

Acts 084
Quantum Leap
Acts 15:1-6
October 22, 2025
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Let us take our Bibles and open them to Acts 15:1. We are continuing our verse-by-verse teaching on Wednesday evenings through the Book of Acts. We are at the halfway point. Acts has 28 chapters and we have finished 14.

The outline of the Book of Acts is found in Acts 1:8, where Christ's words are recorded for us by Luke. Jesus told His disciples:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem [Acts 1-7], and in all Judea and Samaria [Acts 8-12], and even to the remotest part of the earth [Acts 13-28]" (Acts 1:8).

That is the largest section of the book. We finished the first missionary journey last week (Acts 13-14), Paul's missionary activity leaving from Antioch, going into southern Galatia, he and Barnabas, for two and a half years. They had a very fruitful ministry there, particularly amongst the Gentiles. Now he comes back to Antioch, and he gives his missions report at the end of Acts 14.

Structure (Acts 1:8)

- Jerusalem (Acts 1–7)
- Judea and Samaria (Acts 8–12)
- **Remotest part of the earth (Acts 13–28)**
 - 1st missionary journey (Acts 13–14)
 - Jerusalem council (Acts 15:1-35)
 - 2nd missionary journey (Acts 15:36 –18:22)
 - 3rd missionary journey (Acts 18:23–21:17)
 - Trip to Rome (Acts 21:18–28:31)



The second missionary journey is coming, at the end of Acts 15 through the first half of Acts 18. Sandwiched between missionary journey number one and missionary journey number two is something called the Jerusalem Council. When I post what the Scripture we are going to cover I give a title to each lesson. I decided to title this "A Quantum Leap," because here the church as it is being developed—which is what Luke is recording for us in the Book of Acts—takes a massive step forward in terms of its development to what we know it today.

That step could not have been made without the decision that is made here in Acts 15 regarding the Jerusalem Council. This is not the first Jerusalem Council; this is the second Jerusalem Council. The first Jerusalem Council is in Acts 11.

That was a big meeting that they had because a Gentile got saved, a guy named Cornelius in Caesarea. The Jewish leadership in Jerusalem did not believe that could happen. Peter, who led Cornelius to Christ, had to travel back to Jerusalem. He had to give his account of what happened—how this man came to Christ. When they heard what Peter said, they rejoiced. They accepted the idea that a Gentile really could get saved and be filled with the Holy Spirit just as they were in Acts 2.

By the time you get to Acts 15, we are now in our second Jerusalem Council. The issue here is not the same issue because they already resolved the first issue—can a Gentile get saved? The issue here is once a Gentile is saved, do they have to go under the Law of Moses to be a member of the church? That is what they are trying to figure out. Acts 11 was a justification issue related to the Gentiles. Acts 15 is what we would call an ecclesiological issue related to the Gentiles.

Unless someone gives you that background, you will be confused about this, because most people think this is the first council and they are trying to figure out if a Gentile can get saved. That is wrong on both accounts. This is not the first council. Can a Gentile get saved? They already have that tucked away under their belt. Now they are trying to figure out something different.

In a book where there are constant dreams and visions from God and the Holy Spirit speaking, you read Acts 15, and God does not say a single word. He is silent. They had to make this decision based on Scripture. They did not have a New Testament to cite because the New Testament had not been written yet.

In fact, the only book Paul had written up to this point in time was the Book of Galatians. We saw that last week. The only other books that would have been floating around would be the Epistle of James and Matthew's Gospel. Other than that, they had no New Testament, so they had to reason from the Bible that they had, which is Hebrew Bible, called the Tanakh, that we as Protestants refer to as the Old Testament. That is how they made this decision.

Here is an outline of the Jerusalem Council. This would be the second Jerusalem Council. There is the occasion for the council meeting (Acts 15:1-5). Then you have the declarations. Peter speaks up; James, who wrote the Epistle of James, the half-brother of Christ, is going to speak up; Paul and Barnabas are going to speak up. All of those individuals are weighing in (Acts 15:6-21).

Then the Jerusalem church is going to make a decision (Acts 15:22-29). The decision is going to be that the Gentiles do not have to come under the Law of Moses to be part of the church. The decision is going to be delivered to the rest of the churches (Acts 15:30-

35). Once you get past Acts 15:35, beginning in Acts 15:36, now we are into missionary journey number two, which will go all the way up through Acts 18:22.

Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35)

- I. Occasion (1-5)
 - A. Issue: Gentile circumcision (1)
 - B. Antioch's decision (2)
 - C. Journey to Jerusalem (3)
 - D. Arrival in Jerusalem (4-5)
 - 1. Reception by leadership (4)
 - 2. Opposition by Pharisees (5)
- II. Declarations (6-21)
- III. Decision (22-29)
- IV. Delivery (30-35)

With all of that being said, notice the occasion of this particular second Jerusalem Council meeting (Acts 15:1-5). The issue comes up. The issue is Gentile circumcision. Do the Gentiles have to be circumcised like the Jews in order to become part of the body of Christ? We pick it up there in Acts 15:1.

"Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved'" (Acts 15:1).

"Save" is a very broad term in the Bible. Sometimes it refers to your birth in Christ. Sometimes it refers to your growth in Christ. Sometimes it refers to your future glorification. "Saved" is used in the past tense, present tense, and future tense. Here "saved" is being used in the growth sense—the progressive sanctification sense.

What do you do with all these justified Gentiles? For them to grow in Christ and become part of the church? What do they need to do? Do they have to be circumcised like us Jews? As you know from the Law of Moses, once you go under part of it, you have to go under the whole thing. That is the issue that they are dealing with.

Essentially what happened was that Paul was very effective in his first missionary journey in southern Galatia. All the missionary journeys are going to be launched from Antioch at the northern tip of Israel. Virtually everywhere Paul went, he had trouble in the synagogues with the Jews, but when he went and preached the same gospel to the Gentiles, they started getting saved by the bushel, loads of them.

Now you have all these Christian Gentiles in the church. What do you do with these people? Do we put them under the Law of Moses to walk with God or not? That is the big decision that has to be made here. There is a group of people that came from Judea. Notice the language here: they *"came down from Judea."*

Jerusalem is in Judea, and Jerusalem is always up. That is why in your Bible Psalms 120-134 are called the Psalms of Ascent. The Jews had to show up at Jerusalem for different feast days three times a year. When they traveled to Jerusalem they went up, because Jerusalem is up. They sang these songs, or psalms, as they traveled upward. That is how they got the name Psalms of Ascent. If you are on a good Israel tour and your tour guide knows what they are doing, as the bus puts it into a gear to make the upward ascent to Jerusalem as you travel there, he will have you sing or he will teach on these various Psalms of Ascent, because Jerusalem is up.

When these men came down and they left Jerusalem, they went to Antioch because that is where Paul completed his missionary journey and gave his missions report. When it says they went down, it shows you that the person that wrote this book, Luke, knew the geography of Israel. That is something to think about, because a lot of people will tell you, "We do not know who wrote the Book of Acts. Some guy, long after the fact, wrote it." That is your typical liberal thinking. Obviously, the person that wrote this had very intricate knowledge of the land of Israel. He knew up and down, ascent and descent. You want to be sensitive to that as we go through the Book of Acts.

A bunch of people that were pharisaical came down from the Jerusalem area to Antioch, and they basically made this case that it is wonderful all these Gentiles are saved. We know they can be saved because of the first Jerusalem Council meeting (Acts 11), but we have to make these people go under the Law of Moses, starting with circumcision, to really grow as a Christian, to walk with Yahweh.

you notice that these Pharisees were brethren, so they were believers. This is not an issue of saved and unsaved. It is saved people arguing with other saved people related to how saved people grow. This is a discussion amongst the believers. Try not to read into this believer versus unbeliever. That is really not the issue. That word "brethren" tips us off to that.

What is being dealt with here is an ecclesiological issue. The leadership in Jerusalem was open to the idea that if a Gentile gets saved, they need to come under the Law of Moses to walk with God. The reason they thought that is because that is the way it worked for 1,500 years since Mount Sinai. Ever since Mount Sinai, if you have a Gentile salvation—and you do have some of those in the Old Testament—it was understood that they had to become what is called a proselyte, a Gentile convert to Judaism. They had to come under the commonwealth of Israel, the Law of Moses, to grow in their faith.

The most famous proselyte in the whole Old Testament is Ruth. Do you remember where Ruth came from? She came from Moab. She was a Moabitess. She was not Jewish originally. She was not Jewish at all, quite frankly. She was someone that became a believer in Yahweh. You know how the story of Ruth unfolds. Ruth the Moabitess said to her mother-in-law Naomi, who was a Hebrew:

"Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" (Ruth 1:16).

She went under Israeli law to walk with Yahweh. Obviously, the leadership in the early church thought that is how it is going to work in the Church Age, because that is how it had worked for the last 1,500 years. That is what they are having to figure out here.

