

## 37a ACTS

This is the 30th of April, 2004. We continue tonight our study in the book of Acts, resuming in chapter 15. As we do so, let's take a moment at the outset to go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we are grateful for the opportunity to nourish our souls and refresh our spirits through the study of your word. We thank you for the age in which we live and the vast provision that is made in terms of resources and opportunities to study and learn and plumb the depths of what is available in the Bible. We thank you that we have freedom, we are not oppressed, we are not harassed, we are not persecuted.

We have every advantage to pursue an understanding of your word and grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus. We pray that our study tonight will contribute to that goal. We pray that we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We pray that your word will find a permanent resting place in our souls and influence our thinking and our decisions in the days ahead. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

We pick up as I said tonight again in Acts chapter 15 where after the first missionary journey and returning to Antioch, Paul the Apostle has an extensive ministry lasting something on the order of five years. And then there are men who come from Judea and begin to say to the Gentile converts in Antioch and surrounding regions, wait a minute, didn't Shaul tell you that you're in need of being circumcised? You need to get a copy of the Law of Moses and start performing all of the things that pertain to being Jewish. And this threw everybody into consternation because Paul the Apostle had not said anything about that.

So, there was no small dissension. I would love to see some footage of that dissension. You know, Paul the Apostle after having been stoned and beat on and so on was nobody to take things lying down.

He wasn't conciliatory. He wasn't soft. He wasn't one of those that would just sort of compromise and he was pretty feisty, especially in his younger days.

And these are his younger days. So, when it says there was no small dissension, I would suspect that this was quite the conflagration between these people because Paul the Apostle had what you call righteous indignation. This isn't just being confrontational or angry or whatever for its own sake.

He knows that he is right and these people are attacking the Gospel of Grace. They are eroding and undermining the confidence and the faith of these brand new and new in the faith Christians. And he's got sort of the mother hen complex there.

You go picking on my chicks and you're in for a fight. So, anyway, they determine that

they need to go to Jerusalem and kill this thing at the source, basically. Get Jerusalem to stop sending these half-baked Judaizers out to gum up the works where they don't even belong.

They live in Judea. They're from Judea. They're in the Jerusalem church.

If they want to go to an all-Jewish church, if they want to continue to observe the customs, that's between them and the Lord. But they're not content to do that. This is the first principle we encounter tonight out of this passage.

And I touched on it briefly last time. But we encounter this all the time. People in the human race that develop a strong feeling about their beliefs or their hobby or their property or their family or their identity or whatever it may be.

When people develop a strong feeling, one of the common elements of human personality is that we are not content to just sit there and have it to ourselves. We have to go shove it at other people. I saw a great bumper sticker.

It was actually in the back window of a pickup truck when I was coming up Plano Road the other day. The guy said, and I'll substitute one word. If I wanted to hear the trash coming out of your stereo, I would sit in your car.

But see, people who listen to that music are not content to hear it themselves. They have to turn it up and roll down the windows and broadcast it unto the nations. Islam is a proselytizing religion.

Mormons believe in a proselytizing religion. Most of the religions of the world have a missionary element. And sadly, so does Christianity.

And we should not in the sense that I am talking about. It's great to be a missionary. It's great to be an evangelist.

It is great to evangelize. It's great to tell the story of Jesus and His love. In response to people who are asking in places where there is a receptive audience, you will notice in the first missionary journey, Paul goes places where people want to hear the Word.

When he goes to a town where there is just mob violence, he leaves. Anyway, these Judaizers, you think of them. Think about situations in our day.

They are not content to sit down there in Jerusalem and practice their particular brand of Christianity. They have got to look over the fence and say, wait a minute, you are not practicing my brand of Christianity. You are not raising your kids the way I raise my kids.

You are not driving your car the way I drive my car. You are not wearing your clothes the way I wear my clothes. You are not decking yourself out appearance wise the way I do.

You need to conform to my idea. Is this not the bane of human civilization? People getting into each other's business instead of the golden rule? If you want people to leave you alone and let you live your life before the Lord, then leave them alone and let them live their life before the Lord. Don't be getting in their business.

