

The Jerusalem Council

The meeting, recorded in Acts 15, which was called by the elders of the Assembly of believers in Jerusalem was necessitated by the actions of men from that Assembly who had traveled to Antioch, where Barnabas and Paul were ministering. Upon arriving in Antioch and finding believing Gentiles in that Assembly who had not received circumcision, the visitors from Jerusalem told those Gentiles that unless they were circumcised according to the custom of Moses, that is, unless they converted to the Jewish religion, they would not be saved from the coming wrath of God.¹ Barnabas and Paul vehemently argued against them, and the leaders of the Antiochan Assembly, unable to determine what was right, sent a few of their number with Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem to present the matter to the elders and apostles. After they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul testified to that Assembly how God had been using them to convert Gentiles to Christ without requiring them to become Jews. However, some in the Jerusalem Assembly rejected that testimony and insisted that it was necessary to circumcise the believing Gentiles and to command them to keep the law of Moses.² The elders then called this special meeting to discuss the matter apart from the Assembly as a whole.³

Those who argued against Barnabas and Paul were devout men, filled with the Spirit and expert in the Scriptures; indeed, had they not been such men, they would not have been allowed to participate in this Council. In arguing their point, they were able to make skillful use of Scripture, and they would have especially emphasized the fact that Jesus himself was circumcised and kept the law and that all the apostles were still keeping it. Barnabas and Paul, on the other hand, based their case on a revelation from Jesus to them of a gospel for the Gentiles that did not include Moses' law. They conceded that, for the time being, God required Jewish believers to continue to keep the law, but their opponents, dissatisfied with that, demanded that all believers must submit to the law or be damned. Knowledgeable men of God stood in both camps, and arguments on both sides were powerful and persuasive. Feelings ran deep, and zeal was lacking on neither side, for the direction of the body of Christ on earth was at stake, and, as both sides believed, souls were hanging in the balance. The details of the debate are not recorded for us in the Bible; however, knowing the essential points which the debaters would have made, I humbly suggest the following version of this momentous Council, called by the elders of the Assembly of God in Jerusalem.

Jacobus: Men and brothers, I greet you today in the name of Messiah Jesus. May God be with us in this meeting.

Council members: *Amen! Etc.*⁴ *Someone begins to sing a hymn, and everyone joins in.*

Let our God, the God of Israel, surround us,
for His Son, our holy Shepherd, came and found us!
To the people He has chosen, let His kingdom come!
Let our God, the God of Israel, now crown us!

¹ Acts 15:1. Circumcision was not an end unto itself; it was the door through which a man had to pass in order to be allowed to keep the law (cp. Ex. 12:48). The goal was not to be circumcised but to take on the responsibilities and receive the blessings of the law. Paul cautioned his Gentile converse that if they received circumcision, they were “obligated to keep the entire law” (Gal. 5:3).

² Acts 15:4–5. I have imagined that the men who went to Antioch were at this meeting, but the Bible does not say so.

³ In Galatians 2:1–10, Paul refers to a private meeting with the elders and apostles in Jerusalem which took place at least seventeen years after his conversion (cp. Gal. 1:18–24; 2:1), which in turn, took place some years after the Spirit first came. The similarities between the meeting described in Galatians 2 and this meeting in Acts 15 are enough to justify the assumption that they are one and the same private meeting.

⁴ Comments and noises from Council members are heard throughout. There was no strictly enforced order.

Let His chosen people Israel now hear Him.
 Let them join in singing Zion's song and fear Him!
 At the Father's invitation, we approach His sacred throne.
 Let His chosen people, Israel, draw near Him!
 Let the nations of the earth come and adore Him,
 so that they might know the mercy waiting for them!
 Let them tremble at His power! Let them bless His holy name,
 and with gifts and sacrifices fall before Him!

Council members: *Amen! Praise God! Etc.*

The issue is presented to the Council

Jacobus: Now, brothers, unity among those who believe in Messiah Jesus is of such importance that it occupied Messiah's thoughts in the last hours of his life among us, and he took precious time from his few remaining hours to earnestly pray for it.⁵ By this, we know that our unity is one of his deepest desires.

John: Yes, and the Lord also promised that if we were united, he would be with us. He told us, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there, in their midst."⁶

Council members: *Amen! Etc.*

Nahum: May God make it so with us today!

Council members: *Amen! Etc.*

Jacobus: David the King informed us that unity in the family of God is not merely sweet, but that it also carries with it great blessing and an authority equal to that of the high priest himself⁷ – a blessing certainly to be desired!

Council members: *Amen! Etc.*

Jacobus: And so, we are gathered today to resolve an issue that threatens to divide us. For not long ago, Hananiah, with Hushai and Lamech, went to Antioch to visit the Assembly there. When they arrived, they found Gentiles in that Assembly who believed in Messiah but had not been circumcised according to the custom of the law. So, these brothers warned those Gentiles that unless they submitted to circumcision and became part of our nation, they would not be saved with Israel when Jesus returns, but would suffer the wrath of God with all the heathen. Now, when Barnabas and Paul heard them teaching this, they stopped them, saying they had no authority to command such things of Gentiles who believe. Upon that, a great controversy arose, and when, after much disputing, the elders of Antioch could not resolve the matter, the Assembly there decided to send Barnabas and Paul with a few of their elders here, to present the issue to us. And they are most welcome.

Council members: *Amen! Etc.*

Nahum: And we welcome as well the young man of the Gentiles whom Barnabas and Paul brought with them. What is his name again?

Paul: It is Titus, sir.

Nahum: Yes, yes, I remember now. Welcome, Titus!

Council members: *Amen! Etc.*

Jacobus: Amen. Welcome to you all.

⁵ Jn. 17:11b, 20–23.

⁶ Mt. 18:20.

⁷ Ps. 133:1–2.

Now, men and brothers, as you know, after Barnabas and Paul arrived the other day, they testified in our Assembly that God had wrought mighty works among the Gentiles by their hands and that many Gentiles had believed but were not afterward circumcised. Then some of us rose up and joined with these brothers in opposing Barnabas and Paul, testifying that all who believe in Messiah Jesus must be circumcised and keep the law if they hoped to be spared the coming wrath.

Now, we have at no time experienced division such as this since the day God poured out His Spirit from on high, and when we elders saw that our congregation was troubled by the dissension they witnessed, we decided to consider the issue in private, apart from the full Assembly, and we have gathered today for that purpose. So now, I propose that we hear first from Barnabas and Paul, and then from Hananiah and anyone else who has something to say concerning their new doctrine. And may God resolve this controversy and rid us of the turmoil which has arisen because of it.

Council members: *Amen! Etc.*

Jacobus: I will sit now, and we will hear you all. Speak freely, and God will make His judgment known.

