

Acts 085
An Impossible Burden
Acts 15:7-10
October 29, 2025
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If we could take our Bibles this evening and open them to Acts 15:7. I am going to try, if time permits, to look at Acts 15:7-12 this evening. We are in Acts 15, in that third section of the Book of Acts where Jesus said the gospel, via the church, will go to the remote parts of the earth, which is Acts 13-28.

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)



We have gone through the first missionary journey of that section (Acts 13-14). For two and a half years, Paul and Barnabas are very effective in that missionary journey into southern Galatia. This is really the first missionary team that has ever been sent out from the land of Israel.

You look at the Old Testament prophets and none of them went on mission trips except one. Who am I thinking of? Jonah. Actually, Jonah is the only example we have of any kind of missionary in the Old Testament, and he is the only example of a successful prophet. Every one of the prophets' messages were rejected. Here Jonah is wildly successful, and he spends the rest of his days pouting about his success. It is really funny when you look at the story of Jonah.

The nation of Israel basically had a come and see approach. That is why Solomon built the temple in 966 BC. The whole goal was to get the world to come and learn of God through the temple. That is why the Queen of Sheba took a journey of 1,200 miles, which we learn about in Kings and Chronicles—pre airplane, pre luxury ship—to sit at Solomon's feet and learn of his wisdom.

That is why Jesus was so angry when He went into the temple, and He found that they had turned the temple into the First Colony Mall. The whole purpose was for people to

come and learn about who God was, and they had turned it into a commercial enterprise. That is why He overturned the tables and so forth.

Israel had the come and see approach, and the church, as we are learning, is different. It is not come and see, it is a send and go philosophy. Send the missionaries out. I sometimes wonder if some of our megachurches today understand that, because it looks like they have built these beautiful edifices, and really the purpose of the church is to equip the saints so they can go out. Israel's strategy was, "Come and see the beauty and the architecture of the temple and learn of God," and all of that kind of stuff.

Paul goes out with Barnabas on this first missionary journey. He is crazy successful, not with the Jews and the synagogues in the different cities in which he went, but with the Gentiles. Now what is happening is the church is on the precipice of becoming primarily a Gentile body. They have to figure out, "What are we going to do with all these Gentiles?"

The leadership in Jerusalem is still Jewish, so they need to have a meeting to figure this out. They have already figured out that a Gentile can get saved. They had to have a big meeting about that (Acts 11). Peter testified to how Cornelius was brought to Christ under God's power through Peter. The church finally concluded, "Yes, a Gentile can get saved."

Now that a Gentile can get saved and God is saving Gentiles by the bushel—the bucket load, the droves, whatever metaphor you want to use—the issue is, "What do we do with all these people? Do we put them under the Law of Moses to be part of the church?"

That is how it worked for 1,500 years. If you wanted to walk with God as a Gentile—like Ruth who was from Moab, who said to her mother-in-law, "Your God will be my God, your people will be my people"—they called them proselytes. You had to go under the Law of Moses. There is a thinking amongst the Jewish leadership that that is how it is going to work in the Church Age.

They have a big meeting here in Acts 15, which is really not the first Jerusalem Council. This is the second one. People mislabel this as the first Jerusalem Council. The first one was in Acts 11 where they were trying to figure out, "Can a Gentile get saved?" That issue has been put to rest. Now they are trying to figure out, "To be part of the church, do saved Gentiles have to come under the Law of Moses like it was in Old Testament times for proselytes?" That is the issue that is being resolved here in Acts 15.

Acts 15 follows Acts 14. Can I get an amen on that? Acts 14 is all the success Paul had amongst the Gentiles bringing them to Christ. Now that there is this giant population of Gentiles in the Church Age in the body of Christ, I have to figure out what their relationship is going to be with the Law of Moses.

So that is what is going on in Acts 15. Here is an outline of the second Jerusalem Council, as we'll call it:

Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35)

- I. Occasion (1-5)
- II. Declarations (6-21)
 - A. Meeting convened (6)
 - B. Peter's address (7-11)
 - 1. God chose Gentile salvation (7)
 - 2. Spirit authenticated Gentile salvation (8)
 - 3. Peter's challenge (10)
 - 4. Peter's conclusion (11)
 - C. Barnabas' and Paul's testimony (12)
 - D. James' address (13-21)
- III. Decision (22-29)
- IV. Delivery (30-35)

You have the occasion (Acts 15:1-7). The occasion is success with the Gentiles. What do we do with these people? Paul and Barnabas leave Antioch, which is at the northern tip of Israel, and that is where they started their first missionary journey. All the missionary journeys are going to start from Antioch—every single one of them. Missionary journey number three is going to end at Antioch.

