

Galatians Unearthed Part 2: Circumcision, Food Laws, Sexual Immorality, and the Jerusalem Council (Presented 12/16/2017)

The following text is a message from Corner Fringe Ministries that was presented by Daniel Joseph. The original presentation can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzLhWUratNg&feature=youtu.be>

***Portions of this document have been edited from the video message to better present a written document. All the Scripture verses are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted and are in the red text. Therefore, it is recommended that this document is printed in color. The Hebrew is to be read from right to left.**

We are going to break into part two of Galatians Unearthed. We are not exactly going to get to the book of Galatians yet because I am going to continue to build the foundation we need to get some perspective. There are elements we need to possess before we get into this book that are absolutely critical because we need to distinguish between the things Paul intended to say and the things he didn't. It is critical we enter with caution especially regarding Peter's warning (2 Peter 3:15-16).

With that being said, if you remember last week we looked at Acts 15 and 16. In those chapters, we learned about men from Judea who came down to Antioch and started to tell the brethren—**Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved (Acts 15:1)**. We read about the controversy and the fact Paul and Barnabas would not back down. They contended and went toe to toe with men from Judea telling them people do not have to be circumcised for salvation. But the debate got hotter and hotter until they decided the only way to resolve it was to go up to Jerusalem and to the highest court in the land which consisted of the apostles and elders. They did this because they were following the precept and wisdom that is embedded in Torah regarding how matters of dispute were to be dealt with.

This is where we are going to continue. Paul and Barnabas were making their way to Jerusalem, and this is what we read in Acts 15:3-4—**³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. ⁴ And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them.**

What's being described here is the Church, the body of believers. This is the *ekklēsia*. Everyone who needs to be there from the apostles to the elders is present. So you have Paul and Barnabas in their midst telling them all the wonderful things, the miracles, and wonders their eyes have seen regarding what the LORD was doing with both the Jews and the Gentiles.

This is phenomenal! Can you imagine being there in the first century when this crowd circled Paul and Barnabas while they told the *ekklēsia* what had been happening? They tell them there are men who came out from you, and they came to Antioch, but these men are telling the brethren unless they are circumcised, they can't be saved.

Now what's interesting is within this group, this *ekklēsia* that was in Jerusalem, there were believing Pharisees present who are the first ones to respond to Paul and Barnabas' testimony. This is what they

said in Acts 5:5—**But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Law of Moses."**

These Pharisees are not unclear in what they said. They had just heard Paul and Barnabas' testimony that men came down from Jerusalem and said—**Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved (Acts 15:1).** These Pharisees agreed with this statement; they said, "That's exactly right. That's what has to happen." Let me ask you a question. Why are these Pharisees so adamant the Gentiles coming into Israel, coming into the faith, be circumcised?

We can answer that question by posing another question. What is a Pharisee? He is an expert in the Torah. He has devoted his life to the study of Torah, to the teaching of Torah, and even in matters of judgment because they knew the Torah. That is why these Pharisees were so adamant. They knew the Torah and what is written in the Torah. And what is within the Torah? This very command.

Let's take a look at this in Genesis 17:1-2—**When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. ² And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."** Moving to Genesis 17:10—**This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male child among you shall be circumcised.** That is pretty clear. Continuing in Genesis 17:11—**and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.**

In other words, circumcision is evidence you are in a relationship. This is evidence the promise made is legit. So he is given this bit of evidence; this is the sign of the Covenant.

Moving to Genesis 17:12—**He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant.** This is very clear. This instruction is dealing with people who are not physical descendants of Abraham, Gentiles. You are either a descendant of Abraham, or you're not. You are either Israel, or you are not. There is Jew, and there is everyone else, Gentiles. This verse is explicit. So as we see, even the ones who are **bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant** must be circumcised.

Moving on to Genesis 17:13—**He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.** When you look at the text right within Torah, it could not be clearer. This is not an ambiguous statement. A small child could understand what was just laid out in the scenario.

So bring yourself into the first century, and put yourself amongst the crowd and listen to the whispers as Paul and Barnabas are declaring their testimony. Can you imagine all the whispering people saying, "What are they talking about? This is not what the Torah says." Then the Pharisees rise and say, "No. Brothers, listen. You're talking about the exact situation the Torah deals with. We have Gentiles who are coming into the faith; they're being grafted in. The Torah says they need to be circumcised. The Torah is actually set up for this perfect situation. We have the answer. There is no question about this situation. This is so simple."

That's the other thing we need to think about, and this will come into play as we get deeper and deeper into this message. The fact the Pharisees are so adamant about what must be done to the Gentiles tells you they understood what was happening to the Gentiles. What do I mean by that statement? I mean

the Gentiles were coming into Israel; they were literally coming into Abraham's household. The Pharisees were not foggy on that matter, which is why they're so adamant about this command. They understood the reality of what was happening to the Gentiles.