There arose a group of people that came down from Judea and tried to put the Gentiles under the Law for them to walk with God, for them to grow in God. Anybody that mixes law with faith, according to the Bible, is a Pharisee. That is who the Pharisees were. What you will discover in the New Testament is that there are three kinds of Pharisees.

The first group of Pharisees are what I call the justification Pharisees. These are people that said faith in God is not enough to be justified. You have to have faith plus circumcision. Paul is always fighting with those people. Paul will say in Romans 4, "That is not how Abraham was saved, the father of Judaism, because he was saved in Genesis 15:6: 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness.' Circumcision did not come about until Genesis 17." Paul says, "Look at the order."

Jesus made a statement in Matthew 5:20, aimed at that crowd, the justification Pharisees:

"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven"
(Matthew 5:20).

What he is saying is, "Even the best law keepers ain't getting into heaven. They are not getting into the kingdom." I think He overthrew that group there, the justification Pharisees.

The second group of Pharisees are the group called the sanctification Pharisees. These are people that say, "You are saved by faith alone, but we are going to mix law plus faith to grow as a Christian. If you really want to grow as a Christian, you can have your faith, but you need to come under the Law of Moses to grow." That is who Paul is dealing with in the Book of Galatians, which he just wrote at the end of Acts 14.

The churches that he had planted on his first missionary journey had been invaded by this pharisaism and they were overridden by this legalism. Paul writes the whole Book of Galatians to dethrone Pharisee group number two. That is why he says:

"Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3).

What he is saying is, "Faith alone by the power of the Spirit got you in the door, so why would you reverse horses in midstream? It is faith alone, under the power of the Holy Spirit that helps you grow as a Christian. You do not go back under the Law of Moses to grow. You come under a new system called the Law of the Spirit." Sometimes it is called the Law of Christ.

God gives us new principles and He gives us the power through the Spirit to grow. It is a walk, moment by moment, accessing the power of the Holy Spirit by faith. That is how you grow as a Christian. You are not going to grow as a Christian by going back under a legal system and trying to white knuckle it, so to speak. That is what the Book of Galatians is about.

There is the third group of Pharisees. We are running into them right here in Acts 15:1, that is saying, "You have got to go under the Law of Moses to become part of the body of Christ. You better honor the feast days. You better show up on Saturday, not Sunday." I guess they would go so far as to say, "You better tithe."

Christians ask me a lot, "Should we tithe?" My answer is, "If you want to, then go for it, but it is not required." The principles for giving for the Church Age believer are found in 2 Corinthians 8:9, which is not a number. It is to give hilariously, give secretly, give generously, give proportionately.

The New Testament does not give us any number to follow. The concept of tithing really comes from the Mosaic Law. If you want to go under the Mosaic Law and you want to follow the tithing principles, then you really need to give a lot more than 10% because they had three tithes. There were two collected annually and one collected every three years. Your average or your Jew was obligated to give 23 and one-third percent of their income to the Lord.

This group of Pharisees was saying that the Christian had to be involved in all of that stuff, and they had to show up at the feast days. I like celebrating the feast days, learning about them. I respect them, but they are not mandatory or obligatory, because we are not under the Law of Moses, thanks to this decision that was handed down in Acts 15.

The justification Pharisees were overthrown in Matthew 5:20. The sanctification Pharisees were overthrown in Galatians 3:3. The ecclesiological Pharisees are going to be overthrown in Acts 15. These Pharisees keep showing up in the early church. They were there in the first Jerusalem Council meeting.

"And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him" (Acts 11:2).

"How dare you lead a Gentile to Christ without telling him he has to believe plus be under the Law."

"But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy on our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us under bondage" (Galatians 2:4).

That second group invaded the churches that Paul established, and they convinced them. That is why Paul says, "Who has bewitched you? You have abandoned the

principles of grace so quickly." They convinced them "you are saved by faith alone. That is nice, but you cannot grow unless we mix faith plus Mosaic Law." Galatians is aimed at that group.

Now here is the third group coming in saying, "You have to go under the Law of Moses through circumcision to be a part of the body of Christ." The way the Law of Moses is set up is that if you are guilty of part of it, you are guilty of all of it. They were not only saying circumcision, they were saying the whole package. That is how it had been for 1,500 years, and that is how it was going to be, even though they were in the age of the church.

You go down to verse two where Antioch has to make a decision. It says:

"And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some of them should go up to Jerusalem" (Acts 15:2).

