



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Divine Purpose in History and Prophecy

Part XII: Acts 15:13 – 18

Eschatology Doctrinal Studies

TRANSCRIPT

I was very much interested in the crash of EL AL 747 in the Netherlands because where we were staying was about three miles from the airport. And we were on the east of the airport and where that plane struck those buildings was on the south of the airport. We identified very well with it because what we were staying in were high rises that look almost exactly like the ones in which that plane crashed. And throughout the time that I was there, the seminary is located -- well about where we were, about three miles east of the airport, so we were all day long and even through the night were hearing planes taking off. I guess that's one of the dangers of living near these modern airports where so many of those planes take off, but it was a horrible crash.

Let's begin our class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the ministry of the Word of God. We thank Thee for the way in which it enlightens us and enables us to understand things that are happening in our world. We thank Thee for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and for the privilege of proclaiming it and the supreme blessing of knowing him as he is revealed in that gospel as the one who has made it possible for us to experience the joys of eternal

life. We thank Thee for the good hope that we have because of the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross. And we thank Thee for the word of God and the Holy Spirit, the word which the Spirit uses to enlighten us and edify us and cause us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord. We ask that our time this evening in the study of the Scriptures may be profitable for each one of us and that when we leave we may understand more fully, all that Thou hast done for us and what Thou art doing in this world in which we are living.

And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Well, this is the twelfth of our series of studies in the Divine Purpose in History and Prophecy. And we've been studying, the last two times, the present age and this is the final of our series of studies of the present age. There is another important passage, but we'll save that for later on, but this is the final one in which we study the present age. But next week, the Lord willing, I would like to turn to the subject very closely related to it but entitled “The Course of This Age” in which we review what has happened since the first coming of our Lord and what the Scriptures tell us we may expect to happen along the way to his second advent. And I hope that in that we'll be able to analyze some of things that are happening in our world both in the professing Christian world and in the world itself. But we are turning tonight to Acts chapter 15. And I'd like to read the first eighteen verses of this chapter. Acts chapter 15 in verse 1.

“And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. 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. 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. 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.”

Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. 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. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 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? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they. Then all the multitude kept silent.”

That word in the original text can, I think, be translated this way to catch the force of it a little better.

“Then all the multitude fell silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, “Men *and* brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

Now notice he says “that with this the words of the prophets agree.” He does not say the words of the prophets are fulfilled, but they agree. Just as it is written,

“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; So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name”

Now, there is a bit of a problem here in the text that I'm reading, The New King James Version has taken a particular translation that identifies the rest of mankind with the Gentiles. By translating the little word *kai*, which is normally translated *and* as *even*, then the statement then that even all the Gentiles is made to agree with and is identified with the rest of mankind just preceding. But if we read it this way “so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,” you can see that that would say that there are two different groups; the rest of mankind and then all the Gentiles.

Now, we are going to take it that way but there is hot dispute over it and I don't think anyone can be absolutely certain of what James would have understood these words to be in this context. At any rate, verse 17 continues;

“Says the LORD who does all these things.” “Known to God from eternity are all His works.”

Well, we are continuing our study of the important features of the present age to which this passage contributes critically. In one of our preceding studies two or three weeks back, I made reference to the present age and just summarized in a very simple way, the characteristics of it. As first of all, the universal preaching of the Scriptures. We know that from a number of passages in the word of God. There is the preaching of the Scriptures with its personal and international emphasis; not simply in the preaching to individuals but preaching to groups of people such as Jews and Gentiles. So the universal preaching of the Scriptures is one of the characteristics of the present day.

