

## An Important Question

Acts 15:1-29

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October 8, 2017

### Verse 17-18

- In the second half of the quoted text, the Messianic work is extended to the Gentiles
  - God *had* promised that Gentiles would be called by his name *as Gentiles* (that is, apart from converting to Jews)
  - The tent that was once pitched solely in Israel now travels also to the Gentiles

### Verse 19

- James's conclusion is not to press Gentiles who turn to God to be circumcised
- This is based on using God's word to interpret events (*not* the other way around)

### Verse 20-21

- If they didn't want to trouble the Gentiles or add works to salvation through faith, why did they include these instructions?
  - The issue of circumcision had to do with receiving salvation
  - These additional instructions deal with how Gentile believers should live *now that they are saved*, not what they must do to be saved
  - It is the difference between a works-based salvation and lordship salvation
  - Idolatry, sexual immorality, and strangled food (food that still contained blood) all had ties to pagan temple worship, which was to be avoided
  - Another issue was that the apostles wanted there to be fellowship between the believing Jews and believing Gentiles
    - Even if a Jew did not view abstaining from blood as a moral imperative, the idea of consuming blood would have been so repulsive that fellowship involving it would have been impossible

### Verse 22-29

- They wrote a letter to Gentile believers explaining what they had discerned
- They concluded by saying not that if they did these things they would be saved, but that they would do well

### The Issue

- Ever since God called Abraham, redemptive history had centered around Israel
- God's work in Israel always pointed to the coming Messiah (examples from three of Jewish history's most prominent individuals)
  - Abraham was promised the Messiah (Genesis 12:3)
  - Moses prophesied the Messiah (Deuteronomy 18:15)
  - David's line would provide the Messiah (2 Samuel 7:12-13)
- The apostles taught that Jesus *is* the Jewish Messiah (the Christ) (Acts 2:36)
- The apostles also taught that each one must individually turn to Jesus (Acts 2:38)
- The question was: How does a Gentile turn to Jesus?
  - Can you as a Gentile turn directly to Jesus, the Savior or the world?
  - Or must you first become a Jew so that you can turn to Jesus, the Jewish Messiah?
    - If a Gentile had to first become a Jew, circumcision is the way you would convert to Judaism (Exodus 12:48)

### Verse 1

- The men who came down from Judea were not apostles or elders
- They taught that a Gentile must become a Jew (through circumcision) before turning to Christ
- Where would that leave the many Gentiles who *had* turned to Jesus without being circumcised to become Jews?

### Verse 2

- This teaching was contrary to the teaching and ministry of Paul and Barnabas
- The issue is essential to the gospel and it was critical that they came to the correct conclusion

- So a group including Paul and Barnabas was sent to Jerusalem to settle the issue

#### Verse 3

- The churches between Antioch and Jerusalem accepted that Gentiles did not need to convert to Judaism to be saved

#### Verse 4-5

- When a Pharisee was saved, he wouldn't necessarily stop being a Pharisee (Paul didn't (Acts 23:6))
- It's not surprising that non-proselyte Gentiles being saved would be a stumbling block to some Pharisee believers

#### Verse 6

- The leaders (not the congregation) gathered to consider this important question

#### Verse 7

- There was much debate, with some apostles or elders apparently arguing that Gentiles needed to be circumcised
- Then Peter addressed the group and made four points:
  1. God has already revealed his will on this issue
    - God directed Peter to preach the gospel to Cornelius apart from ritual, circumcision, or law-keeping
    - Because this was a true revelation from God, it carried the same weight as Scripture
    - Today, we need to look to Scripture to find what God has revealed

#### Verse 8-9

2. God affirmed Cornelius by the Holy Spirit apart from circumcision
  - Early in Acts, God used sign gifts to authenticate his working
  - We should not confuse this with experience or the false signs and wonders prevalent today
3. Salvation (cleansing) comes from God by faith
  - Peter recognized that salvation is through faith
  - If the requirements of Judaism were added, salvation would no longer be by grace alone or through faith alone

#### Verse 10-11

4. The law couldn't save the Jews — how is it going to save the Gentiles?
  - Believing Jews recognized that their attempts at law-keeping accomplished nothing
  - If they (believing Jews) had been saved purely by God's grace, then so could Gentiles without becoming Jews

#### Verse 12

- Barnabas and Paul gave an account supporting Peter's position

#### Verse 13

- James was the elder of the church in Jerusalem
- He was also the brother of Jesus and the author of the Epistle of James

#### Verse 14

- James began by building on what Peter (Simeon) said
  - He said that what Peter related was God *visiting* the Gentiles
    - The word visited has been used by Luke of God sending the Messiah (Luke 1:68, 78; 7:16)
  - "a people for his name" indicates ownership, previously applied to Israel (Exodus 6:7)
  - James was characterizing Peter's report as God sending salvation directly to the Gentiles
  - the clear implication was that the Gentiles did not need to go through Judaism to come to Christ

#### Verse 15

- Then James turned to Scripture to prove his point

#### Verse 16

- The first half of the text James quotes from Amos announces the Messiah
  - "the tent of David" or the *rule* of David points to the Messianic kingdom
  - God makes for "I will" statements regarding the Messianic kingdom
    - "I will return"