Don't be trying to get them to conform to your standards. As individuals, we have to do this. There is a mechanism for keeping people within certain boundaries so that they don't step on other people's freedom and so that they don't commit crimes and take advantage of the freedom that we have.

What is that mechanism called? Government. Government is there as an impersonal agency to establish boundaries so that people don't get in each other's business. This is in our nature.

This is something that hopefully spiritual rehabilitation will eradicate out of us is the compulsive need to put pressure on people either covertly or overtly. Sometimes we just do it with a look or we try to influence them. All of us are guilty of this.

I speak as one who knows. But that's what these people are doing. This is what's going on.

If you want to get an idea of how the people in Antioch feel, relate a modern experience back. Who appointed you people to leave Jerusalem, come all the way up here to Antioch and start telling us how to run our Christianity? Did God give you a vision and say, go straighten the people in Antioch out? I think not. What are you doing here? And there's more of you coming every other week.

There's more of these phylactery strapped guys coming out of Jerusalem, coming down and saying, whoa, you know, and raining on everybody's parade up here. So they say, let's go to Jerusalem and get this fixed. And that's what verse 3 is.

Being sent on their way by the church, because the church said, you guys need to go down there and stop the flow of these harassing types. They went through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion. We've talked about all that.

And in verse 6, the apostles came together to consider the matter. There had been a lot of dispute. Peter rose up and makes his speech.

We've covered that speech. Verse 10 sums it up. Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck? We almost spent a whole night on testing God tonight.

But we have actually done that study in another context, and we're going to be doing it again in Exodus. So I'm not going to do a testing God study, but I pointed out, and you are welcome to do it, because there are a lot of passages. Just get a concordance, or if you've got a Bible software program, put in testing God, or get a topical, or a new

treasury of Scripture knowledge.

By the way, if there is one book that you can have beside your Bible, make it the new treasury of Scripture knowledge. Every Christian in the United States of America should have their own personal hand-signed, with their own name, copy of the new treasury of Scripture knowledge, because that gets you to the Scriptures that pertain to the Scripture you are looking at. If you want to know what the Bible has to say about putting God to the test, you come over here to Acts 15.10, crack open your new treasury, and it will give you all of the pertinent references.

And you can research that topic to your heart's content. It's like the streets of Dallas. You turn down one street, and you'll see others.

And you can turn down those. You just keep that treasury with your Bible. If I could, if it was practical, I would bind the new treasury of Scripture knowledge to my Bible, and carry it all around as one book.

And in the computer, you can do that. In my computer, when I open the Bible, the new treasury comes up to the same passage, and tracks right along with it. It's never closed.

It's never out of my sight. Anyway, that's my endorsement. That's the one book I can unhesitatingly, unqualified recommendation for.

But, we're not going to do that study, so you have to do it that way. Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck? Notice, by abusing these people, by foisting one's own view of religion on someone else, he doesn't say, why do you abuse these people? Why do you sin against your neighbor? What does he say? You are putting God to the test. You're involving God when you attack His people.

God has an interest. God has a nerve struck, if you will, when we go jumping into each other's bailiwick. And Peter says, you people that are trying to lay this yoke on the Gentiles, you are testing God.

What happened to the last group of Israelites that tested God? Remember Massah in the wilderness? They dropped. They died. Thou shalt not put the Lord thy God to the test.

That's the principle that saved Jesus in the temptations with the devil, wasn't it? Isn't that a scripture he quoted? The devil was tempting him. What did he say? You shall not put the Lord your God to the test. And that's what these people run the risk of doing.

This is a very sobering reminder. Well, I'll leave that to your further research. Verse 11, We believe that through grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved in the same manner as they, by grace, through faith, that not of yourselves, gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

And I can never quote that verse without pointing out to you that in Ephesians 2, 8, and 9, it says by grace you are saved through faith. And then when it says that not of yourselves, the demonstrative there that refers back is neuter. All of the nouns have a gender.

They're masculine or they're feminine. But when it says that not of yourselves, it's not saying that grace is not of yourselves. It's not saying that faith is not of yourselves.