Going on in Genesis 17:14—**And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.** Do you remember what they said in Acts 15:1? **Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.** That is what this just said. Unless you're circumcised, you will be cut off. You will not be saved. What the Pharisees are professing and telling everyone at this council is exactly what the Torah says.

Riddle me this. How can Paul possibly go against the letter of the Law when Paul is a Pharisee? When you read the book of Acts, what you will realize is Paul, long into his ministry, never denounces being a Pharisee—**circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the Law, a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5).** He never denounces it; he identifies himself as a Pharisee. Not only that, but we are told he is a Pharisee of all Pharisees. We are told he studied at the feet of Gamaliel who was the grandson of the great Hillel (Acts 22:3). In other words, if you're going to go to Pharisaic school, and you wanted the best teaching you could possibly be given, Paul was given it. He was given the best teaching available because he was a Pharisee of Pharisees. I guarantee you this, he knew the Law better than anyone who was in that crowd. He devoted his life to it.

So riddle me this. How can Paul, being a Pharisee who knew exactly what the Torah said, take the stance he is taking and totally disregard a commandment in the Torah? Do you know what the answer to that is? It is really simple. The Apostle Paul saw something and actually experienced something that was so radical and miraculous. Even knowing the command, he could come up and say, "Whoa. Hold on. Timeout. This is the situation, gentleman. I'm telling you they don't have to become circumcised. They don't have to do it." The question is, what did he know?

What did Paul know that would make him take this absolute radical position? Let me show you in Colossians 2:11 what Paul said to the Gentiles—**In Him (Jesus) you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.** Do you want to know what Paul knew? This is what he knew. He realized the Gentiles were circumcised by One who no one could possibly be greater than. They were circumcised by God Himself. It was not by man; these Gentiles were being circumcised by God Himself. Let that sink in.

In other words, he already saw it. He knows God Himself is taking care of it. What are the Pharisees going to do to perform a circumcision that's greater than God's? Nothing. This is why Paul is taking this standpoint.

Let's take this discussion to a deeper level so we can get even a better understanding of how all of this works. I want to take you to the book of Romans where Paul talks about circumcision. In Romans 4:7-10, we read this—⁷ **"Blessed are those whose Lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; ⁸ Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin." ⁹ Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. ¹⁰ How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.**

That is a fascinating statement! Paul recognizes his father Abraham came into right standing with God while not being circumcised. Remember the saying, “The deeds (or actions) of the fathers are a sign for the children.” This is what Paul is saying. He is looking at Abraham and his action, and then Paul recognizes what God did with Abraham was a prophetic template of what He would ultimately do in the future. This is powerful! And he's drawing this in and saying, “Look at our Father Abraham. He was justified in the sight of the Living God not while circumcised but while uncircumcised.” There is your prophetic template to help you understand what's going on here.

Now he continues in Romans 4:11—**And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also (emphasis added).** The thing I want to draw your attention to is what I've highlighted here. Paul defines circumcision in detail. Please pay close attention because ultimately you're going to have to take this with you through the rest of this series. What is circumcision? It is the **seal of the righteousness of the faith**. In other words, it's a trophy.

I always use this analogy when I come to this passage. When you have 100 men running in a race, only one wins. The evidence this one man won is the trophy. He can walk around and says, “I've achieved. I took first place in this race.” He can do that because he has the trophy to prove it. You can have the other guys all saying they took first place, but we know they didn't because they don't have a trophy. The one man who took first place has the trophy.

You need to understand what circumcision is. It is the trophy. Abraham, he was given this memorial trophy declaring his faith in the one true God because he believed when God said, “I'll make your descendants the stars of heaven.” Because of that, God gave him this trophy. So this is the **seal of the righteousness of the faith**. This is absolutely beautiful.

Let's go a little bit deeper here and take you into the Greek. The Greek word for seal is σφραγίς (*sphragis*). So σφραγίς is a seal, a signet-ring, impression of a seal, and the proof (of ownership). It's the proof as in the proof of ownership.

I want you to start understanding the reality of the definition of circumcision. If you understand this definition, and what Paul is actually conveying, you're going to understand perfectly what is happening to the Gentiles. You will understand how everything that's happening is still in accordance with Torah even though it seems like a total blatant disregard for it. It's not.

So Paul tells us, the circumcision that was given to Abraham is a seal, σφραγίς. It is the proof of ownership. Abraham is God's. Period. And God is Abraham's God.

Now I want to take you to the book of Ephesians where I want to unpack this in the Gentile realm. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is obviously written to Gentiles. This is what Paul has to say in Ephesians 1:13— **In Him (Jesus) you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also having believed.** Does this sound familiar? This sounds exactly like Abraham. When God presented Himself to Abraham, when He presented the promise, Abraham believed. Same thing happened to the Ephesians. It is interesting; as the Jews were sharing the gospel of Yeshua to the Gentiles, the Gentiles just believed. They were being like their father Abraham.