Do you see the geographical references here? There is no way some guy wrote this 200 years after the Jews had been kicked out of the land, like liberals say. The person that wrote this obviously was an eyewitness and knew the geography of Israel really well, which would be Dr. Luke.

"...the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue" (Acts 15:2).

You will notice that when these ecclesiological Pharisees invaded Antioch, there was great dissension. Everything that was happening that was good at Antioch—and it was a magnificent church of which we have a description of it back in Acts 11:19-30. That is the sending church on the northern tip of Israel. That is where the believers were first called Christians. They were described as having the joy of the Lord. These Pharisees came in and caused an immediate rift and dissension, to the point where Paul and Barnabas had to be pulled into disputes and debates.

That is what legalism does. It wrecks your joy; it wrecks camaraderie; it wrecks unity in the church. Anytime someone is insisting on some set of rules that are not clearly given for the Church Age believer, it is very destructive and it is very damaging.

That is what was happening there at Antioch. It does not only say dissension, it says great dissension. Antioch makes a decision, the brethren—so this is a believing group—determine that Paul and Barnabas and some of the others of them are going to go back to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem and resolve this thing (Acts 15:2).

Paul, Barnabas, and others are now having to leave Antioch and go up to Jerusalem to talk to the rest of the apostles and elders to get this thing solved. Peter already went

through this in Acts 11, with the conversion of Cornelius. He had to explain himself to the apostles and elders that, "In fact, Cornelius was saved by faith alone, without any allegiance to the Mosaic Law whatsoever."

Next it mentions who Paul and Barnabas—who had gone on missionary journey number one and returned to Antioch—and the others would talk to. There are two groups here, the apostles and the elders. Who are the apostles? The apostles are the ones that were with Christ from the beginning, the Twelve. Matthias replaced Judas, they were still living, most of them. They were the ones that had to make this decision because the church, beginning in Acts 2, was built on the foundation of the apostles, we are told.

Ephesians 2 analogizes the church to a temple or a building, and every building has a foundation:

"[The church] having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

In that metaphorical language, analogizing the church to a building or a temple, the first stone that goes into the ground is the most important one. It is called the cornerstone because you use that stone to figure out where every other stone goes. That stone is like the measuring rod. That is Jesus. He is the cornerstone of the church. Then came the foundation stones, and that is the apostles and the prophets. The rest of the structure is built on that sound foundation.

The Lord has been building that as more and more people have been saved for the last 2,000 years. He has been building the walls. I would argue that today He is putting on the roof, because it looks like the Church Age is winding down. Although I am not a date setter nor the son of a date setter, but that is the way it looks to me with the world and the way it is moving.

It mentions not only the apostles, but the elders. The first time we had a glimpse of elders was at Antioch and Jerusalem in Acts 11:30:

"And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders" (Acts 11:30).

We know who the apostles are. They are the original Twelve, with Matthias replacing Judas, who committed suicide. But who are the elders? It is not until Acts 11 that we start learning about the elders. Who are the elders? The elders are the ones that are going to replace the apostles, because the apostles are going to die off.

You cannot have a church without leaders. The model for church government that we think fits best with the New Testament is the elder model that is a congregation governed by a plurality of qualified godly men. That structure is now coming into place

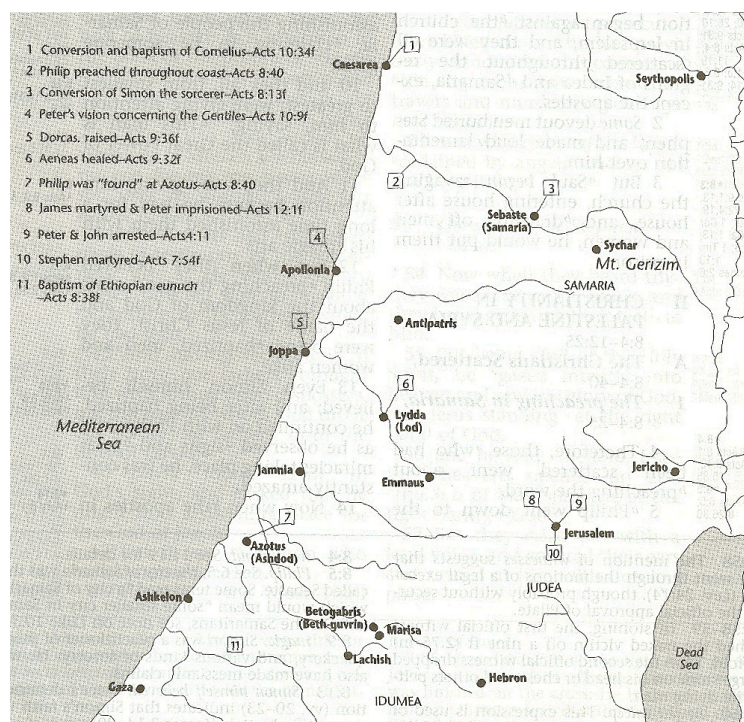
because the apostles are not going to live forever, and they are going to be replaced, leadership-wise, by the elders.