It's not saying that salvation is not of yourselves. It says the whole system. Being saved by grace through faith is not a human device.

Humans didn't think it up. Humans didn't propose it. We didn't go make God an offer.

I know you've got us consigned to the lake of fire, but here's the deal. What if we believe in you? We didn't come up with it. Being saved by grace through faith with no merit on our part is strictly a gift of God and it is not of works.

Now, being saved by grace through faith means that we exercise faith, right? We have to consciously put our trust in Christ as Savior. Yet, verse 29 says, it is not of works, lest anyone should boast. This is one of the most important things you'll ever hear in Bible class.

Exercising faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not works. Faith is not works. You say, well, Sam, if that's the most important thing you're ever going to say, I don't have much to look forward to in class.

Why is this important? Faith is not works. Putting your faith in Christ is not a work. You know why that's important? Because if you truly understand that principle, you will never fall into Reformed theology, you'll never become a Calvinist, you'll never get the gross misunderstanding they have because they say, you can't express faith all by yourself.

It is impossible for a depraved, fallen human being conceived in iniquity and born in sin to exercise faith in Christ. God has to give you that faith. You can't do it yourself.

What's the problem with that view? Whether they admit it or not, whether they understand it or believe it or not, the reason they make that argument is they think that exercising faith is a good work. They'll tell you, if you could express faith in Christ, now you are earning and deserving your salvation because you're doing something good. The Bible just got through saying faith is not a work.

You get no credit for faith. It does not earn you anything. This to me, the simplest thing is, anybody that's been in the service, they say, alright, we've got a 5.30 formation.

You need to be here with your uniform on, all your gear, whatever it is we're going to do, you need to be here at 5.30 sharp. Well, 5.30 comes and they call the squads and

platoons and battalions to attention. You'd better be there.

And you have to go through quite a bit of preparation to be there on time, right? They never in history have given a ribbon for showing up to formation on time. It is non-meritorious. Yes, you have to do something, but you get no credit for it.

It is expected. It is the minimum level of expected function. If you can't drag yourself to formation in the right uniform, you will be penalized.

But if you show up, you get no credit. The general doesn't walk out in front, men, I just want to tell you how glad I am to see you all showing up for formation. You know, not just anybody can show up for formation, but you did.

I mean, do you see my point? Faith is expected by God. Look at what He's done. He sent His Son who died for us, who took the penalty, I mean, my lands.

How could you not express faith? And the fact that we do is no more than what is expected. Remember what Jesus said about the servants who come in from the field? He says, before they make their food, they serve the Master. Why? Even when they do so, they say, we are unprofitable servants.

We have done no more than what is our duty. We didn't profit. We didn't add something.

We didn't bring something with us by coming in and serving the Master. We didn't somehow bring a personal enhancement to His household. We've done our function as servants.

This is the way faith is. And if you understand that point, you are ahead of thousands upon thousands of our fellow believers in Christ who do not understand faith, do not understand works, and have fallen into Reformed theology. And it's not just, oh gee, that's a wrong theology.

The problem with that is you cannot learn the Scriptures with that view. You cannot come to know the Heavenly Father. You cannot appreciate Jesus Christ.

You cannot grow in grace and knowledge of the Savior beyond about an inch and a half if you are yoked with that yoke of bondage that it's all foreordained. It's fated. God decreed it before eternity.

And if I didn't do a good job today, I guess God just didn't decree me enough faith today. You know, it was all grooved in the needles just following the groove. This is the way you end up thinking.

And you say, you know, it robs you of responsibility. It robs you of motivation. It robs you of the fear of the Lord because you're not... Why worry? I'm just a needle in a groove.

I'm going to play out my song and I don't really have any control. So, hey. Well, it's the devil's own lie.

And there's nothing worse than a twisted truth. You can address an error, but it's really hard to straighten people out on a twisted truth because they keep pointing to the true part and saying, well, wasn't God gracious? Wasn't it the love of God? Isn't God sovereign? And you point to all the true things, but you take those and so overbalance them that they're meaningless. Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? We believe we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way that they are.