Now they are back in Antioch giving their missions report. At Sugar Land Bible Church, we call it the missions moment, but they had more than five minutes to do their report. The Greek word that is used there is "tell a long story." They told a long story of all their success under God's power in the first missionary journey.

Here come the legalists. They always show up right when God is at work, demanding that these new converts go under the Law of Moses. It was causing dissension in Antioch, which is quite an accomplishment, because everything we have learned of Antioch is that it was a church that was really built on love and unity. Here come legalists destroying unity, which is what legalism always does. They are demanding people do something beyond what God wants done.

It is an ecclesiological issue. It is not a soteriological issue about salvation. It is an ecclesiological issue, meaning church. Do saved people have to come under the Law of Moses? What is normal in the Church Age? This is the issue.

Paul and Barnabas leave Antioch up north and they travel to Jerusalem. The geography is exactly accurate. They travel up to Jerusalem, which is geographically the way it worked. They go in front of the rest of the apostles, and they have this big meeting there in Jerusalem. The meeting starts, and here come the declarations in the meeting (Acts 15:6-21).

First of all, the meeting is convened (Acts 17:6). The only people that could convene a meeting like this would be the apostles. You cannot have something like this happening today because the apostles are all dead, right? Jesus built the church on the foundation

of the apostles, and whatever decision they are going to come up with is going to affect the church as a whole, Christendom as a whole, Christianity as a whole.

A lot of groups get together and they want to make a decision today that is going to affect everybody in the church around the world. I like to say, "Are you guys apostles? What gives you the authority to make these decisions?" Jesus gave the power of binding and loosing only to the apostles.

The first guy that speaks at this whole thing is Peter (Acts 15:7-11). We are going to try to cover Peter, and then we are going to try to cover also, Lord willing, Paul and Barnabas' testimony (Acts 15:12). Notice what Peter says in Acts 15:7, that God chose the Gentiles for salvation. That is how Peter opens things up.

It says, *"After there had been much debate."* You will notice that the Pharisees, who were mixing law and faith, had their say. Their microphones were not cut off. They were not canceled the way people are canceled today if they say something that goes against somebody's narrative. The legalists got their full chance to say whatever they wanted to say. But the verse continues:

"...Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe'" (Acts 15:7).

This is interesting because it is the last time we are going to hear from Peter in the Book of Acts. All the way through the Book of Acts, there has been a transition from Peter to Paul. Peter has been the main guy in the first twelve chapters, and now Paul is being raised up as the main guy. We have a transition from Jerusalem to Antioch in terms of church leadership, from Peter to Paul, from Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria—which you see really in the first twelve chapters of the Book of Acts—to the remote parts of the earth under Peter.

The outreach was primarily Jewish, but now the gospel more aggressively is going out to the Gentiles. Paul is going to come along and replicate a lot of the same things Peter does. What Peter does at the beginning of the book Paul replicates in the second half of the book, showing us that Paul, even though he was not one of the original Twelve, is an authentic apostle.

Both healed a man lame from birth. Peter, healed by a shadow; Paul, by a handkerchief. Both were very successful, to the point that it invoked jealousy from the Jews. Both confronted a sorcerer, both raised someone from the dead, and both miraculously were released from jail.

Peter is just going to disappear, and Paul is going to be raised up more prominently. What happened to Peter?

Arnold Fruchtenbaum says:

"After having spoken to the disciples, Peter departed, and went to another place ([Acts 12:17b]. He fled out of Jerusalem. Luke chose not to disclose where Peter went, but we do know something about Peter's travels from other passages. According to 1 Corinthians, 9:5, he had an itinerant ministry; according to 1 Corinthians 1:12, he spent some time in Corinth; according to Galatians 2:11, he was in Antioch of Pisidia; according to 1 Peter 1:1, he was in Asia Minor; and according to 1 Peter 5:13, he was in Babylon."¹

By the way, Peter was with his wife, because his wife is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9:5, which really upsets the Roman Catholics because they want Peter to be the first pope and they want to teach the celibacy of the priesthood. What is their first pope doing married? We know he was married because Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. It is hard to have a mother-in-law unless you are married.

