



**The Roots of What is Going On Today  
Origins, Prophecy and Where Persecution Comes From  
Habakkuk 1:1-4  
Acts 15:6-35**

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With all that is going in the world right now, especially the past week. I thought I would spend some time giving a mini-prophecy update before we get into our study in Acts 15..

Let's look at what is going on.



- The IDF attacked a target in Doha with the intent to strike a blow at Hamas.
- Israel has moved into Gaza City removing the last stronghold of Hamas.
- Russia attacked Ukraine and did so overlying Poland using drones that also sent false signals making the people of Poland believe they were under attack.
- Russia and Belarus are engaging in war games simulating the invasion of Poland.
- A young woman was murdered by a career criminal who didn't even know her and no one who was on the light rail did anything to help or stop the man.
- There are calls nationally to not obey the law and to resist all over the invasion we have sustained due to illegal immigration.
- And a line has been crossed here in the United State, Christians are now being martyred for their faith by those who have moved beyond disagreement, to murder. We have been attacked before, but the martyrdom of Charlie Kirk is something new and is a call for all of the followers of Jesus Christ to rally around the cross. Just has been the case each time this has taken place in the past.
- What is going on? Jesus is about to step back into history and take His church.

Matthew 24:6–13

**“And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”** (ESV)

All of this is pointing to where we are on the prophetic calendar. When Jesus was asked about signs of His second coming, not the rapture of the church, one of His answers is as follows:

Matthew 24:10–12

**“And at that time many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will rise up and mislead many people. And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will become cold.”** (NASB 2020)

We see this happening in our culture and had it demonstrated to us several times in the past week. Habakkuk calls it for us.

Habakkuk 1:1–4

**“This is the message that the prophet Habakkuk received in a vision. How long, O LORD, must I call for help? But you do not listen! “Violence is everywhere!” I cry, but you do not come to save. Must I forever see these evil deeds? Why must I watch all this misery? Wherever I look, I see destruction and violence. I am surrounded by people who love to argue and fight. The law has become paralyzed, and there is no justice in the courts. The wicked far outnumber the righteous, so that justice has become perverted.”** (NLT)

That sounds like today and shows us that King Solomon was right, there is indeed nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

In the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul laments the sinful condition of some of the flock there in Corinth. He is seeking repentance from them, but he then says this at the end of the book.



1 Corinthians 16:21–24

“The greeting is in my own hand—that of Paul. **If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha!** The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.” (NASB 2020)

Point 1 – those who do not love the Lord are accursed. Today we would use the term, damned.

Point 2 - When he uses the word Maranatha (Μαράνα), he is taking the Aramiac word for “our Lord” but then adds to it μαράνα θα, the last word is come. Your translation may actually say “our Lord come.”

Just as Habakkuk reflected his concern over the sins of his people, Paul is also concerned over the sins of some who have moved into the church and his thought reflects ours, come quickly Lord, how long can you let this go on? How much more of this can you allow?

Even Jesus reflects this thought as He reassures the church at Philadelphia struggling to remain faithful in a lost world.

Revelation 3:11

“Behold, I am coming quickly! **Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.**” (NKJV)

Just as Jesus tells His people to remain faithful, so Habakkuk will learn the same. And the message is still the same today. Hold on, stay faithful.

Many of us, and I am including myself in this number, found ourselves this past week in anger and turmoil asking the Lord, how much longer? You and I are not the first.

Habakkuk 1:2

**“How long, LORD, have I called for help, And You do not hear? I cry out to You, “Violence!” Yet You do not save.”** (NASB 2020)

Habakkuk feels like he is all alone as he watches the downward spiral of Judah. By the way, you are not the only one watching the downward spiral in this nation, you are not all alone. Remember who has already won the battle and who it is we serve.

1 John 4:4

“Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for **he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.**” (ESV)

Habakkuk is talking to the Lord about it, obviously, since he says that his constant prayer is for help. He is not the first though.