It is by grace. It is through faith. People kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related the signs and wonders.

Then, Peter finishes and James stands up and says, men and brethren, listen to me. Now, I want to put this in a little bit of context because we saw over in Galatians 2, we read this a few weeks ago, that men from James came and Paul was talking about what happened to Peter when the men from James came. Peter was up visiting Antioch and Peter had been eating with the Gentiles and he was remembering, oh yeah, the sheep with the four corners and what God has cleansed, let no man call unclean.

He was doing fine. But then, these phylactery-waving, law-thumping Judaizers came up from Jerusalem and said, well, James has sent us and we're up here to kind of see how... And once they showed up, Peter got spooked and so he quit eating with the Gentiles. Well, this is really important to understand.

That Galatians 2 episode happened before this. Because Paul talks about going up to Jerusalem and he met with no one that sent any other in that Galatians 2. This chapter 15 of Acts is Paul's third visit to Jerusalem. Galatians 2 records the second.

Many, many commentators try to make them be the same visit, but they are not. And it's really helpful to understand that they're not because James and Peter both have learned something from what happened in Galatians 2. And because that Galatians 2 episode has already happened and because the Apostle Paul stood up and kind of browbeat everybody, that's why you have kind of a surprising acquiescence by James here. This James that says we shouldn't be putting any yoke on the Gentiles and stuff is not one that's going to then go send men later up to Antioch.

And this Peter is not going to be the one who's then going to go later. That is earlier. This is later.

This is after that fact. You'll notice that you don't have Paul standing up and making any sort of argument here in Acts 15. He did that last time.

And Peter and James have learned from their fellow Apostle. And so they do the standing

up and the talking in the Jerusalem context here. And Paul doesn't have to.

Paul did his speaking to Peter in Antioch and to James on his earlier visit. So I won't go into all the gory details about how we know that that is the case. Any view that you take has a few little problems with it.

But one of the things people notice here is in Galatians, when Paul is writing to the Galatians, and saying, don't again be entangled in a yoke of bondage, why does he not make a reference to this edict from the Jerusalem church and say, hey, don't you remember what was decided, what the letter was that was written? The reason is, this hasn't happened yet when the book of Galatians is written. Galatians has already been written. And Paul has already had those experiences of that visit in Jerusalem.

Acts 15 is happening after that. And of course, he had plenty of time to write Galatians in the time after the first missionary journey. He's already, oh foolish Galatians, are you so soon turned away? That whole thing.

So I just want to straighten that out. Now, so James answers and says, men and brethren, listen to me. Simon has declared how God at the first visit Gentiles.

Notice, this is a really Jewish context here. He doesn't call him Cephas. He doesn't call him Peter.

He calls him Shimon or Simeon because that's his Jewish name. You'll see that happen very often after Jesus renames Peter. But it happens here.

Peter has reminded us, Simon has reminded us, how God at the first visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. Now, James says some really good things here because by using this phraseology, God at the first visited the Gentiles, visited the Goyim, the nations, to take out a people for His name. If you think about it, that's what God did in the Old Testament to form the nation of Israel.

God visited the nations that were formed after the Tower of Babel and He took out of them a people for His name and it was Israel. So James is hinting, you remember, you know, you're getting all high and mighty about being Jewish and keeping the law, but remember, we're the product of this same process. God came to, you know, we were once just part of the nations and God chose us out and made us a special people, so what's to say He's not doing that again? So there's method in James' approach here.

With this, the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, After this I will return, rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins and I will set it up, so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord who does these things. Now keep your finger here in Acts and turn back to Amos chapter 9. When he says the prophets, he's talking about the scroll of the 12 prophets that would be read in the synagogue or in the temple.

So you go to Amos chapter 9 because your Bible does not say what James just said at the passage that he is quoting. Get over there in Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah and so on. Amos chapter 9. Be good to get those pages unstuck.

Look at Amos 9 verse 11. Does this sound familiar? On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David which has fallen down and repair its damages. I will raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in days of old.

That's how James begins his quote. Now look at verse 12. So that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the Gentiles who are called by my name says the Lord who does this thing.