I will again point out that as Paul and Barnabas and the others are traveling from Antioch back to Jerusalem to get this ecclesiological issue solved, they are not going down, but are going up. It fits the geography of the time period, if it is everything we know about the geography and time in which the Bible was written.

Then you go down to Acts 15:3 and you see the journey to Jerusalem:

"Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren" (Acts 15:3).

Here come Paul, Barnabas, and others traveling from Antioch to Jerusalem. They are passing through Phoenicia, and they are passing through Samaria. As they are passing through, they are talking about what happened on their first missionary journey, where all these Gentiles got saved without any allegiance to the Mosaic Law whatsoever.



As they were narrating these events, people started to rejoice. Phoenicia was known as a Gentile area. Samaria was a half-breed group. That is where a great revival broke out in Samaria in Acts 8. That is why those particular groups are rejoicing the more Paul and Barnabas were talking about God's favor to the Gentiles on the first missionary journey.

This is where Samaria is. This is where Jerusalem is, down here. I have the word Samaria underlined, but it is more like a county kind of thing. Judea is down here. It

would actually encompass Jerusalem. Judea and Samaria are like counties, using modern-day vernacular. Jerusalem would be an actual city. Those are the areas of geography that Paul and Barnabas and others are passing through as they are making their way to Jerusalem to get this issue solved.

It is bringing joy to a lot of people. It is a relief. People are figuring out that God is saving people, and it has zero to do with the Mosaic Law. It has zero to do with ritual. It has zero to do with adherence to the Mosaic Law. It is simply by faith alone.

Next you see their arrival in Jerusalem. There is a reception by the leadership in Jerusalem (Acts 15:4). As is always the case whenever God's freedom is moving, the Pharisees will show up and try to counter it. There is opposition by the Pharisees (Acts 15:5).

Notice the reception by the leaders of Paul and Barnabas and the others traveling from Antioch:

"When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them" (Acts 15:4).

Notice that in their meeting with the apostles—the foundation of the church—and also the elders, those leaders that would replace the apostles as they began to die off, Paul and Barnabas were reporting everything that God had done. On the first missionary journey, virtually everywhere they went, the Jews and the synagogue rejected it, so they went out amongst the Gentiles, and the Gentiles started getting saved. Then the Jews got jealous and drove them from one city to the next. They are explaining, basically, how it worked. "Here is what happened."

Look at the opposition by the Pharisees:

"But some of the the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up" (Acts 15:5).

See that these are saved people. They are regenerated. They are born again, but they are legalists. They are demanding that this new group of Gentiles that have been saved go under the Law of Moses, not to be justified, but to be part of the body of Christ.

Again, this is not an unsaved versus saved issue. These are saved people, legalistic saved people. There are people that are like this, that are always demanding that Christians follow some kind of code or rule book. "Do not smoke or chew or go with girls who do."

I do not know what rules people are coming up with today. You go into some churches and there are rules about women and what they can wear—should their dress cover their knees, and all of these kinds of things. It is like, "You know what? The person has

been in the Lord for three weeks. Why don't we give them a little chance to grow before we put them under some kind of code or rule book? Particularly when the code or rule book really is not found in the Bible anywhere?" It is just man made.

I have had people come here and tell us that we are doing our communion service wrong. I said, "Why is that?" "You do the communion before the sermon and you are supposed to do it after the sermon." I said, "Why is that?" "That is how we did it at our other church." I am like, "That is nice, but can you give me a verse or something that says, 'Thus saith the Lord, 'Communion has to be done after the sermon?'"

The fact of the matter is, the Bible is silent on that. Jesus said, "Do it regularly." There are some churches that say you have to do it every week, and they demand that. Other churches say you have to do it every quarter. We do it every month here, but that is just a decision that we have made amongst ourselves. It is not something that we are trying to force on other churches, because every church leadership has to think that through on their own and see where the Lord is leading them.

