

37b ACTS

Let's resume our study now in Acts chapter 15, verse 13. After Paul and Barnabas relate the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles, James speaks up. I would point out in verse 12 that the reason this is significant, or one reason it's significant, is that the Gentiles have not been circumcised, have they? The Jews are saying, you need to be circumcised or you just can't get anywhere in the plan of God.

But Paul and Barnabas are saying, well, you know, all these uncircumcised people, God was healing, God was restoring withered limbs and sight to blind eyes, and all of the things that Jesus did for the Jews when He was here, He did for the Gentiles and there wasn't a one of them that was circumcised. So if circumcision is such a big requirement, how come God didn't wait to do the signs and wonders until after they were circumcised? And so this kind of takes the wind out of the sails, because if God is going to dispense that kind of grace amongst the Gentiles, what do they need to be circumcised for? What are they going to get when they adhere to the law that they're not getting now? They're getting the Word of God, they're saved, the Spirit of God is moving in a mighty way amongst them, so what are they missing out on that they should need to do this conformity to the law? So this is sort of the weight of this argument. That's why verse 12 is there.

The people were silent listening to Paul and Barnabas as they talked about these signs and wonders, because this is all happening to the uncircumcised. Well, think about us. Somebody can come along and lay a guilt trip on you.

Now, some of us are sort of past this now, but I know in earlier days, especially family or people you work with or whatever, they'd say, oh, well, what church do you go to? Where is that again? I don't believe I've driven by that one. You know, there's however many 900 churches within a five-mile radius in Dallas, but people tend to look askance. You know, if they're from a great big metropolitan thing with a steeple and we're exciting whoever, up in Tulsa they have exciting Eastwood.

Down here, all the churches that are moving north, they're outgrowing their buildings and building something even more monolithic and grandiose. There's like 10 or 12 big crystal cathedral-looking things up in Plano and Allen and Frisco and out that way. It's like the further out you get, the bigger they have to build it, because they want you to be able to see it from downtown.

So somebody that goes to one of those churches and they say, oh, well, you know, we had 16,000 people there on Sunday morning last week. So where do you go to church? You say, well, you know, I was sitting in a guy's living room. You know, you can begin to feel browbeaten and you think, well, you know, maybe I'm not mainstream.

I'm weird. I'm in a cult. I mean, something strange is going on.

Well, this is the kind of thing that people love to do. It has ever been thus. If you go to a college, this is why they have frat boys and they have sorority girls because they want to establish that we're the ins and you're the outs.

And if you do everything just the way we say, we'll let you on the out come in. And that's why they have initiations and they have pledges and all the rest of this kind of thing. It's juvenile.

It's ridiculous. But it goes on all the way through life. You come to a new company and people that have sort of established company culture, you have to kind of work your way in.

And there's people that will enjoy and get some sort of perverse satisfaction out of making new people feel out of place and out of joint and out of sync. Even if you get in just a group of a few people. Have you ever been in this situation where two or three people get together and two of them know each other and they insist on talking about all the stuff they have in common, kind of like, well, we know each other and you all don't know us.

Oh, you remember when we went to Las Vegas and they just go on and on and on. Or, you know, this used to happen in the army. Any two army guys at some point have been in Grafenwoehr, Germany.

They send them all to Grafenwoehr. And so you go some godforsaken place in Beirut or somewhere and two army guys have never seen each other before, have nothing in common. One's black and one's white.

You sit down at a table, the three of you, and the two of them say, well, I remember when we were back in Grafenwoehr. And the guy says, oh, yeah, back in Grafenwoehr. And immediately they have this bond of camaraderie like they were 32nd degree masons or something.

And they've got all of this secret initiation. But people, this is a part of our human nature. We love to do this.

And sometimes we do this to other people. And we sort of, we say, well, you know, someday you'll be at the lofty preeminence of experience that I am and you'll have things in common like we do. But right now you're a lesser form of life because you weren't there and you didn't, you know.