You flip back over to Acts. So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord. Doesn't sound like that they may possess the remnant of Edom, does it? This is a pretty substantial memory lapse on James' part.

If he can't get any closer than that, he's going to lose his little quote down. He's going to have to sit down and somebody else can quote the verse. That they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the Gentiles who are called by my name.

Well, this is what's interesting about this. James' quotation matches the Septuagint. The Greek translation of the Old Testament.

It's word for word what he's got here. It's got the rest of mankind seeking. It's got exoteo in there.

Seek out. It's all there. But we just saw that he's a Jewish guy talking about Jewish things to Jewish people.

He's using Peter's Jewish name Shimon or Simeon. And so why would he then blow a hole in his own argument by going over and quoting the Septuagint? Because all the Jewish people are going to say, wait a minute. You're using the Greek and it doesn't even match my Hebrew.

Why not quote the Hebrew? Hebrew talking to the Hebrews about Hebrew things. Quote the Hebrew text. But the Hebrew text is totally different here than the Septuagint.

So commentators, you know, they've just gushed and flailed and wrung their hands and written entire books about this problem. I will tell you what I think is the deal here. The Septuagint was translated a couple of hundred years before the Lord Jesus Christ.

Two to three hundred B.C. And they used the available Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament when they made the translation. Right? The Masoretic text that our Hebrew Old Testament is based on was copied and copied and copied and copied and copied all the way down. And up until the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, the oldest manuscript we

had of the Old Testament Hebrew was dated 1100 A.D. Which is like 13-1400 years later than when the Septuagint was translated.

Now, the Septuagint has its own set of problems. But, a lot of times when you come to a troubled Hebrew text in the Masoretic, you can look at the Septuagint, which is Greek, and retrovert the Greek into, well, what must the Hebrew have been? How do they typically get at this Greek when we know what the Hebrew is? You go back and sort of reconstruct the borlage or the Hebrew text that the Septuagint guys were using and you say, Aha! And now I can see what happened to my Masoretic text because here is what must have been the original. Ah, I see, they dropped this raish out or they thought it was a dalet and that's how we ended up with this strange problem.

So, Septuagint studies are critically important to Old Testament and New Testament studies like this. Well, why do we care about this? What's the difference? I say all of that to say this. Your text in Amos 9.11 is wrong.

James is right. The Septuagint is right. This other is wrong.

How do you wind up getting Edom? Because Adam. It's Adam. It's mankind.

It's not Edom. Why would you raise up the fallen tent of David so that they can grab Edom? That doesn't make any sense. The Masoretic text has suffered a corruption here.

And James, he is quoting the Hebrew text which happens to be the Septuagintal text because they both matched and were good back in his day and it got fouled up later. So, then you say, if the Hebrew text got messed up there, how do I know where else it got messed up? God knows what He's doing. And anytime there's a problem in the text, if He didn't preserve the text for us, He preserved evidence like this so that we can go back and fix it.

So, you don't have to worry. Don't decide, well, I just can't trust my Bible anymore because I found a mistake over in Amos 9.11. Don't worry about it. God has given us this kind of clue to say, hey, if you really look, you'll be able to straighten that out.

And that's what we've just done. So, what James is quoting here really is the sense and it fits. See, people have come in and said, James twisted Scripture, changed its original meaning to suit the times and we should be able to do the same thing.

I mean, you think this isn't important, it really is important because if an apostle or a church leader can take an Old Testament Scripture that used to mean one thing and twist it around and say something else with it, well then, we should go listen to all these yo-yos on Christian TV that do the same thing and believe everything they say. You're not allowed to do that. You have to take the Word of God at its meaning, the way it was intended, in its context and not go twisting it around.

And so, James has not twisted it. It got messed up later on in Amos. So, it originally did say, so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord.

God is... And what does this really mean? Israel has been disciplined. They have been destroyed as a nation. David's tent has fallen down, so to speak.

And God says, I'm going to raise that tent back up. You know why? Not to mention the Davidic covenant. Not to mention the Abrahamic and the Palestinian and the Mosaic and all the other covenants I've made, all the promises that God has made with Old Testament Israel.

