



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 15:13–21; Amos 9:7–15; Rom 11:11–15

“Gentile Salvation and the Old Testament”

TRANSCRIPT

This morning, for our Scripture reading, I’m going to ask you to do something a little different from that that is stated in the bulletin, and I think it would be helpful for us in understanding the message if we turned, first, to the passage that James cited in the Jerusalem conference, together, in Amos chapter 9. So, if you would turn to the 9th chapter of the book of Amos, we’ll begin reading a few verses, at the 7th verse of that 9th chapter. While you are finding that passage, let me remind you that, essentially, the book of James is a warning of coming discipline, concerning the nation Israel. And so, here, at the end of the book, he will not only give them warning but will also give them some encouragement.

So, we begin reading at verse 7 of chapter 9:

“Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? saith the LORD. Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt? and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir? Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the LORD. For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth. All the sinners of my

people shall die by the sword, which say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent (or meet) us.”

Now, you can see that these verses are verses that proclaim the coming disciplinary judgment upon Israel; but yet, within them there is a bit of hope because He says He will not destroy from off the face of the earth—He will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob. But, now, in verse 11, there comes the prophecy of hope in the light of that, and we read in verse 11:

“In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up its ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, [or Gentiles] which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land, which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God.”

So, you see, there is a remarkable prophecy of the restoration of the nation Israel after the destruction of the tabernacle of David. Let’s turn now to Acts chapter 15, and we’re in the context of the Jerusalem conference, and last week in the exposition we saw how that individuals had come down from Jerusalem to Antioch and had insisted that one must also be circumcised in order to be saved.

Paul and Barnabas and some others went up to Jerusalem about this question. They had a great deal of debate and discussion over it and, finally, after a lot of disputing, Peter rose up in the meeting and came, finally, to the conclusive statement in verse 11, of Acts chapter 15, “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”

And so, the Apostle pointed out that men are saved by grace, free grace as we say, that is it’s not necessary to be circumcised in order to be saved. It’s not necessary to do anything in order to be saved. Salvation is a gift of God.

Well, now, Peter reached his conclusion with that and that apparently satisfied the multitude, for we read in verse 12, and we’ll read beginning there:

“Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.”

So, after Peter had settled the previous question and there was silence, Paul and Barnabas rose and gave details of the way that God was working among the Gentiles. And then, after they finished, there was a second time of silence, for we read in verse 13:

“And after they had held their peace, (then) James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.”

Now, he’s referring to what happened in Cornelius’ house, as is evident from verse 7, when Peter rose up, he first said, “Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago, God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the Gospel, and believe.”

So, now James says in verse 14:

“Simeon hath declared how God (for the first, or) at the first (or for the first time) did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written. (And now he cites the passage we read in Amos.) After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord. (That’s a very general expression, and probably the next words more closely identify it.) And all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. (In other words, this great program is something that God has planned from the beginning of time.) Wherefore (James says) my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day.”

Now, I’m going to ask you to turn to one more passage, in Romans chapter 11, and obviously after you’ve read this and listened to me, you’ll know that this is designed to impress upon you that Paul and James and Peter have a consensus viewpoint on the point of Israel’s restoration; and, as a result of Israel’s restoration, salvation to the Gentiles in a worldwide way.

Verse 11 of Romans chapter 11, Paul, remember, is seeking to answer the question: Has God cast away His people? And he says, “Of course not. I’m one of the people. I’m, “he says, in verse 1, “I’m an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.” He’s not cast away His people, He hasn’t cast away me.

In verse 5, he says, “There is [at the present time] a remnant according to the election of grace.”

But then, in verse 11, now, he says, “I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall?” That is, irrevocably. “God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them [that is, Israel] to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world,” present Gentile salvation, “and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness? For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine service: If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.”

So, Paul anticipates there will be some Gentiles saved throughout this age, but in verse 15, he says something that’s thoroughly in harmony with James and Amos.

“For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, [present Gentile salvation] what shall the receiving of them be [that is, when they are restored to their land] but such a thing as life from the dead?” In other words, worldwide Gentile conversion.

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and may that help to prepare us for the consideration in a moment of the words that James gave in this Jerusalem gathering.

Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we approach Thee through the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and we give Thee thanks for the privilege that is ours, the privilege of approaching Thee and the assurance that we are heard by the Trinitarian God in Heaven. We thank Thee, Lord, for the way in which Thou hast revealed Thyself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; one God subsisting in three persons. We thank Thee for the marvelous provision made for us, by a God who elects a Son who carries out the work of redemption, a Spirit who applies the work of Christ to the hearts of men and women. And we thank Thee, Lord, for the whole church of Jesus Christ, and we pray Thy blessing upon all of that body today, wherever believers may be, and we ask, Lord, that this may be a day of edification and growth for them. We are grateful for the privilege of life and ministry and testimony in our day.

And we pray, Lord, Thy blessing upon the saints, who are gathered here, upon the members of this church, upon our friends who are here and upon our visitors, we especially Lord pray that this may be a time of spiritual growth and edification for all of us. We give Thee an especial thanks for the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us and through His atoning work has loosed us from our sins. We thank Thee for the blood that was shed and for the risen life of the Savior now who lives to secure the benefits of all that He purchased by dying for us. We pray Thy blessing upon our country and upon our president. And we especially, Lord, pray thy blessing upon those whose names are listed in our Calendar of Concern. So many have great need of the ministry of the Triune God; and, Lord, we pray for each of those names and for the families represented and the friends represented, and we ask that if it should be Thy will, Thou wilt minister, encourage, and build up and support and comfort and heal, if it should be Thy will. We commit this service to Thee. We pray that the singing of the hymns and our time of fellowship may glorify Him who is our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. We pray, in His name. Amen.

[Message] From the three passages that we read for our Scripture reading, I'm sure that you would realize that the subject today would have something to do with the Old Testament and Gentile salvation. And that is our topic. We are studying the book of Acts, for those of you who may be visitors this morning, and we have reached that part of the study of this book, in which the Apostle has finished his first missionary journey. He has reported to the church at Antioch. And, now, difficulties had come into the church at Antioch, by reason of the fact that some men had come down from Judaea and had taught the brethren there, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” And that raised the question of grace in the salvation of men. The church in Antioch was disturbed by this. And so, Paul and Barnabas and some of the brethren went up to Jerusalem, to council with the church in Jerusalem about this matter.

So, the snake that had crawled into the Eden of Antioch caused the difficulty; and the way of salvation for Gentiles had become the issue. We might have thought that when Peter preached the

gospel in the house of Cornelius, recorded in chapter 10, that the question of Gentile salvation would have been settled. Well, that did settle the fact of Gentile salvation, about which there had been a bit of confusion. But, nevertheless, there still was the question of the nature, under which Gentiles came into the people of God, and so, the method of their salvation is now raised by these individuals who insist on circumcision after the manner of Moses, before salvation.

This question is, of course, a relevant question in the sense that it raised the question of ceremonies as means of salvation; or, as professions or—shall I say—witness of salvation that has come through faith alone.

Let us remember this, that in the Old Testament, when a Jewish man was born, he was circumcised. But he was circumcised not in order that he might be saved by that act, but rather to identify him with the covenant people of God. If an adult man was converted, through the message concerning the coming redeemer, and he responded in faith and indicated that he wanted to be a part of the people of God, the nation Israel being God’s chosen people, he had to be circumcised in order to identify himself with those people.

Now, Paul makes it plain in other places that circumcision as an act was not a saving act; it was something that was done in order to be a sign and symbol of the righteousness that one obtains through faith. Romans chapter 4 makes that plain and that, undoubtedly, was the kind of thing that Paul would have said.

But the question still remained, now, if a Gentile is converted, should he then still be circumcised and in a sense become a Jew, a member of the chosen people? Well, we know from the study of other passages in the Bible, now, that the Law was done away with when our Lord suffered on the cross at Calvary. The veil of the temple was rent in twain, from top to bottom, signifying the doing away of the Mosaic Law as a code for the people of God.

So, the question is: Is this doctrine contrary to the grace of God? Now, the apostles in the New Testament, makes very plain that salvation is through faith on the principle of grace, resting upon the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross. The cross is, of

course, the foundation of our salvation. Unfortunately, we are born sinners. We live in sin; we continue to practice sin. And then, we come to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus and our sinning does not stop, but our lives have a transforming change at that point. Sin no longer has dominion over us. There is a fundamental change of life; but, nevertheless, we are still sinners as long as we are here upon this earth.