In fact, he is going to write two letters from Babylon called 1 and 2 Peter, and he is going to tell you where he wrote it from: "She who is in Babylon" (1 Peter 5:13). The "she," that could be his wife. I am not sure his wife would want to go with him to Babylon. "Come on, honey, we are going to go to Iraq today." Maybe the "she" is the church in Babylon, because the Greek noun for church is "ekklesia," which is a feminine noun. However you take that, he was clearly in Babylon.

"She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark" (1 Peter 5:13).

Where is Babylon? It is modern-day Iraq. It is between the Euphrates and the Tigris. Why would Peter go to Babylon? He went to Babylon because Paul explained that Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and Peter was the apostle to the Jews; Paul the apostle to the uncircumcised, Peter was primarily the apostle to the circumcised. He explains all of that in Galatians 2:7-8.

Guess where the Jews were? They were in Babylon. Babylon was the place in the Old Testament where they went into the 70-year captivity. You say, "Wait a minute. I thought they came out of the 70-year captivity." Read the genealogical reports in Ezra and Nehemiah as they came out of Babylon. The number that came out was quite insignificant compared to the total population that went into the Babylonian captivity.

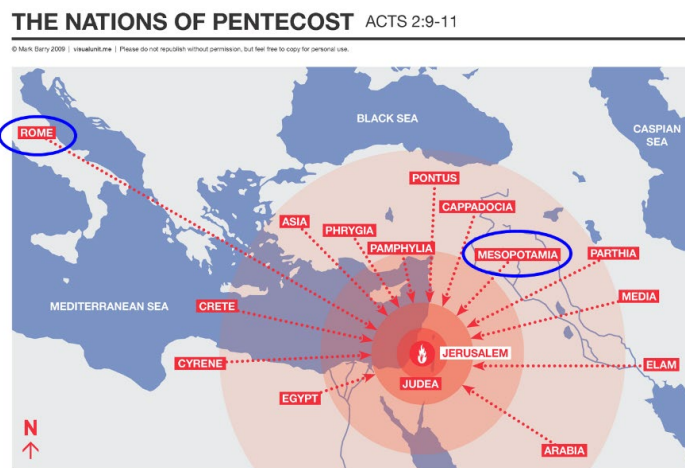
Many of the Jews stayed in Babylon. Because they were Jews, a lot of them showed up on the day of Pentecost since the Jews are commanded three times a year to show up in Jerusalem to celebrate various feasts. They were there to hear Peter preach on the day of Pentecost, where 3,000 people were saved.

¹ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 276.

Acts 2:9-11 mentions all the groups that were there on the day of Pentecost. Some were there from Mesopotamia. "Meso" means "middle," and "potamia" means "rivers," as in you might recognize the word Potomac—the middle of the rivers is between the Euphrates and the Tigris. The Jews called that area Shinar. You will see that in Daniel 1:2.



That is where Babylon is, 58 miles south of Baghdad. It is where the Tower of Babel once stood (Genesis 11:2). It is where Abraham was called out of that region to walk by faith. God, through Abraham, formed what we now know as the nation of Israel. Some of those people, the Jews still remaining there, even after the 70-year captivity was long over, were there to hear Peter preach on the day of Pentecost.



Here is a map of all of the people on the day of Pentecost that were there to hear Peter preach. We know from Acts 2 that a lot of them came from Babylon. Here is Mesopotamia that I am talking about. There were people from Rome also, but Rome is in the west. Babylon is in the east. Peter did not go to Rome. He went to Babylon.

"Doesn't Babylon mean Rome in 1 Peter 5:13?" No it does not. Babylon means Babylon. The Bible knows how to use the word Rome when it wants to use the word

Rome. In fact, you have a whole book in your Bible called the Book of Romans. There is no reason not to take God at His word.

For Peter as the apostle to the Jews, it would have been very logical for him to travel to Babylon. In fact, Josephus, the first-century historian who lived shortly after the time of Christ, talks about Babylon, where there were "Jews in great numbers,"² he says. There is no reason not to take God at His Word.

Everybody that wants you to believe Peter actually wrote 1 Peter from Rome is coming at it really from a Roman Catholic point of view, because they want to make Peter the first pope, and that is why they do not want you to know that he was married. That is why they want you to believe that he actually wrote 1 Peter from Rome.

