

## I. Text:

**Acts 15:1-21** Some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." <sup>2</sup> And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. <sup>4</sup> When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. <sup>5</sup> But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses." <sup>6</sup> The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. <sup>7</sup> After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup> "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; <sup>9</sup> and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup> "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup> "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are." <sup>12</sup> All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. <sup>13</sup> After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me. <sup>14</sup> "Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. <sup>15</sup> "With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, <sup>16</sup> 'AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, <sup>17</sup> SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,' <sup>18</sup> SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO. <sup>19</sup> "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, <sup>20</sup> but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. <sup>21</sup> "For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

Overall, are some observations you had from reading this text?

### 3 General insights into the Jerusalem Council:

1. The Church has always been attacked by false doctrine, false gospels, and false leaders that the Elders must debate, defend, and decide. (Titus 1:9)
2. The Church as always been governed by Elder Rule (decisions of a church are made by a plurality of Elders) (\*Acts 14:23, Acts 15:2,4,6,22,23, 20:17, 21:18, 1 Tim. 4:14, 5:17, \*Titus 1:5, James 5:14, 1 Peter 5:1, Rev. 4:4, 10, Rev. 5:5,6,8,11,14, 7:11,13, 11:16, 14:3, 19:4)
3. The Church as always had leaders of leaders (Peter, James, John) (Galatians 1:18-19, 2:9)

## II. Introduction: Review of Biblical Hermeneutics (Principles of interpretation) and the challenge of interpreting Biblical narrative:

### A. Review of Historical/Grammatical Hermeneutics (2 Timothy 2:15, 3:16-17)

1. **Literal Principle** (vs. allegorical) (account for genre)
2. **Contextual Principle** (context of the verse, chapter, book, Bible) (vs. out of context)
3. **Historical Principle** (correct meaning/understanding is what God was saying to the original audience through the original inspired author) (vs. eisegesis - what it means to me, reading meaning into the text)
4. **Grammatical Principle** (lexical - word meaning and usage, grammar – parsing, diagramming sentence order/structure)
5. **Total Principle** (Synthesis/Panoply)– The correct interpretation/meaning/understanding is in line/congruent with the whole of Scripture/what the entire Bible says about a subject

For further study see: [www.gotquestions.org/Biblical-hermeneutics.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/Biblical-hermeneutics.html) [www.gotquestions.org/Christocentric-Christotelic.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/Christocentric-Christotelic.html)

Dr. Abner Chou (President of The Master's Seminary) Grammatical-Historical Hermeneutic (Its Defense & Demand for Premillennialism)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=IbYjmBiZu9A&t=117s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IbYjmBiZu9A&t=117s)

Why are you Dispensational? [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiroC3VdN\\_k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiroC3VdN_k)

Why are you Premillennial? [www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZxelkBdf\\_A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZxelkBdf_A)

### B. Challenges and Principles to Interpreting Narrative Passages

- ▶ Look for The basic elements of narrative, (a) setting, (b) characters, and (c) plot, are important to consider in hearing the story, but are not themselves the purpose of the narrative or the point of its message.
- ▶ Look for Why has God put this narrative forever in Holy Scripture?
- ▶ Look for What does He want us to know or learn and especially what does He want us to do/live out?

(from bible.org – Hans Finzel "Opening the Book")

1. An Old Testament narrative usually does not directly teach a doctrine.
2. An Old Testament narrative usually illustrates a doctrine or doctrines taught propositionally elsewhere.

3. Narratives record what happened—not necessarily what should have happened or what ought to happen every time. Therefore, not every narrative has an individual identifiable moral of the story.
4. What people do in narratives is not necessarily a good example for us. Frequently, it is just the opposite.
5. Most of the characters in the Old Testament narratives are far from perfect and their actions are too.
6. We are not always told at the end of a narrative whether what happened was good or bad. We are expected to be able to judge that on the basis of what God has taught us directly and categorically already in the Scripture.
7. All narratives are selective and incomplete. Not all the relevant details are always given (cf. John 21:25). What does appear in the narrative is everything that the inspired author thought important for us to know.
8. Narratives are not written to answer all our theological questions. They have particular, specific limited purposes and deal with certain issues, leaving others to be dealt with elsewhere, in other ways.
9. Narratives may teach either explicitly (by clearly stating something) or implicitly (by clearly implying something without actually stating it).
10. In the final analysis, God is the hero of all biblical narratives.

**Summary: The Challenge with Interpreting Narrative Passages (Know, Stop, Change, Do) (SPECs: Sin to Forsake, Promise to Claim, Example to Follow, Command to Obey, Stumbling Block to Avoid) (Romans 15:4-6)**

1. **KNOW** - God recorded the specific event in history because its important for us to know what happened (to learn the attributes/character of God in situations, the depravity of man in situations, the actions and responses of believers VS unbelievers to situations, and to know God's will, plans, and promises for the past, present, and future).
2. **LEARN** – Learn from the sins/rebellion of others, learn from the obedience/faithfulness of others, learn from the actions of Satan and his demons, learn from the actions of God and His angels. Learn the doctrines and truths of God, learn the commands and promises of God, learn the mind, will, and wisdom of God.
3. **LIVE** - As we know and learn from Scripture we are best able to live out, obey, and apply the Scriptures to our everyday thinking, speaking, and living. (Think, speak, act Biblically)

(Article and Book by Wayne McGill - 7 Principles of Biblical Interpretation / 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching)

1. Identify the kind of literature your text is for insight into its meaning.
2. Consider the context of the passage for a better understanding of its meaning.
3. Read the text for its plain and obvious meaning.
4. Try to discern the writer's intentions when he wrote the text.
5. Look carefully at the language of the text for what it reveals about its meaning.
6. Notice the various theological themes in the text.
7. Always take a God-centered perspective for interpreting your text.

What did you learn about hermeneutics (principles on interpreting the Bible)? Can you think of examples from Scripture where the literal vs non-literal/allegory, contextual vs personal eisegesis, historical vs modern, grammatical vs English/paraphrase, and total vs allegiance to a system, preacher, philosophy/logic, or denomination/institution makes a huge difference in how a passage is interpreted or how the Bible is practiced?

**III. Background on Church Councils:** “The earliest church councils were essentially anti-heresy conventions called to sort the wheat of dogma from the chaff of heresy...Protestants generally view ecumenical councils as fallible human institutions that have no more than a derived authority to the extent that they correctly expound Scripture – which generally occurred with the first four councils)