But when the cross comes home to an individual, the first thing that he feels is offense at it, because it says to him, you cannot save yourself. And so, it's an offense, as I mentioned last week, to morality, an offense to philosophy, it's an offense to our culture, it's an offense to our sense of caste, to our human wills, to pride and to the man himself because it declares us dead and we must, therefore, be born again.

Now, Paul and Barnabas didn't jump to conclusions and condemn Jerusalem. When these men came down from Jerusalem, they debated the issue with them. They discussed it with them. But they felt that it would be desirable to go up to Jerusalem to discuss the matter further. And so, they did.

Now, what happened in Jerusalem, which was essentially just a gathering of the church from Antioch with the church in Jerusalem, has been called one of the ten decisive battles of Christianity. When we studied history, you no doubt have read of the ten decisive battles of world history. Well, someone has suggested, that if we had such battles for the history of salvation, this surely would be one of them because the whole question of grace in salvation was raised by what the men from Judaea were proclaiming at the church in Antioch.

As you know, Paul wrote Galatians to deal with the same question and tried to tell the Galatians that if a man is being circumcised in order to be saved, he has fallen from the grace method of salvation and, therefore, is subject to that which is a different kind of gospel from that which the apostles preached. They were very upset over it. In fact, Paul was so upset over this kind of teaching that he wrote the Galatians that if anyone preached that kind of Gospel, then he should go to hell.

Now, that seems to us to be very, very strong language, but he said it twice, so that we would not miss the point.

“If any man preach any other gospel than that which we have preached unto you, let him be anathema. That’s the Old Testament equivalent and the biblical equivalent of saying, “Let him go to hell.” It’s that serious because, you see, the life of individuals is at stake in the preaching of the Gospel in purity. It’s not a matter that we can pass by and think, well, it’s just one of those things that may be somewhat important. It’s “thee” most important issue of life; the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, after there had been a great deal of disputing in Antioch, Peter rose up and gave what came to be, obviously, the conclusion of the church in Jerusalem. And he expressed it so beautifully. We talked about it last week, in verse 11. “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus, we shall be saved, even as they.” That’s the climactic testimony of the Apostle Peter, speaking for others, on this issue. The Gentiles are to be saved, just as Jewish people are saved. And, it’s not necessary for Jewish—for Gentile people who are saved—to be circumcised; whether to be saved or whether to become a member of the covenant community. A man is saved by faith on the principle of grace; and, through that, becomes a full-fledged member of the people of God.

So, that issue is settled by what Peter has said. Now, you’ll notice, that after Peter finished, then all the multitude kept silence. And, after then the silence, Paul and Barnabas arose and they began to tell the wonderful things that had been happening, through them, as they preached the Gospel to Gentiles. Gentiles were being saved as Gentiles; not become members of Israel, but as Gentiles.

And so, they told, as we read here, “What miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles through them.” And so, the council is called upon, again, to make a decision. After Peter gave his message, make a decision: salvation is through grace. Gentiles are being saved as Gentiles. Make a decision, and conform to what God, through the Holy Spirit, is doing.

Well, after Paul and Barnabas got on their feet and told their story, there was a silence again. And the issue of circumcision is over. That has—it’s over with the 11th verse.

Now, James stands upon his feet. This is James the Just, the brother of our Lord. James was a very unusual man. Became a very important man, evidently, in the church at Jerusalem. In fact, tradition says that James the Just was thrown off of the temple at the end of his life, and then clubbed to death. And when they buried him, they looked at his knees, and they were filled with calluses, which they felt, tradition says, were caused because he spent so much time on his knees.

Now, it would be nice if we could have a test of our knees, too, wouldn’t it? We might find some who were very tender. That is, they’ve never kneeled in prayer. Or, just a little bit... Now, I can tell you right now—you don’t have to test my knees—I don’t have any calluses on my knees. But James, tradition says, had calluses on his knees, because he was such a godly prayer warrior.

Well, he was the brother of our Lord, and what would he say when he stood on his feet? Would he side with these Pharisees who believed, who had been confused about circumcision? No, the text makes very plain, he does not.

But, nevertheless, he does it in a very soothing way, because, after all, as we read here in verse 5, “But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees, which believed...” These men, evidently, were true believers in this case; and they were confused. You know, it’s possible for true believers to be confused about biblical doctrine. That’s why you’re here this morning. You hope you’ll have a bit of clarity from the pulpit. Sometimes you get it, sometimes you don’t. But, nevertheless, you hope for clarity so you can grow in the knowledge of the Scriptures.