Listen to what else Paul has to say in Ephesians 1:13—**you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.** The word sealed is *σφραγίζω*. It's the same word for seal. You were sealed how? Through faith. In other words, Paul is telling the Ephesians exactly what he told the Galatians. He told them, “You were circumcised. You were sealed.”

Paul goes on in Ephesians 1:14—**who [the Holy Spirit] is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.** It's the proof.

Do you understand what this anointing of the Holy Spirit is? It's the circumcision of God. It is the proof you will enter into eternal life. Again, this is what the Apostle Paul saw as he was going out with Barnabas ministering. He saw the Holy Spirit fall upon these Gentiles, and he knew what it meant. He knew it was the proof they had been sealed by God Himself. They had been redeemed; they're going to heaven. There's nothing more to discuss. It is a really powerful symbol.

In fact, the prophets prophesied of this in Isaiah 8:16—**Bind up the testimony, seal the Law among my disciples.** What's interesting about this passage regarding the word seal is when you look at this in the Greek Septuagint, you can trace the word all the way back to *σφραγίς*, *sphragis*. This is the stem of the word that is used.

This verse in Isaiah 8:16 is prophecy. When you look at the preceding verses in Isaiah 8:14-15, you find it talks about the Messiah who would come. This is a messianic passage. It talks about a Messiah who would be a stumbling block to both Houses of Israel. He would be as a trap and as a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Then we have the information in verse 16—**Bind up the testimony, seal the Law among my disciples.** So with the coming of this Messiah, this is going to happen—**Bind up the testimony, seal the Law among my disciples.** We're told something's going to happen with the coming of the Messiah. The people are going to start getting sealed; the Law is going to be sealed within them.

What is the New Covenant? Look at Jeremiah 31:31-34 where it talks about the New Covenant being the Torah written on the hearts—³¹ **Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. ³³ But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My Law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”**

Isn't that interesting? When you go to 1 John 2:3, we read—**Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.** That's the very seal, that's the very circumcision, the Mark of God where He circumcises the hearts of men by writing His Torah on them. They're walking according to the commandments of God; they're doing them. Through that, you want the Torah; you desire the Torah.

We're at this time of Hanukkah when the cry of Mattathias to go out and fight the anti-Christ was, “All who are zealous for the Torah, come to me.” That is the cry, “All who are zealous for the Torah.”

There is something happening right now at the end of the age. The spirit of anti-Christ has risen up, and the same exact call has risen to the challenge because there are people all over, Jew and Gentile, who are discovering the Torah, and they're saying, "There's something with this Torah." That is an authentic move of the Holy Spirit. All of this should help you understand why Paul and Barnabas contended with the Pharisees over this matter.

Going back to the council meeting, we're going to continue here. Paul and Barnabas are telling the assembly all the wonderful things God has done. We find the Pharisees stating the Gentiles need to be circumcised. Now the apostles are going to answer as we get to Acts 15:6-7—**Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. ⁷ And when there had been much dispute.** I have to stop there. It says—**when there had been much dispute.** Appreciate how controversial this is. Appreciate the fact people there were standing on the Torah saying, "I cannot budge." This group was within the apostles and elders. Think about how controversial this really was.

Continuing in Acts 15:7—**⁷ And when there had been much dispute Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.**

When I was growing up, I was under the impression the Apostle Paul was the first apostle to the Gentiles. That is not so. The first apostle of the Gentiles was Peter. That's pretty profound in more ways than most people recognize. Why do I say that? Do you remember the whole Cornelius event with Peter going and eating with the uncircumcised men (Acts 10)? As you get to Acts 11, we find Peter's own brethren calling him out for doing such a thing. Peter tells the whole story of what God did with these Gentiles and how he was speaking the Gospel of Yeshua, and the Holy Spirit just fell upon the Gentiles in power. He tells his brethren—**who was I that I could withstand God? (Acts 11:17)**

I share this with you because if you think the men who came from Cornelius, who were considered unclean because they were uncircumcised, to Peter's house was just something insignificant, you would be incorrect. There's more to the story you need to understand. The LORD knew exactly what He was doing when He sent Peter to Cornelius. It was because as we come to the Jerusalem Council, what does Peter have evidence of? He has a testimony to offer in the most controversial thing that ever happened with Gentiles in the first century. The issue was, do they need to be circumcised or not? It is interesting because the LORD had already prepared Peter and his testimony for this moment.

So Peter comes, and he tells them this story. Here we continue in Acts 15:8-10—**⁸ So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, ⁹ and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?** In other words, Peter is saying not even our own fathers were justified in the flesh. They were not justified in the Law and circumcision. Why? Because they all failed to keep the Law—**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.** Psalm 14:3— **There is none who does good, No, not one.** Again in Ecclesiastic 7:20— **For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.** And Psalm 130:3—**If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O LORD, who could stand?** I could go on, but I will stop there.

When we look at this, we find everyone has fallen short. This is where Peter is going with this. We can't be justified in the flesh. Paul covers this in Romans 2:25—**For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the Law; but if you are a breaker of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.** This is

what Peter is saying when he says— **why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?** We cannot be justified in this manner. We cannot be justified in the flesh.