Council members: *Amen! Etc.*

Barnabas: [*Barnabas rises.*] Men and brothers, Paul has asked me to speak first, since I am so well acquainted with you all, men whom I have loved since I sold my possessions and forsook my island home to come here, determined to devote myself with you all to the gospel of God.⁸

Council members: *Amen! Etc.*

Barnabas: We live in an extraordinary time, brothers, for even though God commanded us by the hand of Moses not to add anything to the law,⁹ God Himself has added His Son, to redeem for Himself a people from Israel, as the prophet said, “A Redeemer is coming to Zion, even to those in Jacob who repent of their transgression.”¹⁰

Council members: *Amen! Etc.*

Barnabas: As you know, following the persecution which arose throughout Judea after the stoning of Stephen, some fled these parts and went to Antioch, where they preached the gospel, but only to the Jews.¹¹ However, some who fled to Antioch were not originally from Judea, but from Cyrene and Cyprus, and in time past, they had been conversant with Gentiles. There, in the normal course of life, they spoke of Messiah to the Gentiles they met, many of whom received their testimony and believed. And when we in Jerusalem heard of that, we were glad, and you chose me to go to Antioch to exhort and encourage them all, which I gladly did. And after I arrived, the Lord gave a great increase to the Assembly there.

Later, when I heard that Paul was again in his hometown of Tarsus in Cilicia, I went to Tarsus and brought him back with me to Antioch to help me in the work.¹² I believed that since Paul himself was a Roman citizen,¹³ he would be of help to me in understanding and dealing with the Gentiles, and my expectation of help was not in vain.

Now, just prior to that, here in Judea, you will remember that God sent Simon Peter to Caesarea to preach in the house of a Gentile, Cornelius by name, a Roman centurion who feared our God and had done much good for our people.¹⁴ And when Simon arrived at Cornelius’ house and began to preach, the Spirit suddenly fell upon Cornelius and the other Gentiles in his house, none of whom were circumcised. And if you will remember, brothers, when Simon returned to Jerusalem and reported what

⁸ Acts 4:36–37.

⁹ Dt. 12:32.

¹⁰ Isa. 59:20.

¹¹ Acts 11:19.

¹² Acts 11:20–26.

¹³ Acts 22:25–28.

¹⁴ Acts 10:1–24.

had happened, many of you here today, and in this same room, were indignant against Simon because entering a Gentile's house was not only contrary to our tradition, but it was also contrary to the prohibition that Jesus once gave to you who were his disciples.¹⁵

Apostles: *Yes. That is true. I remember. Etc.*

Barnabas: Consequently, you elders rebuked Simon for going to a Gentile's house. Do you remember?

Joseph, Nahum, Silas: *Yes, we remember. Etc.*

Barnabas: It struck me then, as I know it did you, how humbly and patiently Simon explained to us that God had given him an astonishing vision and had commanded him to go to Caesarea with the messengers Cornelius had sent to find him. Then Simon told us that after he entered the house of Cornelius, when he had just begun to preach, God poured out His Spirit on those uncircumcised Gentiles just as He had poured it out on you all in the beginning.¹⁶

Council members: *Yes. I remember. Etc.*

Barnabas: And you may also remember that Simon concluded his account by asking a question that no one here could answer.

Joseph: How well do I remember, Barnabas! Simon asked us, "Who was I, that I could withstand God?"¹⁷

Barnabas: Yes, and only then did you elders relent, when you could not answer that question.

Joseph: We were convinced by then that God had indeed given His Spirit to Gentiles, as unbelievable as it was. And so, we had no choice but to believe Simon.

Council members: *That is true. Amen. Etc.*

Barnabas: Yes, Simon's testimony compelled us all to acknowledge that God had granted His Spirit to Gentiles, just as He had granted it to us Jews in the beginning.

Barnabas: Now, brothers, I admit that I followed you in opposing what Simon had done, but we opposed him only because we were ignorant. We did not expect God to ever give His holy Spirit to the heathen, and we did not know how to justify what happened at Cornelius' house because it was contrary to the gospel that Jesus himself preached, and which you all still preach.

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: But the doctrine we lacked then, the doctrine which would explain what God did at the house of Cornelius has now been revealed, and God has sent Paul and me to the Gentiles to preach it. For one day, after I had brought Paul to Antioch, as the Assembly worshipped, the Spirit spoke and commanded them, saying, "Set Barnabas and Paul apart for me, for the work to which I have called them!" And so, after the congregation fasted and prayed, they laid their hands on us and sent us on our way.¹⁸ Therefore, to the Gentiles we go, carrying the message which Cornelius and his house heard from Simon before God interrupted his sermon and filled them with the Spirit.

Micah: Interrupted him?

Barnabas: Yes. Simon, didn't you say that you "had just begun to speak" when the Spirit fell on those Gentiles?

Simon Peter: Yes.¹⁹ I intended to preach to Cornelius what I had been preaching from the beginning.

Philip: ... the gospel we *all* had been preaching.

Simon Peter: Yes, that they should repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus so that they might receive the Spirit.²⁰

¹⁵ Mt. 10:1–5.

¹⁶ Acts 11:15.

¹⁷ Acts 11:17–18.

¹⁸ Acts 13:1–3.

¹⁹ Acts 11:15.

Barnabas: But God finished your sermon before you did, for when those Gentiles had heard all that God wanted them to hear, He poured out His Spirit on them before you preached the gospel that Jesus had given you all to preach.

Simon Peter: That's true, Barnabas.

Barnabas: And the message those Gentiles heard from Simon is the message Jesus has now sent Paul and me to preach to the Gentiles. It is simply that if Gentiles work righteousness in God's sight and believe in His Son Jesus, God will grant them remission of sins *without the law*. And that is what happened to Cornelius and his house.

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: Too few of us have asked ourselves this question: if God requires Gentiles to be circumcised and keep the law, why did He interrupt Simon's sermon and prevent him from telling those Gentiles about circumcision and the law? Did God make a mistake?

Uzziel: Now, wait. I have a question.

Nahum: In time, brother Uzziel. Let's finish this first.

Uzziel: Very well.

Simon Peter: As some of you know, God's angel had appeared to Cornelius and told him that his righteous deeds had risen as a memorial before God and that he should send for me at Joppa.²¹ Then, after the servants of Cornelius came and brought me to Cornelius' house, I began preaching, telling them that if they believed in Jesus, God would grant them remission of sins. They must have believed me, for it was at that very moment, when I mentioned the words, "remission of sins", that God poured out His Spirit on them, and their sins were remitted.

Barnabas: That is because they had worked righteousness before you came, and after you came, they believed in Jesus, and that is all that God requires of the Gentiles.

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: And now, God has sent Paul and me to preach that message, and in obedience to His command, we have traveled to many cities, declaring to the Gentiles that a door to the kingdom of the living God is now open for them and that they should repent and believe the gospel.

Now, brothers, Jesus said that whoever forsook family and houses and lands for his sake would receive a hundredfold now, in this life,²² and Paul and I have certainly found that to be true. Traveling in foreign lands with the gospel which Jesus gave us, we received that hundredfold reward, for in almost every place, we found some who would believe, and those who believed joyfully opened up their homes and their lives to us, just as you all did to me when I first came here from Crete. I do not exaggerate when I say that many of them would have plucked out their eyes for us if we had needed them. They are precious saints of God.

Men and brothers, God has set His seal upon our gospel for the Gentiles many times by baptizing with His Spirit precious souls among the Gentiles who believed our preaching and repented of their sins, though they did not know the law. And so, I ask you now, as Simon once asked us, "Who are we, that we should withstand God?"

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: This is why, when Hananiah, Hushai, and Lamech arrived in Antioch and demanded of the Gentiles things which God does not demand, Paul and I contended with them. The elders in Antioch had been content with our gospel, but being inexpert in the scriptures, they became confused when these brothers condemned it. And because they did not know what was right, they asked us to come here with these faithful men so that you might confirm for them the truth of our gospel. [*Barnabas sits.*]

²⁰ Acts 2:38.