So, these men were confused. So, James doesn’t get up and say, “Now, you see, you were wrong. And, furthermore, if you don’t stop talking about this, we’re going to judge you to be walking disorderly, and we’re going to bring you under the discipline of the church. And if you persist in it, we’re going to excommunicate you.”

What these men needed was a little comforting, a little soothing. They’ve been silenced now by the discussion and what Peter has said. And then, Paul and Barnabas have stood and have talked

about the Gentile’s salvation. So, they needed some soothing. And James will give it to them, for he will remind them they were right in one respect; and that is, that there is a preeminence which has been given to the nation Israel and that preeminence, given through the Abrahamic Covenant, through the Davidic Covenant and through the New Covenant, still has its ultimate realization in the future. And so, James will turn to the passage in Amos, and he will point out that Jewish supremacy is relevant, but not to the present day. The future is the day of the restoration of Israel; and, furthermore, there will be as a result of that restoration worldwide Gentile salvation and not simply a taking of a Gentile people out from among the Gentiles for the name of God, now.

So, James, we read, stood upon his feet and said, “Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon...” Isn’t it interesting that he calls Peter “Simeon.” He doesn’t describe Peter as, “Your Holiness.” He doesn’t describe him as the bishop of Rome. He doesn’t even call him Peter, *petros*, Rock, the name that our Lord had given him. He gives him his simply personal name of Simeon. And, it’s helpful to remember how the Bible brings us back down to reality.

There is a history of the Roman church, in the years 440 to 461, that is illustrative of the difficulties that can arise, if we don’t pay attention to the Scriptures very carefully. In 451, a meeting of six hundred and thirty bishops and four papal legates assembled to hear the decree of Leo the Great. And they are reported to have exclaimed, unanimously, “What Leo believes, we all believe!” Anathema to him who believes anything else. Peter has spoken by the mouth of Leo.

Well, that’s contrary to the Spirit of the New Testament. He says, “Simeon—Simeon has declared how God for the first time did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name.” That will give you some idea of what God is doing in the present day. He is visiting Gentiles and He is gathering together His elect from among the Gentiles for the people of God.

So, the purpose of God, now, is evangelization. Spiritual welfare is the important thing; other things are secondary. Social welfare is always secondary to spiritual welfare. What good is it for men if, eternally, we should leave men in darkness and blindness, though we give them help physically in this age. We don’t say that the Christians should not be concerned about the poor and

the disadvantaged, and those who are unjustly treated. We think Christians should be concerned about that. And, particularly some of us, who are fairly affluent, we should particularly be concerned about it because we can do something about it. But, when it comes to the ministry of the Word of God, the preeminent thing is always the spiritual ministry of the Word of God by which a man's eternal spirit is brought into relationship to the Lord God. That's the important thing; and we should not let people deter us from our important and first task of preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. It's so easy to be sidetracked and to be interested in the things that are secondary, rather than primary.

So, James says, “God is visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.” The goal is not the salvation of all gentiles now; not that God would not be interested in the salvation of as many as possible—we don't know the plan of God—but He is visiting them to take out of them a people for His name.

As the Lord Jesus said, before this, “Other sheep I have which are not of this fold,” that is, the Jewish fold. “Them also I must bring.” He is interested in His sheep and the Gospel goes out in order that those whom the Father has given to the Son might be brought to the knowledge of the Lord.

So, the church then is not [to] catch the spirit of the age; the church is to correct the spirit of the age. Always to be a correcting force, a disciplinary force! A force calling the present age to judgment before the Lord God; that the people might understand their lost condition and be saved eternally. Oh, how important that is!

Now, James having said this, said in verse 15, “And to this agree the words of the prophets.” In fact, you'll notice the plural, and that would indicate that the thing that he illustrates from Amos is something he could have illustrated from other places as well. But, he turns specifically to Amos, because that's suitable for his purpose. And he says, “The words of the prophets,” agree, with what is happening now. They spoke of a time of Gentile mercy, before the restoration of Israel to God's favor.