The moment the way one church does something becomes a rule book that everyone has to follow, then all of a sudden you are not in the grace of God anymore, you know you are into a bunch of man-made rules which will suffocate your freedom in Christ. It will suck the joy right out of the room the moment you move into that, the moment we move into this legalism.

We have to be on guard against that. People that come out of substance abuse, you will notice that when they first come out of it—and praise God they came out of it—get extremely legalistic really quickly about what you can see, what you cannot see. I had a roommate that was a recovering alcoholic. He had all these rules about what you can have in the refrigerator and what you could not have in the refrigerator. What kind of stuff you can pour on your food, and what kind of chemicals were in it.

I tried to respect his rules the best I could, because I did not want to be a stumbling block to him. Paul says we should not use our freedom in a way that tears someone down. But then it got into rules about can we have a Christmas tree in the apartment? Can we not have a Christmas tree in the apartment? At some point, you start to recognize this is not the Holy Spirit. This is somebody that is so afraid of going back into licentiousness, because they have reaped all the bad consequences of that, that they are setting up a bunch of rules.

It is similar to what Eve did in Eden when she said, concerning the command about the tree of knowledge, "God said that we cannot touch it" (Genesis 3:3). Look at the original command. God never said anything about touching it, but she was so fearful about violating the command that she made up her own rule. That is pharisaism; that is legalism. The technical word for that is "building a fence around the Law."

The Pharisees did this kind of stuff constantly with Jesus. That is why He was always in conflict with them. They did not want to violate the Sabbath because they knew that if

they violated the Sabbath, that could lead back to the deportation that they had in Babylon. After the Babylonian captivity they passed all of these rules and regulations on what you could and could not do on the Sabbath. It is called Talmud and Mishnah.

There was a Palestinian Talmud, and there was a Babylonian Talmud. I had to read a lot of this stuff when I was in seminary. These rules are just exhausting. It is like reading the IRS tax code. It wears you down reading all of this—whether you could use the bathroom on the Sabbath. That was actually one of the rules. If you have to go to the bathroom on the Sabbath, you better hold that in and you better pray the sun comes up really quickly.

Jesus would heal someone on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees would just freak out over that, because He broke their rule. Jesus would have His disciples eat on the Sabbath. They freaked out about that because they broke their rule.

Jesus said in Mark 7:13, "You have made null the word of God through your traditions." What started off well intentioned, the tail started to wag the dog, and the rules became more important than God's Word. That is why Jesus says, "I am the Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8; Luke 6:5). Let me tell you what the Sabbath is about: it is meant to be a blessing to man. If I heal someone on the Sabbath, you should be happy. If I feed someone on the Sabbath, you should be happy."

They were so focused on their rule book that they lost the original intent of what the Sabbath was about. That is a basic conflict between grace and legalism. That is why you have all of these Sabbath controversies in the New Testament, and that is the kind of thing that is going on here.

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

They have to be circumcised, and it is not going to stop there with these new Gentile converts. They have to submit to the entire Law of Moses. That situation, coming from these ecclesiological Pharisees, leads to the debate and the discussion that is going to happen beginning in Acts 15:6. You see the occasion for this meeting. Paul and Barnabas have left Antioch and are going to Jerusalem to get this matter fixed. The Pharisees are harassing them in Antioch. The Pharisees are harassing them in Jerusalem. This is not a justification issue, but more of a growth or ecclesiological issue.

- III. Declarations (6-21)
 - A. Meeting convened (6)
 - B. Peter's address (7-11)
 - C. Barnabas' and Paul's testimony (12)
 - D. James' address (13-21)

Here come the declarations (Acts 15:6-21). First, the meeting is convened (Acts 15:6). Then Peter speaks up. Peter is brilliant here. He is short and sweet, and what he says is just irrefutable, in my opinion (Acts 15:7-11). Then Paul and Barnabas speak up briefly (Acts 15:12). Next this guy named James, the half-brother of Christ.

We call him the half-brother of Christ because he shared the same mother of Jesus, Mary, but not the same father, because Jesus was born of a virgin. Joseph was not his biological father, but Joseph was James' biological father. That is why we call him the half-brother of Christ. He is the one that would become the pastor at the church at Jerusalem. He is the one that wrote—probably already or close to this time—the little Epistle of James, only five chapters. He is the one that died a martyr's death. They basically pushed him off the wall.