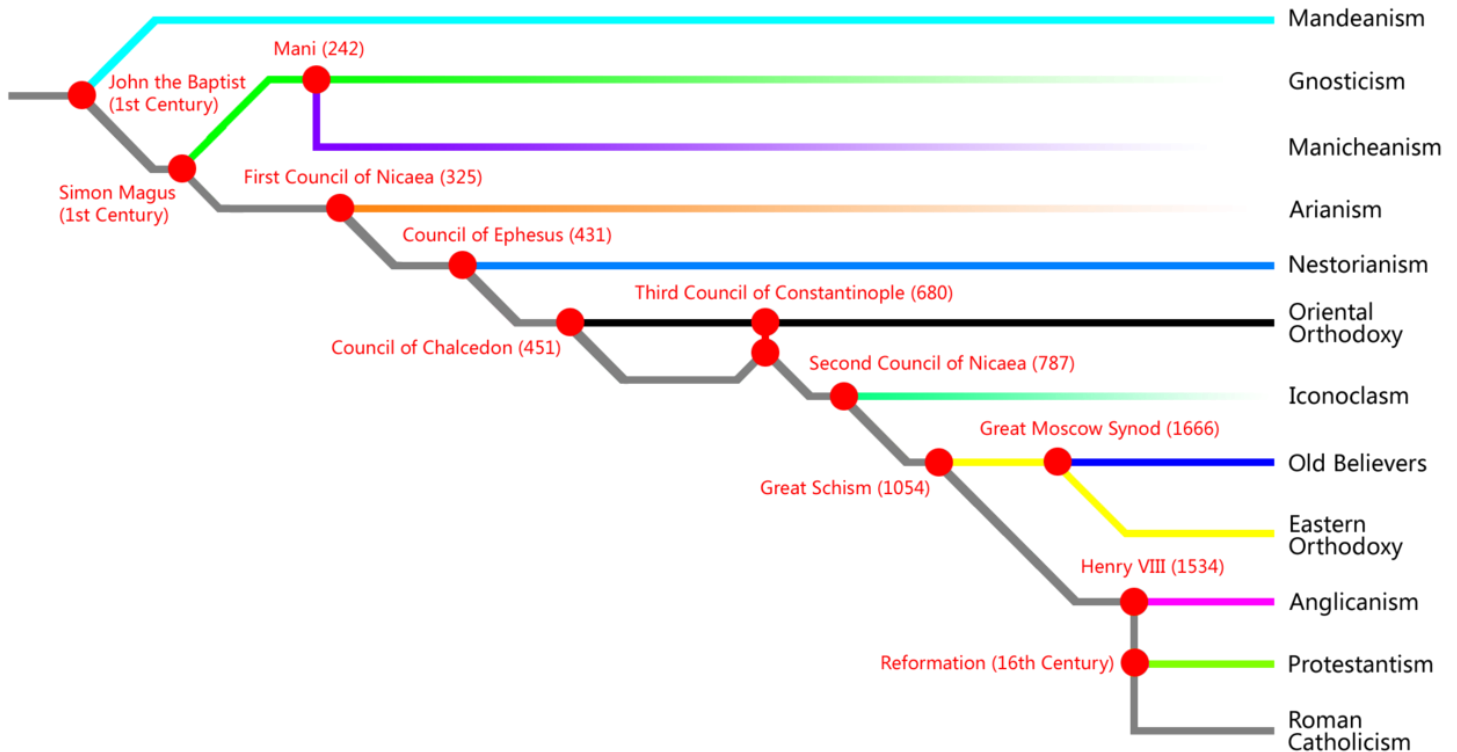
## Some Important Church Councils

Jerusalem Council (50 AD)	A person is saved by faith not by keeping the law
Council of Nicaea 325 AD	Affirmed Christ's deity
Council of Ephesus (431)	Emphasized the unity of Christ's personality
Council of Chalcedron (451)	State the relationship between two natures of Christ
Council of Constantinople (553)	Deals with claim that Christ had one nature merged rather than two
Council of Constantinople (680)	Christ had one or two wills
Council of Nicea (787)	Restore permission for Christian images

### The Bible Teacher's Commentary by Paul J. Bucknell

- ▶ Church councils are not always right.
- ▶ Councils should keep to the scriptures.
- ▶ Councils should avoid political government interference.
- ▶ Councils should include church leaders (vocational and non-vocational).
- ▶ What happens if church councils make poor decisions?
- **Genuinely listen to one another**
- **Believe in absolute truth**
- **Stand up for truth (debate okay)**
- **Value God-led experience**
- **Use scripture for final judgment**
- **Submit to the scriptures**

How many/which church councils do Protestants accept and why?



## IV. Main Points: 9 Points to Know, Learn, and Live from the Jerusalem Council

**John MacArthur Study Bible, p.1660:** Acts 15:1–30 Throughout its history, the church's leaders have met to settle doctrinal issues. Historians point to 7 ecumenical councils in the church's early history, especially the Councils of Nicea (a.d. 325) and Chalcedon (a.d. 451). Yet the most important council was the first one—the Jerusalem Council—because it established the answer to the most vital doctrinal question of all: "What must a person do to be saved?" The apostles and elders defied efforts to impose legalism and ritualism as necessary prerequisites for salvation. They forever affirmed that salvation is totally by grace through faith in Christ alone.

### Point 1: (Acts 15:1) Discern False Gospels that are UnBiblical (Unless you... you cannot be saved)

1. O.T. Salvation - Unless you keep the O.T. law you cannot be saved
2. Baptismal Salvation: Unless you are baptized in our particular church you cannot be saved
3. Works Salvation: Unless you come and do the ceremonies/rituals of our religion, or our institution you cannot be saved.
4. Cult Salvation: Unless you follow our leader(s), our rules, our secret rituals, you cannot be saved
5. Universal Salvation: Unless you discriminate, judge, or bigotedly claim your way is the only way... everyone will be saved.
6. No Salvation – Unless you believe in fairy tales, need a crutch to cope, no one needs to be saved – there is no God or Hell to fear. After you die, that's it, there is no afterlife.
7. **\*\*\*Biblical Salvation (only this one is true/truth)** – Unless you repent and believe (have faith/trust in Jesus/God's grace alone for salvation) you cannot be saved. (Luke 13:1-5, Acts 16:30-31) (Repentance and Faith – Mark 1:15, Acts 19:4, 20:21, Hebrews 6:1) ("will be saved" John 10:9, Acts 2:21, 11:14, 16:31, Romans 10:9,13)

### Point 2: (Acts 15:2) A Strong DEFENSE and DEBATE over primary doctrinal issues such as the GOSPEL is not only good but is required of the church and commanded for all Christians to defend. (Jude 1:3-4, Titus 1:9-16, 2 Tim. 2:23-26, Titus 3:9-11, 1 Tim. 5:1-2)

#### Debate over Circumcision throughout the N.T. (should Christians follow the O.T. moral law, O.T. ceremonial law, or both?)

- ▶ Jesus – John 7:21-24
- ▶ Stephen – Acts 7:8
- ▶ Peter & Cornelius – Acts 10:45, 11:2-3, \*18
- ▶ Paul & Barnabas – Acts 15:1, 5, \*6-21
- ▶ Paul & Timothy – Acts 16:1-3
- ▶ Paul Recounting the Jerusalem Counsel – Acts 21:15-25
- ▶ Paul on the value being Jewish - Romans 2:24-3:1, \*3:2-9
- ▶ Paul explaining the blessing/crediting of righteousness to Abraham was *before* he was circumcised – Romans 4:9-13
- ▶ Paul stating circumcision and uncircumcision is nothing – 1 Cor. 7:18-20
- ▶ Paul showing Titus not convinced to be circumcised / and pointing out Peter's hypocrisy to withdraw from Gentile believers – Gal. 2:3-16
- ▶ Paul reminding Circumcision/following the law of Moses is slavery – Gal. 5:1-13, 6:12-15
- ▶ Paul's warning against "false circumcision" and contrasting the false gospel of works with the true gospel of faith– Phil. 3:2-12
- ▶ Paul explaining the true spiritual circumcision of the heart by Christ not hands – Col. 2:11-15
- ▶ Paul exhorting to stand against pseudo believers – many who are rebellious Jews - deceivers promoting circumcision and following the Mosaic law for salvation – Titus 1:10-16

**Point 3: (Acts 15:2)** There is a place for strong and courageous **REBUKE** and **CORRECTION** of false doctrine in the Church by standing firm on the foundations of Scripture (1 Tim. 5:19-21, 2 Tim. 4:2-5, Titus 2:15, Jude 1:9, Rev. 3:19)

The True Gospel of Salvation by GRACE through FAITH (Romans 3:24-25, 5:1-2, 15:15-17, Galatians 1:6, 5:4-6, \*\*\*Ephesians 2:5-10, Titus 3:5-7)

**Point 4: (Acts 15:2b-4)** Expect Trials, Push back from Satan or Opposition from unbelievers, or even internal Division – which usually comes on the heels of major spiritual breakthroughs, progress, and victories in the CHURCH

The False Gospel of Salvation by Human Works / Deeds / Ceremonies / Rituals / Etc.

(The Lie/falsehood/foolly to trust in our own goodness, morals, and deeds for God to forgive us, accept us, or allow us entrance into His coming Kingdom/heaven because the standard is perfection and NONE of us can meet it – we all fall short of the glory/perfection of God) (Romans 4:1-5, Romans 9:11, 32, Galatians 2:16, 3:10, Ephesians 2:9, 2 Timothy 1:9, \*\*\*Hebrews 6:1, what about James 2:21-25?)

**Point 5: (Acts 15:5)** Know that some of our greatest struggles and fights for Biblical truth/doctrine will come from WITHIN the church (Well-intentioned Dragons by Marshall Shelley)

Matthew 23/Luke 11 (Woes to the Pharisees)

1. Legalism (going beyond what the Scriptures says, adding man-made requirements to the Bible)
2. Hypocrisy (seeing or criticizing the faults in everyone else except yourself, keeping others to a standard you don't live by or live up to yourself)
3. Pride / Jealousy / Love of Position (Love of Self)
4. Materialism / Love of Money (Root of all evil)
5. Excuses / Hatred and Justifying Murder (Spiritualizing Rebellion)

**Point 6: (Acts 15:6)** The Elders of a Local Church should come together to SOLVE difficult matters facing the Church (personal disputes, differences of opinion/philosophy of ministry – how to go about doing something, doctrinal disagreements – especially anything that can threaten to divide, discourage, distract, or destroy the church) (Galatians 2:7-16)

**Point 7: (Acts 15:7-11)** Good Spiritual Leader's Speak Up and SHAPE the conversation by pointing to God's will/choices like including the Gentiles in His plan of salvation (Peter's Input at this all important Elder's Meeting)

**Point 8: (Acts 15:12)** Good Spiritual Leader's recount not what they have done but what God has done (Paul and Barnabas' Input at this all important Elder's Meeting)

1. They give the EVIDENCE of Gentile inclusion (signs and wonders)
2. They give all the credit/GLORY to God (what God had done through them)