²¹ Acts 10:4.

²² Mk. 10:30.

Council members: *Comments.*

Jacobus: Thank you, Barnabas. And again, we greet the elders who have come with you from Antioch. And brother Titus. I believe that God will give them the assurance they desire.

Council members: *Amen. Etc.*

Jacobus: Now, brother Hananiah, what have you to say?

Hananiah: Uzziel, you had a question?

Uzziel: No, I will wait. I want to hear you. Please, go ahead.

Hananiah: As you wish. [*Hananiah rises.*] First of all, Jacobus, I join you in hope that God will restore the unity which His Assemblies happily enjoyed before the advent of this new doctrine. My hope is that God will purify His Assemblies so that we may once again walk in the sweet unity of the one true faith. I give God thanks for the wise elders we have here, men loved by God and by all the upright. And we are also thankful that God has kept brother Barnabas safe while he was away from us and that He has returned him to us in good health.

Council members: *Amen. Etc.*

Hananiah: Now, as we would expect, our brother Barnabas has said much that is true. We do indeed live in an extraordinary time, just as he said, for God has fulfilled His promise to our fathers to send the Redeemer to Israel, our Lord Jesus. And we eagerly await the return of Messiah Jesus to fulfill the remaining promises and to reign over the earth forever from this holy city!

Council members: *Amen! Praise God! Etc.*

Hananiah: Now, men and brothers, I am not blind. I know that most of you have already given your assent to Barnabas and Paul's gospel. Some of you have told me so. But I pray you, as just men, to hear me out, for I cannot believe that in assenting to their gospel, you have considered the matter as fully as you might have. We must be circumspect in our judgments, brothers. Wise Solomon understood that the man who presents his case first always seems right,²³ and he warned us not to make judgments before thoroughly considering an issue. He said, "It is folly and shame to him who responds to a matter before hearing it out."²⁴ So, I am grateful for the opportunity to present the other side of this matter.

To begin, I must re-emphasize something that has been mentioned, but may not have been sufficiently considered, to wit, the household of God has not once, since Messiah walked among us until now, suffered any division over doctrine. We have suffered through persecutions together and have overcome other challenges to our faith, but the faith itself has never been a matter of controversy. Our faith, the faith of Messiah Jesus, is sound; it is sure; and it has brought us very great blessings.

Council members: *Amen. That is true. Etc.*

Hananiah: Even when Ananias and his wife were slain by the Lord for their deceit, it was not a doctrinal matter, but a moral failure which cost them their lives. So, I would ask that every man here take special note of the undeniable fact that the Assemblies of God suffered no division concerning the faith until the introduction of this new doctrine. I think that is significant because, as brother Jacobus rightly said, it is Messiah's fervent desire that all who believe in him be in perfect unity. I have thought much lately about how pleased he and the Father must have been with us these past two decades to see perfect unity among us as we strove together for the gospel that Messiah taught us.

Council members: *Comments.*

Hananiah: Now, all of us who have known brother Barnabas know him to be a good and faithful man.

Council members: *Amen. That is right! Etc.*

²³ Prov. 18:17.

²⁴ Prov. 18:13.

Hananiah: He is also an astute man and an accomplished speaker, and he can be very persuasive. But again, I caution you, my brothers, to guard your hearts above all else, as Solomon warned us,²⁵ lest you be swept up in excellent speech and fail to examine carefully the words that have been spoken. False words can sound true.

I will be the first to admit that Barnabas sounds right, but we all know that good men can have wrong ideas, and if they are adept with words, good men can make wrong ideas sound right. Ahithophel was also a good man, King David's wisest counsellor, whose counsel was like an oracle of God.²⁶ However, wrong thoughts turned his heart against David, and he gave his cunning counsel to Prince Absalom instead, which led Absalom to commit irreversible outrage against his father.²⁷ Our history, brothers, contains many such stories, and they teach us, if we heed them, that the ideas which have been most destructive to our nation were promulgated by good men gone astray from God's law.

Council members: *Comments.*

Hananiah: But now, to give more specific answer to our brother Barnabas, I deny his assertion that we who traveled to Antioch demanded of the Gentiles what God does not demand. Every prophet who ever prophesied of these last days spoke of the Gentiles coming to Israel and submitting to God's law. Zechariah said, "Many people will come, even mighty nations, to seek the LORD of Hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the LORD's favor."²⁸ Isaiah said, "The foreigner will join himself to them and be united with the house of Jacob."²⁹ Ezekiel said that Messiah Jesus will welcome the heathen who come to Israel and will command us to "divide this land among yourselves and the foreigner who sojourns among you. They shall be to you as native sons of Israel; along with you, they shall be divided an inheritance among the tribes of Israel."³⁰ How many such prophecies there are! Jeremiah said, "O LORD, to you will come nations from the farthest reaches of earth, and they will say, 'Our fathers inherited nothing but falsehood and vanity, and nothing in them is worthwhile.'"³¹ There is no prophet who contradicts these things, brothers. They all agree, for the same God spoke through them all.

Uzziel, Levi, Hushai, Lamech, Benjamin, Micah, Maschil, Nadab: *Amen! Etc.*

Hananiah: Isaiah even spoke of the Gentiles coming to this land to be our servants! "Strangers will stand and tend your flocks, and the children of foreigners will be your plowmen and your vinedressers."³² And again, "Sons of the foreigner will build your wall, and their kings will serve you."³³ And again, "They will bow before you, face to the earth, and lick the dust of your feet."³⁴ "They will follow you in chains. They will pass over and bow down to you. They will entreat you, saying, 'God is with you, and there is no other God! No other!'"³⁵ "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising."³⁶ And "at that time, they will call Jerusalem, 'the throne of the LORD', and all the nations will be gathered to it, to Jerusalem, to the name of the LORD, and they will no longer walk after the stubbornness of their evil heart."³⁷

Note, brothers, that the prophets say the Gentiles will share in our blessings *because they join Israel and submit to the law!* "From Zion will the law go forth," said Micah, "and many nations will say,

²⁵ Prov. 4:23.

²⁶ 2Sam. 16:23.

²⁷ 2Sam. 16:21–22.

²⁸ Zech. 8:22–23.

²⁹ Isa. 14:1a.

³⁰ Ezek. 47:21–23.

³¹ Jer. 16:19.

³² Isa. 61:5.

³³ Isa. 60:10a.

³⁴ Isa. 49:23a.

³⁵ Isa. 45:14b.

³⁶ Isa. 60:3.

³⁷ Jer. 3:17.

‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob! And He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths.’³⁸

Council members: *Comments.*

Hananiah: Now, neither I nor the brothers who went with me to Antioch have anything against the Gentiles who believe; on the contrary, we love them and we welcome them! As does God, so do we!

Hushai: That is why we went to Antioch in the first place, to welcome them into our fellowship. Let the Gentiles believe in Messiah Jesus; we rejoice in that. But let them not ignore our law, for they cannot be saved without it! Only those who worship God according to His will worship God well, and His will was revealed in Moses and the prophets as well as in Jesus.

Lamech: Yes, let the Gentiles come – but as the prophets said they should do! We will gladly welcome them.

Nadab: By all means, let them come in!

Hananiah: We earnestly desire it.