But, it is necessary that Israel be raised up so that the rest of mankind can seek the Lord. They are the trustees of the oracles of God. Remember over in Romans 10, to them belong all of these things.

It is them through whom comes the Christ. You can't let the tent fall down and get trampled and disappear, or the rest of mankind is not going to be able to seek the Lord. But here, they do.

Even the Gentiles were called by my name. So, you have James recognizing that this is the fulfillment. The Gentiles are coming in.

Says the Lord who does all these things. Known to God from eternity are all his works. Therefore, now we're back in Acts 15, 19.

Therefore, James says, I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God. And I said last time, if he had just put a period there and stopped, he'd have been in good shape. But he just couldn't reign himself in.

But, we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, sexual immorality, things strangled, and from blood. Why these four things? He doesn't say murder. He doesn't say homosexuality.

He doesn't say a lot of things that he... Well, I guess homosexuality could be included under fornication. But, so many things that he could have said in there. And of all things, he says, watch out for something that's been strangled or from blood or things associated with idols.

And, of course, you figure the immorality. This is the word *pornea*, by the way, that, unfortunately, has been squeezed down to pretty much only mean fornication. Years ago, we did a study on *pornea* to see that an essential element of *pornea* is the breaking of faith, the breaking of trust.

That's an essential element of *pornea*. You have made a vow. You've made a promise.

You've made a covenant. There is a spoken or unspoken understanding, and you break

it. You violate it.

And you do it in an egregious way. And, of course, this finds its greatest example in adultery or fornication. That's why Jesus said that the only legitimate reason to break up a marriage is over pornia.

And you don't have to hire a detective to peek through the window and wait for somebody to have sex with somebody else and then say, aha, now I can divorce you. It's pornia. It is the breaking of faith in not just, oh, you said you'd bring eggs home and you didn't, type of thing, but a serious breach of your vows.

It can be in a lot of different areas. I think banging your spouse around qualifies in either direction. There are some hefty women that have beat their little mousy husband senseless, and those guys need to leave.

Child abuse, if you have one of the partners in a marriage that can't keep their hands off the kids in one way or another. God says you can divorce that person. You need to get you and your kids out of the house of somebody that breaks a trust in that way.

That is pornia. And that's what you have here. That's one of these four elements.

Why these four elements? We're going to pause and take our break, and when we come back I will answer that question. But out of what we have covered and what we have reviewed tonight in this session, what do we take away from this? I see two things. First of all, how important it is for us to live our own lives.

We have our hands full trying to pilot our own ship through the rocks and shoals and trying to navigate the valley of the shadow of death without trying to decide how everybody else ought to live, whether in the past, in the present, or in the future. We have to hoe our own row. Every man must bear his own burden.

We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and we need to give each other a lot of latitude. It's not our calling. And in many cases, what believers end up doing is assuming for ourselves the job of the Holy Spirit.

Whose job is it to convict of sin? Jesus sent the Spirit to convict of sin. It is not our job to convict each other of sin. Secondly, we're going to see James make a big mistake here.

And yet, so far, he seems to be right on track. He's quoting Scripture. He's making the right choice here.

He's not saying, oh no, we need to circumcise all those Gentiles. He's making the right decision here. He's 95% of the way to doing a great thing and having a really good day.

But he's going to mess it up in the last 5% that we're going to come back and see. And if there's one other principle that we bring from this, and we'll flesh it out after the break,

it's so important to finish well. It isn't how you start that people remember.

It's how you finish. Do you push through and get that last 5%? That's what distinguishes a 30-fold field as opposed to a 100-fold field. The 30-fold field just quit producing before the harvest season was over.

It isn't how you start. It's how you finish. And you can fall down a lot of times.

You can reverse yourself. You can take wrong exits and have to go under and come back and get on the road again. But it isn't how you start.

It's how you finish. James is ultimately going to finish well. We'll see it in the epistle of James.

But here, he gets 95% of this right and he's about to make a really big mistake. That's what we'll see when we come back from our break.