**Point 9: (Acts 15:13-21)** Good spiritual leaders base their contributing comments and decisions on SCRIPTURE (James' Input at this all important Elder's Meeting)

He affirms his fellow Elder Peter

He argues/bases his input directly from Scripture not just experience

He makes a clear and concise judgment of what he thinks should be done

Don't trouble the Gentiles who are turning (epistrepho) to God (don't complicate the gospel – keep it simple, don't add works like circumcision)

Let's write them a collective Elder's letter

1. Urge them to avoid things/food contaminated/polluted by idols
2. Urge them to abstain from fornication (porneia – sexual immorality – sexual acts/gratification outside of marriage) Friberg: **πορνεία**, (1) generally, of every kind of extramarital, unlawful, or unnatural sexual intercourse *fornication, sexual immorality, prostitution* (1C 5.1); (2) when distinguished from adultery (μοιχεία) in the same context *extramarital intercourse, sexual immorality, fornication* (MT 15.19); (3) as a synonym for μοιχεία (*marital unfaithfulness, adultery* (MT 5.32); (4) metaphorically, as apostasy from God through idolatry (*spiritual immorality, unfaithfulness* (RV 19.2)
3. Urge them to avoid things strangled and with blood (sacrifices in the context of idolatry)

## VI. Application:

1. **Check** every Bible teacher/preacher to make sure they are inline with God's Word The Bible like the Bereans.  
**Acts 17:11** <sup>11</sup> Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.
2. **Hold** your Elders accountable and ensure they are experts in the Bible and good spiritual examples and pacesetters.
3. **Ask** them your honest questions and make sure that your Elders are making decisions based on the Bible after careful listening/debate/discussion, prayer, and examination of the decision or questions in light of the Scriptures as our final authority for faith (what we believe) and practice (how we live).
4. **Trust** God to work through the plurality of Elders (safety net of the Holy Spirit) unless they teaching outside the Bible and you have specific Scriptural evidence to the contrary of their teaching or advise
5. **Obey** your spiritual leaders - Too many people think they know better than their Elders so that they don't seek out their counsel, don't heed their advise, or totally reject their wisdom often to their own detriment and folly. **Hebrews 13:17** <sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

What is ONE thing you learned or want to apply from this sermon?

# TRUTH BIBLE CHURCH



## FOLLOWERS OF JESUS SEEKING TO...

### LOVE GOD SUPREMEPLY

**Matthew 22:37-38** <sup>37</sup> And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND." <sup>38</sup> "This is the great and foremost commandment.

### SERVE PEOPLE SINCERELY

**Matthew 22:39** <sup>39</sup> "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'

**John 13:34-35** <sup>34</sup> "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup> "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

### REACH THE LOST URGENTLY

**Matthew 28:19-20** <sup>19</sup> "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

# Acts 15:1-21

1 Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. 3 Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. 4 When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.



# Acts 15:1-21

5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses." 6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. 7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; 9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.



# Acts 15:1-21

10 "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are." 12 All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me. 14 "Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. 15 "With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,

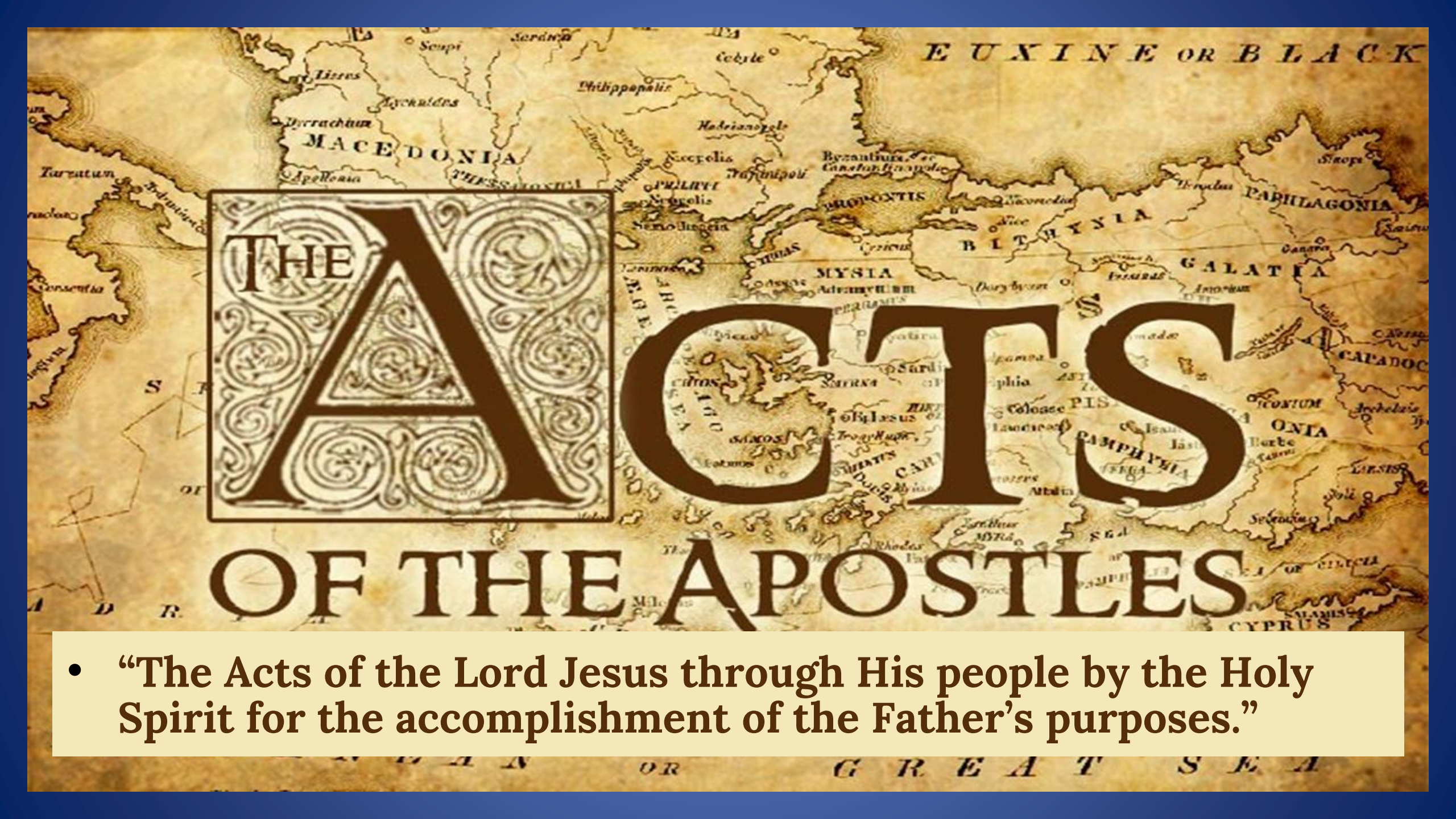




# Acts 15:1-21

16 'AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, 17 SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,' 18 SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO. 19 "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, 20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. 21 "For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."





**THE ACTS**  
OF THE APOSTLES

- “The Acts of the Lord Jesus through His people by the Holy Spirit for the accomplishment of the Father’s purposes.”

# Historical/Grammatical Hermeneutics (Interpretation)

1. **Literal Principle** (vs. allegorical) (account for genre)

2. **Contextual Principle** (context of the verse, chapter, book, Bible) (vs. out of context)

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5. **Total Principle** (Synthesis/Panoply)– The correct interpretation/meaning/understanding is in line/congruent with the whole of Scripture/what the entire Bible says about a subject