Habakkuk here typifies the faithful person who has to live in the world as it is and who has grown weary with the world’s ways of wickedness. (Just like us.) When he looks about him, he sees those on every hand who do not care a whit for God’s will—those who take the word of God and twist it to their own purposes; (can you say false teachers and their inordinate proliferation) those who openly break every code of decency and morality and yet who justify their ways; (that sounds like politicians today) those who seek their own selfish ends and who stamp their self-seeking on a whole generation; (media and the glorification of evil) those who violate and cheat and deceive and yet who are honored in society’s eyes. (Achtemeier 1986, 36)

This is a behavior that we see taking place all around us today. Those who seem to be the most strident in the cries are lauded by the media as being activists. Isaiah though had a different view.



Isaiah 5:20

**“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (NKJV)**

Our culture is running full speed in the wrong direction and much of the church has been complacent as this movement took place, just like the priests and leaders of Judah over 2000 years ago.

Rescue will not come by mere politics. We do not need a political movement. We need a theological protest. True Christianity and true gospel preaching depend on a firm commitment to the authority of Scripture. That is why, since the time of the Enlightenment, the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture have been under constant attack. We need revival and an outpouring of the Spirit. (Mohler 2020, 13)

In verse 4, just as we see happening around us today, Habakkuk saw the same.

Habakkuk 1:4

**“Therefore the Law is ignored, And justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore justice comes out confused.” (NASB 2020)**

The problems with judges who make up their own standards is not new. Here is the thing we must realize, what happened just prior to the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon, is a picture of the world just prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ. And if that is the condition we are now seeing, we are seeing shadows of the future meaning that all of us must be looking up as our salvation draws near (Luke 21:28).

God’s word was ignored, just like it is today. King Josiah’s revival kicked off because someone found the Torah in the Temple and then read it, discovering that what it said was not being followed. We need the same discovery today. We need to rediscover the Bible and that means we need return to Jesus since at present, it is the church those who are born again, who are no longer fully engaged in the great commission or even serving Jesus.

Here at Calvary Chapel, we intend to be engaged which is why we are working with Child Evangelism Fellowship to establish a Good News Club in one of the two schools here in Hobe Sound.

It is why I will continue to present the gospel. We have received the grace of God and who am I to remain silent and not tell others about Him. That is why we podcast, globally, five days a week and why we take all of our teachings and make them available on all of the platforms worldwide that we do. We are using the dubbing capability in the software for You Tube right now to take our messages and have them be redubbed into other languages.

But here in the US, many who say they are Christians are confused because they have followed wimpy self-serving pastors and leaders we see. In way too many churches they have walked away from the primacy of God’s word with them and chased after other things. That is indeed Satan’s plan.

Am I saying that many churches today are serving Satan and not the Lord, yes, that is indeed what I am saying. Too many Pastors are playing games and teaching or embracing false doctrines and taking those in the church to hell, not to the Kingdom. We are in the last days; Jesus is coming back at any second and way too many today who are comfortable in their churches getting their weekly Ted Talk will find themselves left behind because they do not know Jesus. Why is that, because those who are supposed to be shepherding them, don’t.

Being a believer, coming to Christ, changes us.



When God's law is abandoned, when Christ is tossed away, the result is chaos. Justice is not upheld, and it appears that the wicked win. This is and has been confusing to many just this week and was confusing to Habakkuk.

Thus, questions.

The righteous in every age ask similar questions. One of the helpful lessons to be learned from Habakkuk is that God does know what is happening. He is not oblivious to wickedness in high places. In his time and in his way the Lord brings judgment on those who oppress the weak. (Barker 1999, 299)

This is why we pray for those who are in leadership. This is why we pray for those who have been accused of the crimes we have witnessed all too graphically this past week.

Without Jesus, all they have to look forward to is the Great White Throne Judgment and hell. And yes, I struggle with wanting them to be told about how to avoid that, but the grace of God steps in.

Romans 5:6–8

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— **but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**” (ESV)

Habakkuk asks God “why” as he prays, but he doesn’t suggest any solution. He knows who he is talking to, and that God can supply solutions way beyond his imagination. It is okay to ask the Lord **why** as we pray. It is okay to be angry and mad about what has happened. Habakkuk sure was. As we have seen in the prophets, the answer to why, many times, is simply let those who are sowing sin and evil, simply get what comes along with that. Let them reap what they sowed.