Council members: *Comments.*

Hananiah: Brothers, you know that the uncircumcised Gentiles to whom God sent Simon some years ago were ignorant of our law when God poured out His Spirit on them. But it appears that a great error in judgment has been made by some of you concerning that event, for you seem to have mistaken God’s compassion for those ignorant Gentiles to be a sanctioning of their ways.

You will recall that in King Hezekiah’s day, some Israelites, as ignorant of the law as were Cornelius and his house, came to Jerusalem to keep the Passover, but were unprepared according to the law. And you will recall that Hezekiah prayed for God’s indulgence, and God heard the King’s prayer, and not only forgave their error but even healed many of them.³⁹ But did that great mercy from God, as unexpected and unlawful as it was, mean that God no longer required obedience to His law? Of course not. Those ignorant Israelites were expected to know the law when the next feast came round; otherwise, God would have cursed them. God is good, but He is nobody’s fool.

And you will recall that when David, out of dire necessity, transgressed the law in order to feed himself and his starving men, taking and eating sanctified bread which only the priests are permitted to eat, God overlooked that transgression, forgave David and his men, and spared their lives. But in doing so, was God giving permission for men to come eat the holy bread whenever they wished?

Council members: *Comments.*

Hananiah: Of course not! Had David come to the sanctuary when his belly was full and eaten one crumb of the holy bread, it would have been an unforgivable sin, punishable by death.

Council members: *Comments.*

Hananiah: Yes, God gave His Spirit to the uncircumcised at Cornelius’ house, but He expected us to rejoice at His mercy on the heathen, not to devise a new doctrine that teaches them that they need not obey God’s law! God will accept the worship of the Gentiles just as He accepts ours, and He will bless them just as He blesses us, *when they serve God as we serve Him*. For the prophet said, “As for the children of the foreigner who join themselves to the LORD, every one who keeps my Sabbath rather than profane it and who holds fast my covenant, them will I bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”⁴⁰ No man said these things, brothers; God said it! He will accept the worship of the heathen *if they keep His Sabbath and His law!*

Council members: *Comments.*

³⁸ Mic. 4:1–2.

³⁹ 2Chron. 30:17–20.

⁴⁰ Isa. 56:6–7.

Hananiah: These sayings are true and worthy of acceptance by all. And these prophecies must come to pass, for as Messiah Jesus said, “The scriptures cannot be undone.”⁴¹ But what prophet declared Barnabas’ doctrine, that since God has shown mercy on the Gentiles, He will not show them the great things of His law?⁴² Did Barnabas tell us of any prophet who said that?

Uzziel, Levi, Hushai, Lamech, Benjamin, Micah, Maschil, Nadab: *No. Not one! Etc.*

Hananiah: I will conclude with this. Barnabas was mistaken when he said it was because the elders in Antioch were “inexpert in the scriptures” that they could not confute us. Rather, they could not confute us because the truth cannot be confuted, however appealing the arguments raised against it.

The promises of God regarding the heathen are as clear as they are unshakable. How is it, then, that we are accused of demanding too much of the Gentiles, when we demand only what God Himself has repeatedly said they must do – indeed, when we demand only what Messiah Jesus taught, and whose example of keeping the law, I remind you, we were all following when God set His seal of approval upon us and our faith by pouring out His Spirit on us! [*Hananiah sits.*]

Council members: *Comments.*

Silas: It is easy to see why the elders in Antioch found it difficult to determine the truth in this matter.

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas’ reply to Hananiah

Nahum: Men and brothers, Hananiah has presented us with arguments which must be addressed. First, the prophets did speak, many times and in words easily understood, of the Gentiles coming to Israel and joining with us in order to serve God. That cannot be denied. Second, God did set His seal of approval upon the faith of those who were keeping the law when He sealed us with His Spirit, and He has continued for many years now to likewise bless those in Israel who obey Him and keep His law. So then, Barnabas, my son, what do you say to those truths?

Barnabas: As for the first point, Nahum, we know that the Gentiles will someday join with Israel to serve the Lord; the prophets often spoke of that day. But a careful reading of those prophecies shows that the Gentiles will join Israel to serve God only after Messiah returns, for it is written, “I will return, and I will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem,” and “all nations whom you have made will come and bow down before you, O Lord, and they will glorify your name.”⁴³ However, the Gentiles cannot come to Jerusalem and bow down to Jesus if he is not here, can they?

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: Therefore, Jesus must return before those prophecies – any of them – can be fulfilled.

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: So, let me ask now, can anyone here tell me when the Lord will return to Jerusalem so that the nations *can* come and bow down to him?

Council members: *Comments.*

Simon Peter: The prophets did not say when those prophecies would be fulfilled because they did not know. They spoke of Jesus’ sufferings and his glory, but they did not understand what the Spirit was saying through them. God told them only that their prophecies were not for their own time.⁴⁴

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: Hananiah, do you know when the prophecies you mentioned will come to pass?

⁴¹ John 10:35.

⁴² cp. Hos. 8:12.

⁴³ Zech. 8:3a and Ps. 86:9.

⁴⁴ 1Pet. 1:10–12.

Hananiah: We do not know precisely, but soon, surely.

Barnabas: How soon?

Hananiah: As soon as Jesus returns. And that will certainly be soon, for what would be the point of Messiah delaying the fulfillment of prophecies he has begun to fulfill? He has already suffered through the gruesome part, his great agony and death. Nothing awaits now but his glory.

Micah: The angels that appeared to us at Bethany as we watched Jesus ascend into heaven said he would return, just as we saw him leave.

Barnabas: But did those angels tell you when that will happen, Micah?

Micah: Well, not specifically, no.

John: No one knows when Jesus will return. Jesus said that not even he knew, but only the Father.⁴⁵

Council members: *Comments.*

Andrew: One evening before Jesus died, John and I sat with Jesus on the Mount of Olives, along with John's brother, Jacobus, and Simon. We asked him about his return and the end of this age, and Jesus told us many signs to look for which have not taken place and which will take years to transpire.⁴⁶

John: And we have not yet seen any of those signs of his coming or of the end of the world.

Simon Peter: No, we have not.

Andrew: One sign which struck me is that he said Jerusalem would be destroyed before he returns.

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: Obviously, then, many things must take place before Jesus returns, and the prophecies of Gentiles coming to Israel to serve Messiah apply to the time *after* Jesus returns, not to our time.

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: Also, brothers, you know that according to the prophets, every Jew that is alive in this land when Messiah Jesus returns will receive him as King, for Messiah spoke through the prophet Zechariah and said he would "pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitant of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplication, and they will look to me whom they pierced."⁴⁷ And on that day, Israel "will mourn for him as one mourns for an only son, bitterly crying out for him as one would bitterly cry out for a firstborn. The wailing in Jerusalem that day will be great."⁴⁸ That generation of our people will be "an afflicted and lowly people,"⁴⁹ but God chose them before the world began, to be humbled by great suffering and receive Messiah when he returns, for the angel told Daniel, "At that time, your people will be delivered, every one who is found written in the Book."⁵⁰ And at that time, if anyone in Israel refuses to submit to Messiah, even his own parents will have a hand in killing him!⁵¹

Council: *Comments.*

Barnabas: Now, look around you, in this city and beyond. You know how it is. Do you think that every soul in this perverse generation that cursed Jesus and turned him over to the Romans, and that persecutes us who believe, would bow at Jesus' feet and receive him if God were to send him back today?