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

# What is Biblical Hermeneutics?



**Got  
Questions**

*Your Questions. Biblical Answers.*

- ▶ **Biblical hermeneutics is the study of the principles and methods of interpreting the text of the Bible.** Second Timothy 2:15 commands believers to be involved in hermeneutics: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who . . . correctly handles the word of truth.” The purpose of biblical hermeneutics is to help us to know how to properly interpret, understand, and apply the Bible.
- ▶ **The most important law of biblical hermeneutics is that the Bible should be interpreted literally.** We are to understand the Bible in its normal or plain meaning, unless the passage is obviously intended to be symbolic or if figures of speech are employed. The Bible says what it means and means what it says. For example, when Jesus speaks of having fed “the five thousand” in Mark 8:19, the law of hermeneutics says we should understand five thousand literally—there was a crowd of hungry people that numbered five thousand who were fed with real bread and fish by a miracle-working Savior. Any attempt to “spiritualize” the number or to deny a literal miracle is to do injustice to the text and ignore the purpose of language, which is to communicate. Some interpreters make the mistake of trying to read between the lines of Scripture to come up with esoteric meanings that are not truly in the text, as if every passage has a hidden spiritual truth that we should seek to decrypt. Biblical hermeneutics keeps us faithful to the intended meaning of Scripture and away from allegorizing Bible verses that should be understood literally.
- ▶ **A second crucial law of biblical hermeneutics is that passages must be interpreted historically, grammatically, and contextually.** Interpreting a passage historically means we must seek to understand the culture, background, and situation that prompted the text. For example, in order to fully understand Jonah’s flight in Jonah 1:1–3, we should research the history of the Assyrians as related to Israel. Interpreting a passage grammatically requires one to follow the rules of grammar and recognize the nuances of Hebrew and Greek. For example, when Paul writes of “our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” in Titus 2:13, the rules of grammar state that God and Savior are parallel terms and they are both in apposition to Jesus Christ—in other words, Paul clearly calls Jesus “our great God.” Interpreting a passage contextually involves considering the context of a verse or passage when trying to determine the meaning. The context includes the verses immediately preceding and following, the chapter, the book, and, most broadly, the entire Bible. For example, many puzzling statements in Ecclesiastes become clearer when kept in context—the book of Ecclesiastes is written from the earthly perspective “under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:3). In fact, the phrase under the sun is repeated about thirty times in the book, establishing the context for all that is “vanity” in this world.
- ▶ **A third law of biblical hermeneutics is that Scripture is always the best interpreter of Scripture.** For this reason, we always compare Scripture with Scripture when trying to determine the meaning of a passage. For example, Isaiah’s condemnation of Judah’s desire to seek Egypt’s help and their reliance on a strong cavalry (Isaiah 31:1) was motivated, in part, by God’s explicit command that His people not go to Egypt to seek horses (Deuteronomy 17:16).
- ▶ **Some people avoid studying biblical hermeneutics because they mistakenly believe it will limit their ability to learn new truths from God’s Word or stifle the Holy Spirit’s illumination of Scripture.** But their fears are unfounded. **Biblical hermeneutics is all about finding the correct interpretation of the inspired text.** The purpose of biblical hermeneutics is to protect us from misapplying Scripture or allowing bias to color our understanding of truth. God’s Word is truth (John 17:17). We want to see the truth, know the truth, and live the truth as best we can, and that’s why biblical hermeneutics is vital.



SPECTRUM MULTIVIEW BOOKS

EDITED BY STANLEY E. PORTER  
and BETH M. STOVELL

# BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

FIVE VIEWS

CONTRIBUTIONS BY  
Craig L. Blomberg, Richard B. Gaffin Jr.,  
F. Scott Spencer, Robert W. Wall, and Merold Westphal

1. Craig Blomberg advocates a “conservative” or “maximalist” version of the “historical–critical/grammatical” view.
2. Scott Spencer represents a “literary/postmodern view.”
3. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. articulates a “redemptive–historical view” in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos. ‘
4. Robert Wall offers a canonical–critical approach to the Scripture.
5. Merold Westphal presents what the editors call “the philosophical/theological approach.”



**Abner Chou | Grammatical-Historical Hermeneutic:  
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## Why Are You Premillennial? | Abner Chou & Costi Hinn



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# Interpreting Narrative Passages can be a challenge

- ▶ General Principles to Keep in Mind:2) The basic elements of narrative, (a) setting, (b) characters, and (c) plot, are important to consider in hearing the story, but are not themselves the purpose of the narrative or the point of its message.
- ▶ Why has God put this narrative forever in Holy Scripture?
- ▶ What does He want us to know or learn and especially what does He want us to do/live out?

# Principles for Interpreting Narratives

(bible.org – Hans Finzel “Opening the Book”)

1. An Old Testament narrative usually does not directly teach a doctrine.
2. An Old Testament narrative usually illustrates a doctrine or doctrines taught propositionally elsewhere.
3. Narratives record what happened—not necessarily what should have happened or what ought to happen every time. Therefore, not every narrative has an individual identifiable moral of the story.
4. What people do in narratives is not necessarily a good example for us. Frequently, it is just the opposite.
5. Most of the characters in the Old Testament narratives are far from perfect and their actions are too.
6. We are not always told at the end of a narrative whether what happened was good or bad. We are expected to be able to judge that on the basis of what God has taught us directly and categorically already in the Scripture.
7. All narratives are selective and incomplete. Not all the relevant details are always given (cf. John 21:25). What does appear in the narrative is everything that the inspired author thought important for us to know.
8. Narratives are not written to answer all our theological questions. They have particular, specific limited purposes and deal with certain issues, leaving others to be dealt with elsewhere, in other ways.
9. Narratives may teach either explicitly (by clearly stating something) or implicitly (by clearly implying something without actually stating it).
10. In the final analysis, God is the hero of all biblical narratives.

# Summary:

## The Challenge with Interpreting Narrative Passages

(Know, Stop, Change, Do) (SPECS: Sin to Forsake, Promise to Claim, Example to Follow, Command to Obey, Stumbling Block to Avoid)

1. **KNOW** – God recorded the specific event in history because its important for us to know what happened (to learn the attributes /character of God in situations, the depravity of man in situations, the actions and responses of believers VS unbelievers to situations, and to know God's will, plans, and promises for the past, present, and future).

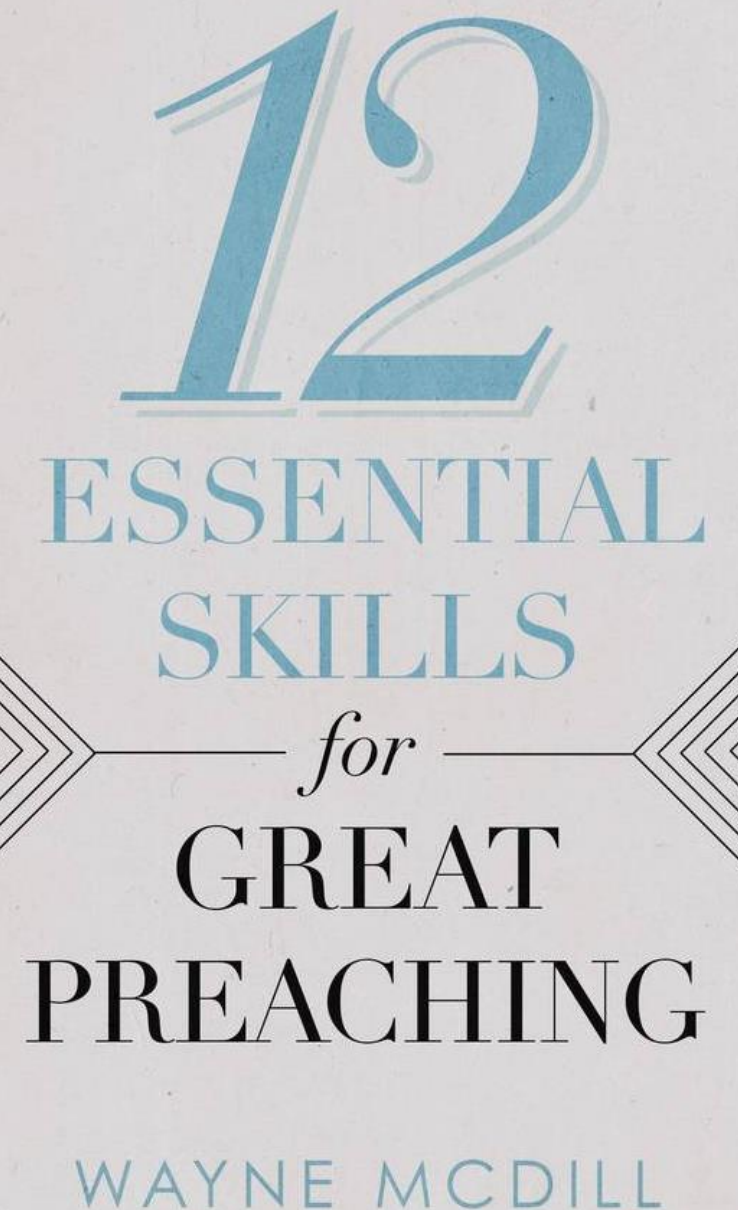
2. **LEARN** – Learn from the sins/rebellion of others, learn from the obedience/faithfulness of others, learn from the actions of Satan and his demons, learn from the actions of God and His angels. Learn the doctrines and truths of God, learn the commands and promises of God, learn the mind, will, and wisdom of God.