The building of his new society is one of the characteristics because we are told by our Lord that during the present time we may expect him to build the church, and he is going to build the church and has been building the church on the confession; the reality of the confession made by Peter “thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

Now, the building of the church involves its formation. And we read in the book of Acts chapter 2 how the Holy Spirit came baptized those who were there, into one body. We are told that later on in the book of Acts that that's what happened on the occasion of Acts chapter 2, the day of Pentecost. We also learned that as a result of this the people of God take on a new character because there is equality of place in the body for Gentiles with the Jews. Up until this time, when a Gentile came to the knowledge of the Lord, he must be circumcised and become part of the body of the people who were Jewish people. But now things are different in that respect. The body is the people of God characterized by equality of place in that body for Gentiles as well as Jews, equality of worship and service, yet with differing roles for the sexes. The New Testament epistles make that very plain that there is no difference so far as status in the body of Christ for men and women, males and females, we are all one in Christ Jesus, but nevertheless the apostles make it plain that there are difference of roles within the Church of Christ. And we, in reading the New Testament epistles, see why they thought that that was necessary.

There is also a universality of priesthood and spiritual gifts. That is all of us, male or female, we are priests of God and we are able to get down by our bed or wherever we pray and offer our prayers to the Lord having assurance that we have access to him. And if you'll remember, not everybody had that kind of access to God in the days that Israel acted as the people of the gathered people of God. You can understand how marvelous it was for them to think of themselves as a priest and not a priesthood as being composed as a separate body of people, a limited body, a minority within the people of God.

And then another thing that characterized the church was the simplicity of the corporate worship of the body because the early church met, they observed the

ordinances of baptism, and they observed the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. And those were the ordinances that they observed, and their meetings were meetings which were extremely simple. They gathered, they listened to the word of God as those who had gifts expounded the word of God in their meetings. They listened to people who offered prayer. They sang hymns, so we are told. And that was the fundamental simplicity of the function of their corporate worship. They did not have liturgy. They did not have the kinds of forms that we have today. They did not have choirs. They did not have one man who ministered the word of God, and only one. They did not have any one man who was called the pastor of the body. There were a multiple -- possibilities of multiple ministry by gifted people. And it's very important for us to remember that because once we turn away from that, we may expect difficulties and trials to arise.

The government of the local church was in the hand of elders, and they were assisted by deacons. It was not in the hands of one man. It could never have been said in the early church that one man was the pastor of a particular church. I would challenge you to find anywhere in the New Testament, that statement. And we of course, and in Believer's Chapel, we try to practice this, I know failingly, but nevertheless we try to practice this, in making it very plain that according to our understanding of the word of God there is no such thing as the pastor of a church who rules as the president of a corporation, the spiritual corporation. Government is in the hands of a plurality of men who are called elders in the New Testament. These are the things that characterize the new body; the church of Jesus Christ.

Now, one other thing, and I'll want to deal with this particularly next week because it comes up as we consider the course of the present age. The church age, we are told, climaxes in apostasy and also the translation of the believing element. These are the things that are the important features of the church of Jesus Christ which the book of Acts and the epistles particularly deal with.

Now, in Acts chapter 15, we have another passage then dealing with the present age. Paul returning to the mother church of Gentile Christianity, that is, in Antioch, found that as someone has said, that a snake had crawled into Eden. And what, of course, had happened was that some individuals had come in and had said “it's not only necessary to believe in Jesus Christ in order to be saved, it's also necessary to be circumcised.” So what becomes the issue is the method of salvation. In other words, do we enter into salvation and into full salvation by simple trust in our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, or is it necessary for us in addition to believe in Christ to be circumcised.

The world does not like the idea of a cross as the means of salvation, and it's not surprising that an issue like this should arise because the idea that there is nothing that we must do in order to be saved is something that is very difficult for individuals to accept. In fact, if you witness to your friends, you will discover that that is one of the common objections that people make to the freeness of the Gospel in Jesus Christ. “You mean to say that that's all there is to entering into eternal life; to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has died for sinners and that any sacrifice, sins are forgiven?” The cross, as we've often said, is an offense. Paul called it the offense of the cross. It was an offense to him. It's an offense to our morality; works cannot justify. It's an offense to our philosophy; for the appeal is to faith and not to human reason. It's an offense to culture because its truths are revealed to the babes and not simply those of us who have more intelligence than others. It's an offense to our sense of caste because God chooses the poor and the humble. He does not choose all necessarily those who live in North Dallas and pass by those who live in South or East Dallas. It's an offense to the will because it calls for unconditional surrender. It's an offense to our pride because it reveals the exceeding sinfulness of the human heart. And it's an offense from what is said, to man himself, because it declares him dead and tells him he must be born again.