Council: *No. Not at all. Etc.*

Barnabas: Or would our wicked rulers kill a man for *not* believing in Jesus? On the contrary, they would bless him.

Council: *That is true. Yes, they would. Etc.*

⁴⁵ Mk. 13:32.

⁴⁶ Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 21.

⁴⁷ Zech. 12:10.

⁴⁸ Zech. 12:11a.

⁴⁹ Zeph. 3:12b.

⁵⁰ Dan. 12:1b.

⁵¹ Zech. 13:3.

Barnabas: God is ready to avenge all disobedience, but Israel’s obedience must be fulfilled first, and though God has brought many thousands in Israel into this grace, there are many more thousands who reject Jesus, including most of our rulers and judges.

Council: *Amen. That is true. Etc.*

Barnabas: No, brothers, God will not send His Son to Israel again until He has utterly crushed this stiff-necked people, for the prophets said, “I will bring distress upon Jerusalem, and there will be mourning and moaning. And when you are abased, you will speak from the ground, and your talk will be humbled in the dirt,”⁵² “and they shall know that I, the LORD, did not say in vain that I would bring this evil upon them.”⁵³

Philip: Amen, Barnabas. And knowing that would happen, Jesus wept over Jerusalem and said, “O Jerusalem! Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! Behold! Your house is left to you, desolate. I tell you that you will by no means see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.’”⁵⁴

Council members: *Comments.*

Hananiah: But I was with you when Jesus said that, Philip. He was in a village on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. And when he arrived and was riding that donkey into the city, the multitude rejoiced greatly and cried out just as Jesus predicted, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!”⁵⁵ His prophecy *was* fulfilled. Do you remember?

Philip: Yes, and I remember thinking at the time how amazing it was that Jesus had told us beforehand that the people would raise that shout when he came. And seeing that, we were doubly certain that Jesus was about to set up his kingdom.

Matthew: The people thought so, too, and began crying out, “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David,”⁵⁶ and “Blessed is the King of Israel who is coming in the name of the LORD!”⁵⁷

Philip: We were all excited, expecting Jesus to set up his kingdom right away.

Council members: *Comments.*

Philip: But here is something you do not know, Hananiah, because you were not with us a few days later when Jesus was in the temple, teaching. I was surprised, and I think we all were, to see that Jesus was still grieving for Jerusalem and to hear him say, even more passionately than before, that the city would not see him again until they welcomed him.⁵⁸

Hananiah: [*thoughtfully*] I didn’t know he said it again, after he came into the city.

Silas: It’s true, Hananiah. I was there in the temple when he said it.

Hananiah: So, when he made that statement on the way here, he was talking about his second coming to Israel, and not his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem?

Philip: It must be so. Otherwise, why would he have still been grieving days later, after he was in the city?

Barnabas: God will certainly send His Son again from heaven to rescue Israel, Hananiah, but that day will not come until this nation has been thoroughly chastened and humbled. Then, the whole nation will cry out together, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!”

Hananiah: I do see what you are saying.

Council members: *Comments.*

⁵² Isa. 29:2a, 4a.

⁵³ Ezek. 6:10.

⁵⁴ Lk. 13:22, 34–35.

⁵⁵ Mt. 21:9; Mk. 11:9.

⁵⁶ Mk. 11:10.

⁵⁷ Lk. 19:38; Jn. 12:13.

⁵⁸ Mt. 23:37–39.

Matthew: We were wrong, all of us, about these things in the beginning, Hananiah. And we continued to be wrong even after Jesus ascended into heaven, for we still expected him to return quickly to establish his kingdom.

John: I certainly did.

Jacobus: I believed the same thing.⁵⁹

Simon Peter: I even declared that the time was at hand for the moon to turn to blood and the sun to turn black.⁶⁰

Andrew: It seemed plausible at first, but in retrospect, we should have known that Jesus was not coming back any time soon. None of the things he had told us to look for had happened.

Simon Peter: Yes. Odd, isn't it, how we can know things, and yet, not know them?

Philip: It certainly is.

Azariah: We had plenty of good reasons to think the wrong thing.

Elkanah: Good ideas are like knives, the better they are, the worse they can hurt you.

Council members: [*Laughing*] *That's the truth. Amen, Elkanah. Etc.*

Azariah: And our particular good idea was that since the prophets spoke of Messiah coming to us like the early and latter rains,⁶¹ then the two rainy seasons God has given this land was a sign that Messiah would give us two outpourings of the Spirit within a year, the early rain being the one that fell right after Jesus ascended into heaven, and the latter rain being the one Jesus will pour out on Israel when he returns.

Jether: Yes. So, it seemed reasonable to assume that the “former rain and latter rains” of the Spirit would come within that first year.

Micah: Do you no longer believe Jesus will do that when he returns?

Jether: Oh, yes. We know that when Jesus returns, he will pour out the Spirit on Israel a second time, for the prophets said, “On that day, there will be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness,”⁶² “and I will forgive their blood-guiltiness which I had not forgiven.”⁶³ But obviously, the latter rain did not fall on Israel within a year of the first one.

Maschil: But might not that latter rain yet take place soon? More than two decades have passed since Messiah ascended into heaven, and we certainly do not expect him to wait a hundred more.

Simon Peter: A thousand years is as one day to God, Maschil. Moses even said that, to God, a thousand years is “like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.”⁶⁴ We do not know what God has planned, or if He had a plan, but changed it.

Council members: *Amen. He may have. Etc.*

Silas: Our God is not just a bigger one of us, as the heathen view their gods, sharing our perspective of time. Messiah's former and latter rains may be very far apart, Maschil, from our perspective. We just don't know.

Council members: *Comments.*

Andrew: When Jesus was here with us, we misunderstood so much! I remember that after he rose from the dead, when he suddenly appeared in our hiding place,⁶⁵ he told us that he was sending us to preach, just as the Father had sent him, and when he said, “Receive the Spirit,”⁶⁶ I thought that he meant he was giving us the Spirit right then.

⁵⁹ As is seen in James 5:8–9.

⁶⁰ Acts 2:16–21.

⁶¹ Hos. 6:3; Joel 2:23.

⁶² Zech. 13:1.

⁶³ Joel 3:21a.

⁶⁴ Ps. 90:4. The only Psalm attributed to Moses.

⁶⁵ Jn. 20:19.

⁶⁶ Jn. 20:19–22.

Bartholomew: So did I. I thought he was giving us the Spirit and that we should go start preaching.

Simon Peter: I did, too. But that was because none of us knew what receiving the Spirit meant.

Bartholomew: Right. But it sounded as if Jesus was talking about something taking place at that moment.

Philip: Yes, it did. But we were not sent, and he did not give us the Spirit until Pentecost.

Apostles: *Amen. That's right. Etc.*

Barnabas: It was because I was so sure that Jesus was returning soon that I sold all my possessions and brought the proceeds here, to lay at your feet. What need did I have of houses and lands if I was about to reign with Jesus over the whole world?

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: But time passed, and we were forced to admit that we had been mistaken.

Simon Peter: Yes, that is true, Barnabas.

Council members: *Comments.*

Joseph: Do you see that, Hananiah?

Hananiah: I think so, yes. Of course, I already knew that the Gentiles would join with Israel to serve Messiah after he returns, but I do see now that he will not return as soon as I have thought. What you all have said makes that clear. And on that point, I admit that I was mistaken.