It's just, it has ever been this. It was this way thousands of years ago. Ancient Hittites sat around and did this to each other.

Ancient Israelites sat around and, you know, belittled one another. It's been going on since Cain and Abel. Cain, oh, I knew mom and dad before you did.

You know, it's always been this way. Well, this is what these people are doing. And so they're saying, well, you know, we're the Jews.

We've known God since creation. And these uncircumcised Gentiles, I mean, we can't just let them run them up knowing God and not joining our little club. We've got to put something on them.

We've got to kind of initiate them into the fellowship of the righteous kind of a thing. And it's just this juvenile thing that all of us have in us. So, but they have to keep silent.

Paul and Barnabas are saying, look, whatever you may think, God has come down and worked mighty miracles and distributed his spirit amongst them. So are you going to put God to the test and say God doesn't know what he's talking about? God messed up because he did miracles for them and they didn't get circumcised yet? They're not keeping the law. They have never gone to synagogue on a Sabbath.

They're eating pork every third or fourth day. And God came down and healed their little son and put his withered limbs back to rights and gave sight to the blind. And the next day went out and celebrated and had a big bacon, lettuce, tomato sandwich right afterwards.

So if you're trying to put this yoke on them, you're putting God to the test. You're saying God really doesn't know what he's doing. Well, that's why this verse 12 is in there.

The signs and wonders make a difference because this is God's seal of approval. God is there. God is active.

God is dispensing grace to these people that have never done anything related to the law. So when they quit speaking, James answers. Now remember again, this is after Galatians.

You get the idea. Maybe James has learned something. And you say, well, James, good job.

You're doing a whole lot better than you did in Galatians when you sent the men up to Antioch and screwed up the works. But James, like all the rest of us, is a work in progress. And he's going to get 95% of the way there and then he's going to blow it.

So he stands up and says, brethren, listen to me. Shimon has related how God first concerned himself taking from among the Gentiles a people for his name. And he's got a nice little hook back to when the Israelites themselves were taken out to be a people.

Then he says that the prophets agree. And he quotes a couple of different passages. He pulls a little fragment out of Jeremiah.

He pulls a little bit out of Amos chapter 9 and verse 11 and so on. And rebuilding the

fallen tabernacle and all that. And you say, well, what's going on? Why does he quote the part about rebuilding the fallen tabernacle? Because really, the tabernacle of David, this is not the tabernacle of worship.

This isn't what Moses and the tabernacle workmen put together under instruction from God. This is David's tent. This is his royal tent.

This is his little portable home away from home throne room. The tabernacle of David. His temporary rule over Israel.

The temporary greatness to which Israel came at the height of the Old Testament day. Well, that collapsed. Why did it collapse? Who knocked the pins and the ropes away from that tent so that it all caved in? Disobedient, faithless, apathetic believers who got tangled up with idols.

Who strayed from God. All we like sheep have gone astray. Who said that? One of the prophets trying to get the Israelites to come back to the fold.

And they didn't. So the tent fell down. It collapsed.

All the props got knocked out of it. And so the prophet Amos says, quoting God here. After these things I will return.

I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen. This is a millennial promise. The royal tent of David with his little traveling throne.

That's the Lord Jesus sitting on the throne of his father David. The tabernacle, the dwelling, the hegemony of Israel as the superior kingdom is not only going to be restored but expanded under the Lord Jesus Christ. So this is a millennial promise.

Why is James quoting it here? Because the Lord Jesus coming in his first coming is a foreshadowing. He came and it could have happened. He offered the kingdom.

He raised the potential. The tent was potentially there if people would have acknowledged it and walked into it. And he did bring new life and new faith and new promise and new energy and the Holy Spirit into Israel.

It's not going to be, you know, Jesus said my kingdom is not of this world because at that time it wasn't. It will be in the millennium but it wasn't there. But there is a sense in which that spiritual tabernacle has been raised up.