Now, he doesn't say that Amos is fulfilled now. He says, simply, that what Amos says agrees with what is happening. Now, if you'll remember the Scripture reading, in Amos chapter 9, verse 7 through verse 10, it was stated that the Lord was going to have to discipline Israel. Amos was one who prophesied of judgment and so, he prophesied of disciplinary judgment that was to come to Israel. But, he said, He's not going to destroy Israel totally. But, Israel is going to have to experience disciplinary judgment.

After that, James went on—Amos went on to say—the tabernacle of David will be rebuilt. The ruins will be erected again. In other words, he's talking about something that's been in existence, it has collapsed in ruin, and he's talking about the rebuilding of it. That would let us know right then that he's not talking about the present church, which is a new thing. Paul calls the church a “new man” in Ephesians chapter 2.

So, when he says, “To this agree the words of the prophets,” he's saying simply, “If you read Amos carefully, look at the context of verses 7 through 10, you'll see that discipline was set forth. And then, following that, the words of a comforting future.”

So, “To this agree the words of the prophets...”

Now then, with verse 16, he says, “After this I will return...” Now, it is very striking, if you will look at the Hebrew text of Amos chapter 9, in verse 11, you read the words, “in that day” not “after this.” And then, if you look at the Greek translation of the Hebrew text, it, too, has, “In that day.” In other words, it renders it just like the Hebrew text.

But, James has said, “After this...” Now, I suggest to you the fact that James writes, *meta tauta*, or “after these things,” whereas the text—the Greek text as well as the Hebrew text—and he's largely following the Greek text of the Old Testament here—whereas those texts have “in that day,” that he has made this change with an interpretive purpose. “After this...” After what? Well, not so much after what James is speaking about in this context—not, after the church age so much—but after Jewish disavowal. After Jewish disciplinary judgment. That will take place for a considerable period of time. That accounts for what's happening in James' day, and Paul's day, and Barnabas' day;

in which, evidently, the nation Israel has turned aside from the things of the Lord. The natural branches have been broken off of the olive tree, salvation is now going out to the Gentiles because Israel is refusing the message.

Remember what Paul has said in Acts chapter 13, preaching in Antioch? He said, in verse 46 of Acts 13, “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”

So, James is simply saying that this particular day is a day of Jewish disavowal—Jewish judgment—disciplinary judgment. They are not cast away utterly, because God keeps His faithful Word. And it’s so important for us to realize this because if it were true that God gave these promises to the nation Israel and then reneged on them, what assurance would you have when He gave you the promise of eternal life if you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ—what assurance would you have that He would keep His promise for you? So, it’s very important to remember that we are talking about the faithfulness of the Word of God.

That’s why Paul in Romans chapter 3 says, “Does not man’s unfaithfulness annul the promises of God?” or the oracles of God? And he answers his own question, “God forbid! Let God be true, and every man a liar.” After this, therefore, this “this” I think refers to the Jewish disavowal, which is taking place now, and then the ultimate restoration. “After this, I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David.”

Now, it’s very striking to me that some interpreters—Christian men—affirm that what we have in the term “the tabernacle of David” is a reference to the Christian church. Now, that’s a startling thing! The reason it’s so startling is that the term “David” is used approximately fifty-nine times in the New Testament, never does it have any other sense than David the son of Jesse. So, when we see this expression, “the tabernacle of David” this is clearly a reference to the Davidic covenant, and the promises that God gave to David; that someone from his seed would sit upon a throne and rule and reign in the kingdom of God over the earth.

So, I take, then, James to be saying, “After this, I will again build the tabernacle of David,” which is fallen down. It was in ruins in James’ day. “And I will build again the ruins thereof and I will set it up.” In and then in purpose, He says, “I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles...” Now, I suggest to you that that little expression “and all the Gentiles,” is probably explanatory of that rather general expression: “That the residue of men might seek after the Lord.”

And, especially all the Gentiles... Now, notice, in verse 14, James had said, “Simeon hath declared how God for the first time did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name.” Some Gentiles; not all—but, in verse 17, we read: “That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.”

In other words, he refers to the same thing that Paul refers to in Romans chapter 11, verse 11 and 12; and verse 24 through 27; passages we read in our Scripture reading, in which Paul says things like this. And if you can get this, it will help you to understand, so, I think, so much more plainly what James is saying.

So, let me read, again, Romans 11:11 through 15. Paul writes: “I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them [that is, Israel] to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world,” that is, Gentile worldwide salvation—what Paul will say in verse 25 and verse 26 is the coming in of the fullness of the Gentiles—“Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness?”