Paul points that out in Romans 1, and the point is simple, they all really do know better. Accountability to God does exist.

Romans 1:28–32

“And **just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a depraved mind, to do those things that are not proper**, people having been filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, and evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unfeeling, and unmerciful; and **although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them.**” (NASB 2020)

It is no surprise that the apostle Paul and others used Habakkuk to reflect on the power of God in the face of Torah’s incapacity. If Habakkuk’s complaint about God’s passivity is understood as a complaint about the lack of God’s anger in the face of wrongdoing, Paul’s answer at the beginning of his letter to the Romans seems to be that God’s wrath is evident precisely in his lack of intervention, in his handing over of humanity to its own devices. This relates to the answer that unfolds in Hab 2. The punishment of sin is experiencing sin and its consequences. (Renz 2021, 230)

Hosea 8:7a “They sow the wind, And reap the whirlwind.” (NKJV)

We live in the last days, we know that. God is indeed moving and what we are witnessing are the shadows of what the Tribulation will be all about, lawlessness. Pray for our leaders as well as those who are in law enforcement as the job is not easy. Coming closer to the end also demands that we become more situationally aware of our surroundings. Not to be in fear, but to be in faith and trust that God still has everything in control, even when it doesn’t seem like it.



This is not a time to hunker down; it is a time to stand up and proclaim the soon return of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

It is a time to “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love.” (1 Corinthians 16:13–14, NKJV)

Be praying for the families of those who have been impacted this past week. And be praying for the perpetrators of the crimes that they would find the Lord before it is too late.

Don't worry about the condition of the world around us, instead, look up.

Luke 21:28

**“Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”** (NKJV)

As we move into our study today, we will discover the roots of the Luciferian conspiracy to destroy the church from the inside. It finds its roots in religious people who have decided that what they think is more important than what the Lord thinks or is doing.

We talked about it last week, it shows up as Jesus + and many all around us today are into this. Just one more reason for the wimpiness and self-serving attitude of many in ministry.

Acts 15: 6-35

Legalism has shown up in the church accompanied by alleged believers who are not reflecting the Holy Spirit in what it is they are pushing.

Acts 15:5

**“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 keep the Law of Moses.””** (NASB 2020)

Nowhere in the Old Testament, anywhere, does the word of God say this. No where. But we do see the impact that unbelieving believers can have on a fellowship, in this case, of churches. Thus, the first church conference is to discuss, legalism. It will not be the last.

Acts 15:6–11

**“The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.** After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, 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. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Since this is the case, why are you putting God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our forefathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”” (NASB 2020)

Pharisees, who know the Torah, have become followers of Jesus. But it appears that they have either not been discipled or believe that they are knowledgeable enough of the word to opt out of that.

Here is the thing, if you are not a Christian, but have Biblical knowledge, and there are many today who would fall into that category, being discipled is still essential.



We need to be aware of this since there are so many churches around today who no longer teach the full counsel of God, if even cracking open a Bible at all in their teaching time. The advent of seeker friendly churches has not been all good since it tends to leave folks as babies in Christ with no real hunger for the meat of the word. And many never develop even the beginning of a Biblical worldview.

Even worse, there are those who are out there who have so twisted the scriptures, that anyone coming out of one of those fellowships may be genuinely confused about what they do believe, and some may not be saved at all. Jude talked about this.

Jude 22–23

“Show mercy towards those who have doubts; save others by snatching them out of the fire; and to others show mercy mixed with fear, but hate their very clothes, stained by their sinful lusts.” (GNB)

Those who show up from elsewhere, unless they have been taught the word, tend to come in one of three categories. First of all, they love the Lord, they have a general understanding of the word but due to misleading teaching, have some doubts about what we teach and believe and as we come alongside them to help them grow, we show mercy to them and lovingly help them to grow.

A second group that we see show up will be so poorly taught that they have a misunderstanding of what constitutes salvation. As we explain what it is, we are seeing them saved, literally snatching them out of the fire they were headed towards but simply did not know that because they had been taught to rely on things like works, rather than on the completed work of Jesus Christ. Many have knowledge of the word but not a true Spiritual understanding of the word until they are saved.