Look at Peter and his discourse—¹¹ **But we believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.** ¹² **Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles (Acts 15:11-12).**

So first Peter rises during this high point of contention amongst the apostles and the elders and gives his testimony. Then we had Paul and Barnabas rise, and they further add to Peter's testimony by telling them what they had seen, and they gave their submitting evidence in this court case.

Now we continue in Acts 15:13—**And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me."** This is the time where you really want to pay attention because James isn't just anyone, and when he says **listen to me**, you better believe every single person in that court, all the apostles and elders, immediately stopped and gave him full attention. Why do I say that? Because he was Nasi. He was the Prince of the Court. James was a man who was so highly respected, so revered; they had likened him to a camel in a sense he had camels knees because he was prostrated before God day and night.

I can take this a step further. The early Church fathers spent a lot of time talking about him and articulating the thoughts of how revered he was. They did this to the extent they seriously mention many Jews who were living in the first century who held him in such high regard that when the temple was destroyed in seventy A. D., they said it was because of what happened to James. James was thrown off the pinnacle of the temple by the priesthood, the Kohanim. That, however, did not kill him. So they started to pick up stones to stone him, and then a guy with a club came and clubbed him to death. Do you want to talk about a horrifying way to die? James experienced it. Here's my point. They said the Jews revered him so much as a righteous and holy man of God so when the temple was destroyed, they said it was because of what had been done to James.

Ultimately, we know that's not why the temple was destroyed, but I just wanted to put this man and how revered he was in context. James is the head of the court, and he says— **brethren, listen to me.** He's going to be the final authority. He has come up last, and he is going to give this conclusion we find in Acts 15:14-18—¹⁴ **Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.** ¹⁵ **And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:** ¹⁶ **'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up;** ¹⁷ **So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things.'** ¹⁸ **"Known to God from eternity are all His works.**

James, the Nasi of the court, does something so imperative. Understanding this is going to put into context the rest of the series. What does James do to persuade his brethren? First, he draws attention to Peter's testimony. Then James goes to the Word of God to show his brethren the prophets have prophesied about this moment. To establish the reality of what is about to be decided, regarding the fact they are not going to require the Gentiles to be circumcised, James is going to the Word.

Now I'm going to tell you something. That's what carries weight. When you understand something about Scripture and how it works, the deeper and deeper you get into studying, you realize you can't read one Scripture and create an entire theology out of one doctrine. It doesn't work. If you're of that opinion, guess what? You can't agree with the New Covenant. It would be like the Samaritans who believe the Torah is the only Scripture. They refused to receive any further revelation of the Living God; therefore, they deny the prophets. This is why Samaritans do not sacrifice in Jerusalem. The reason is you can't find command to sacrifice in Jerusalem anywhere in the Torah. To find that command pertaining to Jerusalem being the place to go to sacrifice, you had to wait for the later revelation. You had to wait for the prophets and the writings.

This is a critical aspect of what we see happening. We need to look at the totality of Scripture to properly interpret where things are at and what God is doing, because God will leave a witness for Himself in the written Word. This is what James recognized. There is a witness; there is a testimony in the prophets.

James could have certainly gone to the prophet Isaiah because Isaiah 43:18-21 tells us something very interesting. He says the LORD would do a new thing. This would be something that's never been done. It would be a brand new thing where the jackals and ostriches would be drinking living water in a desert. This is why Peter, in his vision in Acts 10, saw these unclean animals coming down, and the LORD was telling Peter to rise, kill, and eat. It was in direct association to what was prophesied in that the jackals and ostrich would be anointed with the Holy Spirit. Powerful! So we understand these things through the totality of God's Word.

Now moving on to Acts 15:19—**Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God(emphasis added).** In the Greek, we read *ἐπιστρέφουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν*. The reason I put the Greek up here is I want you to understand the stem *ἐπιστρέφουσιν* means to turn, as in the process of. These Gentiles are literally in this process of turning. This is what James recognized, "Don't trouble them. They don't need to be circumcised because they're in this process right now. They are actively, *ἐπιστρέφουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν*, turning to the LORD God."

If you were to look at it in the Hebrew, the equivalent transliteration would be *shewb* or *teshuvah*, repentance. So they're actively doing this or actively turning to God. So James, Nasi or the head of the court, declares the Gentiles don't need to succumb to circumcision.

However, James is not done. There are requirements he is going to pass judgments on. There are requirements he is going to impose and implement to these Gentiles who are *ἐπιστρέφουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν*, turning to the LORD.

In Acts 15:20, we find out what those things are—**but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.** So James picks four commandments that are to be placed on the Gentiles as they're in this process of turning, but you have to admit it's a little mysterious.