Well, this conference in Jerusalem becomes one of what someone has called, the Ten Decisive Battles of Christianity. I've forgotten what the other nine were, but this one

is supposed to be one of the ten. We know of course, that it is very important. And the dispute took place and it is described particularly in the opening ten verses of the chapter. And we're not dealing primarily with that, so you will pardon me if I simply say that after much dispute Peter rose up and spoke and his words settled the issue. In verse 11, we read Peter stood up after the dispute had been going on for a considerable period of time, “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? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they.”

That's a remarkable statement, and Mr. Spurgeon has a very interesting paragraph concerning it. I don't know whether you've notice it or not, but notice the wording of it. “We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.” I'm going to read you something Mr. Spurgeon says because I think it illustrates the fact that even here in the midst of a company debating these issues, there is still the tendency for our sense of being just a little better than others to arise, even within the Christian family. Listen to what he says.

He says, “I call this the converted, moral man's statement. Let me show you what I mean. Observe and admire the way in which Peter puts the case. A company of Jews have assembled to discuss a certain matter and some of them look very wise and bring up certain suggestions that are rather significant. Say they, “Well, perhaps these Gentile dogs may be saved.’ Yes, Jesus Christ told us to go and preach the gospel to every creature, therefore, no doubt, he must have included these Gentile dogs. We do not like them though and must keep them as much under our rules and regulations as we can. We must compel them to be circumcised. We must have them brought under the full rigor of the law. We cannot excuse them wearing the yoke of bondage.’

Presently, the apostle Peter gets up and you expect to hear him say, do you not, to these gentlemen , ‘While these Gentile dogs as you call them, can be saved even as you.’” No. Spurgeon says he adopts a different tone. He turns the tables and says to them, ‘We

believe that you may be saved even as they.’” It was just as if I should have a company of persons here now who had been very bad and wicked who had plunged into the deepest sin that God's grace had met with them and had made new creatures of them in Christ Jesus. There's a church meeting, and when these persons are brought before the church, suppose there are some of the members who should say, 'Yes, we believe that a drunkard may be saved and a person that has been a harlot perhaps may be saved, too,' but imagine now that if I were to stand up and reply, 'now my dear brethren I believe that you may be saved even as these.' What a rebuke it would be.

This is precisely what Peter meant. Oh said he, “Do not raise the question about whether they can be saved. The question is whether you can be saved, you who have raised such a question.” We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they.”

So he takes the objectors back and to put the Gentile believers first in order to cast out the bad crowd, wicked devilish spirit of self-righteousness. I think that's probably what Peter did have in his mind when he said “We shall be saved in the same manner as they.” No question about them, but how easy it is for people in the church of Jesus Christ who have been there for a good while to think that they are just a little bit better than other people and seem to take that attitude into the affairs of the local church. Never forget, my Christian friends, it's by the grace of God that you, a wicked, dead sinner are saved. Never forget that.

Now, James' speech is what I'm interested in. In verse 13 through verse 18. You'll notice that after Peter speaks, the multitude fell silent. They regarded that statement, “we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they” as settling the issue. And so there was a period of silence. That issue was put aside. 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. So this was an occasion for the two missionaries, Barnabas and Saul, to stand

up and tell just what God had been doing in Antioch and how many Gentiles and others had come to the knowledge of the Lord. The counsel is called upon to make choice on these issues. Are we going to have salvation of Gentiles in the same way as Jews and possess the same privileges? And is the condition to be simply faith or faith in some other things such as circumcision? The counsel must make the decision.