I looked into this very carefully, and found that all of the tradition that locates Peter in Rome starts a good hundred years after 1 Peter 5:13 was written. It is just shocking the number of Bible commentators that will tell you, "It says Babylon, but he was really in Rome." Even one of my heroes, Dr. Charles Ryrie, does that in his Ryrie Study Bible.

I have been to Rome. I have been to Vatican City. They make you go through all these metal detectors and walls to get in there, which was really funny to me because the Pope, at the time, was condemning Donald Trump with his wall, saying it was unchristian to have a wall. I am thinking, "Have you guys looked at your own place here?" The Pope does not only live behind a wall; he lives behind multiple walls. He is giving this speech from behind a wall about how having a wall is somehow unchristian.

They show you this whole song and dance. That place is loaded with every kind of treasure you can imagine—beautiful artwork, anything you could think of of wealthy proportions. You take this big tour through there and see all that, and what they do not tell you is how they got all that money. They got all that money through the sale of indulgences, going back over a thousand years, pre Martin Luther, actually.

This is what Luther was so angry about, because they just ripped off the people from one generation to the next by saying things like this:

"When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs."

Johann Tetzel, in the time of Luther, gave these sermons about how your deceased relatives are in purgatory. They are agonizing. They are saying, "Why don't you get us out of here?" If you just paid the right price to the priest, they would get out.

The poor people. Why didn't they just read their Bible and figure out that purgatory is an unbiblical doctrine? It is hard to do when you cannot read. It was October 31st, 1517 that Luther nailed the 95 theses to the door there in Wittenberg, Germany, talking about his disagreements with the Roman Catholic Church. One of the things that really ticked him off was the rip off that they were doing to these peasants who could not read.

² Josephus, *Antiquities*, 15.3.2.

All over Europe, no one had Bibles. The Bible is literally—you can see paintings of it and things—chained to the pulpits. The people were basically told, "You cannot understand the Bible, even if you could read it and had one." That is why Martin Luther is so big on printing Bibles and raising literacy standards, because he did not want to go back to the dark ages where people were manipulated through the sale of indulgences.

That is how the public school system started in the United States. In Massachusetts, there is something called the Old Satan Deluder Law of 1647. Basically, they say, "When the population starts to grow, we are going to start schools so people can become literate." It was not so that they could all pick the best stocks and retire early, but so that they could read the Bible.

The law actually says, "We know that Satan's goal is to blind people of the truth of the Bible." Then the law says, "As in former times." And you say, "What former times is it talking about?" These are all children of the reformers that came to our country—the pilgrims—and they were still reacting against the Dark Ages when they did not have Bibles, could not read, and were manipulated by the priesthood.

The spiritual children of Luther, when they came to the United States of America, said, "We are never going to let that happen again. Everybody needs to be able to read so they can read the Bible for themselves, so that we do not have a repeat of the Dark Ages." That is what Luther was pulling Christendom out of.

Keep that in mind when you hear all these talking heads on cable TV talking about how the Bible should not be in the public schools. Are you kidding me? The public schools were started to teach the Bible. That is the whole point of it. They want to get the Bible out of everything. It is just amazing how things have deteriorated.

When you go to the Vatican, you take the tour through this place in Vatican City and you see all this wealth. It was a cruise, so we cruised around there in the Mediterranean and visited different biblical sites. We also spent five days in Israel, went to Crete, the Island of Cyprus, and all kinds of places. When we get back from it and I am safe in the boat and the ship is sailing, I get chances to teach on the boat.

I said, "I hope you guys understand that that whole song and dance that we just saw is a total sham and a total lie. First of all, all that money they have in there they got by stealing from illiterate peasants over a period of more than a thousand years, called the Dark Ages. Number two, they tried really hard to convince you that Peter, their first pope, was in Rome, when I believe Peter was in Babylon not Rome (1 Peter 5:13)."

I am not saying do not go there and visit. It is neat to see all that, but you have to understand that the whole thing is just a total, satanic deception. Peter did not go to Rome. At least he did not write 1 Peter 5:13 from Rome. He wrote it in the city of Babylon, which makes perfectly logical sense, because he was the apostle to the

circumcised, and that is where the circumcised were. They were in Babylon in great numbers.

That is where Peter is going. We are not going to hear much about him. I do not think we are going to hear anything more from him in the rest of the Book of Acts. The whole name of the game is going to be the Apostle Paul.

What does Peter say here at this conference council?