It is actually very mysterious. It is so mysterious it draws you into it, which is kind of the intent here. I ask this, "Where are the Ten Commandments? Where are the basic ones?" If I was to send you out to preach the gospel and to do these things, one of the first things you're going to do when asked how a person should walk with the LORD is to tell them to go to the Ten Commandments. That is the heartbeat of the Torah. This is very simple. You need to pay close attention because if we're going to

share the gospel, you better get this under lock and key right now. Why? Because this was established in Jerusalem by the apostles, the judges, who will judge Israel. This hasn't gone anywhere. In other words, it is incumbent upon us today we understand what is being commanded if, in fact, we want to declare the gospel. That is because the same thing is supposed to happen today as it did in the first century.

Looking at these four things. There is only one commandment here you can even liken to the Ten Commandments which is, thou shall not commit adultery. The rest of them are absent. There is nothing about making graven images. There is nothing about taking the LORD's name in vain. There's nothing about honoring your mother and father. There's nothing about killing somebody. Isn't that a good thing not to do? What about stealing? That is a good thing not to do. Coveting and bearing false witness are both absent. So the four things James mentioned should be drawing you in a mysterious fashion of wanting to investigate.

As a side note, I have had discussions that are hard to believe regarding this passage. I wish I could say it was just one person, but I have had discussions with men who have come to me and said, "Daniel, you don't understand. Gentiles don't have to keep anything in the Torah. In fact, all you need to do is go to the Council of Jerusalem, and you will find it was established exactly what Gentiles have to do." My response is always, "Wait a second. You can kill somebody." To which they generally respond, "Well, we shouldn't, but it's not incumbent upon us." No one has challenged their theology; they just simply want to look at these four things. A really funny conversation I had is when I said, "All right. According to you, all you have to do is these four things. Well, what are they?" The gentleman couldn't even respond to me what those four things are.

So given all that, this is something we really need to dig into. The first thing we really need to ask is why these four commandments? What is specific about them and the urgency? Before anything else is mentioned, these four are mentioned.

Let's take a look at this. The first thing I want to point out here is three of the four commandments are food Laws. Things polluted by idols, things strangled, and from blood are food Laws, but they're not just any food Laws.

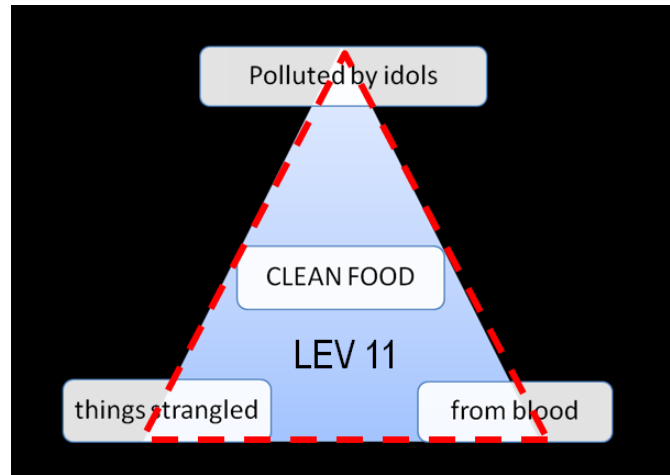
One of the things we're going to talk about later on in this study is the traditional way of successful Jewish teaching, and what they would pride themselves in. Good teachers of the Law, the Word of God, of the Torah, and the prophets, took pride in the fact they could take a comprehensive list of commandments and requirements and boil it down and simplify it for you. They would make it easy to understand.

It is like the story of Hillel and Shammai where the Gentile comes to Shammai and says, "Teach me the Torah while standing on one foot." Shammai runs him off with the builder's cubit. This Gentile then goes to Hillel and says, "Teach me the Torah while standing on one foot." Hillel response to him, "What you hate, don't do it to your brother." Hillel took the whole Torah and condensed into one commandment. That's what the Jewish teachers are known for. The Jews took pride in this. The great teachers of the day did this. This is also what Yeshua did. The Apostle Paul did it, and now you're going to see James does it. Why? Because in reality, these three food Laws being commanded are summing up the entirety of the food Laws. James just threw a perimeter around how clean food becomes defiled.

Leviticus 11 tells us the things God has created to be received as food, and they're all established on the testimony of two whether they're fish in the sea with fins and scales, or whether they are animals with split hooves who chew the cud. Rabbit chews the cud, but it doesn't have a split hoof; it's unclean.

So what James does here by taking these three specific commandments is he draws a perimeter around the entire food Laws. At the top of the chart, we have things polluted by idols. You need to understand something; it could be a cow, deer, or goat, but if that cow, deer, or goat in any way has been offered to an idol, it's unclean. Clean food has now become defiled.

The same thing applies to things strangled. You can have a cow, deer, or goat which God has sanctified by His Word that is clean for us to eat. But if it is strangled, you cannot eat it because it is now unclean. This is related to the next, and that is blood.