Now, having said that, we read in verse 13, and after that they become silent again. Paul and Barnabas having given their missionary report, after they had become silent, James answered saying, “Men *and* brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how that God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.” So, I'm sure everybody would have been very interested when they saw James arise in the meeting. You notice incidentally that they didn't have any agenda, they didn't have an order of service. These meetings were meetings in which the freedom of the Holy Spirit operated and when people fell silent as God the Holy Spirit moved in the hearts of the men that were gathered there. Because you see, one of the reasons this would work is because we are in the early days of the church in which there is a very significant relationship with the Lord through the Holy Spirit that Christians knew and experienced.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we today, in 1992, had groups of people and in Believer's Chapel, who were so in contact with God through the Spirit that we could expect the Spirit to work in our meetings in this way. This should be one of the things to which we should constantly pray. At any rate, when James the just --, now this is not James of Peter, James and John, this is the brother of our Lord, the other James, of course, has lost his life. But now James the just arises and he was particularly known as a Jew of the Jews. And so there would be great interest in what this man is going to say. Is he going to side with the Pharisaical element that would like individuals to be put under the requirement of circumcision and thus under the law?

No, as a matter of fact, he not only does not take that side, but he even sites, if we are to believe that these are the words that he precisely said, and that Luke has not

modified them by using the Greek translation of the Old Testament to accurately report what he said, why he even replied in the Greek language. And so if he did cite the Septuagint and this text agrees more with the Septuagint, then with Masoretic Text, then that would indicate that he did not side with those that wanted to put the yoke on the neck of Christians again. He stood up and evidently what he had in mind was as a delegate to this particular conference. In the midst of it, he wanted to be sure that there were no hard feelings as a result of the discussion, the debate, Peter's statement. So, I think that what he wanted to do was something like this. These individuals who have said that circumcision is necessary are individuals who believe the word of God as we believe the word of God, and they believe that the children of Israel, the elect people of God, have a certain preeminence in the plans of God. And in a sense, they are right about that because there is a certain preeminence that the elect people have. And so I think that what he may have had in mind is there is a preeminence and the preeminence is true, but the preeminence appears in the future when the nation returns again to the Lord and Israel's ethnic future becomes a reality in the conversion of a nation as a whole. So it would appear that what he wants to do is to, in a sense, bring the sense of the congregation gathered there to peace and harmony. So he argues that what was needed is soothing. And he soothes them by citing a text of Scripture that refers to the glorious future that the nation does have as well as the glorious future of Gentiles who are going to be saved. So Jewish supremacy is relevant but it's future. And we look forward to it.

Now, he begins by saying “Simon,” the authorized version is “Simeon.” That's very interesting, isn't it? He doesn't say now your holiness has spoken. He doesn't say Father Simeon has spoken. He doesn't say the bishop to be of the church at Rome has spoken. He doesn't say the Pope, of course. As a matter of fact, he doesn't even use the word “Peter.” He uses his personal name, Simeon or Simon. Simon has declared how God for the first time visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name. Now of course he is referring to what happened in Cornelius' house where Peter is there, the

individual preaching when the Holy Spirit falls on the gathering of the Gentiles, and those who had any doubt about it learned surely that Gentiles could be saved immediately by the ministry of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they began to speak in other tongues. Simeon has declared, or Simon has declared, how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name.

Now, that is one thing I would like to emphasize. You can see that what James is saying is that the things that have happened to the Gentiles, who are in the church, their salvation is something that has happened because of the purpose of God in the present day. And the purpose of God in the present day is to take out of them a people for his name.

Now, lying back of that also is, of course, the fact that Israel has, as Paul and others will say, has been cast aside. In Romans chapter 11, Paul makes that statement very plainly. Their failure, their defeat, their falling away, that has taken place. And so Peter is saying -- or James is saying that Simeon, or Simon, has declared that God has visited the Gentiles to take out of them, a people for his name. And that will tell us something about the present age in this respect, that the present age is an age of evangelization; evangelization of the Gentiles. Now in other places of course, Jewish people are also the object of evangelization. In fact, in the evangelization of the Gentiles, it may be that we should go to the Jews first. But at any rate, the evangelization of the Gentiles is expressed here, and the purpose of God is to evangelize the Gentiles; to take out of them a people for his name.