Finally, there are those who are not saved, they think they are and they are so thoroughly indoctrinated by the false teaching they have been listening to, that there is a real danger for those working with them of being sucked in. So, we operate in fear for them loving them to an understanding of the word, showing mercy, yet watching ourselves as well. I have talked with folks from this camp more than once, and they tend to believe they know more than anyone else. They have a preconceived notion of what we need to do to look like where they just left, and they want us to be just as confused as their prior church. These tend to be those circumstances where protecting the flock becomes important and once they figure out that we will not give them a platform, they leave.

Here at Calvary Chapel, we do not do catechism, or anything like that, we simply teach the word of God. We will indeed disciple those who are new to the faith including those who have Biblical knowledge, but not a Spirit filled perspective.

Every so often I read a commentary on scripture that very quickly you discover the person is writing solely as an academic exercise and there is no real faith or spiritual discernment of the text being provided. Just empty data. I always wonder why would someone bother to write a commentary if they did not truly know Jesus?

Once that person truly experiences Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit enters, then the word has a whole new meaning since it is now God Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit teaching us. If you think that might be you, no worries. Others of us have been there before. It is okay to ask questions, that is why we do a Q&A after the service. There is no such thing as a dumb question either. We all are growing at different speeds, and we just love to help you get fed and understand His word.

In this case, the leadership of the early church does the right thing, they want to examine what it is that is being said, and, in the process, they will indeed be relying on the Holy Spirit for direction.

I wish Doctor Luke had provided the opening prayer, but he didn't.



We also do not get any of the debate here, but we do get Paul's version of what took place in Galatians 2. It looks like before any of the open session took place, there was a rather extensive debrief that took place amongst the leadership.

Galatians 2:1–3

"Then fourteen years later I went back to Jerusalem again, this time with Barnabas; and Titus came along, too. I went there because God revealed to me that I should go. **While I was there I met privately with those considered to be leaders of the church and shared with them the message I had been preaching to the Gentiles. I wanted to make sure that we were in agreement, for fear that all my efforts had been wasted and I was running the race for nothing. And they supported me and did not even demand that my companion Titus be circumcised, though he was a Gentile.**" (NLT)

Putting the pieces of this conference together, after Paul and the team from Antioch arrived, they met privately with the leadership of the church in order to outline, without any other issues, what the Lord was doing in their ministry.

It appears though that the debate referenced by Doctor Luke takes place after the private meeting. In other words, those who were the agitators, were not allowed in until everyone who was leaning on the Holy Spirit for guidance had a chance to hear.

There is a form of church government that is used that the Bible says nothing about that is good. That is not what we see here.

That would be the church that is led by those who make up the church without any connection with their qualifications for leadership, Spiritual fitness, or even salvation. That is called the Laodicean church in Revelation 3, the rule of the laity and Jesus says don't go there.

My father-in-law was part of a church that had that form of church government and once he even questioned whether those who were deacons, since even they were popularly voted on by the bulk of the church, were even saved. In retrospect, they weren't. Not only did that church, which started off well spiral downward, but today it is gone.

The church in Jerusalem was based on the fact that all believers formed a collective priesthood (1 Peter 2:9)... "with a spirit of cooperation existing between those who led and those who served. In the second century, however, the church separated clergy for holy lifestyles, which they believed an average person was not capable of following. This resulted in a fissure between clergy and laity. With the clergy's elevated status, came special privileges like interpreting God's word, a greater access to God and a higher spiritual status, which diluted the priesthood of all believers, resulting in a clergy-laity divide. This separation discouraged the laity from ministry and pursuing a holy lifestyle, which resulted in a shift of spiritual responsibility and transferred control of the church to the clergy. Unfortunately, even after the Reformation, the clergy-laity divide remains in the church, deteriorating the cooperative nature of ministry." (Wilson 2016, 13-14) And literally creating a problem that continues to today.

Once again, it is balance we look for and need and yes, both of those extremes are not held in high repute by the Lord. In Revelation 2, He has something to say about those who rule over the laity, in other words have created a professional group of leaders just like the Pharisees.