Not only in Israel but by extension in the human race. So James is doing a good thing here. These are the pertinent scriptures.

The Lord makes these things known from long ago. Therefore, James says, it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles.

But we won't trouble them but we'll lean on them.

We won't trouble them but we're going to fence them in a little bit. Now my question is, and I've been puzzling over this for two weeks and it finally came to me why he picks these things. Have you thought about this? You think, now here's a bunch of God forsaken pagans living in complete degradation and total apostasy and all kinds of evil.

Now they've just signed up and joined. They're going to be a Christian. What should we tell them? What are the things we need to get them to quit doing now that they're Christians? Stay away from things strangled.

Stay away from blood. Stay away from things associated with idols. And stay away from pornia.

Don't break your promises and do things that are outside the normal bounds of sexual morality, which is all about promises. You have a commitment to your family. You have a commitment to your parents.

You have a commitment to your children. And this is all about respecting the boundaries and the promises that make up a family. That's what pornia is really all about.

When you degrade and abrade and breach and wear down and tear apart the good things that bind a family unit together within a marriage and between elders and youngers, you are engaged in pornia. So he says, let's get them out of that. We'll tell them don't do that.

And I think, so they can cheat people blind in business. They can lie. They can bear false witness.

What about the other seven of the Ten Commandments that aren't in here? How about let's tell them to love their neighbor or something? Oh no, we're going to tell them, for thou shalt nots. No, you know, love the Lord your God. You're in Jerusalem.

You're writing to these brand new Gentile Christians, and your big word from the mountain is, don't get a strangled animal. I mean, what about loving God? You know, all of these things. It's an odd choice, I think.

And I ask myself, why did James choose this? Well, I have an answer for you. James, look at what James says. Go on past what he says.

He says, abstain from things contaminated by idols. This is actually the pollution of idols, literally. The pollution of idols.

Anything that defiles and pollutes related to idolatry. Fornication, i.e., pornia. Fornication is kind of weak and limited for what pornia represents.

What is strangled and from blood? Why? Verse 21, for Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath. So, what he is saying is, there are Jewish communities and synagogues for many hundreds of years now, ever since 721 B.C., 586 B.C., when we couldn't worship in the temple anymore. People have been reading the law and coming to grips and coming to a knowledge of what's in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

And the morality code that God has put out there is available. We don't need to send them a copy of the law. Every city has already got a copy of the law.

So, what should we tell them as a summary? Well, he's not trying to pick the most important thing. That's not his criteria. You could think murder, love the Lord your God, whatever.

But these, look at these. What are these? That he chooses and that they agree to and think this is a good idea. What is the whole problem in this chapter? How did this conflict get started? It is the difficulty that Jewish Christians have with Gentile Christians.

What do you do if you are an observant Jewish Christian? You've been raised all your life to not eat pork, to not eat meat that has anything to do with an idol. And here's a Gentile Christian who loves the same Lord you do, witnessed and sustained by the same Spirit of God as you, and he invites you over for chow, and he's got this meat that is anathema to you. Or he's got some weird thing going on in his household.

He's got the harem right around the corner, and he invites them all down to the table or whatever. There's things that as a Jewish Christian, you just can't in good conscience overlook, because they violate everything you stand for, everything you believe in, everything you were raised for. And it's a social problem.

It's all the same as if you went to Africa, and the chief in the little village in the middle of the jungle comes to Christ, and he says, come to my feast. And you come there, and everybody is stark naked, and they're about to eat some kind of raw pig intestines or something. And I mean, you're both Christians, he's grateful, you want to have fellowship, but you can't show up naked, and you can't eat raw pig intestines.

It's just not a thing you can do. You're too culturally divided for that. Aside from any actual morality issues that may be involved, it just puts a real kink in the whole fellowship aspect of things.

So, James, very knowledgeable man in the Scriptures, he says, you know what? We've decided we're not going to put the yoke of the law on them. But, if you go to the Old Testament, there are transcendent things stated in the Old Testament that apply to everyone. And if you go back and look, how I found these was by searching the Old Testament for the phrase, cut off from.

