

*Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

## *God's Promises Cannot Fail*

**Acts 15:12-21**

**Keywords:** Acts 15, Amos 9, Millennium, Gospel, Sovereignty, Idolatry

**PowerPoint Presentation included:**

**SermonAudio Blurb:** The major question of whether the Gentile believer is under the Law of Moses for either salvation or as a rule of life has been resolved with a resounding “no.” James now gives direction and encouragement to both the Jewish believers as well as to the Gentile churches. And in doing so, James points both groups to the glory of God’s plan of redemption and restoration.

### **I. Introduction.**

- A. Turn to Isaiah 40.
- B. Today we have the privilege of being reminded of the truth that God is in control.
  - 1. This might sound trite but it is the very foundation of any Christian’s hope.
  - 2. All around us, and even in us, things can quickly become out of control. And in the midst of swirling chaos we can forget that even in the presence of evil, God is present and working.
  - 3. We will quote passages from the bible:
    - a. *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)*
    - b. Or as Taylor reminded us from the story of Joseph in Genesis, that what others intend for evil, God intends for good.
  - 4. But usually we think of these sort of passages when considering ourselves as individuals. And in doing so we forget that God is in control of all things, including history, events, time, and so on.
- C. God’s sovereignty is seen in multiple ways but the greatest example is the unfolding of the grand plan with in which we all live.
  - 1. From eternity past we find that the fall of mankind into sin was part of God’s plan. The apostle Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 1. But also the work of redemption where God saves sinners through and in His Son, Jesus Christ.

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2. And within space and time we see kingdoms rise and fall, there is an unrelenting battle in what I will call the spiritual realm.
  3. And yet the bible makes it plain that as nations and demonic forces rail and rant and lash out against God, He is seated on His throne and He laughs.
  4. Isaiah 40:21-28 is a beautiful example of the sovereignty of God.
- D. But this sovereign control of God is not merely a theoretical exercise. It is seen in the unfolding plan of God.
1. We find the prophets of old declare time and time again that nations and events shall take place simply because it is the will of God.
  2. Both the beginning of time and its end are not merely known by God, but He is working all things for His glory.
  3. And a key part of His plan involves the nation of Israel. And the way Israel functions in God's plan is through several covenants.
- E. Each of these covenants had promises built into them and they affect our passage today in one way or another.
- F. Back to the unfolding of the plan:
1. Halfway into Old Testament history of Israel and we find the nation of 12 tribes split apart into two groups, Israel and Judah, with Judah always having a descendent of David as king.
  2. At the end of the Old Testament we find the nation scattered all over the world with a small number back in their land. And the throne of David fades away. 400 years of silence.

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3. At the beginning of the New Testament we find the announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ. And with it we have repeated statements of the fact that He is of the line of David and will take the throne of David.
4. We find Israel still in rebellion as a nation though. They could have been gathered and restored but they wanted rebellion.
5. They reject Jesus as King, He is crucified and then rose from the dead three days later.
6. In the book of Acts we see the inauguration of the final covenant (New) and with it the promise of the outpouring of God's Spirit upon the people. We watch those who believed in the death and resurrection of Jesus be persecuted by the leaders of Israel.
7. Many flee but they do so with the gospel on their lips. And then something happens that creates some huge questions. Gentiles, always hated by the Jews, are saved and forgiven by God. This is made evident because they too had the Holy Spirit come upon them.
8. Then a former persecutor of the newly formed entity called the "church" becomes a follower of Jesus Christ. His name is Paul and he started to go out into the lands of the Gentiles and sees many believe and follow Jesus Christ. They too give clear evidence of having received the Holy Spirit.
9. This leads to questions in the minds of the early Christians who were all Jews. What do we do with these Gentiles? Are they supposed to convert and become Jews? Don't they need to keep the Laws of Moses like we do?
10. Where do they fit into the plan of God?
11. And the answer was simple for most of them. Yes, they need to become Jews. The males need to be circumcised as Moses commanded. They need to follow the Laws of Moses.
12. And that is where we find ourselves today.

G. Review:

1. Vss 7-8 we find the testimony of Peter
2. Vs 9 We see that there was no distinction in salvation and the giving of the Holy Spirit. No prerequisite of baptism, circumcision and so on.
3. Vs 10 If God did not put additional standards (what he calls a yoke) then why should the Jewish Christians try to do so on the new Gentile Christians?

