness of Gentiles.

Romans 11:1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Romans 11:25-27 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. [26] And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: [27] For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

Act 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:

16] "After this I will return..." Quoting Amos 9:11-12.

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: [12] 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.

James provides the criteria by which any new work of God must be judged: is it in full conformity to God's Word?

James quotes **Amos 9:11-12** actually says that salvation will come to the Gentiles; this demonstrates that this is truly a Biblical concept.

Today, many things are considered Biblical if they merely fail to contradict something in the Word, even though they may have no root in the Word of God whatsoever.

"Councils have no authority in the church unless it can be shown that their conclusions are in accord with Scripture."

He is answering the implied question:

If a Gentile does not have to come under the Law, what is the future of Israel?

"After this" refers to the calling out of the Gentiles.

After that he will return. Who? Jesus.

Romans 9, 10, 11 - Paul deals with the future role of Israel.

Romans 11:25 - "until" implies that the blindness will be lifted.

Fullness of the Gentiles is that number of people that God, in his foreknowledge, has determined to be in the Church.

Postponement of the Kingdom and the calling out of the church: “a mystery” (Eph 3:3-6).

Ephes. 3:3-6 *How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, [4] Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) [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; [6] That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:*

Thus, “after this” is after the fullness of the Gentiles.

After this, two things happen:

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

Bible does not promise a conversion of the world in this age: only a remnant (always, only a remnant).

Tabernacle of David?.

1 Chron. 15:1 *And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent.*

“Ruins” = things dug down.

Future Role of Israel

Dan 9; Isa 63; Zech 12, 14; Rev 12; Hosea 5...

An understanding of God’s Word with respect to the future of Israel will avoid the current heresies of:

“Kingdom Now”, “Dominion Theology”, “Reconstructionists” etc.

Promise to Mary: Throne of David,.

Luke 1:32-33 *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: [33] And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*

Act 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.*

20] James is concluding that the Gentile converts are not to be burdened with the yoke that Israel has had to bear.

There is no reason for them to, because Israel and the Church are separate entities.

Idolatry and fornication: two chief sins of the Gentiles.

Things strangled and from blood are two things which would be particularly offensive to a Jew.

Prohibition of eating of blood antedated the Law by almost 900 years.

Genesis 9:4 *But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.*

Nothing about the Sabbath....?! No Circumcision required ...

Blood = murder?

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

21] Ignoring one very “stubborn” fact: these Gentiles were already saved.

The letter of decision: THE DECREE GOES OUT

Acts 15:22-35

"Then the apostles and the elders together with the whole Church took a decision to choose men from their number and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas who is called Barsabas and Silas, men who were leaders among the brethren, and they sent a written message by their hand. `The apostles and the elders, brethren, to the brethren from the Gentiles who are throughout Antioch and Syria and Cilicia--greetings. We have heard that some who came from us have disturbed you with their words in an attempt to upset your souls. They were not acting under our instructions. We have therefore decided, when we were met together, to choose men and to send them to you, with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who are men who have devoted their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore despatched Judas and Silas to you to tell you the same things by word of mouth. It was the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us to place no further burden on you other than the rules which are necessary--that you should keep yourselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these things you will be doing well. Farewell.' So these were sent away and came down to Antioch. They called the congregation together and delivered the letter to them. When they had read it they rejoiced at the message of comfort. Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, exhorted the brethren with many an address and strengthened them. After spending some time there, they were sent away with every good wish for their welfare from the brethren to those who had sent them. But Paul and Barnabas with certain others, too, stayed in Antioch teaching and telling the good news of the word of the Lord."

22] Not to be confused with Judas the brother of James and half brother of Jesus, etc.

(Nothing more known than here.)

Silas (= Silvanus in the epistles):

Paul's close companion on his Second Missionary journey.

Once the Church had come to its decision, it acted with both efficiency and courtesy.

The terms of the decision were embodied in a letter.

But the letter was sent by no common messenger; it was entrusted to Judas and to Silas who went to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

Had Paul and Barnabas come back alone their enemies might have doubted that they brought back a correct message; Judas and Silas were official emissaries and guarantors of the reality of the decision.

The Church was wise in sending a person as well as a letter.

Often a great amount of trouble might be avoided if a personal visit is paid instead of someone being content with sending a letter – or – email...

22) Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. 23) With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. 24) We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. 25) So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—26) men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27) Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. 28) It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29) You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.