Daniel: There is no disgrace in being wrong, Hananiah. The disgrace is in refusing to be made right.

Council members: *Comments.*

Hananiah: Brothers, it appears that I may have hurt my own cause by using scriptures which apply to a much later time. I am thankful for the insight you all have given me. What you have said to me in regard to Messiah's return is right, and I am grateful for the more perfect understanding.

Daniel: Solomon defined a wise man as one who can still learn, Hananiah.⁶⁷ You have shown that you are wise, in that you can still be instructed.

Hananiah: I am not ashamed to be made wiser, Daniel. Whatever is true concerning Messiah is all that I want, and only that will I embrace if God gives me the grace to hear His wisdom.

Council members: *Amen! God help us! Etc.*

Nahum: This is good, brothers. May God continue to grant us peace.

Council members: *Amen! God help us! Etc.*

Hananiah resumes his argument

Nahum: Now, let us put aside the matter of when Messiah will return, since none of us know when God will bring that to pass. He may not send Jesus back to Israel even in the lifetime of the youngest man here. Whether sooner or later, however, the issue is whether or not we are to command the believing Gentiles *in our time* to keep the law.

Council members: *Yes. That is true. Etc.*

Nahum: We must address this, not only to bring rest to our brothers in Antioch, but to ensure peace in the household of God in every place, for this matter touches upon the very nature of the new covenant which God has made with His people. Barnabas and Paul testify that Messiah has given them a gospel for the Gentiles which does not require that they keep the law. Then, what shall we say of the gospel Jesus preached, which does require men to keep the law, and which gospel we still preach?

Silas: It is beyond dispute, as Hananiah rightly said, that God set His seal upon our gospel by granting us His Spirit, and it is beyond dispute that God is continuing to do so. What Hananiah disputes is Barnabas' contention that beginning with Cornelius, God also set His seal on a different gospel.

Hananiah: Yes, that is it.

⁶⁷ Prov. 1:5.

Nahum: Hananiah, what more do you have to say?

Hananiah: [*Hananiah rises again.*] Brothers, I have already explained that God’s mercy on the ignorant does not mean that He excuses ignorance when it is self-willed, but that He expects better of those souls in the future. What Barnabas and Paul see as God setting His seal upon a different gospel, I see as God showering mercy upon upright, ignorant souls, while expecting them to learn to do His will or be damned, as the law teaches, and as we were teaching the Gentiles in Antioch before we were stopped.

It remains clear to me – and in this, I think I cannot be proved wrong – that God’s will for men, both now *and* after Messiah returns, is that they honor His law and His Son. This is the gospel with which we began, and it is our calling and our solemn duty to contend for this gospel, which has been confirmed by the Spirit of God and by the example of the Lord Jesus himself.

Council members: *Comments.*

Hananiah: Long before Messiah came, he spoke of this gospel, saying through Isaiah, “To the law and to the testimony! If men do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”⁶⁸ With that word of God, we must agree, for God plainly said that there is no light in a man who does not “speak according to this word”! And it is for just such a time as ours that God defined the right path, for God knew that challenges to the true faith would come. And knowing that, He told us very plainly, so that even the simplest man could understand it, that the true path is the path of God’s law *and* God’s testimony to His Son, the holy Spirit.⁶⁹ The law testified beforehand that the Son was coming, and now, the Spirit testifies that he came and that he is coming again! The law and the Spirit work together to bring glory to God, and only by adhering to these two holy, immutable things can we hope to please God or be able to judge between the true gospel and vain gospels devised by men.

I thank God that we are not left to ourselves to choose the right way. The LORD promised that He would be a voice behind us, whispering, “This is the way; walk in it.”⁷⁰ And the “it” which the voice of God is saying to walk in is the way Jesus walked, the way Isaiah foretold: “To the law and to the testimony!”

Council members: *Comments.*

Hananiah: God’s law and God’s Spirit are both in my heart, brothers. I am compelled by the love of God to preach them both, together. I must proclaim what I hear whispered in my ear, and that is the gospel our Lord Jesus preached and commanded us to preach.⁷¹ I must proclaim, “To the law and to the testimony. This is the way; walk in it!” And if I am wrong in walking by that light, may God have mercy on my soul. I can do nothing else. How can it be any other way? [*Hananiah sits.*]

Council members: *Comments.*

Daniel: Thank you, Hananiah. You have communicated your position in a manner that commends both you and it. Some of us will say your argument is weak, as you must expect, but I hasten to add that I see no weakness in your spirit. Plain speech comes from a pure heart and is easily understood, and it is always welcome among the upright. Contentiousness in any cause is ungodly, and a wise servant of God never demeans the truth by quarreling over it, though he may speak forcefully in its defense, as you have tried sincerely to do. So, I commend you, brother Hananiah, for balancing a godly attitude with straightforward speech.

That said, let me encourage you to hear these men patiently, for they seek to perfect your faith. Incomplete truth, clung to, yields complete control over the soul, but the purging of the heart from imperfect thoughts yields perfect peace.

⁶⁸ Isa. 8:20.

⁶⁹ Jn. 15:26. See also 1John 5:6, and Revelation 19:10.

⁷⁰ Isa. 30:21.

⁷¹ Lk. 12:3.

Council members: *Comments.*

Nahum: Barnabas and Paul, you know that from the time of Abraham until now, God has required the heathen to be circumcised if they would be a part of His covenant with Israel, and to submit to our law if they would serve Him truly.

Barnabas: Yes, of course.

Paul: Yes.

Nahum: Then, respond to Hananiah's second point, for you teach that God no longer requires the heathen to receive circumcision or to keep our law.

Joseph: Brother Paul, we would hear from you, son.

Paul: Sir, I am content for Barnabas to continue.

Joseph: Nevertheless, we would hear what you have to say.

Barnabas: Go ahead, Paul.

Nahum: Yes, son. Barnabas is free to add what he will after you have spoken.

Paul addresses the Council

Paul: Very well, I will do as you ask. [*Paul rises.*] Men and brothers, it is fitting that you who govern in the house of God should demand of Barnabas and me to give an account of our ministry. And we gladly do so, for in speaking to the Gentiles about Messiah Jesus, we represent not only Jesus, but also you and God's saints everywhere. And aware of that, I assure you, we conduct ourselves in all purity and sincerity among them.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: It is not for lack of eagerness to answer that I have remained silent, but I felt compelled to wait for my elders and to hear first from those who were in the faith before me.

Jacobus: Speak freely Paul. You are among brothers here.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: Thank you, Jacobus. I will. Men and brothers, what I say, I say as a servant of God who should give account of himself to his betters. Yet, I do not speak so as to please you any more than I speak to the Gentiles to please them. To all men and in all places, I say only what Messiah has taught me to say. And the gospel he has sent me to preach, I preach without respect of persons and with great plainness of speech. Therefore, I pray that you will receive kindly my direct manner.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: First of all, brothers, I would have you to know that in whatever foreign city Barnabas and I find our Jewish kinsman, we do exactly as Hananiah has said. We preach Jesus to them and encourage them to continue in the law of our fathers. In other words, we tell them, "To the law and to the Spirit." You have no doubt heard the slander about Barnabas and me, for it is rampant among Jews everywhere, that we teach Jews to forsake Moses. That is damnable slander. We have never attempted to persuade any of our nation to cease worshipping according to the customs Moses passed down to us.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: Moreover, in no village or city do we preach to the uncircumcised before presenting ourselves to the Jews of that place, if any are there. For the gospel must be preached first to the Jews, and only then to the Gentiles.

