

THE BOOK OF ACTS | GOD'S REVELATION OF TRANSITION

SESSION 49 | ACTS 15:12-27

ACTS 15:12-21 | THE CONFRONTATION AT JERUSALEM: THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

- Verse 12 –
 - Barnabas and Paul seem to piggy-back on Peter's words and share the wonders God had worked among the Gentiles (as recorded in the previous chapter, and perhaps more).
- Verses 13-17 –
 - These words of James confirm our earlier interpretation, that the salvation offered to Cornelius was a kingdom salvation, previously prophesied.
 - Here, James speaks of how **Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles**.
 - James is not talking about what God is doing of late through Paul, but what God had done a decade earlier through Peter.
 - Were these the same thing? Absolutely not! What God did through Peter (here and here alone in the book of Acts called **Simeon**, for unknown reasons) was in harmony with **the words of the prophets** (unlike Paul's message, which was previously unrevealed - Eph. 5-6, etc.).
 - To confirm, James quotes Amos 9:11-12, which teaches:
 - the **tabernacle of David** will be rebuilt (note that this is a *kingdom* verse)
 - the rebuilt kingdom will be for both Jews and Gentiles.
 - Note that in Amos 9:12 the KJV says **the remnant of Edom** while James speaks of **the residue of men**.
 - The words *Edom* (the name of a nation) and *adam* (mankind) are the same word in Hebrew, with only the vowel markings different.
 - Since the Hebrew Biblical text doesn't include vowel markings, the word can be translated either way.
 - Here, the Greek clarifies for us the Hebrew.
- Verse 18 –
 - These are words of James, not of Amos (as in NASB).
 - The words speak of James' confidence in God's ability to establish a new dispensation that he has not previously revealed. In effect, James concludes by saying, "God knows what he is doing."
- Verse 19 –
 - James gives his *judgment* (i.e. **my sentence**, but not in the sense of a judge declaring the sentence) is to **trouble not** the believing Gentiles.
 - This is monumental for James, who had previously (we believe) written that one must **keep the whole law** and not **offend in one point** (James 2:10).
- Verses 20-21 –
 - These two verses must go together, or confusion will arise. The *reason* that the requests of verse 20 were made is because of the reality of verse 21. James was trying to reach those in **every city** that **preach him** (Moses). How much progress would James make if this Pauline group went about doing things that would be downright offensive where Moses is preached?
 - The requests were to avoid things (i.e.: food) polluted by idols, **fornication** (sexual immorality), **things strangled** (the Jewish rabbinical interpretation of the law was that kosher meat be killed in a quick manner) and from **blood** (kosher meat is to be drained of its blood as much as possible).

- The reason for the above prohibitions was not *sanctification* but *evangelism*. Paul declared that he was willing to do anything for the salvation of the Jews, so this did not become an issue for him. He did not flaunt his liberties.
- Note that the Jehovah's Witnesses forbid blood transfusions based on this verse.

ACTS 15:21-31 | THE CONFRONTATION AT JERUSALEM: THE COMMUNICATION OF THE MATTER

- Verse 21 –
 - This might be the most important "for" in the Bible! It gives the reason for the request.
 - **Word Study: *γάρ***; a causative particle standing always after one or more words in a clause and expressing the reason for what has been before, affirmed or implied. For, in the sense of because, and so forth. (Zodhiates, Spiros. *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* 2000 : n. pag. Print.)
 - This is James' reason for the request: the teaching of the Law of Moses is so old and has gone so far (geographically) that in every city you will find a synagogue with the teaching of the Torah.
 - Since James joins Peter in the evangelization of the Jewish people, it concerns him that Jews may get a negative view of Christians based on some of these surface matters alone.
 - Rather than balking at the loss of freedoms, Paul remembered his main goal was to see the Jews be saved. He said in 1 Corinthians 8:13 that he would no longer eat meat if it would hinder his witnessing.
- Verse 22 – There are two significant issues in verse 22.
 - First, **the apostles and elders, with the whole church** were acting here. This speaks much more to congregationalism than the supposed papacy invented by the Roman Catholic church.
 - Second, we are introduced to Silas, who will accompany Paul on his second missionary journey. This tells us that the Gospel that Paul will teach is not "exclusively gentile," but for both Jews and gentiles. This is strong indication that the Jewish assembly accepted the Gospel of Paul, while still preaching the Kingdom Gospel to the Jewish nation. The two gospels are incompatible to individual salvation, but not incompatible when one message is national, and one is individual.
- Verses 23-24 –
 - The message from the Apostolic assembly makes it clear that the assembly **gave no such commandment** that the Gentiles **must be circumcised, and keep the law**.
 - These words do not tell us that the assembly disagreed with this message, but rather that they did not send the men out to proclaim the message.
- Verses 25-27 –
 - This is an example of one local assembly making its own decision, independent of others, and then displaying friendly love and cooperation with another local assembly, which also has its own leadership and makes its own decisions. Modern ideas of bishops and controlling bodies are post-Biblical with no New Testament basis.
 - The Jerusalem assembly chose to send **chosen men** to the Antioch assembly (et. al., v. 23) to communicate their position. These men would go with **our beloved Barnabas and Paul**, words that display the closeness the assembly had with these two leaders. The two men selected were **Judas and Silas** (who were introduced in v. 22).
 - Note that Judas was surnamed Barsabas, and the "runner up" for the replacement of Judas Iscariot was **Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus** (Acts 1:23). The Judas of Acts 15:22 could possibly be the brother of the Joseph of Acts 1:23.
 - **Silas** is called by his Latin name *Silvanus* in Paul's epistles.
- ...to be continued