

James' Jerusalem Judgment

Compiled by Paul R. Blake

Introduction:

A. Acts 15:13-30

1. Up till now the sermons have been about the salvation of sinners and the restoration of erring Christians
2. Now the emphasis shifts to an error that impacts more than one Church
3. Sermons that save, sermons that restore, sermons that encourage, sermons that edify, and now sermons that address doctrinal error
4. An example of how a sermon can have more than individual application, but can address the needs of a collectivity

B. Set up background and setting from Acts 15:1-12 (exegete)

1. Acts 15:1-5 - Problem: Dissention
2. Acts 15:6-7 - Process: Discussion
3. Acts 15:7-11 - Peter's Discourse
4. Acts 15:12 - Paul's Declaration

I. JAMES ADDRESSES THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM

A. Acts 15:13-21

1. Vs 13 - "The multitude kept silent."
2. Vs 14 - Recognized the testimony of faithful witnesses
 - a. Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3 - eyewitness accounts
 - b. Recognized the authority of one speaking by the Holy Spirit
3. Vs 15-17 - testimony of the prophets
 - a. Luke 24:44; 2Peter 1:21
4. Vs 18 - Recognized the eternal plan of God
 - a. Purposed salvation for all men from the beginning
 - b. Gen. 3:15 - Adam and Eve were not under the Law of Moses
5. Vs 21 - Recognized the influence of the Law of Moses

B. Acts 15:19-20 - The Seven Noahide Laws (implicit in Gen. 2:26-27, 9:1-7)

1. Not to deny God (idolatry)
2. Not to blaspheme God
3. Not to murder
4. Not to engage in incestuous, adulterous, bestial, or homosexual activity
5. Not to steal
6. Not to eat a living animal or its blood
7. To set up courts to ensure obedience to the other six laws.

C. These were laws practiced by the patriarchs long before the Law of Moses

1. Practiced by faithful Gentiles
2. Echoed and reinforced by the law of Moses
3. James was reminding them of what Jews and Gentiles had in common
 - a. Setting the stage for Paul's lengthy discussions in 1Corinthians 8 and Romans 14

4. He restates only four: fornication, idolatry, eating blood, or live animals, because these were the four that Gentile converts would have the most trouble with temptation due to their background

D. Acts 15:22-23 - Results

1. This answer pleased everyone because it was the right one
2. A letter was written; honorable well-known men were sent to confirm

II. THE LETTER WITH JAMES' JERUSALEM JUDGMENT

A. Acts 15:23-29 - The letter - Sent to all the congregations; not a violation of local church autonomy. Possibly the first epistle

1. Vs 24 - No one is authorized to require more than what God has commanded
2. Vs 25-27 - Commending the men for verification of the truth
3. Vs 28-29 - This answer is from the Holy Spirit
4. Vs 30-31 - The response to the letter
5. Vs 32-35 - The follow up for reinforcement

Conclusion:

- A. This was serious dissention over the most emotionally charged issue of the first century; it had the potential to divide every church in the known world.
1. It was resolved by righteous men who did not have the Bible written down in its entirety, but who trusted in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit
 2. The answer was accepted by Jew and Gentile alike, who were happy to have a God given answer that brought peace.
 3. There is no reason why the same thing cannot occur today when any issue arises that threatens the peace of brethren