When I was growing up, my family members were avid hunters and fishermen. Many of you who know me today know I kind of left my roots. But be that as it may, the tradition in my family was when you killed your first deer, you drank the blood. This was a ceremony and a big deal. When you killed your first deer, it's common to drink the cup of blood. Torah, however, tells us that is abominable. Deer is clean; you can eat the meat, but you can't drink the blood. What these men are doing in the woods is an abomination to the LORD, and fortunately, the LORD protected me from that.

Now what I want to do is I want to briefly cover these food Laws. Some of you may understand them just fine, but I'm covering this because you need to be able to teach this. This is gospel stuff; this is gospel 101, and we need to know how to teach this.

We are going to go through some of these scripturally and look at what it has to say. We are going to begin with things polluted by idols. In 1 Corinthians 10:18-19, Paul addresses this very issue—¹⁸ **Observe Israel after the flesh: are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?** ¹⁹ **What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything?** In other words, Paul is telling the people to look at the priest. These men eat of the sacrifice and, therefore, are partakers in the altar. That is a powerful statement because of what altars are? Altars are places where you draw near to God. Altars are places where you thank God with thanksgiving. Altars are places you confess the LORD. This is the ultimate place of intimacy with God.

So what Paul is saying is when someone goes to the altar and brings an offering to the priest, the priest kills it. Out of that sacrifice, there's a priest portion (Numbers 18 and Deuteronomy 18), and he partakes of it. But the whole ceremony is of God; this is all unto Him in honor of Him. If it is a peace offering, the one who brings the offering will have a portion. But it's all centered around God.

So Paul makes this point, but then he says in 1 Corinthians 10:19—**What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything?** Paul actually goes deeper into this two chapters earlier

in 1 Corinthians 8. There he basically says, “We know. We are in the know. When we look at these idols that are carved by men, they are nothing. They're inventions of man; they're nothing.” Paul is very careful not to give any credence to these false idols because they're nothing.

However, listen very carefully as Paul goes on to say this in 1 Corinthians 10: 20-21—²⁰ **Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.** ²¹ **You cannot drink the cup of the LORD and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the LORD's table and of the table of demons.** We know there is an entity behind these images men have carved on their own and are worshiping; the entity is the demons. So when they offer to these gods which are total fictions of demons and of man's mines, those offerings are going somewhere. This is what Paul is bringing to the table. He says, “Therefore, you cannot eat things sacrificed to idols because you cannot partake of the LORD's table and in the table of demons. This is off limits. The argument is over right here.”

Paul goes on and gets practical here in 1 Corinthians 10:22—**Or do we provoke the LORD to jealousy?** Think about who God is. God says He is a consuming fire. Read Deuteronomy 4:24. He says—**For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.** Read Exodus 34:14—**for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.** This literally is one of the names given to the LORD. It is *qanna'* (qanna'). It means jealous. He is jealous. That's who He is.

Continuing in 1 Corinthians 10:22-26—²² **Are we stronger than He?** ²³ **All things are Lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are Lawful for me, but not all things edify.** ²⁴ **Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.** ²⁵ **Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake;** ²⁶ **for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness."**

I love this because Paul is getting practical. These people are living in Corinth. This is the pagan epicenter of the world. They are surrounded by pagans. Practicality, this is very helpful at this moment. He tells them, “If you go to the meat market, don't ask questions for conscience sake because the earth is the LORD's in all its form.” So the intent is as you are going to the meat market looking for hamburger or lamb chops, all these things that God created to be received with thanksgiving, you are not asking the butcher if that meat was offered to an idol. Paul says you don't have to do that. I will add this. If it has a Halal sticker on it, you can't eat it. With that sticker, you've been notified it was offered to an idol.

So when you are at places like COSCO, and you see these meats that were blessed according to Islam in the name of Allah, you can't eat this. So just to be clear, if you know it is Halal, or you know it has been offered to an idol or any idol god, it is forbidden.

Moving on to 1 Corinthians 10: 27—**If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake.** I've had gentlemen discussions about this with both non-Jewish and Jewish believers where these people will say, “This is what Paul said. Eat whatever is set before you. So if I go to a friend's house, and they slap a pig in front of me, I'm going to eat it because I don't want to offend them. I want to be very clear on something; that is not what Paul is addressing. Talk about ripping a passage out of context! Again, do what James did. You must look at the totality of Scripture. Scripture must interpret Scripture. Scripture must support your interpretation. If it goes against it, you have a more significant problem. This is not what Paul is saying.

To point out something else about this, read Luke 10. When Yeshua was still on the earth, He commissioned the seventy to go out two by two to preach the gospel. He tells them the exact same thing in Luke 10:7—**And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give. He tells them, "When you go into the house, eat whatever set before you."** Was Yeshua saying that in the context of someone slapping pig in front of you—you're supposed to eat? No. They knew better than that. They would have said, "Absolutely not." They would not have done that. We know this to be true because Peter in the vision in Acts 10 says, "I've never eaten anything common or unclean." To try to force the idea of eating unclean animals into the Luke 10:7 and 1 Corinthians 10: 27 doesn't work.