24] Does "Judaizing" end?

"Synagogue of Satan"

Rev. 2:9-10 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. [10] Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Romans 2:28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

Romans 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.*

Deut. 30:6 *And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.*

Jeremiah 4:4 *Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.*

Deut. 9:24-26 *Ye have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you. [25] Thus I fell down before the Lord forty days and forty nights, as I fell down at the first; because the Lord had said he would destroy you. [26] I prayed therefore unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, destroy not thy people and thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand.*

Circumcision is of the heart, far beyond the symbol of the circumcision of the flesh.

John 8:12-44

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. [13] The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true. [14] Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go. [15] Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man. [16] And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me. [17] It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. [18] I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me. [19] Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also. [20] These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come. [21] Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come.

[22] Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come. [23] And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. [25] Then said they unto him, Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning. [26] I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him. [27] They understood not that he spake to them of the Father. [28] Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. [29] And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. [30] As he spake these words, many believed on him. [31] Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; [32] And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

[33] They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? [34] Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. [35] And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. [36] If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. [37] I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. [38] I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. [39] They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. [40] But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. [41] Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. [42] Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. [43] Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. [44] Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

Note: Sincerity not enough: they were sincere...

Notice that this letter is written specifically to these churches where Jews and Gentiles mixed together in this tension; it was not addressed to every Gentile congregation.

Who made the decision at the Jerusalem council?

When the apostolic letter says it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us, it makes it clear that it was the Holy Spirit who decided the matter.

When we decide matters and it goes against our position, can we view it as a decision of the Holy Spirit ???

The issue is settled here in the infancy of Christianity, and for all time: we are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, not by any conformity to the law, and such obedience comes as a result of true faith, after the issue of salvation has been settled.

`How can I know God's will for my life?'

1. God guides through Church unanimity.

The letter written to the Church at Antioch stated that the believers in Jerusalem were in one accord.

Whether you're wrestling with an issue of lifestyle or doctrine, find out what the Church says about it.

Throughout Church history, what has been the stance of the Church regarding the subject with which you're struggling?

Beware of those who say, 'You don't need the Church. It's outdated and old-fashioned.'

Proverbs 22:28 says, 'Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.'

It is through the wisdom of Church unanimity presently and historically that God has guided His people very significantly.

2. God guides through gifted men and women in the Body.

God gave to the Church prophets, pastors, evangelists, and teachers for the perfecting of the saints and the work of the ministry.

Ephes. 4:11-12 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; [12] For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

How can you know God's will?

Be around whenever prophets, pastors, evangelists, or teachers expound the Word.

It's the wise woman, the mature man who approaches every Bible study, every time of fellowship expecting the Lord to speak through His Body.

3. God guides through the gifts of the Spirit.

Earlier in this chapter, there was much debate and discussion.

Suddenly, James the Camel-kneed stood up and as he spoke, an interesting thing happened: Everyone in the room melted into unity and agreement, so too with us.

There are times when, during an endless dialogue or discussion, someone suddenly says something which settles not only in your brain or your mind, but deep within your heart — and you know it's the Lord, speaking through a word of wisdom.

I hope when you're struggling with finding God's will for your life, you avail yourself of settings where words of wisdom, knowledge, and prophecy are being exercised. Frequently that's how the Lord speaks most clearly.

4. God guides through desires we may have personally.

As the delegation headed back to Jerusalem, Silas said, 'I like it here in Antioch. I think I'll stick around.' We'll see how the Lord will use Silas' personal desire as the book unfolds.

The reason I teach the Word is because I love to teach.

I'm doing exactly what I want to do.

Those who imply that ministry is supposed to be drudgery are lying.

That's bad theology and a blasphemy to the nature and character of our Father.

Psalm 37:4 declares, 'Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.'

Therefore, those who are delighting in Him through service to Him are doing so because they genuinely enjoy it.

5. God guides through concerns we feel internally.

Paul said, 'I'm curious about how the believers we saw five years ago are doing.'

So too today.

Suddenly you'll be aware of a situation, a need, or an opportunity and it will tug on your heart.

The person next to you might not feel a thing — not because he's insensitive or unspiritual, but because meeting that particular need is not his calling.

One of the big problems in the Body of Christ is 'ministry projection' where we decide whoever doesn't have our vision, or our calling, is carnal.