3. **LIVE** – As we know and learn from Scripture we are best able to live out, obey, and apply the Scriptures to our everyday thinking, speaking, and living. (Think, speak, act Biblically)

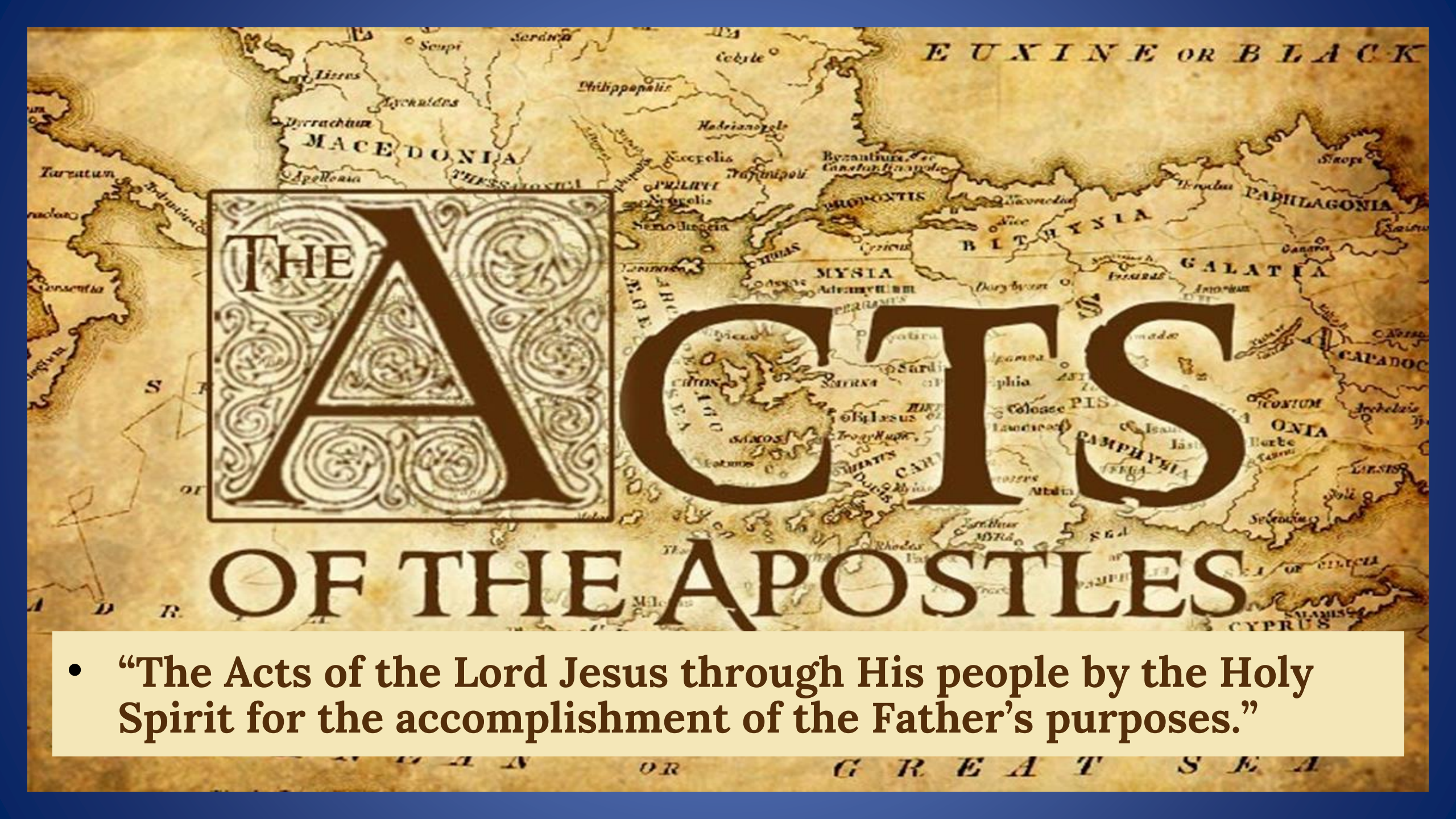
▶ **Romans 15:4-6** <sup>4</sup> For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. <sup>5</sup> May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

# 7 [Practical] Principles of Biblical Interpretation

- ▶ 1. Identify the **kind of literature** your text is for insight into its meaning.
- ▶ 2. Consider the **context** of the passage for a better understanding of its meaning.
- ▶ 3. Read the text for its **plain and obvious meaning**.
- ▶ 4. Try to discern the **writer's intentions** when he wrote the text.
- ▶ 5. Look carefully at the **language of the text** for what it reveals about its meaning.
- ▶ 6. Notice the various **theological themes** in the text.
- ▶ 7. Always take a **God-centered perspective** for interpreting your text.



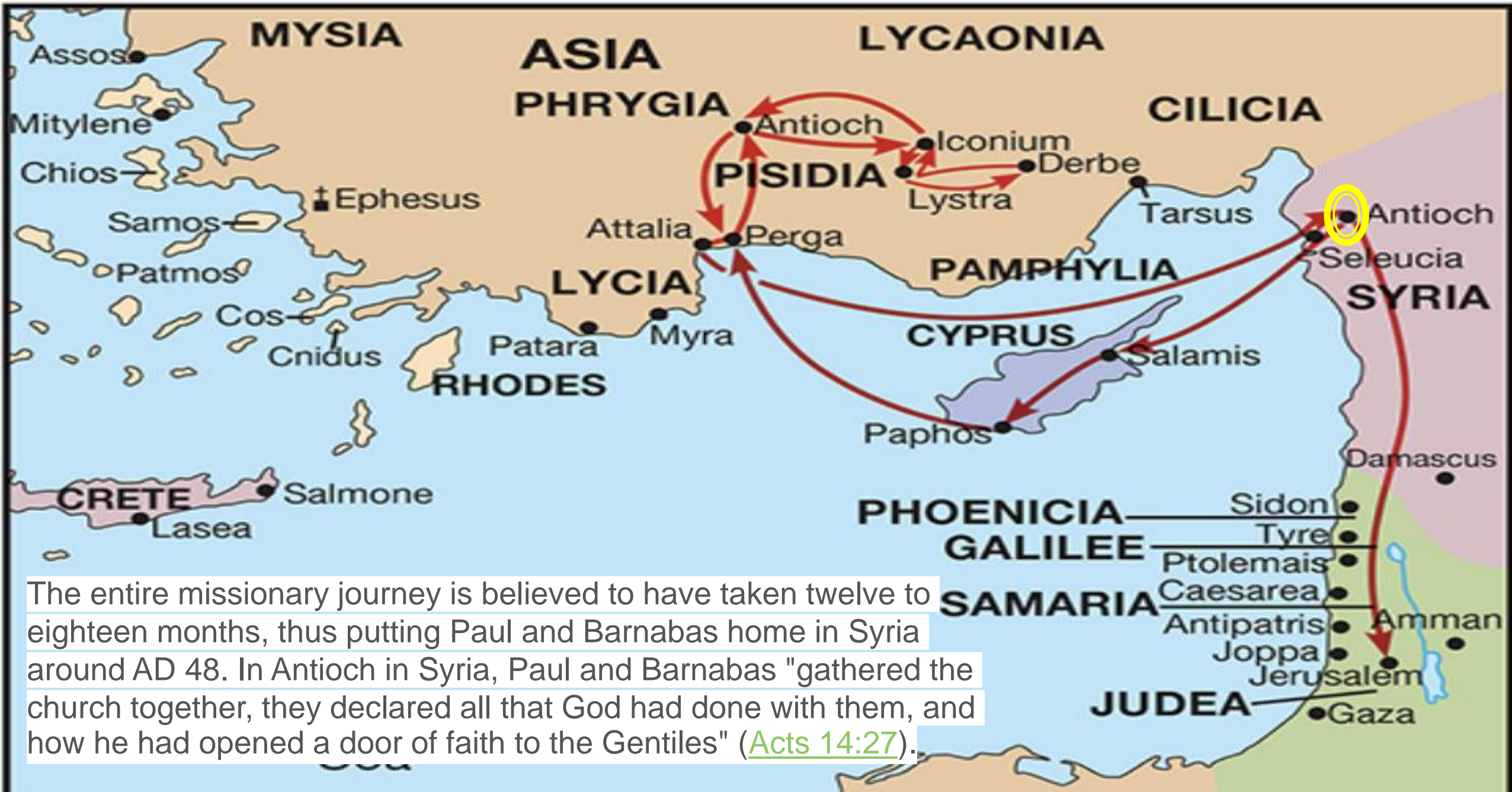
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ESSENTIAL  
SKILLS  
— for —  
GREAT  
PREACHING  
WAYNE MCDILL



**THE ACTS**  
OF THE APOSTLES

- “The Acts of the Lord Jesus through His people by the Holy Spirit for the accomplishment of the Father’s purposes.”

# Paul's First Missionary Journey • AD 47–49 • Acts 13:1–14:28



The entire missionary journey is believed to have taken twelve to eighteen months, thus putting Paul and Barnabas home in Syria around AD 48. In Antioch in Syria, Paul and Barnabas "gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" ([Acts 14:27](#)).