And for twenty centuries whole denominations have developed around the concept of lording it over the laity. This appears to be the problem Jesus was addressing in Revelation 2:12 – 17 in His letter to Pergamum. They had an issue with Balaam related immorality as well as a group called the Nicolaitans.



The two teachings are identified further by the similarity of the etymology of their names: νικᾷ λαόν means “he overcomes the people,” and in rabbinic literature “Balaam” (bil’ām) was etymologized to bl’ ’m or blh ’m, “he who consumes the people” (e.g., b. Sanhedrin 105a), or it could be construed as “rule over the people” (b’l’m). (Beale 1999, 251)

In most churches today, an unthinking acceptance has been given to the idea that the pastor is the final voice of authority in both doctrine and practice, and that he is the executive officer of the church with respect to administration. (Stedman 1995, 106)

Let me be the first to let everyone here know that is not my desire for Calvary Chapel. I prefer the model we see in the early church.

Ray Stedman related the following. “The point is simply this: No one person is the sole expression of the mind of the Spirit; no individual has authority from God to direct the affairs of the church. Whenever a church gathers itself around the unquestioned leadership of a single individual, it ceases to be a church; it becomes a cult. A plurality of elders is necessary as a safeguard to the all-too-human tendency to play God and lord one’s authority over other people.

Even when a plurality of elders is established, care must be taken that the church’s leaders (who, biblically, are to be seen as servants, not bosses) exercise their authority with humility, not by dominating, controlling, and intimidating others. The influence of a servant-leader is not the power to give orders but the ability to inspire enthusiasm and voluntary cooperation.” (Stedman 1995, 107-108)

We see this played out in real time here in Acts 15.

The conference involves the entire congregation, even including the naysayers, but there have been clarifying meetings beforehand with those who have Spiritual gifts and offices related to the administration and doctrinal health of the church.

Thus, the debate. We do not know how long this took place. But “keep in mind some key features of Mediterranean culture. Its agonistic character means the debate would be very lively. We might call it “hot.” Moreover, the debate does not follow parliamentary rules of procedure but is rather a shouting match with unmediated interruptions. Eventually, debaters tire out.” (Malina and Pilch 2008, 106-107)

And once they tire out, literally feeling like they have nothing else to say, Peter does speak up and gives his opinion.

He provides a quick history of his own experiences and then draws a conclusion from all of that.

Acts 15:7–11

“After there had been much debate, **Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, 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. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Since this is the case, why are you putting God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our forefathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”**” (NASB 2020)

As part of his conclusion, Peter plays to the room, specifically the rather argumentative legalistic defenders by pointing out God still loves Israel but there is now no distinction between Jewish believers



and gentile believers. It isn't all about ritual purity anymore, it is all about faith in the completed work of Jesus Christ.

And as he concludes, Peter asks a pointed question, why are you wanting to test God on this? In other words, why are you wanting to find out if God is still loyal to Israel on this topic by insisting on something we had trouble doing ourselves be done by those who are not part of Israel, but exercise faith in Christ?

And then he finishes with a serious reality check, you know, they become saved just like we become saved, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, faith.

Once Peter is done, then it is the now time for Barnabas and Paul to speak, going almost last is a good thing too since Paul has this innate ability to be brutally honest. What was his opinion of the debate and allowing those to argue for legalism as long as they did?

Galatians 2:4–5

**“Even that question came up only because of some so-called believers there—false ones, really—who were secretly brought in. They sneaked in to spy on us and take away the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. They wanted to enslave us and force us to follow their Jewish regulations. But we refused to give in to them for a single moment. We wanted to preserve the truth of the gospel message for you.” (NLT)**

What did you really think of them Paul?

It was after all of the argument, followed by the word of wisdom and knowledge provided by Peter, that Barnabas and Paul are allowed to talk.

Seeing his comments there in Galatians about what he heard, I wonder how often Barnabas had to kick him under the table to keep him from speaking up. Or was it once of those things that had been decided on earlier that they would go last. In reality, it could also be the wisdom of the Holy Spirit holding them off to last. Because they were able to attest to all the signs and wonders that took place, to include a possible laugh or two as they told the story of when the folks brought out oxen to sacrifice to them. But the importance of the mission was made real with the numbers of who came to faith as well as the persecution the team sustained, Paul specifically.