I would like to bring the changes on that just a little bit. It's evangelize, not civilize. It's a reference to the preaching of the word of God to produce the spiritual welfare of those to whom the word of God comes; not to give them social welfare, but spiritual welfare. The preaching of the gospel is always primarily that individuals be saved, not that their social conditions be better. There has been a great struggle in evangelicalism over this over the past 20 to 25 years. And it is very plain from this -- and

I won't emphasize it tonight, it is very plain from this that so far as the ministry of the gospel is concerned, the first and primary concern of heaven itself is that individuals hear the gospel; that they may have eternal life. How much better that is than better physical conditions.

Now, I know of course that people will say but if you improve their social conditions they will be more responsive to the gospel. There is no certainty of that at all, but the important thing, the most important thing is their spiritual well-being. And the history of the Christian church is that when they carry out the preaching of the gospel and people are brought to the knowledge of the Lord, then many of them become instruments for social betterment of society itself. In fact, if you want a simple illustration, there is no illustration of any hospital until Christians became concerned and responsible for hospitals. And we have seen that, of course, in many other ways. Vernon McGee used to put it in the language of the common man. He said, “The Lord never told Israel to plant flowers in the wilderness.”

Today we have in the church so many things that are contrary to the word of God, contrary to this preaching, designed to take out of them a people for his name. What we hear from Christian pulpits often is a message that everybody is ultimately going to be saved. So there is no point in taking out of them a people for his name. There is no point in saying there is a distinction because there is no distinction ultimately; everybody is going to heaven. That is contrary again to the word of God, contrary especially to the things that are found right here in this part of Holy Scripture.

It was my privilege to sit and listen to Karl Barth. And I heard him say in meetings in Switzerland and Boswell, that he was not a Universalist. And I believe that that was something that he genuinely meant. There were just a gathering of about 35 of us around. And when he made the statement, he was answering a question from an American who said, “Since you believe that everyone is elect, do you believe that all therefore will be saved?” And he said, “No, I do not believe necessarily that all will be

saved. I do believe that all are elect but I also believe that so far as ultimate destiny is concerned, that is something that belongs with the Lord God.” and he would not go any further than that. But there are individuals today in within the Christian company: Presbyterian ministers, Baptist ministers, Independent ministers who believe that every single individual will ultimately find his way to heaven.

I give you one illustration. John Hick, a Presbyterian minister from Great Britain now living in the United States and very prominent as a liberal theologian has argued that only Universalism make sense out of worldwide suffering and further prevents Christianity from becoming triumphalistic in its attitude to other faiths. That is, it prevents Christianity from saying “we are the...we possess...through Christ, the only way to God. Or we preach through Christ, the only way to God.” Universalism prevents Christianity from becoming triumphalistic, but actually that is an attack on Jesus Christ. He said, “I am the way, the truth and the life; No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” If we really believed that anyone -- or everyone is going to come to faith in Christ apart from Christ, we not only are attacking Christianity as a group of people who have a common faith, but we are attacking -- most significantly, we are attacking Jesus Christ himself. And we are attacking what the Bible says about the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. But this is what we have within professing Christian company. And some modern Roman Catholic theology, the adherence of such faiths that are different from Roman Catholicism are regarded as [quote] “anonymous Christians” [unquote]. In other words, they are individuals who are in religions that are really disguised versions of the truth and therefore they are anonymous Christians, this within the Christian professing company. But our text says that God has visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name. A separation is taking place within Gentiledom and some are coming to the knowledge of the Lord and some are not.