So, you can see, Israel is to have a fullness. Verse 13: “For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office [or my service]: If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.”

He knows that in his present day, this is the day of the salvation of some Israelites—the remnant, he mentions in verse 5—but not yet all.

Verse 15: “For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, [present Gentile salvation] what shall the receive of them be, but such a thing as life from the dead?”

And then, in verse 25 and verse 26, he says, “But I, brethren, I wouldn’t want you to be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, [that’s the Davidic King] and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”

So, Paul’s plan, it seems to me, thoroughly harmonizes with what James says, “Today is the day of Jewish disavowal, the day of the salvation of few Jewish people, but there is a remnant,” according to the election of grace, great numbers of the Gentiles are coming in but Israel’s promises are not forgotten. They have a glorious future. And the aim of the future of the salvation of Israel is not simply the restoration of Israel, but the ultimate blessing of the whole of the earth.

That’s good Calvinistic doctrine! That’s the way in which God is going to accomplish His worldwide salvation.

So, that’s what he means. It’s all very simple to me.

“Known unto the Lord,” he says, “Are all His works from the beginning of the world.” This is part of His overall plan, by which He is bringing to pass His purpose.

Now, at this point, having made—I think—his point fairly plain, James points out a very important principle. And that’s this: there are times when it is necessary for us to avoid doing things to offend others. And, after all, what he is essentially saying is, the Gentiles are going to be saved as Gentiles, now. We’re not under the Mosaic Law as a code. The tendency of people who are told they are not under the law as a code is, occasionally, to become licentious in their freedom. But our freedom is a freedom to do the will of God, and not to go contrary to the moral principles of the Word of God—or even the moral principles of the Law of Moses. We should never think that our freedom is the kind of freedom that enables us to violate the moral principles of the Law of God.

That’s however the tact that some have taken; and we must avoid that. And, further, there is another principle—if you have individuals who recognize their freedom, where they are further limited by the fact that not everybody understands the freedom that we have in Christ—there are taboos that are erected in the Christian church; they vary around the country because they are largely cultural. And, spirituality is judged by whether you adhere to the particular taboos that a particular church in a particular area may erect.

Now, one way in which we can respond is simply to do what we see is right and let the chips fall where they may; and if we offend somebody with our freedom, so much the worse for them. But that is really not the biblical way. We should remember that some people are weak Christians; while some are strong.

Paul calls himself one of the strong, who understands freedom. But the strong are to bear in mind the weak consciences. And so, if certain things which Paul knows he can do are, nevertheless, disbelieved by others, then Paul says, “It’s the Christian thing not to make your freedom a cause of stumbling for someone else.” Because if you cause a person to do something that he really is opposed to, doesn’t really understand he has that freedom, but thinks it’s wrong, you damage his conscience, because he does something contrary to his conscience, and it’s easier then for him to do something else and you start him out in a pattern of sinning. And the Lord said, “He that commits sin becomes the servant of sin.” And if you start paying no attention to your conscience, the chances are your pattern will not be reversed for some time.

Let me give you a simple illustration: suppose you go out to Utah, and you know that the Mormons, who I presume are the majority of people in that state, you know that they are opposed to drinking coffee. So, what should you do when you go in the restaurant? Order coffee in a loud voice, so that everybody in the audience, everybody sitting nearby will know that you’re a different kind of Christian?

No. That really isn’t, I think, the way that you should do it. Why don’t you order a glass of milk. Maybe you’ll have a chance to speak to someone without having already offended them before

you’ve even had the chance to talk to them. After all, that’s a small sacrifice to pay for visiting Utah. Of course, it’s a sacrifice to visit Utah in anyway. [Laughter] But, nevertheless, that’s a small sacrifice.

So, you should have a tender conscience, yourself, for others whose consciences may not yet be as knowledgeable as you think yours is.

So, we need to be—be aware of things like that. Paul uses the illustration of meat sacrificed to idols. We shouldn’t eat those meats if it’s going to offend someone.

So, James after having said we have freedom from the law, we don’t have to be circumcised, either to become a member of the covenant company or worse, of course, to think we are saved by that; he introduces a few things that these people should do when they are in the midst of people who believe some of those things.