Council members: *Comments.*

Nahum: We would expect no less of you, Paul, or of you, Barnabas. That is good and right. But tell us now of your gospel, and why you teach that the Gentiles need not keep our law.

Paul: Yes, sir. Men and brothers, in preparation for this meeting, I have been pondering this question: What is the foundation of the gospel that Jesus has given me? And after much contemplation, I have concluded that the foundation of my gospel is the unique authority of Messiah Jesus to save. He

is the one whom the prophet said God would make “most blessed, forever,”⁷² for God has exalted Jesus above all things and placed all power in his hand; nothing can be added to him, and nothing can be taken away. Jesus has all power to save forever those who come to God by him, and nothing but Jesus can save at all. He needs nothing, and all that we need is in him. He is uniquely our Savior. From that truth, revealed to me by Jesus himself, springs all else that I know and teach.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: God is holier and higher than the heavens, brothers. He abases Himself even to look upon what is in heaven, much less to view the wickedness of earth.⁷³ As David said, “Even the heavens are not clean in His sight.”⁷⁴ There into the highest heaven, God has exalted Jesus to reign in glory with Him, at His right hand, far above everything that has a name or that can be named. The Son’s glory surpasses all things in this creation, and all glory that is glory is now his.

John: That is so good, Paul. Amen!

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: This unique glory of the Son is the rock upon which my gospel rests. Compared to his glory, the glory of the prophets fades away, for the only glory they had was the glory they received from God to prophesy of things about which they knew nothing, especially His hidden Son. But the Son has now been revealed, and he has redeemed us, and in him alone should we glory if we glory at all.

From the foundation of the world, God kept His Son hidden from all creatures, that He might reveal him now, in our time. How blessed we are to be the generation chosen to know God’s Son, for in the Son were hidden all the riches of the true knowledge and wisdom of God! No creature knew God before the Son was revealed, for no creature *can* know God unless the Son reveals God to him, as Jesus said, “No one really knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone really know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son may choose to reveal Him.”⁷⁵

Abraham was called the friend of God, but Abraham did not know his Friend. Moses, too, we are told, conversed with God as friend would speak with friend,⁷⁶ but Moses did not know the Friend who spoke with him. David was “a man after God’s own heart,”⁷⁷ but he did not know the God his heart was like. And Daniel was “greatly loved” by God,⁷⁸ but he did not know the God who loved him. All those great men of God were dead to the true knowledge of God, for the Son had not yet come and revealed it to us.

Council members: *Comments.*

Micah: Paul, forgive me, but this is difficult to hear. You are asking us to believe that holy men such as Noah, Daniel, and Job did not possess the knowledge of God. That is a statement so strange to the scriptures that I can hardly believe my ears. The scriptures do say that Samuel did not know the LORD when he was a youth, but that was only because “the word of the LORD was not yet revealed to him.”⁷⁹ Later, God revealed Himself to Samuel by sending him His word.⁸⁰ That is what the scriptures say!

John: The Son of God is the Word of God that was not yet revealed to Samuel, or to anyone else at that time.

⁷² Ps. 21:6.

⁷³ Ps. 113:6.

⁷⁴ Job 15:15b; cp. Job 4:18b.

⁷⁵ Mt. 11:27.

⁷⁶ Ex. 33:11.

⁷⁷ 1Sam. 13:14.

⁷⁸ Dan. 9:23.

⁷⁹ 1Sam. 3:7.

⁸⁰ 1Sam. 3:21.

Micah: But the plain meaning of those scriptures, John, is that the prophet Samuel *did* come to know God after the word of God began coming to him.

Paul: The prophets and wise men knew only what God allowed them to know, Micah; the true knowledge of God was not revealed to them because God was reserving that honor for His Son.

John: If we had possessed any truth at all, Micah, Jesus would not have said that the Spirit would lead us into *all* of it.⁸¹

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: The law could not give us the knowledge of God because it could not give us the Spirit, through which all true knowledge of God comes, as John just said. Before the Spirit came, it was just as God told Jeremiah: “Every man is brutish in knowledge.”⁸² But God promised this new covenant, by which we would receive the Spirit and obtain the knowledge of God. He said, “I will put a new spirit within them, and I will engrave my law on their heart. And they will all know me, from the least of them even to the greatest, says the LORD.”⁸³

Nor did Moses’ law give us the righteousness of God, for only in God’s kind of life, the holy Spirit, is found God’s kind of righteousness, and when the Son came into the world with it, he exposed what we knew as righteousness to be no righteousness at all, as Isaiah said, “We all are like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like a filthy garment.”⁸⁴ They were law-keeping Jews who hated Jesus and had him killed because when he came, they were exposed as unrighteous within. Man’s kind of righteousness makes men proud, and men who are proud of their righteousness despise the righteousness of God, for His righteousness exposes theirs to be vain. I myself was blameless according to the law when I hated this way. Look what damage I did to the saints in my pride, blameless as I was under the law!

Silas: This is a truth which everyone will do well to consider. Moses himself said, “It will be *our* righteousness, if we are careful to do all this law.”⁸⁵

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: God did not condemn our fathers for their lack of His righteousness, brothers, for He had not yet revealed it to anyone, and our fathers were walking in all the righteousness God had shown them. But the fact that the law did not bring in the righteousness of God is seen in Isaiah, when God said – more than seven hundred years after the law was given! – “My salvation is near to come, and my righteousness, to be revealed.”⁸⁶ And Gabriel, after revealing to Daniel the precise year when Messiah would appear, said that Messiah would come and “atone for iniquity, and bring in eternal righteousness,”⁸⁷ which he did when he purchased the Spirit for us and poured it out from heaven.

God’s life is not just a higher level of our own kind of life, brothers. And God’s righteousness is not just a higher level of our kind of righteousness. It is another kind of righteousness altogether, which was never seen on earth before Jesus walked among us with it. And when Jesus ascended to heaven, the earth was again void of that righteousness until the Spirit came and filled some of you with it.

John: If I may, Paul?

Paul: Of course.

John: The last night Jesus spent with us, he said, “I am giving you a new commandment,” and then he said, “Love one another; just as I have loved you, so you also must love one another.”⁸⁸ I thought he

⁸¹ Jn. 16:13.

⁸² Jer. 10:14a; 51:17a.

⁸³ Ezek. 11:19a with Jer. 31:33b, 34b.

⁸⁴ Isa. 64:6.

⁸⁵ Dt. 6:25.

⁸⁶ Isa. 56:1.

⁸⁷ Dan. 9:24–25.

⁸⁸ Jn. 13:34.

meant that we should love each other better than we had done to that point. But then, when the Spirit came, I experienced a love that I had never known. It was God's kind of love, the love Jesus had loved us with. Then I understood that what he had said was just another way of telling us that we needed the Spirit, for the Spirit filled our hearts with God's kind of love and made us able to love each other as Jesus had loved us.

Council members: *Comments.*

Andrew: Yes, John. Jesus was trying to tell us the whole time he was here that God was about to change the standard for us from the righteousness of the law to His kind of righteousness. Do you remember his sermon on the mountain, when he would say, "You have heard it said ... but I say...?"