Well, it would be natural for him also to want to support this by Holy Scripture and so he does. He says, “and with this the words of the prophets agree.” What he is

saying simply is that the prophets spoke of a time of Gentile mercy before Israel's restoration of Gentiles saved as Gentiles. And I underline again, he said, “with this the words of the prophets agree.” Not fulfilled yet, but agree. And then he cites Amos chapter 9, verse 11 through verse 15. And Amos and he say “after this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David.” Now there are different ways in which this may be understood. And if you will go back and listen to some of the tapes there are some tapes in which a more technical treatment of this has been given by me so you will at least understand what I believe about it. It is possible that when he says “after this” that he is referring to the Gentile out-calling in verse 14 “God visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name” after this Gentile out-calling. It's possible that that's in view or it may be a reference to Amos chapter 9. And I'll turn to Amos chapter 9; that's Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah. So if you just get anywhere near there. Amos chapter 9, verse 11 through verse 15 is the citation that he has in mind. Actually he cites verses 11 and 12, but I want you to notice the preceding context. This chapter, Amos chapter 9, has been called “the war on pretense.” And the pretense is the pretense of the Israelites in the northern kingdom who put themselves forth as God's people but who are not anything like God's people, anything but God's people. And in the course of dealing with them, he makes the statement in verse 7, “are you not like the people of Ethiopia to me O children of Israel, says the Lord.” You know that must have been a very cutting thing for Amos to say because they regarded themselves -- and rightly in one sense, they regarded themselves as different from everyone else; the elect people. But Amos says, “you are like the people of Ethiopia to me O children of Israel. Did not I bring up Israel from the land of Egypt? Yes! The Exodus, the Great Exodus? But not only did God do that, he said that I brought up the Philistines from Caphtor. I brought up the Syrians from Kir.”

Now, what he is trying to say is that the fundamental thing that makes a difference between Israel and the nations, is faith in the promises. And if you don't have faith in the promises, you are not different from the others. And to make it even worse, he's

mentioned Israel's natural enemies; Egyptians, Philistines, and the Aramians, or the Syrians. Some of those are still their enemies today, aren't they, after all this time?

He says “Behold the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom.” They've been living the life of pretense. They are not ones who are faithful to their election. “A sinful kingdom, I will destroy it from the face of the earth.” That is the sinful kingdom of elect Israel. “Yet, I will not utterly the house of Jacob, says the Lord. There is a remnant, a remnant within the disobedient. For surely I will command will sift the house of Israel, among all nations and drive them to the four corners of the earth and then as grain is sifted in a sieve, yet not the smallest pebble shall fall to the ground.” This is one of the sieves that you put everything in and those things that don't fall out are the things that you throw away. The things that do fall through the sieve are the grains representing the true reality. “ So I will sift them among the nations as grain is sifted in a sieve, yet not the smallest pebble shall fall to the ground of those that are worthless.” “All the sinners of our people shall die by the sword who say that calamity shall not overtake nor confront us.” Now the promise, “On that day, I will raise up the tabernacle of David which has fallen down.”

So I suggest to you that what we have in Acts chapter 15, is James' interpretive addition explaining Amos 9:7-10 and Jewish disavowal at the present time. For as he looks out on this crowd with Gentiles now being saved, it's evident that Israel as a nation is being set aside because they have crucified the Messiah and they are not responding to the Gospel. And what James is saying is what Amos was talking about is precisely what is happening now at the present time. Israel is set aside, God is calling Gentiles.

There is another way to deal with this, but the result is the same. We look at it either from the Gentile viewpoint or from the Jewish viewpoint. The point the passage teaches is selection from Gentiles now, then world blessing in the future. Let me read on “after this I will return and rebuild a tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins. I will set it up 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. After this I will return.

I'm not sure that's a reference to the Second Advent. As a matter of fact, it's probably not likely. “I will return and rebuild” really is intended to have the force of I will reestablish. I will reestablish the tabernacle of David. The tabernacle of David, the restoration of the dynasty of David.