This Week's Sermon Title:

## **"The Jerusalem Counsel"**

**Acts 15:1-21**





# The MacArthur Study Bible (Acts 15 Introduction)

- ▶ **15:1–30** Throughout its history, the church's leaders have met to settle doctrinal issues. Historians point to 7 ecumenical councils in the church's early history, especially the Councils of Nicea (a.d. 325) and Chalcedon (a.d. 451).
- ▶ **Yet the most important council was the first one—the Jerusalem Council—because it established the answer to the most vital doctrinal question of all: “What must a person do to be saved?” The apostles and elders defied efforts to impose legalism and ritualism as necessary prerequisites for salvation. They forever affirmed that salvation is totally by grace through faith in Christ alone.**

# Some Important Church Councils

Jerusalem Council (50 AD)	A person is saved by faith not by keeping the law
Council of Nicaea 325 AD	Affirmed Christ's deity
Council of Ephesus (431)	Emphasized the unity of Christ's personality
Council of Chalcedon (451)	State the relationship between two natures of Christ
Council of Constantinople (553)	Deals with claim that Christ had one nature merged rather than two
Council of Constantinople (680)	Christ had one or two wills
Council of Nicea (787)	Restore permission for Christian images

Making Significant Decisions

(Acts 15:1–36)

– The Jerusalem Council –

The Bible Teacher's Commentary

Paul J. Bucknell

- ▶ Church councils are not always right.
- ▶ Councils should keep to the scriptures.
- ▶ Councils should avoid political government interference.
- ▶ Councils should include church leaders (vocational and non-vocational).
- ▶ What happens if church councils make poor decisions?
- **Genuinely listen to one another**
- **Believe in absolute truth**
- **Stand up for truth (debate okay)**
- **Value God-led experience**
- **Use scripture for final judgment**
- **Submit to the scriptures**

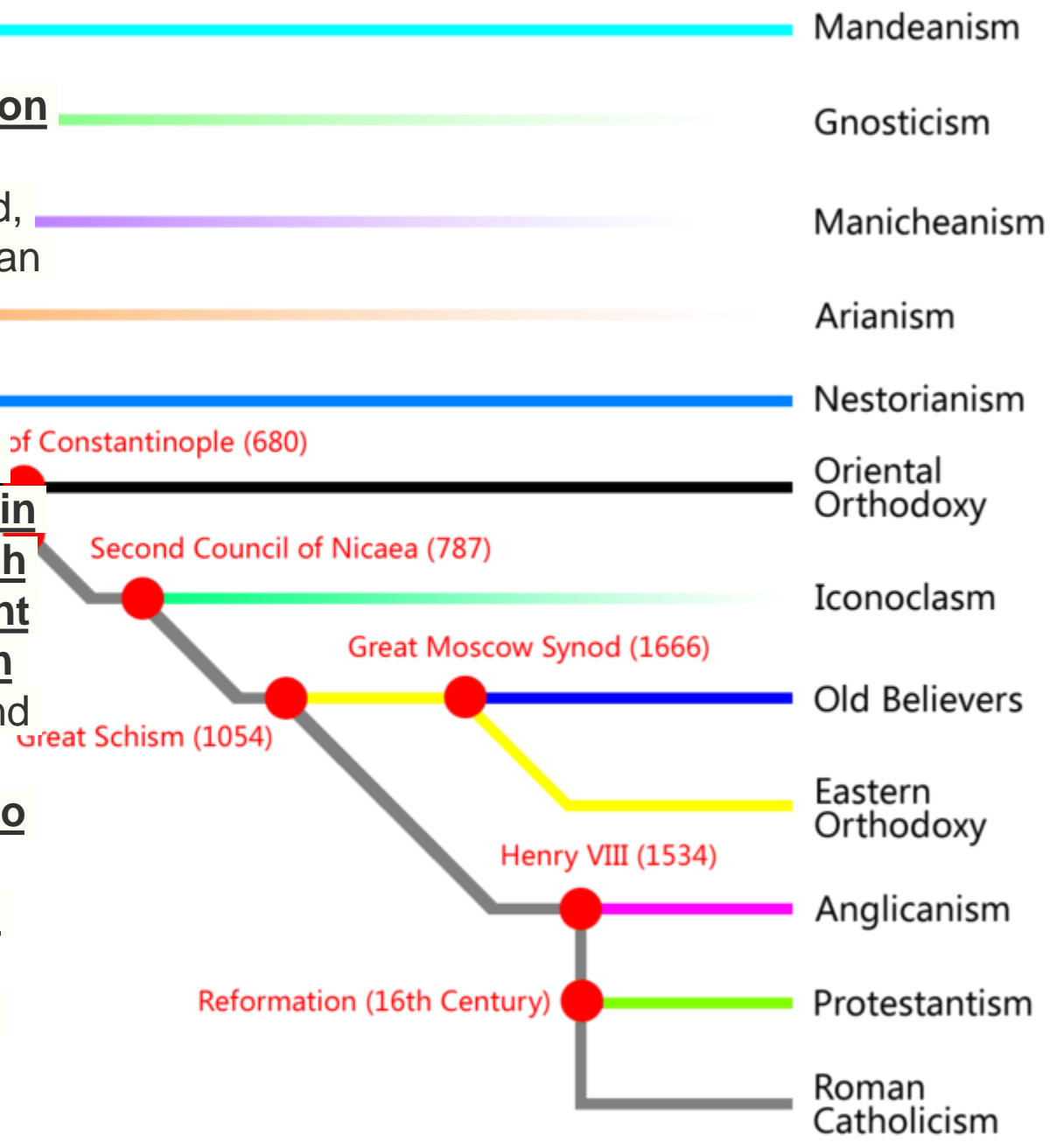
## Some "Lessons" From The First Four Councils

Carl A. Volz of the Luther Seminary wrote: "1) The crucial issue was soteriological, that is, the touchstone question always was, "How does this teaching (heretical or orthodox) affect my salvation? If Christ was not truly God, is salvation accomplished? If Christ was not truly human, can he suffer and die, or be my substitute? So also today?

[Source: Carl A. Volz, professor of church history at Luther Seminary, web.archive.org, martin.luthersem.edu =]

"2) The arguments were biblical. All four councils were passionate exercises in biblical interpretation. Indeed, in all four councils the participants sat in rows facing each other (not facing the front of the church) and at the front of the church in the position of the "chair" was an open bible, symbolic of the conviction that all discussion must find its authority there. =

"3) All "heresy" was a truly "orthodox" position taken to extremes. There is truth in all heresies (Arianism, Nestorianism, Apollinarianism, Docetism, Pelagianism, etc.). All arise from an orthodox position taken to extremes to the exclusion of other factors. Heresy was not an imposition from outside the church but arose from within. Gnosticism may be an exception to this. =



# What Exactly Is A Church Council?

- Church councils are formal meetings of bishops and representatives of several churches who are brought together to regulate points of doctrine or discipline. The meetings may be of a single ecclesiastical community or may involve an ecclesiastical province, a nation or other civil region, or the whole Church.
- Ironically, one key to understanding the orthodox teachings of these councils is in relation to heresy. The councils, especially the earliest ones, were essentially anti-heresy conventions, called to sort the wheat of dogma from the chaff of heresy.

# How Many Major Church Councils Were There?

- **The Roman Catholic View**

- There were 21 major Ecumenical Councils in the church.

- **The Eastern Orthodox View**

- No - There were 7 major Ecumenical Councils in the church.

- **The Protestant View**

- Anglicans – there were 7 major Ecumenical Councils in the church.
- Most Other Protestants – No - there were 4 of them.

- **Others**

- Oriental Orthodox– accepts only the first 3.
- Nestorian Church of the East– No – only the first 2.

## The Roman Catholic List

### Antiquity (c. 325 – 451)

- Nicaea I
- Constantinople I
- Ephesus
- Chalcedon

### Early Middle Ages (553–870)

- Constantinople II
- Constantinople III
- Nicaea II
- Constantinople IV

### High and Late Middle Ages (1122–1517)

- Lateran I
- Lateran II
- Lateran III
- Lateran IV
- Lyon I
- Lyon II
- Vienne
- Constance
- Florence
- Lateran V

### Modernity (1545–1965)

- Trent
- Vatican I
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- Vatican II

# But How Infallible are Ecumenical Councils?

- The doctrine of infallibility - solemn definitions of ecumenical councils, which concern faith or morals, are infallible.
- The Roman Catholic Church holds that solemn definitions of ecumenical councils meet the conditions of infallibility only when approved by the Pope, while the Eastern Orthodox Church holds that an ecumenical council is itself infallible when pronouncing on a specific matter.
- Protestant churches generally view ecumenical councils as fallible human institutions that have no more than a derived authority to the extent that they correctly expound Scripture (as most would generally consider occurred with the first four councils).