"...Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe'" (Acts 15:7).

He is referring back about 8 to 10 years earlier in Acts 10-11, where he led Cornelius to Christ. He is saying, "Do you know what? God has always contemplated that this time in history would come when he would favor the Gentiles in the age of the church."

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).

Peter has the keys. What does a key do? It opens the door. Once the door is open, it stays open. It is Peter that leads the first Jews to Christ in the Church Age—3,000 in Acts 2. It is Peter that comes from Jerusalem to lay hands on the Samaritans, a half-breed race, who had received Christ, that they might receive the Holy Spirit in Acts 8. It is Peter who leads the first full-fledged Gentile—not a hybrid race Samaritan, part Jew and part Babylonian, as in Acts 8—but an uncircumcised Gentile to Christ. That was Cornelius in Acts 10.

Peter took those keys that Jesus gave him and he opened three doors. He opened the gospel to the Jews and once it was opened, it stayed open. He opened the gospel to the Samaritans, and once the door was opened, it stayed open. Then a third time he opened the door of the gospel to the Gentiles. Once it is open, it stays open. That is how that worked out in church history.

"...Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe'" (Acts 15:7).

God chose the Gentiles for salvation. You notice he talks about the "word of the gospel." How do people get saved through the word of the gospel?

"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

Unless someone hears the Word of God articulating the gospel, they cannot get saved. This defeats the whole social gospel mentality where you do all these kinds of humanitarian things and service projects.

Before we started to purge our missionary roles here at Sugar Land Bible Church, we actually had missionaries come back and do their reports, and they would say something like this in front of the whole church: "We really do not say anything about Jesus. We dig wells and we show love and we pass out blankets. If they ask us about Jesus, then we will say something." That is basically sending someone to hell on a full stomach is what that is. That is social gospel.

Social gospel is these humanitarian type things. It is the kind of stuff like our former president Jimmy Carter was involved in—Habitat for Humanity, building homes for people that do not have homes, and all of these kinds of things. It is all humanitarian type stuff, which, when you think about it, is not really wrong on the front end.

We all have physical needs that need to be met, but you should always use that as some kind of platform to preach the gospel. Once it becomes, "We are going to feed you and clothe you and keep you warm and never talk about the word of the gospel," then it is not biblical. It has gone into something that is more akin to social gospel, rather than the Great Commission that God gave us.

Like one guy I heard of, he would go over and mow his neighbor's lawn all of the time. He did this because he thought he was sharing the gospel. I think at some point I asked him, "Have you ever used that as an opportunity to share the gospel?" The guy said, "Not yet." I said, "How long have you been mowing this guy's lawn?" He said, "Oh, about 15 years." Then you are really just sending someone to hell with a nice lawn. What good is that?

At the end of the day we should mow people's lawns, but you do not just mow lawns to mow lawns and say I am fulfilling the Great Commission. You use it as a platform to preach the truth and pray for a door to open for you to do that, or else it is just another humanitarian work. If you are into humanitarian work, you do not have to be in a church for that. You can join the Rotary Club or Habitat for Humanity or whatever cause you know that you are into.

Peter says, "I actually opened my mouth." In fact, the Ethiopian eunuch was evangelized by Philip (Acts 8) because it says that Philip opened his mouth and shared the gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch. Peter had opened his mouth and he had shared the gospel with Cornelius. There was a great conversion there in Acts 10.

Then you notice in Acts 15:7 that Peter is talking amongst the brethren. That is how to understand what is happening here in Acts 15. This is not a discussion about saved versus unsaved. Ultimately it is a discussion about what do you do with all these saved people. Do they have to come under the Law of Moses to walk with God or not? This is

not so much a justification issue that is being dealt with here. It is not so much a sanctification issue that is being dealt with here. It is an ecclesiological issue.

Then Peter outlines how Cornelius was saved at the very end, that the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and look at this and believe. What does that mean? It means there is one condition for justification. There is one thing that brought Cornelius to saving faith—a right relationship with the God that made him. He believed, meaning he trusted. Believe is a synonym for trust. He trusted in the message. He trusted in the person of Jesus Christ to fix the ultimate problem that he had, which is his sin separating him from a holy God.

Lewis Sperry Chafer says:

"...because upwards of 150 passages of Scripture condition salvation upon believing only."³

The number is more like 160. Dr. J.B. Hixson has them all listed in his book. I think the title of his book is "Getting the Gospel Wrong." If you go to one of the appendices in the book, he has every single passage listed, and it is absolutely overwhelming. In fact, it is so obvious, it is striking how we have messed this up.