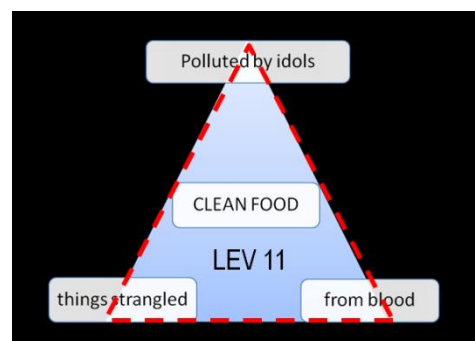
So Paul, on a practical level, tells them to eat whatever is set before them—**But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness" (1 Corinthians 10: 28).** He has quoted that twice now. He has kind of packaged it and acknowledged the authority of the LORD. Everything we do is in honor of Him— **the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness.** I'm not going to eat something that's offered to an idol because I'm not honoring God by doing that. I'm not acknowledging the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness. It is really simple.

So here you see this requirement. You have hamburger, or you have a beautiful steak, and you want to eat it; then someone tells you it's been offered to an idol and is therefore unclean; you have to walk away. It's the Law.

Moving to our second prohibition, which is the eating of blood. This is pretty simple. Going to Leviticus 17:12—**therefore I said to the children of Israel, 'No one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood.** It's very simple. You can go back to Genesis 9:4—**But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.** Blood is forbidden from any animal unclean or clean.

The third-way clean food becomes defiled is strangled. We can read this in the very next verse of Leviticus 17:13—**Whatever man of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who hunts and catches any animal or bird that **may be eaten**, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust (emphasis added).** You're to drain the blood. The Jewish way of killing animals is the most merciful way you can kill because they respect God's creation, and they don't seek to inflict harm on animals. That is because righteous men actually care about the well being of their animals. We can read that in Proverbs 12:10.

So this is something the Jewish people are very careful to do. However, there is a prescription in that we don't strangle it because what ends up happening? The meat is mixed with the blood. That's what's happening because the blood hasn't been drained. So wrapping this up. What we see James doing is he is drawing a perimeter around how meat, that is considered clean by God, and is to be received as such, becomes unclean. We need to be able to convey this principle.



Isn't it interesting that the first thing delivered to the Gentiles is food Laws? How preposterous is that? In the arena of Christianity I grew up in, food was irrelevant to me. I didn't want to hear about this stuff because Yeshua "declared all foods clean." So you were wasting your time to talk to me about these things. What I didn't know was when Yeshua declared all foods clean, the topic Yeshua was discussing

was not about pork. It was about eating bread with unwashed hands, and He said that is totally fine (Mark 7:1-23).

So it's a really peculiar thing. As the spirit of anti-Christ is moving, arising, and breaching the walls of the Church, the very first thing commanded to Gentiles is the very thing that has been ripped out. It is a scary thing.

Let's look at Acts 15:20 again. There are three things—**things polluted by idols...from things strangled, and from blood.** Now we have the fourth thing the Gentiles are commanded to keep which is sexual immorality.

How do you define sexual immorality? I could line up ten pagans in Corinth, and I could go there and say to them, "Keep the food Laws and abstain from fornication. Just do that. Have a nice day." Then I walk away. The problem is every one of those men is going to have a different definition of what sexual immorality is. So when you are talking about delivering these Laws, when you tell Gentiles they need to abstain from sexual immorality, how do you define the term? The term cannot be defined apart from the Torah.

I want you to think about that. The resource James and all the other apostles were drawing from is explicitly the Torah. All of these commandments are actually found in Leviticus seventeen and eighteen. The definition of what sexual immorality comes from Leviticus eighteen. It is repeated in Leviticus twenty. The command is comprehensive and laid out in detail. There was no New Testament at the time James gave these instructions. They did not have the New Testament as a resource to draw from. Even today the New Testament is not the resource you would draw from for ultimately defining what sexual immorality is.

Why do I say that? Because the New Testament says nothing about having a monogamous relationship with an animal. Nothing! It is like some of these conversations I've had with people who will say, "If it is not in the New Testament, we don't have to worry about it." I beg to differ because you're using a measuring rod the apostles never used. They never had the New Testament. The apostles' measuring rod was the Torah and the prophets, and the New Testament is a commentary on the Torah, prophets, and the reality of it.

To define this is critical. You need to understand you have the apostles who are the elite of the elite of the Church. When they're dealing with these things, and they're bringing these things to the brethren, do not think for a moment they're simply using their own terms and leaving these Gentiles with those terms. They are teaching these Gentiles Torah. Why? Because they have to define these terms. They have to tell them, "No, you can't marry your sister. You can't do that. You can't have a relationship with an animal. Look in the Torah."

You would think naturally that would occur to people, but if you have read the news lately over the last year, I think I've read seven articles where people have been caught having relations with an animal. We are in the days of Noah. Now more than ever we need to be zealous for the Torah.

