

Text: Acts 15:12-21

Title: James' Contribution at the Jerusalem Council

Truth: What is happening with the Gentiles is no surprise!

Date/Location: Wednesday 7/10 and 7/17/2013 and 7/17/2024 at FBC

I. The Report of Barnabas and Paul, v. 12

A. Initially when Paul and Barnabas came to Jerusalem, they reported to the church what God had done with them on the missionary tour through Asia Minor. Then the doctrinal storm started up again where the Pharisee sect said that circumcision was necessary for them to be saved.

B. Peter then preached (v. 7-11) to the group and reaffirmed that **circumcision is absolutely not under any circumstance a requirement of salvation. Let me state that clearly again: circumcision saves no one, nor is it necessary to be saved, either before you are saved or after you are saved.** It is a work, which like any other work which is *thought* to be necessary to obtain God's saving grace, is antithetical to grace. Faith is one idea, and works are another; grace is coordinate with faith, and wages are coordinate with work. Grace and wages are separate ideas.

We are going to see how the church arrived at the no-circumcision conclusion in the upcoming verses.

C. On the positive side, Peter said that God knows people's hearts, God presents the good news to people through His servants, people believe in Christ, at which time God gives the Holy Spirit, God purifies them by faith, and this applies to Jews and Gentiles, which two groups encompass all of humanity.

D. Then in verse 12, the gathered church silently listened to Paul and Barnabas describing the miracles and wonders God had done through them. There could be no question that God was at work, for the things that happened were not due to the men's own power; and they were not something that spontaneously happened; and they happened in response to the apostolic preaching.

E. The emphasis was on Gentile ministry, and from the context, it is clear that Paul and Barnabas were *not* teaching those Gentiles the circumcision/law-based gospel that the Pharisaical sect demanded.

F. Peter, Paul, and Barnabas testified before the assembly that they had personally witnessed the conversion of **Gentiles** (Acts 15:7). God had given them the Spirit and cleansed them through faith (15:8, 9), not making a distinction based on ethnicity (15:11).

II. James' Use of Scripture

Evidently after their report, between verses 12 and 13, the church was abuzz with excitement because of what they heard. They could see they were part of something much bigger which God was doing in the world, and even more importantly they saw that the Lord's teaching in Acts 1:8 was coming to pass: Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

So, after they quieted down again, James stood to speak. He was the third to speak—after Paul/Barnabas and Peter.

A. The high-level outline of James's message is as follows: Early on in the history of the church ("at the first," Acts 10-11), God "visited" the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. This is in agreement with what God said in the prophets, namely that at some time in the future God promised to rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. This then will turn into a world-wide movement of people toward the Lord in the end times.

B. Details of the Amos 9:11-15 quotation

1. "After this" is a reference to the last days. Amos writes, "on that day" and "the days are coming." The time of blessing that he describes fits in the millennial kingdom.
2. At that time, God will rebuild the tabernacle of David, a reference to the Jewish kingdom, which will grow expansively to have dominion over the whole earth. This kingdom will have a full complement of social, political, religious, and international features to it. It will be rebuilt "as in the days of old" by which I understand God to be making a comparison to the form and operation of that kingdom, but not putting a limitation on the millennial one to be as small or geographically constrained as the historical kingdom.
3. Read Amos 9:11-15. Note "possess" is correct; "seek" is spelled similarly in Hebrew but does a good enough job of capturing the essence of the passage, particularly because it is those who are called by God's name, that is, have a special relationship with him. The point is that mankind outside of Jewry will come to them and seek God. For example, Zech. 8:23.
4. Israel will be regathered and inhabit what will be just before that time a nation full of abandoned cities. There will be abundant agricultural blessings during that era which will cause the season of harvest to take so long that it overlaps the season of planting.

5. More directly to the point, what James is saying is that if God is going to do a work among the Gentiles in the future, then it is nothing to be surprised at that He is doing something now in the present age with them! There should be no question that God is including and will include Gentiles in His program. And these Gentiles will be real Gentiles, not Jews or quasi-Jews.

III. James' Conclusion

- A. God knows what He is doing and has done so since eternity past. Should God be pleased to have Gentiles in His kingdom in the future, there is no problem to have them in the church now.
- B. It is no stretch then to say that we should not be demanding that Gentiles turn into Jews today. Gentiles can keep their ethnic and cultural identity and still be saved Christian church people.
- C. The proceedings of the Jerusalem council seem to be quite "normal," but the reality is that behind the scenes the Holy Spirit was guiding these men. In such an important time in church history, with Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and James overseeing the decision, there is no question that the Spirit guided the church.
- D. There are some basics that the Gentiles should avoid as believers:
 1. Things that are sin, in particular sexual immorality. That is pretty obvious because it has been repeatedly mentioned as a work of the flesh (a sin) since the beginning of time.
 2. Things that are sinful *and* unwise or offensive (things strangled, blood). The significance of "strangled" is not in the means of death, but in that the blood was still in the animal, instead of cutting it open and draining it as the OT Law required in respect of the life that God gave it. Gen. 9:4 laid down long ago that the "life" was not to be mistreated and disrespected by drinking the blood. See also Lev. 3:17, 7:26, 17:12-14, 19:26, Ezekiel 33:25, and others.