That is why our Halloween tracts and things like that are going to focus on believing as a condition that has to be met, not on confessing, not on forsaking all of your sins, not on being bold for Christ, not on whatever work you want to throw into it. Those are conditions for growing. Those are conditions for being fully rewarded at the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ. Do not get me wrong, those are important, but they are not salvific. The moment anyone introduces a verb other than that is the moment they just taught heresy.

Paul calls down a very harsh condemnation against such preaching in Galatians 1:6-9. That is why we consider ourselves a free grace church. All of our missionaries have to sign on to this if they want support from this church. There is a single condition that has to be met for the lost sinner to come to Christ, which is to believe, which is a synonym for saying trust in Christ alone.

You do not have to repent of all of your sins. First of all, if you repent of all of your sins, what about sins that you have committed that you cannot even remember? Beyond that, we sin in our Christian lives, do we not? Do you ever sin as a Christian? Those of you that are not putting your hand up or sinning right now, right? We all sin as Christians. That is why we are in fellowship, out of fellowship. If you sin as a Christian, I guess you really did not repent of all your sins on the front end.

That is why we have the Halloween tracts the way we do. It is why we teach the way we do. We do not teach that you have to submit your life to the Lordship of Christ to be

³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, vol. 7, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 265-66.

saved or justified. The late John MacArthur and his crew teach all of that, but that is a false gospel. "Wait a minute. John MacArthur is very popular. Who are you to criticize him?" It is not an issue of a majority vote here. It is what the Bible says.

You do not get saved by submitting to the Lordship of Christ. That is nothing more than a work on the front end. Now, once you get saved, the Spirit of God is going to start tugging at you to submit to Christ's authority, but that is a growth issue and not a birth issue.

Here are some of the famous passages that address this:

"Then [Abraham] believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

Abraham fulfilled one condition. It was not, commit, obey, persevere, and serve to be justified, because in the next chapter he botched everything up. He messed up everything so badly that we are still paying for it to this day through the descendants of the Ishmaelites. He said, "We are going to have to help God fulfill His promises for a child. I will go and impregnate Hagar." From Hagar came the Ishmael line that are thorns in the side of the nation of Israel, right down to the present day.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

We will eventually get to Acts 16. In Acts 16:30-31, the Philippian jailer is going to ask Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

Peter is rehearsing all of this, how Cornelius got saved. Then he moves into Acts 15:8-9, where he talks about how the Holy Spirit authenticated Gentile salvation as part of the argument that he is building towards.

"And God, who knows the heart, testified to them [Gentiles] giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us [Jewish believers]; and He made no distinction between us [Jewish believers] and them [Gentile believers], cleansing their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8-9).

When Cornelius got saved, do you know what he got? Immediately he got the Holy Spirit.

"All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also" (Acts 10:45).

Peter says, "Us Jews, when we got saved, got the Holy Spirit. Cornelius, this uncircumcised Gentile, he got the exact same thing." He makes reference to this in Acts 11 at the first Jerusalem Council, when they were ironing this out, and he had to travel back to Jerusalem to convince the Jewish leadership of the church that Gentile really got saved. Peter explains:

"And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them [Cornelius and his entourage, Gentiles] as He did upon us [Jewish believers] at the beginning" (Acts 11:15).

Where is the beginning? The beginning is Acts 2. "How God dealt with the Gentiles is exactly how He dealt with us at the beginning." Then there was no division between Gentile believers and Jewish believers. You see how he says that in Acts 15:9:

"And He made no distinction between us and them" (Acts 15:9).

"We got saved by grace alone through faith alone, and received the Holy Spirit immediately (Acts 2). That is exactly what happened to the Gentiles." Later, Paul is going to talk about no distinction, where he will develop the concept of the body of Christ:

"By abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two [Jewish believers and Gentile believers] into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity" (Ephesians 2:15-16).

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

We are as Gentiles. I am a Gentile believer. I am on completely the same standing as a Jewish believer in the body of Christ. Peter is saying, "This is evidence: by the fact that Cornelius got the Holy Spirit when he believed, just like we received it (Acts 2)."

It is interesting to notice the emphasis on the heart in Acts 15:9:

"And He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9).