You know, at this point, there is a great deal of difference of opinion over what James is saying here. Some among amillennial brethren like to say that what we have here is a reference to the present-day salvation and not a reference to future ethnic salvation at all; that we are to understand the tabernacle of David as the church of Jesus Christ. And, therefore, what James is talking about is simply what is happening at the present time and not what is happening in the future. After this, I will return and rebuild the tabernacle of David, and that is what is happening. The church is being built and Amos' prophecy is being fulfilled. I would like to disagree with that. And this is very fundamental for amillennialists because this is one of the ways in which they have sought to establish the point that the salvation of Gentiles today and the church of Jesus Christ is really the salvation of biblical-believing Israel. But now in the first place, if we look at what is stated in Amos chapter 9, and what Amos says after these two verses, I think you will see that it would be very difficult to take Amos to be referring to the present day only. He goes on to say in verse 13;

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, And the treader of grapes him who sows seed; The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, And all the hills shall flow *with it*. I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; They shall build the waste cities and inhabit *them*; They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from

them. I will plant them in their land, And no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them,” says the LORD your God.”

That's very plainly a prophecy of Israel's ethnic future, and the gift of the land and the enjoyment of the kingdom of God upon the earth. What makes it more difficult to take this tabernacle of David as a reference to the church is the fact that David, that term David, the personal name of the king of the Old Testament occurs 59 times in the New Testament, never of anyone other than the historic king. Isn't that interesting? And yet we are told the tabernacle of David is the church of Jesus Christ. But the term itself refers to King David. The phrase cannot refer to the Christian church. Further, what we read from Matthew chapter 16:18, in our Lord's words, is that the church shall be, future, shall be built. But what we read here is of the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David. And furthermore, not only the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David, as if we have new construction of a building, but we have reference to ruins. “I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up.” In other words, we have a tabernacle in ruins that is to be rebuilt. Very appropriate for a nation that has crucified the Messiah, has been disavowed by the Lord God throughout this period of time, but nevertheless, like the remnant in Amos 9, has a future set forth in the word of God. So unfortunately for the amillennialists, this passage is no help to their theories.

He goes on to say, so the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who have called by my name. In other words, the out-gathering of Gentiles is taking place at the present time. God visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name; that's what he's doing today through the preaching of the gospel. Every time the gospel is preached and every time an individual responds to it, Acts chapter 15 in verse 14, James' words are being fulfilled. God is visiting the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. So that we would call -- for example, we would call that the out-calling.

But, furthermore, we go on to read that the tabernacle of David shall be built again. That which is the out, is the regathering, was called gathering, the out-gathering of Gentiles by the gospel at the present time, then the regathering of Israel, expressed here as well; “I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins, I will set it up,” the regathering of Israel, and then following so the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles, what we might call an in-gathering; a worldwide in-gathering of the Gentiles in the future.

Now, the Apostle Paul gives us something of the same thing in Romans chapter 11 verse 11 and verse 12. I'd like for you to turn over there, and we'll read these two verses where Paul is talking about Israel's failure and having been set aside. “There is a remnant,” he says, “according to the election of grace,” in verse five of chapter 11 of Romans. And then in verse 11, he says;

“I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles. Now if their fall *is* the riches for the world”

In other words, if Israel's disavowed, if they are turning away from the Lord today, has been the occasion as Paul says, for the riches of the salvation of Gentiles to the four corners of the earth, think of the millions of Gentiles who have been converted since Israel turned from the way of the Lord. Then Paul says, “their failure, the riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!” In other words, how many more Gentiles may be expected to be saved when Israel is brought back to the knowledge of the Lord. And so the same pattern found in Acts chapter 15 is found here; that is, the out-gathering of Gentiles at the present time, the future regathering of Israel, and then the in-gathering of vast numbers but Paul calls such a thing as life from the dead of Gentiles in the future. So

we look forward to the greatest day of salvation that has ever taken place on the face of the earth when Israel returns to the Lord.

We know, of course, in the book of Revelation, the apostle who wrote that gives us a vision in which there is seen a vast multitude which no man could number out of every kindred tribe, tongue, and nation. And it is they who have been brought out of the great tribulation to the knowledge -- through the knowledge of the Lord into the presence of the Lord. John, Paul, and James agree in that respect. You might wonder well, what happened at the counsel of Jerusalem, so called? Well, the remaining verse tells us something about that. James' judgment wins approval as the word of the Holy Ghost, verse 19 we read;

“Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,” [notice verse 28] For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.”