He says in verse 19, “Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols...” That’s very offensive to the Jewish people. They learned their lesson in the captivity. “...And from fornication,” which probably is a reference to marriage within certain small family lines prohibited by the Law of Moses, “And from things strangled,” and from eating things from which the blood has not been strained out. Jewish people were offended by that and thought that that was contrary to the Law of Moses.

So, James says you shouldn’t do that, and he explains why in verse 21, “For Moses from ancient times hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogue every Sabbath day.” And they will see, that you are doing things contrary to their law, and therefore, they will not be as open to you.

Well, the letter was sent out and distributed and that became a very, very important landmark in the history of the Christian church.

The importance of it is very, very obvious and it’s quite clear from this that the Apostle Paul and Barnabas and James and Peter, standing for the purity of the Gospel, and rejecting the

requirement that any kind of ceremony is essential for our salvation, did—made a decision—that has influenced the Christian church since.

Someone has said of Paul, at this place, and in other places where he stood for the truth, that, “He was three cubits in stature, but nevertheless, he touched the sky.”

Well, the same thing could be said of the others, who stood for the truth here. We are not saved through any kind of ceremony. Now, we’re not troubled by circumcision. We are troubled, today, by people in the Christian church who widely over the Christian church affirm it’s fine to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you must do that in order to be saved,—but you also must be baptized in water to be saved—and we pointed out last week that the same principles that pertain to circumcision pertain, also, to baptism. And Paul calls circumcision a work. Those who affirm salvation through baptism are really affirming a salvation through works; whereas, we are saved by grace through faith, that not of ourselves—it is the gift of God.

Salvation then is freed from legalism; it is rooted henceforth without question in the grace of God, no longer can traveling legalists, like the Judaizers say that Jerusalem is supporting them rather than Paul and his company.

I know a lady whose father was an evangelist. And he was a very well-known evangelist. When I was first a Christian, many people knew of Abe Stewart, he was an evangelist for the Moody Bible School and also a preacher among the Christian brethren. Now, he was a young man and someone told him when he was young that all he needed to do to be saved was to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But he didn’t think that that was right because it seemed too easy for him, to just believe in the Lord Jesus. So, he went about it according to his own ideas. So many people try to do that, don’t they? They want to go about it their own way. So, he joined a church, he sang in the choir, he became quite a worker. That’s a Christian, isn’t it? Someone who joins a Christian church, who sings in the choir and who is busy in the work of the church—that’s a Christian, isn’t it? No. Not necessarily—not necessarily—well, he thought that maybe he could get peace that way. But, he said, afterwards, “I really didn’t have peace.” And one day, while he was reading the Bible, he read the

parable of the sower. And as he was reading that parable, in the 12th verse of Luke chapter 8, he read, “Then cometh the Devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.”

He said, “You know, I threw down my Bible and I said, ‘Will you look at that, even the Devil knows that a man will be saved if you simply believe.’” And so, from that time on, he said that awakened him. He believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, stopped trusting anything else; and then, of course, he became a very fruitful evangelist of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus.

If you are here this morning, and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we invite you to trust him. Not ceremonies, not works, not joining the church, not your baptism, not your membership, not your sitting at the Lord’s Table, not your culture, not your family, not your family history—nothing else but the saving work of the Lord Jesus in shedding the blood on Calvary’s cross for sinners. And if by God’s grace you’ve come to see your need that you are a sinner, that you need eternal salvation, because you’re a sinner and headed for a Christ-less eternity; Christ is the remedy. He’s the city of refuge for you. And we call upon you to flee to Him. It’s very, very simple, as Mr. Stewart discovered. In your heart to give thanks to God for what Christ has done for sinners. Acknowledge you’re a sinner and lean upon Him for eternal life.

Come to Christ! Believe in Him! Don’t leave this auditorium without that faith in Him and in Him alone, which saves.

Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful for these magnificent words, which Luke has recorded for us so faithfully. We know, Lord, there are many things that puzzle us but we sense that Thou hast in wonderful grace come to us through the Lord Jesus Christ, offering eternal life to all who will come and lean upon Christ. And, Lord, if there should be someone in this audience, who has never believed in Him, we pray that through the Holy Spirit, Thou wilt work in their hearts in efficacious

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grace and bring them to know Him whom to know is life eternal. We pray, Lord, that Thy grace, mercy and peace may accompany us as we close our meeting.

We pray in His name. Amen.