God made, to the nation of Israel, the New Covenant. We are partakers in the New Covenant. We are not take-overs of the New Covenant, but we participate in some of the soteriological—salvation oriented—blessings of the New Covenant. That is what we celebrate at the Lord's Table on a monthly basis here at Sugar Land Bible Church.

What is the New Covenant all about? It is about God changing the heart. God, through the prophet Jeremiah, spoke and said:

"Behold, the days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah'" (Jeremiah 31:31).

Now, national Israel has not received this yet. They are going to get the whole package. We participate in some of the blessings of this without taking over the whole thing and shoving Israel out. That is why, when Paul is raising money in Romans 15 for the suffering saints in Jerusalem, he makes a statement: "We owe it to them to bless them materially since we share with them spiritually. Since we are beneficiaries spiritually of this New Covenant, why don't we open our wallets a little bit and bless the Hebrew Christians materially?"

"[The New Covenant will] not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,' declares the Lord. 'But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' declares the Lord, 'I will put My law where within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they will all know Me, from the least to the greatest,' declares the Lord, 'for I will forgive them of their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more'" (Jeremiah 31:32-34).

We look at Israel today in unbelief, and we say, "Do you know what? What they are today is not the end game." Yes, they are a nation in unbelief, but that is going to change because of the New Covenant. The time in history is going to come—you have to understand this—where every single Jew on planet Earth at the end of the seven-year Tribulation Period will be born again, regenerated just like we are.

We as the church have not taken over that covenant, but we participate in its soteriological blessings because this is what God has done with us. He has changed us from the inside. It is not like you see a bunch of rules inscribed on a tablet and say, "I better try harder." It is God putting His laws inside of our hearts. That is what the new birth, being born again, being born from above, is about. That is why Peter, as he is talking about the conversion of Cornelius, talks about "their hearts by faith."

If you look at Acts 15:8, it says: *"And God who knows the heart..."* God is a specialist in the heart. What is inside people? This is what God said to Samuel as he found out that the second king was this little runt named David. "He is the king? No way." God, through the prophet Samuel said:

"Do not look at his appearance or the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

It was Saul that was tall and good looking, and look at what he did for the nation, mostly a lot of negative. God sees not as man sees. God looks at things differently than humans do. That is the gospel. It deals with the heart. That is why there are people that believe in Jesus in John 2. They were saved, but they were not ready for fellowship.

"But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men" (John 2:24).

This is in John 2:23-25. Jesus saw what was within man. God starts to prefer people based on their heart for Him.

What is the gospel all about? It is not about some kind of moral reformation from the outside, which was my understanding of Christianity, for the first 16 years of my life. If they told me to do it, I did it. I was an acolyte in the Episcopal church. They gave me a big silver cross for perfect Sunday School attendance. I had things memorized and yet I was not saved. I was not born again.

I thought Christianity was some kind of thing I had to do on the outside to please God. Unfortunately, there are a lot of I's and my's and me's in that—a lot of self-righteousness, when Christianity is about God coming into you and internally changing you from the inside. That is why Peter, as he is making his case at Jerusalem to the Jerusalem leadership, is emphasizing what happened to Cornelius in his heart.

Then Peter gives a challenge. I love this verse. I am so glad we are going to at least get to it tonight. The computer wants a title every time I teach, so I call this "An Impossible Burden," because of this verse. I was hoping we would get to it, or else I would have to change the title.

"Now therefore why do you [Jewish leadership] put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples [Gentile converts]" (Acts 15:10).

You notice he calls them "disciples" here. He is not dealing with how unsaved people get saved. That is not the issue. The issue is: What do you do with saved people in terms of joining the church? That is the issue. It is not a justification issue; it is an ecclesiological issue.

"...by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10).

He calls those under consideration disciples because here we are dealing with ecclesiology. We are not dealing with this justification stuff anymore. Justification that got fixed in Acts 11. We are not dealing with sanctification anymore. That got fixed in

the Book of Galatians. We are dealing here with this third group of Pharisees that were demanding that these Gentiles—although no one is arguing they are not saved—had to come under the Law of Moses for the church.

What is this Law of Moses thing? Do you guys know about that? We are studying it on Sunday mornings. In the Book of Exodus, God took the nation of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. He brought them to Mount Sinai; He gave them the Mosaic law; and they said to God, "Everything You have said in Your Law we will do" (Exodus 19:8). That is the biggest over-promise and under delivery line in the history of mankind, because they broke everything.