Incidentally, you'll notice that there was a unanimity in that body of believers and they regarded their decision as not simply their decision but the decision of the Holy Spirit as well. There is nothing wrong in a body of Christians with a decision to make to wait until unanimity comes to the conviction of those who are involved in the making of the decision. Unanimity, there is not a recalcitrant minority left and James giving the majority vote, a minority vote, nay, that is not found in Scripture, they waited until there was unanimity and then the decision was made and, no doubt, that's one of the reasons that decision has stood the test of time. The decision is expressed in the letter that follows. No ceremony is necessary to bring to Jesus Christ; verse 19;

“Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God.”

Verse 24;

“since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls saying you must be circumcised to keep the law, to whom we gave no such commandment.”

There are only three possible ways of salvation. Number one, by man alone or by works. If that is so, Christ died in vain. There is no need to have a cross if men may be saved by their good works. Second, by man and God or by faith and works. How would we ever know when we've done enough? Since there is nothing in the word of God that tells us how many works we must do in order to be saved. And, furthermore, who would get the glory from a salvation which God accomplishes with my help? And yet, the Scriptures say “my glory I will not give to another.” Salvation, therefore, is by God alone. That's why Jonah said salvation is of the Lord and that, too, is why too Peter said, “but we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved in the same manor as they.”

You know, there comes a time in spiritual matters when someone must take a stand. There comes a time in our own personal life when we must make a stand. We must make a stand with our family, with our friends, with our compatriots, with our business compatriots. There comes a time when you, as a Christian, will be forced to take a stand. The Apostle Paul was forced to take a stand. This counsel was forced to take a stand. Someone has said with reference to Paul and what happened here -- because after all he was the one that in the beginning is responsible to this -- that what we have here is the apostle taking a stand and then he is described as “three cubits in stature, he touched the sky.” Isn't that a marvelous expression? Three cubits in stature, he touched the sky. Three cubits probably because he was a very small man and perhaps he was just a little

over five feet. But at any rate, that was the description; “three cubits in stature, but he touched the sky.” He stood for the truth of God in a difficult situation.

There is a text that has been often cited in recent years that comes ultimately from Martin Luther. And it expresses something I think that is true. If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I'm not confessing Christ however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the babble rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved and to be steady on the battlefield on all the battlefield besides is near flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point; the point at issue. How important that is in your personal life, in your family life as a Christian, and in our church life when we stand for what we believe is divine truth. Salvation is free from legalism, is now rooted in grace, traveling legalists can no longer claim Jerusalem's support, and the church was saved, humanly speaking, for the proclamation of the grace of God by this marvelous decision that took place here.

Age Stewart was an evangelist among the Christian brethren. You may have heard of his testimony which he often gave of how concerned he was about his soul. He was told to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and trust him as Savior, but he thought that was too easy so he went about it according to his own idea. He joined a church, he sang in the choir, he became quite a worker. He hoped in all of these things to obtain peace with God, but there was no peace. One day he said while he was reading the Bible and the Parable of the Sower, he came to the words, “then cometh the devil and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.”

Stewart said, “I threw down my Bible and I said will you look at that? Even the devil knows a man will be saved if he will believe.” And so out of that, he turned to the Lord and found salvation in Him and was a very fruitful work for the Lord Jesus in Bible teaching. I used to have some of his works in my library. If you are here tonight and have never believed in Christ, it's true. Not only are we told in Scripture that it is our

responsibility to believe the message concerning the Son of God, but even the devil knows that, too. Come to Christ, believe in Him, trust in Him and enjoy the blessing of eternal life.

Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word and we thank Thee for this great decision made by that church. We thank Thee too for this program of which we are apart to call out of the Gentiles a people for Thy name. O Lord, help us to be truly what the Scriptures say that we are, a people for Thy name and give us the courage and the critical experiences of life to give a true testimony for our own Savior God.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.