## 3 General Observations about the Jerusalem Counsel

1. The Church has always been attacked by false doctrine, false gospels, and false leaders that the Elders must debate, defend, and decide. (Titus 1:9)

2. The Church as always been governed by Elder Rule (decisions of a church are made by a plurality of Elders) (\*Acts 14:23, Acts 15:2,4,6,22,23, 20:17, 21:18, 1 Tim. 4:14, 5:17, \*Titus 1:5, James 5:14, 1 Peter 5:1, Rev. 4:4, 10, Rev. 5:5,6,8,11,14, 7:11,13, 11:16, 14:3, 19:4)

3. The Church as always had leaders of leaders (Peter, James, John) (Galatians 1:18–19, 2:9)



# Point 1: Discern False Gospels that are UnBiblical (Unless you... you cannot be saved)

Acts 15:1 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."

1. **O.T. Salvation** – Unless you keep the O.T. law you cannot be saved
2. **Baptismal Salvation**: Unless you are baptized in our particular church you cannot be saved
3. **Works Salvation**: Unless you come and do the ceremonies/rituals of our religion, or our institution you cannot be saved.
4. **Cult Salvation**: Unless you follow our leader(s), our rules, our secret rituals, you cannot be saved
5. **Universal Salvation**: Unless you discriminate, judge, or bigotedly claim your way is the only way... everyone will be saved.
6. **No Salvation** – Unless you believe in fairy tales, need a crutch to cope, no one needs to be saved – there is no God or Hell to fear. After you die, that's it, there is no afterlife.
7. **Biblical Salvation (only this one is true/truth)** – Unless you repent and believe (have faith/trust in Jesus/God's grace alone for salvation) you cannot be saved. (Luke 13:1–5, Acts 16:30–31) (Repentance and Faith – Mark 1:15, Acts 19:4, 20:21, Hebrews 6:1) ("will be saved" John 10:9, Acts 2:21, 11:14, 16:31, Romans 10:9,13)

# Debate over Circumcision throughout the N.T.

(should Christians follow the O.T. moral law, O.T. ceremonial law, or both?)

- ▶ Jesus – **John 7:21–24**
- ▶ Stephen – **Acts 7:8**
- ▶ Peter & Cornelius – **Acts 10:45, 11:2–3, \*18**
- ▶ Paul & Barnabas – **Acts 15:1, 5, \*6–21**
- ▶ Paul & Timothy – **Acts 16:1–3**
- ▶ Paul Recounting the Jerusalem Counsel – **Acts 21:15–25**
- ▶ Paul on the value being Jewish – **Romans 2:24–3:1, \*3:2–9**
- ▶ Paul explaining the blessing/crediting of righteousness to Abraham was *before* he was circumcised – **Romans 4:9–13**
- ▶ Paul stating circumcision and uncircumcision is nothing – **1 Cor. 7:18–20**
- ▶ Paul showing Titus not convinced to be circumcised / and pointing out Peter’s hypocrisy to withdraw from Gentile believers – **Gal. 2:3–16**
- ▶ Paul reminding Circumcision/following the law of Moses is slavery – **Gal. 5:1–13, 6:12–15**
- ▶ Paul’s warning against “false circumcision” and contrasting the false gospel of works with the true gospel of faith – **Phil. 3:2–12**
- ▶ Paul explaining the true spiritual circumcision of the heart by Christ not hands – **Col. 2:11–15**
- ▶ Paul exhorting to stand against pseudo believers – many who are rebellious Jews – deceivers promoting circumcision and following the Mosaic law for salvation – **Titus 1:10–16**

## Point 2: A Strong DEFENSE and DEBATE over primary doctrinal issues such as the GOSPEL is not only good but is required of the church and commanded for all Christians to defend.

**Acts 15:2** <sup>2</sup> 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.

**Jude 1:3-4** <sup>3</sup> Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. <sup>4</sup> For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

**Titus 1:9-16** <sup>9</sup> He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. <sup>10</sup> For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. <sup>11</sup> They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach-- and that for the sake of dishonest gain. <sup>12</sup> Even one of their own prophets has said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." <sup>13</sup> This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith <sup>14</sup> and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth. <sup>15</sup> To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. <sup>16</sup> They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

**2 Timothy 2:23-26** <sup>23</sup> Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. <sup>24</sup> And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. <sup>25</sup> Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup> and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

**Titus 3:9-11** <sup>9</sup> But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. <sup>10</sup> Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. <sup>11</sup> You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

**1 Timothy 5:1-2** Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, <sup>2</sup> older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

# The True Gospel of Salvation by GRACE through FAITH

- ▶ Romans 3:24–25
- ▶ Romans 5:1–2, 15:15–17
- ▶ Galatians 1:6, 5:4–6
- ▶ \*\*\*Ephesians 2:5–10
- ▶ Titus 3:5–7

## Point 3: There is a place for strong and courageous REBUKE and CORRECTION of false doctrine in the Church by standing firm on the foundations of Scripture

Acts 15:2 <sup>2</sup> 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.

1 Tim. 5:19-21 <sup>19</sup> Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. <sup>20</sup> Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning. <sup>21</sup> I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism.

2 Tim. 4:2-5 <sup>2</sup> Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. <sup>4</sup> They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. <sup>5</sup> But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

Titus 2:15 <sup>15</sup> These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

Jude 1:9 <sup>9</sup> But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

Rev. 3:19 <sup>19</sup> Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

# The False Gospel of Salvation by Human Works / Deeds / Ceremonies / Rituals / Etc.

(The Lie/falsehood/folly to trust in our own goodness, morals, and deeds for God to forgive us, accept us, or allow us entrance into His coming Kingdom/heaven because the standard is perfection and NONE of us can meet it – we all fall short of the glory/perfection of God)

- ▶ Romans 4:1–5
- ▶ Romans 9:11, 32
- ▶ Galatians 2:16
- ▶ Galatians 3:10
- ▶ Ephesians 2:9
- ▶ 2 Timothy 1:9
- ▶ \*\*\*Hebrews 6:1
  
- ▶ What about James 2? (esp. vv 21–25)

## Point 4: Expect Trials, Push back from Satan or Opposition from unbelievers, or even internal Division – which usually comes on the heels of major spiritual breakthroughs, progress, and victories in the CHURCH

Acts 15:2-4 *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. <sup>4</sup> When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

- ▶ New Conversions
- ▶ Great Joy
- ▶ All that GOD had done with/through them

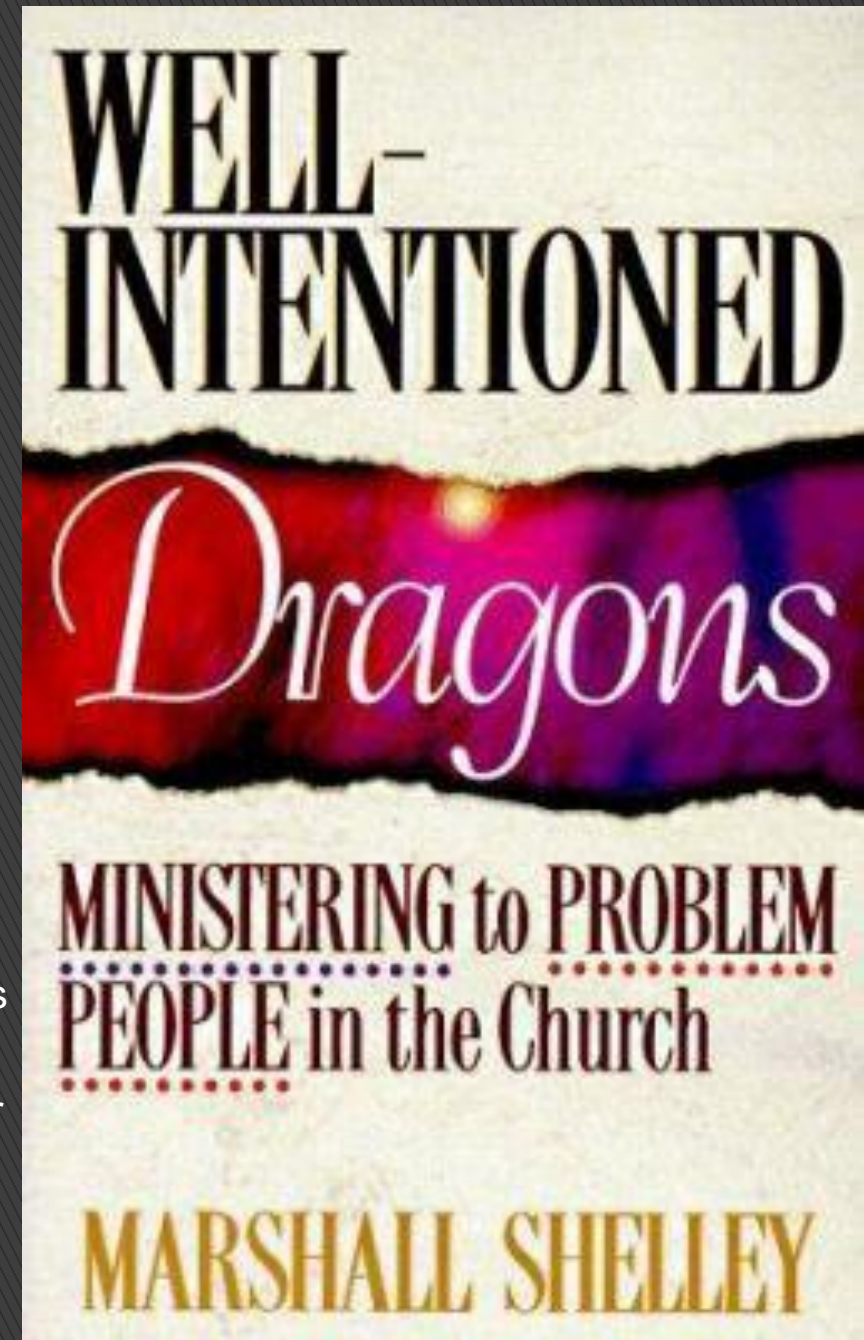
**Point 5:** Know that some of our greatest struggles and fights for Biblical truth/doctrine will come from WITHIN the church (Well-intentioned Dragons)

Acts 15:5 <sup>5</sup> But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."