The Law of God is laid out as a Suzerain-Vassal Treaty. It is a superior entering into a covenant with an inferior—God entering into a covenant with His nation. There is a preamble, a historical prologue, what the vassal has to do, the covenant obligations, what you did with the covenant text, storage and reading instructions. Then there are witnesses. Who can witness to God? God calls heaven and earth as His witnesses.

This whole thing in the Book of Deuteronomy is laid out exactly like a Suzerain-Vassal Treaty in the ancient Near East in the time of Abraham and Moses. That is how you know the Bible is historically accurate.

Deuteronomy follows the same treaty structure, and part of it is blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. "If you honor Me," God says, "then you are going to be blessed—your crops and you are going to win wars and all that kind of stuff. You are going to lend and not borrow (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). But if you go against the covenant text, the Ten Commandments primarily, then you are going to be cursed (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). You are going to go out and you are going to try to fight wars, and you are going to lose. You are going to borrow instead of lend. Your crops are not going to be fruitful."

You can now track Israel in the land under this structure for 800 years. They messed everything up to the point where Solomon, the third king of the united kingdom, botched everything up very badly at the end of his life. I do not know what was going on in his head, but it is almost as if the guy woke up one day as a grumpy old man and everything that God said to do in Deuteronomy 17, he went and did the opposite.

The king is not to multiply wealth for himself. What did Solomon do? He multiplied wealth for himself. The king is not to enter into foreign treaties with other countries. What did Solomon do? He entered into foreign treaties with foreign countries. The king is not to multiply wives for himself. What did he do? He had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3). Those are just gross treaty violations. This is the guy that wrote the Book of Proverbs.

God then, at the end of the Solomonic reign in 931 BC, took the nation and divided it because of what Solomon did. It was covenant discipline all the way back to the Law Moses. "If you obey Me, you will be blessed. If you disobey Me, you will be cursed."

Now we have two divisions within Israel. The Northern Kingdom had 19 kings. How many good kings do the Northern Kingdom have? Zero. Goose egg. Nada. If your team goes zero and nineteen, that is not a great season. God brought them into dispersion at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 BC. Why? Because that is what God said at Sinai. "If you disobey Me, you will be cursed."

That left the Southern Kingdom of Benjamin and Judah. When you read Ezekiel 16, it describes the Northern Kingdom as the older sister, and the Southern Kingdom as the younger sister. The Northern Kingdom is described as a harlot. She became like a harlot, a hooker, with the way she went after all of these false gods.

Ezekiel says that one was named Oholah, and the other one was named Oholibah, the younger sister (Ezekiel 23:4). You would think that the younger sister would see what happened to the older sister and learn her lesson, but the Southern Kingdom was worse. The little sister was a bigger harlot than the older sister. Ezekiel 16 lays this whole thing out very graphically, I might add—a very sexually explicit metaphor. It is the kind of thing that when you are reading through the Bible with your family you think, "Do we read that?"

The little sister, the Southern Kingdom, was taken into the Babylonian captivity. Then they came back from the Babylonian captivity. They rejected Christ. As the great theologian Yogi Berra said, "It is déjà vu all over again." The nation was scattered by the Romans in AD 70 and went into what is called the Diaspora, which they are now gradually coming out of in our lifetime.

What is Peter's point? His point is, "Us Jews have done a horrible, terrible job keeping God's law. Do you think these Gentiles are going to do much better?" That is his point. "Why in the world would we tell these Gentiles, get under the Law of Moses, when us Jews have messed the whole thing up from day one? We are the people that built the golden calf." If you build a golden calf, you are only violating the first two commandments. No other gods before me, no graven images (Exodus 20:3-6).

Moses is up on the mountain for 40 days, and they build this golden calf. Who is leading the charge? Aaron. It is like the movie "Hoosiers" where the sheriff, the guy with the badge who is supposed to keep the crowd under control, is the most rambunctious one running into the locker room, telling the coach he is doing it all wrong, and he is like the law keeper. That is what you have with Aaron. What is Aaron's excuse? "We had all these bracelets and gold and we threw it into the fire and this calf popped out. I do not know how it happened." He totally denies responsibility.

Peter's point is, "Us have completely messed everything up. Why in the world would we put this yoke on the Gentiles?" Then he gets to his conclusion, which we cannot get to today because I am over time. We will pick it up there in Acts 15:11 next time.