Because most of the abominations say, if somebody commits it, he will be cut off from his people. And when you get that list of things, anyone who does not undergo the rite of circumcision will be cut off from his people. If you eat the blood, cut off from his people.

If you do this, if you do that, if you do the other. Well, then, within that list, there are two classifications. If you eat the meat of the peace offering that you're not supposed to eat, you'll be cut off from your people.

There are many of them that have to do with being Jewish and keeping the law. But then there are some that are transcendent. And guess which ones are transcendent? Turn with me to Leviticus, chapter 17, verse 8. God talking to Moses, Then you shall say to them, Any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them.

Whatever follows verse 8 here applies not just to the Jews, but to the Gentiles that may be in the area. Any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and does not bring it to the doorway of the tent of the meeting to offer it to the Lord, that man shall be cut off from his people. Any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood.

I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls. For it is the blood, by reason of the life, that makes atonement.

God says, when you're talking about atonement, which is universal, not restricted to the Jews, anybody who comes to faith, well, then you can't mess up the picture of atonement. But anybody who eats blood, all these English people eating blood pudding, or whatever they have over there, and these African people that nick the... or are they in India? Somebody nicks the neck of a cow, and the blood goes into a cup, and they drink it warm right out of the cow, and then they put their thumb over it until they don't kill the animal, but it's like they're short on water or something, I forget where that is, Africa I think, out by the belt or something. And so they find an animal, or maybe it's the camels, maybe the Arabs do it with the camels.

I've seen that happen two or three different places where tribesmen somewhere actually drink the blood straight out of the animal as their liquid when they can't get water. Anyway, whatever that is, God says it's an abomination, you're cut off from your people. So James is looking at this and saying, this is a transcendent command.

This goes back all the way to what God told Noah right after the flood. Long before Abraham, God said, you can eat the meat, don't eat the blood. Remember that over in Genesis 10? And you have the same thing repeated here.

Therefore I said, this is verse 12, Leviticus 17, I said to the sons of Israel, no person among you may eat blood, nor may any alien who sojourns among you eat blood. This is one of the most often repeated prohibitions in the law. I've found like 9 or 10 times where God says to Israel, don't eat the blood, you shall not eat the blood.

If you eat the blood, you'll be cut off from your people. The life of the flesh is in the blood, don't eat the blood. Over and over and over and over again.

And it applies not only to them, but also to the aliens. Now, go forward one chapter in Leviticus to chapter 18. By the way, there was a practice among the Greeks when they would do their sacrifices, they didn't do them the way the Israelites did.

Some of their ritual things involved strangling the animal to death. I think some of the Incas and Aztecs did the same thing. And then they did the same thing with their human sacrifices.

The Druids, the Celts, a lot of other ancient peoples strangled their victims, whether animal or human. The Bog people that they dig up over there have in many cases been strangled and the cord is still around their neck. And these were ritual sacrifices.

And of course, they started out doing this with animals and graduated up to people. But the idea of not eating something with its blood, if you strangle the animal, its blood is still in. The idea of slitting the throat of an animal and then eating the meat is that the heart pumps the blood out.

I mean, it's kind of gross to think about, but you hang a deer and all that kind of thing for enough time to try to get it all to drain out. But these sacrificial animals, the reason God had the Israelites have the priests slit the throat, the animal is alive and its heart evacuates the vast majority of the blood out of the animal until it dies. And so when you then partake of that meat, the blood is no longer in it.

If you strangle the animal and its heart stops beating, all of the blood is still in there. And so much of this meat offered to idols had the problem of not having been properly drained in what a Jew would consider a kosher way. So regardless of how long they hung it or what they did to it afterward, meat that came from a strangled animal was assumed to have the blood in it.