We know from extrabiblical tradition that surrounded Jerusalem, according to one account, as he lay there on the ground suffering, they came and expedited his death by throwing rocks at him till he was dead. He was known as camel knees in the early church, because he had these big, thick calluses on his knees because he was a man of prayer. He was on his knees praying so much that he developed these calluses.

He is a heavy hitter, and he comes in in Acts 15:13-21. God has not said anything to him. There is no vision. He is reasoning from the Book of Amos, brilliantly.

Notice Acts 15:6. The meeting has convened:

"The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter" (Acts 15:6).

We know the difference between the apostles and the elders. Now I just want to say one thing. There are a lot of people running around today who want to have another meeting like this. They are upset about some issue taking place within Christianity, and they say, "We want another Jerusalem Council to solve this matter."

One of the guys that has advocated is a guy named Hugh Ross, who is into the Creation ministry. I am not a fan of his at all. He does not believe in a global flood. He believes in death before Adam. He takes a very old, ancient date for the Creation of the cosmos. He believes each of the Creation days is an age, not a literal 24-hour day. He is one of these kinds of guys.

I am a little embarrassed to say this, but I was in the church that basically launched him before anybody knew who he was in Southern California. Now he is famous, and the guy has this tremendous ability to take Christians who believe in the original Creation account literally, the way we teach it at this church, and to shift them on it.

He gets Christians to believe that believing in evolution and things like that is not that big of a deal. As we here at this church teach, it is a big deal, because it goes against what God said. If you damage the foundation of the Bible, you are damaging the Bible.

Hugh Ross's ideas are called progressive creationism. He is out there teaching all this stuff.

Then the young earth creationist group, which our church is more affiliated with, pushes back at him. The criticism of him was severe. This was long after our church had launched him. I was just a college student at the time. I did not know up from down. I was not in leadership at all. I was in this apostate church, and I ultimately grabbed the best thing in the church and left, which was my wife. There was one good thing that came out of it.

Hugh Ross, when people pushed back, would say, "We need to have another Jerusalem Council meeting and get this issue fixed. We need to hear from all the theologians and all the scientists, and we need a ruling on this." He was appealing to Acts 15. In "Charisma Magazine" in June 2003:

"Ross advocated for a second Jerusalem Council on creation following the model in The Acts of the Apostles, where the early Church leaders held a summit to hammer out an agreement on a contentious issue of whether or not Gentile converts should be required to follow Jewish customs and law. He believes the creation controversy is the biggest issue facing the church, more significant than the question of women's roles, 'because of the impact it is having on evangelism.'" ¹

He thinks the way to win people to Christ is you come up with an understanding of creation that does not challenge people's evolutionary presuppositions, old earth creationist presuppositions. He claims we need to change this because it is inhibiting our evangelism. That is his basic perspective.

My response to that is that the answer for unbelief is not more unbelief. The way you lead people to Christ is confrontational. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). I became a Christian because I heard a truthful, confrontational presentation of Jesus that challenged my presuppositions, and I started to understand that God was not interested in taking my pagan presuppositions.

I believed all the evolutionary stuff, too. I went K-12 to public school. They taught me evolution was a fact, and I believed it. When I was led to Christ, I did not have somebody telling me, "You can believe that, but you can have Jesus, too." What I heard was truth, and that is how I got saved.

Hugh Ross is saying that we need to water this down because we are keeping people away from Christ. It is the same kind of thing. It is a discussion amongst believers. I think Hugh Ross is a believer. I just do not think his approach is right. Because this issue is so contentious, he wants to have another Jerusalem Council meeting.

¹A. Butcher, "He Sees God in the Stars", *Charisma* (June 2003), p. 38–44. J. Sarfati "Shame on Charisma!" creation.com/rosspc, May 29, 2003.

I am not only picking on the creation issue. There are all kinds of other issues I have noticed that have come up over the years, and people want to do different things, and they want to have another Jerusalem Council to give some kind of authority to what it is they are teaching.

The truth is, you cannot have another Jerusalem Council. Why? Because it was convened by the apostles. Do we have apostles today? They are long gone. Only to the apostles, who were the foundations of the church and who were given the authority of binding and loosing (Matthew 16:19), could have a meeting like this. Anybody today that suggests, for whatever motive, another Jerusalem Council meeting, the whole thing is laughable, because you do not have apostles today.

There is a technical definition for an apostle. It is back in Acts 1 where Matthias was going to replace Judas. The criteria was that you had to have been with Jesus from the beginning of His earthly ministry, and you had to have seen the resurrected Christ. I have people today that tell me they are apostles, and I usually try to answer with a little humor. Sometimes you get more bees with honey than vinegar. I usually say something like, "You look good for your age. What are your exercise tips? Because you should be about 2,000 years old right now."