With all of the arguing done, followed by the witness testimony, some of which they had heard before, the leader of the church speaks. This is James talking, the half-brother of Jesus Christ. There are those who would hold him in esteem, even though Paul tells us in Galatians he would not be one of those doing so. He is already pushing back on the legalism, and I think suspects that he is not done with this yet.

James quotes from Jeremiah 12:15 as well as from Amos 9:11 & 12 which clearly states in it that salvation will come to the gentiles.

Acts 15:13–21

“After they stopped speaking, James responded, saying, “Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has described how God first concerned Himself about taking a people for His name from among the Gentiles. The words of the Prophets agree with this, just as it is written: ‘AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE FALLEN TABERNACLE OF DAVID, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,’ SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS known from long ago. Therefore, it is my judgment that we do not cause trouble for those from the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols, from acts of sexual



immorality, from what has been strangled, and from blood. For from ancient generations Moses has those who preach him in every city, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” (NASB 2020)

When God said there were Gentiles who are called by His name, He said they stay Gentiles. They were not Gentiles who had been made Jews. Therefore, Gentiles do not need to become Jews and come under the law to become right with God. (Guzik 2013, Ac 15:13-21)

And as part of his overall assessment, James decides that “instead of taking the full yoke of the Torah (613 commandments), non-Jews do well to simply follow the Seven Laws of the Sons of Noah for all mankind.” (Kasdan 2022, 114)

The council listened to the evidence and made the decision that a Gentile does not need to become a Jew in order to become a Christian.

If Gentiles were not being required to observe the Jewish ritual laws, how would Jewish Christians who maintained strict Torah observance be able to fellowship with them without running the risk of being ritually defiled themselves? James saw the question coming and addressed it in his next remark (v. 20). Gentiles should be directed to abstain from four things: from food offered to idols, from sexual immorality (porneia), from the meat of strangled animals (pnikton), and from blood (haima). When looked at closely, all four of these belong to the ritual sphere. (Polhill 1992, 330)

With that James has pronounced his judgment based on the scriptures as well as the testimony that has been presented. But he is not dictating here, we see that next.

Acts 15:22–35

“Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas who was called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, and they sent this letter with them: “The apostles and the brothers who are elders, to the brothers and sisters in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles: Greetings. Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have confused you by their teaching, upsetting your souls, it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth. **For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from acts of sexual immorality; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.**” So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and after gathering the congregation together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brothers and sisters with a lengthy message. After they had spent time there, they were sent away from the brothers and sisters in peace to those who had sent them out. But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.” (NASB 2020)

And that is it for the first ever church conference, one that was designed to deal with the error of legalism that still continues on today. But “that is the report. That is all they have to say to them. Gentile believers are not required to meet any of the demands of the Mosaic system but they are to exercise courtesy to those who do—especially in the area of meats offered to idols, and of course they are not to commit fornication.” (McGee 1997, 579-580)

What we see is a healthy church operating as the church. This is not presented by someone who asserts he speaks ex cathedra, this is the church in agreement on a matter and then sending a letter to communicate to those who had been impacted by the error to help them know how to deal with it.



We see how ministry is supposed to take place, “the Work of the Ministry belongs to the entire body of believers, who should be equipped, guided, and encouraged by those who are gifted by God to expound and apply His Word with wisdom and power.” (Stedman 1995, 112)

And we see that take place here.

The one mission we have been called to as the church is to make disciples. That means helping others to grow and be more like Jesus, no matter who they are or where they have come from.

If you have never met Jesus, I would love to take some time to introduce you to Him.

Romans 3:21–24

“But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.” (NLT)

Romans 10:9–13

“If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.” Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. For “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”” (NLT)

### **ABC’s of Salvation**

- A. Acknowledge that you are a sinner, tell Him that.
- B. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sin and that He rose from the dead.
- C. Confess that Jesus is Lord. Tell someone about what you have done.



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