And so the strangulation thing relates to the blood remaining in the meat. Well, now you go to Leviticus 18 and down to beginning about verse 6. None of you shall approach any blood relative of his to uncover nakedness. I am the Lord.

I'll leave you to read the rest of this, but this is how we come to understand what the sin of Ham was against Noah after coming out of the ark, after planting the vineyard, Noah and Mrs. Noah get drunk. And then you go to Genesis and it says that Ham saw his father's nakedness. And you think, well, what's the big deal? I mean, you know, men

have been in situations like this all down through history.

What is the big deal? Well, it had nothing to do with Noah. It had everything to do with Mrs. Noah. Read the next verse.

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father. This is Leviticus 18.7. That is the nakedness of your mother. She is your mother.

You are not to uncover her nakedness. Any kind of indecent exposure of the mother, and in particular, sexual relations with one's mother or with the wife of one's father. It also goes with second wives and your mother died and he remarried.

Whatever it is, the woman to whom your father is married, her nakedness is your father's nakedness. When Ham uncovered his father's nakedness, something happened with Mrs. Noah. That uncovered Noah's nakedness.

I have proposed to you in the past that Ham, they had a big drunken orgy in there, and Ham and Mrs. Noah made out. She got pregnant and her son, by that copulation, was Canaan, who was actually the fourth son of Ham. When Noah wakes up and sees what has been done to him and he says, he doesn't say, cursed be Ham for uncovering my nakedness.

He says, cursed be Canaan. His servant shall he be to his brethren. Why does he curse Canaan? What did Canaan have to do with it? There are only two legitimate answers that I have ever been able to make work.

One is the one I just gave you. Canaan is the illegitimate offspring of this in the same way that Moab and Ammon were the product of Lot and his daughters. Kind of an opposite gender, same type of thing.

And, of course, Moab and Ammon are a curse on a thorn in the side of Israel to this day. The other possibility that Dr. Criswell proposed, I had never heard it before until I heard him preach this. He thinks that Ham already had his son Canaan and sent him in to do a homosexual thing with Noah.

And because Canaan agreed to do this and was some sort of a homosexual, then my question is, how can he be a homosexual when there's only eight people on the planet? But, anyway, it's an idea. So, you know, maybe that's how he got started down that road or something. But either way, I base my interpretation of this on Leviticus 18.

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father. That is the nakedness of your mother. Anything untoward going on with the mother, that is the father's nakedness.

And you can read all down through the rest of that. Why are we even looking at this? Because this is the pornia aspect. And God says at the beginning and at the end of this

section, look up at verse 3. You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you.

And then he lists all of this intramural sex. All of this incestuous type of stuff. He says this is what they do in Egypt.

This is what they do in Canaan. This is the reason I am getting these people out of the land because they do this kind of thing. Look at verse 24.

23 is talking about bestiality. And then he says, Do not defile yourself by any of these things, for by all these, the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. Even a Gentile, who is already defiled by definition in the mind of a Jew, God says this activity defiles even a Gentile.

So James says, let's tell the Gentiles don't engage in pornia, which includes this subset of pornia here, which is fornication, adultery, incest, bestiality, all of these horrible perversions of what is supposed to be a wonderful thing restricted to marriage. As for you, he says, verse 25, the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought this punishment upon us, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants. And of course this is prophetic because Israel is going to go into the land.

They are going to fail to heed this command. They do not drive everybody out. They wind up adopting these practices.

And the land of promise spews them out to Assyria and spews them out to Babylon as well. You are to keep my statutes and my judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native nor, end of verse 26, nor the alien who sojourns among you. There are very few of the commands in the Mosaic law that apply not only to the Jews, but also to the resident aliens.

But the ones about blood and the ones about this type of polluting, defiling, perverse activity are universal. So James is going to his Old Testament and saying, we need to tell them that because we are letting them off the hook on the law, doesn't excuse them from these things that transcend the law and go beyond being a Jew, go beyond being an Israelite. These apply to everyone.