So we get back to the looming question. Why these four things? Where are the Ten Commandments and all the other commandments for that matter? Why the urgency regarding these four?

We get our answer in 1 Corinthians 6:18—**Flee sexual immorality.** [This is one of the four given by James] **Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.** There it is! That's the key to understanding why these four commands were given. Think about it. Every sin a man does is outside the body, but if you commit sexual immorality, you are bringing sin in. It is coming in.

That is interesting because the food does the same thing. When I'm eating food polluted by idols, whether I'm eating blood or whatever, what is it doing? It is coming into our bodies which are then the temple of the Living God. Look at the very next thing Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19—**Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?**

This is the reality why these four commandments were given to the Gentiles. It is because judgment begins at the House of God. You must first purify your own temple so the Holy Spirit will continue to dwell within you. All you need to do is start thumbing through the pages of your Bible and look at what happened in Israel when they defied their temples. The actual physical temple was destroyed. When they started to defile their temples, God came in and destroyed it. Read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17—**¹⁶ Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.** If you defile this temple [your body], God will destroy you.

Now we understand, why these four commandments. Why not, “Thou shall not kill, or steal, and all the others.” The first thing, the most urgent thing, is to purify your temple because the Holy Spirit wants to rest upon you and dwell within you so you can be holy.

So getting back to James in Acts 15:20—**but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.** He gives these four things. Do you think that's the end of the story? It is not.

Look at the very next verse found in Acts 15:21—**For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath (emphasis added).** James is brilliant! He said these four things must be first; they must purify the temple because this is where the Holy Spirit is dwelling. Then James is basically saying, “I am not worried about it because Moses is being preached in the synagogue every Sabbath.” In other words, he understands they're going to be hearing the Torah every week.

That's what you call growing in faith. I'm going to hear the Word of God; it's going to sow into me. You see, this is about a relationship. The Torah is about intimacy with God. Satan has come in and said, “No. No. You don't want to hear that. Torah is a curse.” Actually, the Torah is the voice of God. It is the character and nature of God. It is His likes and His dislikes. It's intimacy; it's relationships. He gets to talk to you.

Do you ever think about the relationship? It is built on two things with God. Those two things are prayer and reading the Word/Bible. It is allowing God to speak to you; and in prayer, you are speaking to Him. That's a beautiful relationship. If you take one of those things out of the equation, it's a miserable marriage. If you're trying to talk to your spouse who won't talk back to you or absolutely refuses to listen to you, it is a miserable marriage. Torah is the facilitator of a beautiful relationship between God and His people. It's His voice; we need to hear it.

Let me take it a step further. Torah does something so critically important for us. It produces something inside of you. I'm going to tell you if you don't have that something, you're not going to make it. And what is that? Go to Deuteronomy 31:11-13—¹¹ **when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this Law before all Israel in their hearing.** ¹² **Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this Law,** ¹³ **and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess" (emphasis added).**

What is the Torah doing? It is instilling fear. This is not the fear of the world but the fear of God. Why is that important? Look at Proverbs 16:6—**by the fear of the LORD one departs from evil.**

If you want the strength to overcome temptation, trials, and tribulations, you're going to need to have the fear of the LORD. Take away that fear, and what's going to happen? You're going to sin; you're going to give in to sin. Fear is not an option for believers. We must have the fear of the LORD. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 7:1—**Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.** How is holiness perfected? Fear.

We need fear. We've got to have it. Look at Psalm 103:11, and this is getting really controversial—**For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him (emphasis added).** Hold on a second! Are you telling me I receive the mercy of God through fear?

Are you starting to see how important the fear of the LORD is? I'm going to tell you right now the fear of the LORD will have more strength and power than the fear and intimidation of the devil. That is because the devil loves to play on our fears. He will hunt you down. He knows each and every one of you. He knows your weaknesses, and he knows your fears. He knows the things that scare you, and he will embellish them so you go home and sit in a corner sucking your thumb spiritually speaking. Perhaps actually physically. I don't know.

Hebrews 4:1—**Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it (emphasis added).** The writer of Hebrews is saying you better have fear or you may fall short. We need the fear of the LORD.

Do you think it's a coincidence that the devil has stripped the Church of the Law? Do you know the effects of what he has done? All he needs to do to destroy fear is take the Law out of the Church. Stop letting them hear the Law, it will remove the fear, and Satan will get them because they will cave in to sin.

This tells us; we need the fear of the LORD. In fact, Exodus 20:19-20 talks about Moses being at the mountain, and the people are saying, "Don't let God speak to us because we're terrified. You speak with us." What does it say in verse 20? **And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin."**

That is the ticket. That is the key to surviving the tribulation. The fear of God and be zealous for the Torah. Go back and listen to it; it will scare the daylights out of you. That is exactly what we need. We need it because, you know how rebellious your flesh is. Don't feed your flesh by removing the Law. Listen to the LORD; listen to His voice.

Amen.