The prohibition of consuming the blood of an animal came before the Law of Moses, so it is not able to be set aside by a simple appeal to "we are not under the Law of Moses." I take it that we should observe it as well, particularly since it is re-stated by the apostles in the church age.

I added "unwise or offensive" because if there are Jewish people in your church, they will definitely be upset by these forbidden practices, and they are easy to omit from any diet.

3. Things that border on idolatry if not outright idolatry: things polluted by idols. Being involved in idol sacrifice in some way is unacceptable for Christians. You cannot drink the cup of demons and the cup of the Lord (1 Cor. 10:21).

These basic things are principles that come out of the Old Testament and that should have been commonly known since Moses was read throughout the cities of the Gentile areas under consideration.

God's Law is not so commonly known today. In any case, the reminder of moral conduct is as needed today as it was then.

- E. These things are not legalistic! *What the Pharisaical sect was doing was legalistic*—that is, attempting to establish their own righteousness by performance. Rather, these things are helpful and necessary moral guidance: directions to stay on the straight and narrow, not options but not meritorious. It would *not* be wise for a Christian today to say that he is not under these “laws” and ignore them because they were for a time past. NO, rather, they are for today as well, so says our early church brethren, so says the Spirit in the Word, and so our consciences agree.
- F. It is interesting that many Gentile people had access to the Old Testament scriptures back then. Some of them were more influenced by the Bible than many of our own countrymen are today, despite the fact that we have more and unfettered access to the Word of God. It is this influence that formed the moral foundation upon which James could expect certain moral values to be shared by Christians everywhere. Even the pagans know some of these things!

Sabbath reading of the Scriptures in that time was important for the entire culture. It helped the culture be informed, it helped constrain sin. Public reading of Scripture is a necessity as well today for the same reasons. In addition, it is interesting to note that scientific studies have shown that reading of the Bible has mental health benefits (lower depression, anxiety, anger, suicidal thoughts, PTSD effects; higher forgiveness and compassion). It also reduces harmful behaviors such as drinking, premarital sex, porn, gambling. This should be no revelation to us who follow Christ because we know that the man who lives by the word of God will be blessed. But that *science* recognizes this is remarkable.
- G. Because a Gentile has become saved and must exit his former lifestyle of sin to please the Lord, following these simple directives is a necessity.

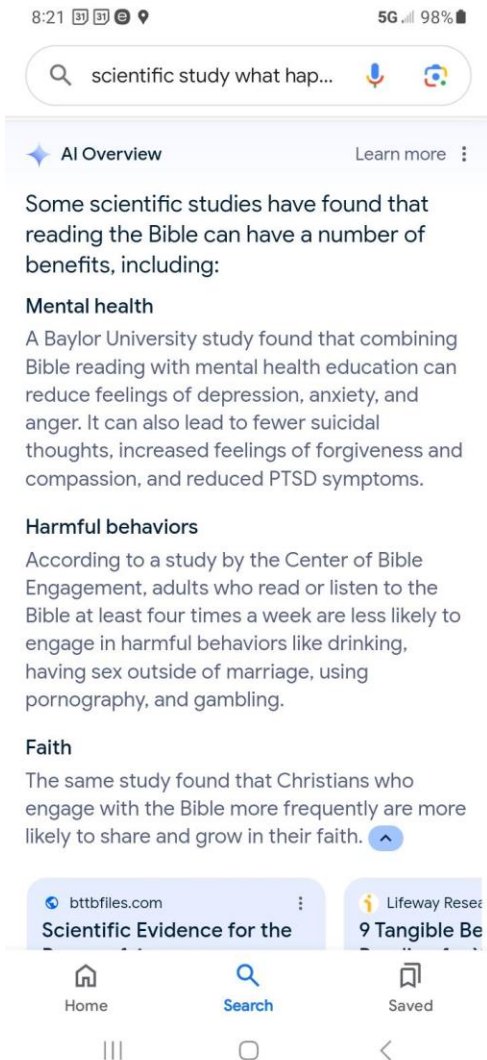
Conclusion

Telling Gentiles to be circumcised *troubles* them. The early church recognized that God made no such requirement upon people, and that doing so was distressing to them because it was *wrong*.

OT morality has a place still in our lives, an important place because it reflects Gods' character which has not changed.

MAP

References



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AI Overview Learn more

Some scientific studies have found that reading the Bible can have a number of benefits, including:

Mental health

A Baylor University study found that combining Bible reading with mental health education can reduce feelings of depression, anxiety, and anger. It can also lead to fewer suicidal thoughts, increased feelings of forgiveness and compassion, and reduced PTSD symptoms.

Harmful behaviors

According to a study by the Center of Bible Engagement, adults who read or listen to the Bible at least four times a week are less likely to engage in harmful behaviors like drinking, having sex outside of marriage, using pornography, and gambling.

Faith

The same study found that Christians who engage with the Bible more frequently are more likely to share and grow in their faith.

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