Ministry projection is the result of a failure to understand that the way of the Lord is to guide us individually through concerns we feel internally.

Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch

A joyful reception among the Gentile Christians at the church of Antioch

30) The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. 31) The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.

We can imagine how these Gentile believers felt, wondering how the decision might come forth - and how relieved they were to see that the principle of grace had been preserved.

Rejoicing as a division of the church was avoided certainly but also relieved to not be burdened with Law and tradition....

The ministry carries on in Antioch

32) Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. 33) After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. 35) But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

Time is summarized.

A substantial amount of time goes by before v. 36.

Judas and Silas serve well as visiting ministers; then Judas returns, leaving Silas in Antioch for future ministry.

PAUL TAKES THE ROAD AGAIN

Acts 15:36-41

"Some time after, Paul said to Barnabas, 'Come now, let us go back and visit the brethren in every city in which we preached the word of the Lord, so that we may see how things are going with them.' Barnabas wished to take John who was called Mark along with them; but Paul did not think it right to take with them one who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. There was so sharp a difference of opinion that they were separated from each other and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and went off when he had been commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches."

Paul suggests to Barnabas a return trip from Antioch to all the cities where they had previously planted churches in the first missionary trip

36) Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."

Paul was a born adventurer and could never stay long in the one place. He decided to take the road again; but the preparations for the journey ended in a tragic breach.

Paul had a real pastor's heart; he was not content to merely plant churches without seeing them carefully nurtured and growing in the faith.

Paul "mothers" the churches, he prays for them, writes them, keeps in touch with them, counsels them...

Contention over John Mark

Paul and Barnabas divide over the issue of taking John Mark with them

37) Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 38) but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. 39) They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, 40) but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. 41) He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Barnabas wished to take John Mark but Paul would have nothing to do with the man who had played the deserter in Pamphylia.

John Mark had previously left the missionary party under less than honorable circumstances (**Acts 13:13**); this made Paul unwilling to trust him on future endeavors.

The difference between them was so sharp that they split company never to work with each other again.

"A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city" (Prov 18:19).

Luke does not give us a clue as to who was "right" and who was "wrong" between Paul and Barnabas; but it is never good when personal disputes flare up among those serving in the ministry.

But this much is certain, Mark was supremely fortunate that he had a friend like Barnabas.

In the end, as we know, Mark became the man who redeemed himself.

Since Barnabas was John Mark's cousin (**Colossians 4:10**), it is easy to see why he would be more understanding towards him.

Col. 4:10 Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)

It may well have been the friendship of Barnabas which gave Mark back his self-respect and made him determined to make good.

It is a great thing for a man to have someone who believes in him.

Barnabas believed in Mark and in the end Mark justified that belief.

Mark became Peter's amanuensis and converted Peter's gospel from the Aramaic to the Greek which gave us the Gospel of Mark!

The relationship between Paul and Barnabas was also no doubt affected when Barnabas sided with the Judaizers in Antioch when Peter came to visit.

Galatians 2:13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

Paul with Silas and Barnabas with Mark, split; each going out to different fields of ministry.

Barnabas disappears from the record

It is hard to know if the personal relationship was strained for a prolonged period; as Christians, we are commanded to resolve relationship problems with others before we present ministry to God.

Matthew 5:23-24 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; [24] Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Later, Paul came to minister with John Mark and to value his contributions to the work of God.

Col. 4:10 Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)

2 Tim. 4:11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

Philemon 1:24 Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.

We don't know if it was Mark who changed or Paul who changed - probably both!

Notice what Paul's ministry was, in addition to evangelism: strengthening the churches, this is the main job of any pastor.

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

The narrative of Paul's second missionary journey, which occupied him for about three years, is given in the section of Acts which extends from ***Ac. 15:36 to Ac. 18:23.***

It began from Antioch.

Paul first made a tour of the churches of Syria and Cilicia.

Then he re-visited the churches in the regions of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch.

There followed a period when he could not see his way clear before him.

That time of uncertainty ended with the vision at Troas.

From Troas, Paul crossed to Neapolis and thence to Philippi.

From Philippi he moved on to Thessalonica and Beroea.

From there he went to Athens and then on to Corinth where he spent about eighteen months.

From Corinth he travelled to Jerusalem by way of Ephesus and finally back to Antioch, his starting point.

The great step forward is that with this journey Paul's activity passed beyond Asia Minor and entered Europe.