The life of the flesh is in the blood. That prohibition goes back to the days of Noah. And in the very same story of Noah, you also have cursed Canaan because of pornia, violation of the proper family boundaries and bonds and trusts.

So he's not dreaming this up. He didn't just grab something out of the air to conciliate and make a compromise. He's got a scriptural footing.

Now, what I find especially interesting about this is James has accurately quoted Amos. James has made the right decision in saying we're not going to decide that Gentiles need

to keep the law. Of course, it's not his decision to make anyway.

God has already demonstrated that they are not under the law. God has already revealed it to the Apostle Paul that they're not under the law. God has already revealed it to the Apostle Peter that they're not under the law.

And so, he chimes in and says the right thing here. But, go back to Acts chapter 15. We are going to write to them that they abstain from these.

It seemed good to the Apostles and elders with the whole church to choose men from among them to send to Antioch. And sending this letter, verse 23, the Apostles and the brethren who are elders to the brethren in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings. Since we have heard, verse 24, that some of our number whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls.

Remember, the Galatians 2 people in the earlier deal were men from James. They were under instructions. That's, again, what makes me think Galatians 2 is earlier.

This is Paul's third visit to Jerusalem after that. And they've learned. They say, now, we didn't send these guys.

There's no mea culpa here. It's not our fault. These guys, loose cannons, have done this.

And it seemed good to us. They've disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls. It seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select these men to send 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. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials. Stay away from things sacrificed to idols, blood, things strangled, from fornication.

Keep yourselves free from such things. You will do well. This is in the nature of conciliation.

Don't shock your Jewish Christian friends. If you stick with these, the Jews should not have a big beef. You're not putting them on the spot with your liberty that they, in good conscience, can't tolerate, can't fellowship with you over these things.

It all sounds great. Except, James says, I think it would be good. He writes in the letter, It seems good to us and to the Holy Spirit.

Where did the Holy Spirit speak anywhere in this meeting? You know what this is? This is no different than the Pope. Even when the Pope is right, the Pope comes out and says, Boo on abortion. Well, he's right.

That's a bad thing. Nobody in their right mind looks at that and says, Yay, let's have more abortions. I mean, he's right.

It's wrong. But, you can be right in a wrong way. James does not point the Gentile believers to the Scriptures.

Why doesn't he take them to Leviticus 17? Why doesn't he point them? Instead of saying, It seems good to us. What's he doing? He's saying, We're blessing you with our ecclesiastical authority. We are giving you no other burden but this.

It seemed good to us to send these men. Therefore, we have sent. How many times do you find the first person pronouns here? We have thought this over.

We found out that this was happening. We are deciding that we'll lay no other burden on you but this. Even though his conclusions are correct and his Scripture is rightly interpreted, he doesn't send people to the authority of Scripture.

He puts them under his own authority. He acts like a Pope. And that is wrong.

You do not grant or deny authority from the church. Now, if anybody had a license to do this, it would be Peter. Jesus said, What you bind on earth has been bound in heaven.

What you loose on earth has been loosed in heaven. Jesus never said that to James. James wasn't present on that occasion.

How come it doesn't seem good to Peter to bind and to loose here? This guy has no leg to stand on. I had to sift through about six different things there before I could find a good one. He has no portfolio.

He has no charter. He has no authority. Who put the stick in his hand? Who died and left him in charge? We, it seemed good, and I'm invoking the name of the Holy Spirit.

God be praised. Says who? The Holy Spirit didn't speak. There was no tongue of fire that came down.

Nobody stood up. Agabus didn't say, Hey, wait a minute. Just invoke the name of God for no good reason.

There is nothing in the Scripture that says the Holy Spirit made a peep. Peter did the same kind of thing when they elected Matthias. Speaking of which, speaking of which, before we run out of time here, go back up.

Look at verse 22. If you want another little telltale signal that all is not well, it seemed good to the apostles and elders with the whole church. It doesn't say in verse 22 that it seemed good to the Holy Spirit.