I used to do that kind of stuff with my students who were very into this, who thought they were apostles and all of this kind of stuff. I found that approach worked better because at least it got them thinking, rather than me just getting angry at them, which is my human tendency.

But Jonathan Sarfati said:

"Such an idea is preposterous, because the Jerusalem Council involved the Apostles (Acts 15:6), thus James's decision in verse 13 had apostolic authority. Jesus gave the power of 'binding and loosening, loosing' to Peter, then to all His apostles (Matthew 16:20). In a Jewish frame of reference, these terms had legislative meanings: 'to bind' meant to forbid something, and 'to loose' meant to permit something. No one today has this level of authority."²

You have it at Bethel in Redding, California. You have this New Apostolic Reformation that they are pushing. The whole idea is that they think they are apostles and they could recognize other apostles. Once you do that, you take the actual apostles and you diluted their authority. If Pastor So-and-so was an apostle, then I need to put his teachings in Revelation 23. If he is an apostle, he is writing under direct inspiration.

The fact of the matter is, his sermon might be very inspiring, but it does not rise to the level of this book, because the book, the canon of Scripture, has been shut for 2,000

² Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise*, 36.

years. John, the last of the apostles, died in AD 95. That is why you cannot have another Jerusalem Council meeting, as much as people try to push this.

"A major reason for the need for such authority was that the New Testament was not yet written, so the Church needed to be guided by the Apostles. Now that the Canon of Scripture is closed, and the Apostles are no longer alive, the Church is to be guided by Scripture alone (2 Tim. 3:15-17)."³

Jonathan Sarfati, in his book "Refuting Compromise," is discrediting, I think rightfully so, what Hugh Ross is promoting.

The meeting is convened by the apostles. The decision is going to be binding and mandatory because of the presence of the apostles. It is the apostles, Peter included, that were given the power of binding and loosing. In Matthew 16:19, Jesus said to Peter,

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

That is not a power that I wield as a pastor or as a Bible teacher, because I am not an apostle, but Peter wielded that power because he had apostolic authority, and he could make decisions under the guidance of the Spirit that were on par with the Bible. In fact, there are even two books that he wrote in the Bible, called 1 and 2 Peter.

The meeting is convened and Peter is going to speak up there, in Acts 15:7-11. He is going to explain that God chose Gentile salvation (Acts 15:7) because of what happened in Acts 11. He goes, "Don't you all remember what we decided in Acts 11? The Gentiles could get saved." Then he is going to say, "The Spirit authenticated Gentile salvation (Acts 15:8-9), because what has happened to these Gentiles that got saved is that they were filled with the Holy Spirit immediately, just like us Jews were at the beginning (Acts 2). What happened to these Gentiles happened to us. What happened to Cornelius happened to us. What happened on the first missionary journey with all of these Gentile salvations happened to us Jews."

Then Peter is going to say something that is humorous, but it is brilliant (Acts 15:10). He says, "You know us Jews, when it comes to law keeping, we are really bad at it. We stink. Look at our history. This is why we went into captivity. We were sacrificing our children to Molech. You want to talk about a bunch of lawbreakers. We Jews, we Hebrews, have been idolaters and rebellious against God in our whole history." He says, "Do you think these Gentiles are going to do better? It is silly to try to put them under the Law when we Jews have done such a terrible job keeping it?"

³ Ibid.

Finally, he is going to give his conclusion (Acts 15:11), which is basically, "We believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way as they are. We got into this program by grace through faith, so that is how we are going to grow—by grace, through faith—under the law of the Spirit, not by putting a bunch of people back under the Mosaic Law. That is coming in Acts 15:7-11.

Here comes the heavy hitter, the half-brother of Christ. James is going to speak up. He is going to quote the Book of Amos, and he is going to talk beginning in Acts 15:13. Paul and Barnabas will talk Acts 15:12, but James is going to come in beginning in Acts 15:13. He is going to quote the Book of Amos, because that is the only thing to quote. God is not speaking here. There is no New Testament to quote. He seals the deal. That's all she wrote.

The decision is made. "We are not going to put these Gentiles under the Law of Moses to join the church." They are going to make their decision, and it is going to spread everywhere, and everybody is going to be really happy about it. I hope you are happy about it, because, if the decision went the other way, you guys would be looking a lot more Jewish than you look.