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4. Vs 11 We find that the ONLY standard we judge others for Christian fellowship. Are they people who are recipients of God's saving grace?
- H. And it is here that we see James, the Apostle step forward and begin to explain to the Jewish and Gentile believers what is actually happening (12).
  1. 12a everyone becomes silent. This was a lot to take in for everyone. Minds are racing. Questions are rising up.
  2. 12b It is here that Barnabas and Paul get up to address the group. The big issue is resolved, the Gentiles are not under the law in any way.

## **II. God's Sovereign, Saving Plan.**

- A. James gives the explanation as to what is happening.
  1. What follows is a loose quotation of Amos 9:11-12. But it is important for you to note that it is a loose quotation.
  2. He is using Amos as one illustration of his bigger point that all of the Old Testament Prophets wrote about, that there would be a work of God among the Gentiles.
- B. A note about Amos and Acts 15:
  1. There was a choice made by the translators to capitalize the words "After these things" and then normal case for "I will return" and then back to upper case.
  2. There is a lot of difference taking place between "in that day" vs "after these things"
  3. In Amos the prophet has spoken over and over about the reality of God's judgment. He was speaking to the disobedient 10 tribes.
  4. The "tabernacle" of David is called a little hut in Amos. Both picture something very insignificant.
    - a. The house of David has fallen badly. Again this assumes you know the biblical storyline.
    - b. And in Amos it is written that God will shake the house of Israel and all the sinners of Israel shall die. All who say that they are fine and that no evil will overtake them.
  5. And then, "in that day" God will raise up the fallen booth of David.

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- a. And in that day the ruins will be rebuilt of the Davidic kingdom will be rebuilt. And it is said in three different ways to emphasize it.
- b. And then in the verses that follow not mentioned by James, he describes the glory of a Israel that has been restored because YHWH has saved them.
6. But James doesn't use "in that day" because that day has not yet happened. For the events described in ch 9 have not happened even to this day.
7. Instead he gives a time frame reference. "After these things." What things? Vs 14b, how God is taking from among all the Gentiles a people for Himself.
8. What he is doing is not trying to tell the Jews that they were done in the mind of God and that is why God is saving Gentiles. But that after God is done saving out of the Gentile world those who are His, then Amos 9 will happen.
9. Romans 11:

C. And behind all of this is the sovereign faithfulness of God.

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D. Now James transitions to what to do now.

1. No, the Church is not some sort of new Israel that is going to take over the promises of God to Israel in some special, spiritual way.
2. No, God has not forgotten Israel.
3. Yes, God is saving people from all the nations to be a people for His Name.
4. So James tells the Jewish believers and leadership, to not trouble the Gentile believers. Leave them alone.
5. Here, then, he turns his attention to what to do with the Gentiles and it is interesting what he is doing. First he gives some rules for them.
  - a. First, stay away from things related to idolatry. Some translations take this to mean “food” (NIV) but it is not actually mentioned.
  - b. They are to break from sexual immorality. This was and continues to be a huge thing. They are to get rid of those habits and customs regardless of what their culture says.
  - c. And to not eat food strangled or food where the blood is left in them. This is a law given all the way back to the days of Noah in Genesis 9. The meat is fine, but you must bleed the animal. You do not drink the blood. Again, it does not matter what the culture does.
6. But notice vs 21 and the word “for.” This is the reasoning behind these rules.
  - a. Because Jews are scattered throughout the Gentile world and they know and hear the reading of Moses, meaning the laws given to Israel.
  - b. The point he is making is this, tell the Gentiles that they are under grace. But don’t let that freedom cause them to become a stumbling block to the Jews they know. Do not rub this in their faces.
  - c. This is just the law of Christ being worked out. The Law of love. It is for the sake of the gospel that they should refrain so that the Jew is not so offended that they cannot or will not listen to the sharing of the gospel.

### III. Conclusion.

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- A.     So what have we seen?
- B.     We see that God is still faithful to the promises made to Israel. He will gather them together again in the future, when their King, Jesus Christ returns.
- C.     We see that God is drawing out from all the nations Gentiles like you and me to be a people of His own possession.
- D.     We see that we are not saved via the keeping of the 10 commandments or some other sort of goodness on our end. Rather it is fully and only by God's grace toward us.
- E.     We see that we do not flaunt our freedom in Jesus Christ but we walk carefully and wisely before a world that is looking for an excuse to trip up and cry victim.
- F.     May we all do this for the glory of God.

## **Benediction**

**May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and give you peace.  
Amen.**