It seemed good to the apostles and elders with the whole church. And this tells you that just because everybody is in agreement and in a majority doesn't make it right. To choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

Who did they choose? Judas. Who's the first guy? We know Silas. Silvanus.

He's going to show up later. He's going to become a mighty man of faith in the church and all that. But look at the first guy.

Look at the first guy. Who is he? Judas called Barsabbas. Now, aside from the obvious name of Judas going on here, go back to Acts 1. Verse 21.

Peter is speaking. Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning with the baptism of John until the day was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. We have got to elect the twelfth apostle.

Seems good to us to fill Judas' empty chair. So they put forward two men. Who's the first guy? Everybody remembers Matthias.

Nobody remembers the other guy. Joseph called Barsabbas. Joseph called Barsabbas was the guy that didn't get picked.

First runner-up. Matthias got picked. The lot was cast.

This is his only mention. Here's Joseph Barsabbas. But it would appear that the Barsabbas family was a big noise in the church there.

They were prominent. They were probably the contributors and well thought of and so on. I thought, well, we've got to put the rich people in so they'll keep planking into the plate or whatever.

So Joseph called Barsabbas is in on this whole deal of picking the wrong apostle. Now you go 14 chapters later, and when they decide to send some men to deliver this letter, we're back to the Barsabbas family. And now we have Judas Barsabbas, who is picked for this mission and never heard from again.

Just a point of interest. So there is a little bit of an overtone, of a clue here, that that Barsabbas idea links these two events together. In both cases, you have people going off half-cocked, thinking they're doing a good thing, quoting Scripture right and left, invoking the name of God, and in fact, making a mistake.

Everybody agrees. Everybody's happy. We're all of one mind.

Everybody's praising God. It's wrong. How do we know it's wrong? We don't have time to turn that, but you go to the epistles of Paul.

Does he ever refer to this letter? Does he ever tell anybody in his later letters, well, you should know you're not under law but under grace, because remember that letter James wrote? You don't need James when you've got the Word of God. Paul goes back to the Bible. He says, remember Sarai and Hagar? You've got Mount Sinai, and you've got law and grace there.

He goes through that whole thing. He never once refers back to the council. He never cites ecclesiastical authority.

This is the beginning. You're looking at the pebble that starts the stream that will become the Catholic Church right here. We think it's good.

We are going to give you some help. We're going to interpret the Scriptures for you. We're not going to tell you the Scriptures themselves.

We're just going to tell you what we think, because we've looked at the Scriptures for you. We're not going to tell you about Leviticus 17 and 18. We're not going to tell you about Genesis 10.

We'll digest it. We'll shape it, and you just go by what we tell you. This is evil.

It is a wrong thing, and James is not through screwing up things in the church. We're going to go forward another six chapters or so and see him actually succeed in finally tripping up the Apostle Paul himself with this same kind of thinking. And you know what? He's going to refer back to this letter on that day.

He's going to say, remember when we wrote the letter about the thing strangled? Paul, you need to take a vow. And Paul's going to do it and fall for it. It's going to send Paul in a completely different direction.

So what is the upshot of this? John the Apostle tells believers, you have no need that any man teach you. You have the Holy Spirit. You go to the Scriptures.

You make your decision based on the Word of God. Don't listen to the opinions or the pre-digested conclusions of people. You should be able to follow.

If you have a position on what Scripture says, it shouldn't be, well, I heard Sam say, or I heard a pastor say, or I read McGee or somebody else say. I have looked in the Scripture, and I see for myself, this is what God says. This is what the Word of God says.

That has to be the foundation of our faith. You have no need that any man teach you. It doesn't mean nobody teaches.

God commissions and gifts thousands of people. But we have a responsibility to go to the first source. It is the Word and the Spirit that sustain us.

Well, that's all we have time for tonight. Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the privilege of studying your Word.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will minister these truths to our souls. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.