1. **Legalism** (going beyond what the Scriptures says, adding man-made requirements to the Bible)
2. **Hypocrisy** (seeing or criticizing the faults in everyone else except yourself, keeping others to a standard you don't live by or live up to yourself)
3. **Pride** / Jealousy / Love of Position (Love of Self)
4. **Materialism** / Love of Money (Root of all all evil)
5. **Excuses** / Hatred and Justifying Murder (Spiritualizing Rebellion)

Matthew 23:1-39 – Woe to you Pharisees...

Luke 11:38-44 <sup>38</sup> When the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. <sup>39</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. <sup>40</sup> "You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? <sup>41</sup> "But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you. <sup>42</sup> "But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every *kind of* garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. <sup>43</sup> "Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places. <sup>44</sup> "Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over *them* are unaware of it."





**Point 6: The Elders of a Local Church should come together to SOLVE difficult matters facing the Church** (personal disputes, differences of opinion/philosophy of ministry – how to go about doing something, doctrinal disagreements – especially anything that can threaten to divide, discourage, distract, or destroy the church)

- ▶ **Acts 15:6** <sup>6</sup> The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.
- ▶ **Galatians 2:7-16** seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter *had been* to the circumcised <sup>8</sup> (for He who effectually worked for Peter in *his* apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), <sup>9</sup> and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. <sup>10</sup> *They only asked* us to remember the poor – the very thing I also was eager to do. <sup>11</sup> But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup> For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. <sup>13</sup> The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup> But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? <sup>15</sup> "We *are* Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; <sup>16</sup> nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

## Point 7: Good Spiritual Leader's Speak Up and SHAPE the conversation by pointing to God's will/choices like including the Gentiles in His plan of salvation (Peter's Input at this all important Elder's Meeting)

**Acts 15:7-11** <sup>7</sup> After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup> "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; <sup>9</sup> and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup> "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup> "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."

## Point 8: Good Spiritual Leader's recount not what they have done but what God has done (Paul and Barnabas' Input at this all important Elder's Meeting)

**Acts 15:12** <sup>12</sup> All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

### What I like about Paul and Barnabas' input:

1. They give the EVIDENCE of Gentile inclusion (signs and wonders)
2. They give all the credit/GLORY to God (what God had done through them)

## Another PARALLEL passage giving Paul's insight into the Jerusalem Counsel

**Acts 21:17-25** <sup>17</sup> After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. <sup>18</sup> And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. <sup>19</sup> After he had greeted them, he *began* to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. <sup>20</sup> And when they heard it they *began* glorifying God; and they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; <sup>21</sup> and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. <sup>22</sup> "What, then, is *to be done*? They will certainly hear that you have come. <sup>23</sup> "Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; <sup>24</sup> take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law. <sup>25</sup> "But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication."

## Point 9: Good spiritual leaders base their contributing comments and decisions on SCRIPTURE (James' Input at this all important Elder's Meeting)

**Acts 15:13-21** <sup>13</sup> After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me. <sup>14</sup> "Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. <sup>15</sup> "With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, <sup>16</sup> **'AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, <sup>17</sup> SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,' <sup>18</sup> SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO. <sup>19</sup>** "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, <sup>20</sup> but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. <sup>21</sup> "For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

# Things I like about James' input

- ▶ He affirms his fellow Elder Peter
- ▶ He argues/bases his input directly from Scripture not just experience
- ▶ He makes a clear and concise judgment of what he thinks should be done
  1. Don't trouble the Gentiles who are turning (epistrepho) to God (don't complicate the gospel – keep it simple, don't add works like circumcision)
  2. Let's write them a collective Elder's letter
    1. Urge them to avoid things/food contaminated/polluted by idols
    2. Urge them to abstain from fornication (porneia – sexual immorality – sexual acts/gratification outside of marriage) Friberg: **πορνεία**, (1) generally, of every kind of extramarital, unlawful, or unnatural sexual intercourse *fornication, sexual immorality, prostitution* (1C 5.1); (2) when distinguished from adultery (**μοιχεία**) in the same context *extramarital intercourse, sexual immorality, fornication* (MT 15.19); (3) as a synonym for **μοιχεία** (*marital*) *unfaithfulness, adultery* (MT 5.32); (4) metaphorically, as apostasy from God through idolatry (*spiritual*) *immorality, unfaithfulness* (RV 19.2)
    3. Urge them to avoid things strangled and with blood (sacrifices in the context of idolatry)

# The MacArthur Study Bible (Acts 15:13–19, p. 1661)

- ▶ **15:13 James answered.** He delivers the third speech in defense of salvation by faith alone by relating how God's future plans for Gentile salvation agree with His current work.
- ▶ **15:14 people for His name.** *See notes on chaps. 10, 11. Cf. Mal. 2:2, 5; 3 John 7.*
- ▶ **15:15–17 James quotes Amos' prophecy (9:11, 12)** of the millennial kingdom to prove that Gentile salvation was not contrary to God's plan for Israel. In fact, in the kingdom God's messengers will announce salvation to the Gentiles (**Zech. 8:20–23**).
- ▶ **15:17 Gentiles ... called by My name.** *James' point is that Amos makes no mention of Gentiles becoming Jewish proselytes. If Gentiles can be saved without becoming Jews in the kingdom, there is no need for Gentiles to become proselytes in the present age.*
- ▶ **15:19 we should not trouble.** The Gr. word for "trouble" means "to throw something in the path of someone to annoy them." The decision of the Jerusalem Council, after considering all the evidence, was that keeping the law and observing rituals were not requirements for salvation. The Judaizers were to cease troubling and annoying the Gentiles.

# The MacArthur Study Bible (Acts 15:20, p. 1661)

- ▶ **15:20** James and the other leaders did not want the Gentiles to revel in their freedom in Christ, which could cause the Jewish believers to follow that same liberty and violate their consciences. So James proposed that the Gentiles abstain from 4 pagan, idolatrous practices that were violations of the law of Moses so as not to offend Jews. **1. things polluted by idols.** Food offered to pagan gods and then sold in temple butcher shops. Because idolatry was so repulsive to Jews and forbidden by God (cf. Ex. 20:3; 34:17; Deut. 5:7), they would avoid anything to do with idols, including meat offered to idols (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1–13). **2. sexual immorality.** Sexual sins in general, but particularly the orgies associated with the worship of pagan gods. The Gentiles were to avoid being offensive to Jewish sensibilities in their marriages and any relationship with the opposite sex. **3. things strangled,** and **4. from blood.** *Dietary restrictions (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 3:17; 7:26; 17:12–14; 19:26; Deut. 12:16, 23; 15:23; 1 Sam. 14:34; Ezek. 33:25).*



# SO WHAT?

## Application



1. **Check** every Bible teacher/preacher to make sure they are inline with God's Word The Bible like the Bereans. **Acts 17:11** <sup>11</sup> Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so.
2. **Hold** your Elders accountable and ensure they are experts in the Bible and good spiritual examples and pacesetters.
3. **Ask** them your honest questions and make sure that your Elders are making decisions based on the Bible after careful listening/debate/discussion, prayer, and examination of the decision or questions in light of the Scriptures as our final authority for faith (what we believe) and practice (how we live).
4. **Trust** God to work through the plurality of Elders (safety net of the Holy Spirit) unless they teaching outside the Bible and you have specific Scriptural evidence to the contrary of their teaching or advise
5. **Obey** your spiritual leaders - Too many people think they know better than their Elders so that they don't seek out their counsel, don't heed their advise, or totally reject their wisdom often to their own determent and folly. **Hebrews 13:17** <sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.