Those who had been with Jesus: *Yes, we do. Amen. Etc.*

Andrew: Over and over again, he said that, quoting Moses and then saying, "but this is how it will be from now on." He was trying to prepare us for the great change that was coming, but we could not even imagine at the time what he was really saying.

Council members: *Comments.*

Simon Peter: And do you remember the time we asked him who could be saved, and he said, "With men, it is impossible"?

Those who had been with Jesus: *Yes, we do. Amen. Etc.*

Simon Peter: I was stunned. What were we to do, if we could do nothing to be saved? But, again, he was only telling us that with *our* kind of life, we could never measure up to the standard God was about to require.

John: Yes. Without God's kind of life, it is impossible for us to do the will of God in this covenant, but in His Spirit, we do His will without even thinking about it. His commandments are not burdensome to the man who walks in the Spirit because they are no longer foreign to his nature.

Paul: A man without God's Spirit is, as I say it, living "in the flesh", and such a man cannot please God because it is impossible for someone "in the flesh" to obey the law of God that Jesus was talking about. Anybody in the flesh can practice Moses' law, even the wicked.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: I love the law, just as you all do. But we may now have God's kind of righteousness instead, and God's kind of love, and wisdom, and knowledge, and His power over sin and death. Those things are found only in God's life, and if God's life is not in us, we possess none of those things and cannot please God.

Council members: *Comments.*

Micah: But David said the law is perfect, Paul.⁸⁹ And that has to be true, for it is the written expression of what is in God's perfect heart.

Paul: Yes, the law is perfect, but being a handwritten document, it is limited in what it can do for us. Nothing on the outside of us can make us perfect, whether it be the law or Messiah himself. But the Spirit can enter into us and sanctify us within, ~~and to make that possible is the reason Jesus suffered and died.~~ No handwritten document can perfect us or guide us through every situation in life. There isn't enough paper or ink on earth to write down all the instructions we need.

As perfect as the law is, even as perfect as Messiah Jesus is, both it and he are on the *outside* of man. We needed them both within us! That is why Messiah did not stay on earth when he came; if he had stayed here, he would have been just another perfect, holy thing outside of us, and our souls would have remained in bondage to sin – yes, even if he had stayed here a thousand years! The Son of God came, not to stay here and reign in earthly glory, but to pay the price for us to have the perfect life of God⁹⁰ that can enter into us and make *us* perfect!⁹¹ And when he rose from the dead and ascended to

⁸⁹ Ps. 19:7.

⁹⁰ Jn. 10:10.

offer himself to God for us, God accepted his sacrifice and answered Jesus' prayer for us, that we, too, might have God's kind of life. And God sent it from heaven with the sound of a rushing, powerful wind, and it entered into you, Micah, and you, Hananiah, and you Hushai, and you apostles, bringing into your hearts God's law and God's testimony of His Son, and making you partakers of His very nature! The law could never do that! And Jesus could never have done it if he stayed on earth.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: And since that first outpouring, the Spirit has been given to many who believed, to Barnabas, and later, even to me, who once hated the name of Jesus. But God had mercy on me, and by the power of His endless life, I was transformed, as we all were, from the ignorant creatures we were into sons of the living God, and brothers of Messiah Jesus. This is our gospel to the Gentiles. Jesus alone can save. I do not tell them, "to the law and to the testimony", but "to Jesus", for in him alone is all of man's hope!

Council members: *Amen! Praise God! That is right! Etc.*

Council members: *Comments.*

Micah: We know the Spirit is wonderful, Paul, and much to be desired. And we know the awful price that was paid for us to have it. But why do you downplay the law so much? The law is not just another thing of man; it is the work of our God!

Paul: The *giving* of it was the work of God; the *doing* of it is the work of men.

Micah: And must not a man do what God has said?

Barnabas: Yes, of course, if God has told a man to do it. But God commanded *Israel* to keep the law; He did not command Gentiles to keep it.

Maschil: Then Israel, by keeping the law, is righteous, and the Gentiles, who do not keep the law, are not righteous!

Paul: Under the law, yes. But if our righteousness, which is by the law, had been sufficient, Messiah would not have had to come and suffer, would he?

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: Brothers, if there were such a thing as a law that could give men God's righteousness, then righteousness would have been by Moses' law. But no handwritten law, even the perfect one God gave us, can enter a man and do that. But God's law of the Spirit can! And I praise God for it! I am not ashamed of my gospel! And I would rather praise God for His power and goodness than to debate about how powerful and good He really is!

Most Council members: *Amen! Praise God! Etc.*

Paul: Amen to God! This is my life!

Most Council members: *Amen! Praise God! Etc.*

Paul: Now, brothers, it was the Son's unique honor to bring about this new and living way. No one else in heaven or earth could have done it. And now, according to the grace and foreknowledge of our God, and by faith in His sinless Son Jesus, men of any nation may obtain mercy and serve God with us, acceptably, in spirit.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: That is why Barnabas and I resisted you, Hananiah, and those with you when you came to Antioch. You were subverting the souls of those Gentiles by telling them that putting their hope in Jesus is not enough, but that they must also be circumcised and keep the law. Neither God nor these elders sent you to Antioch to tell them that.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: I pointed out to you, before the whole Assembly in Antioch, that believing in Jesus was certainly enough for God, for He had received them into His kingdom for doing so, bearing them

⁹¹ Jn. 10:10.

witness by giving them His Spirit just as He had done to us. But you would not listen. You did not believe the unshakable fundamental truth of my gospel: Jesus alone saves, for in this covenant, only what Jesus does for a man means anything to God.

That is what Jesus taught me. I did not learn it from man, nor even from the scriptures, but by revelation from Jesus. What I preach is his gospel, and it will withstand every contradiction. [*Paul sits.*]

Council members: *Comments.*

Hushai: Our nation has always been open to foreigners who want to serve our God, as long as they serve God the way God has commanded. Barnabas and Paul are saying the Gentiles may serve Messiah – *Israel's* Messiah! – without belonging to Israel and without following Messiah's own example of keeping the law. But God has always required the heathen to be circumcised and submit to our law if they would have their worship be acceptable to Him.

Barnabas: God allowed uncircumcised Naaman to return uncircumcised to Syria, and He allowed him to attend his king into the temple of Rimmon, as he was required to do, and even to kneel with the king as he worshipped that abomination.⁹² Naaman never kept our law; he merely loved the God who gave it. Acceptable worship is a matter of the heart, Hushai, not of proper form.

Hananiah: It is well-known that the law can be kept merely as a form, to maintain appearances. God has always condemned that. And I would say that the more wicked a hypocrite is, the more religious he will become because he has more wickedness to hide. When this nation became so filthy that God called it Sodom instead of Israel,⁹³ He went on to say that they had worn Him out with the multitude of their many sacrifices and other observance of the law.⁹⁴ But the law can also be kept sincerely, with a pure heart! It does not have to be abused!

Consider it, brothers, for what I say now is true. It was because we in this room were keeping the law from the heart that the Almighty poured out His Spirit upon us! He has never given His Spirit to anyone in Israel who was not keeping the law from the heart.

Micah: Yes, Barnabas. And what does that mean? Our own experience, my friends, proves that obedience to the law together with faith in Jesus pleases God, for God granted us His Spirit while we were doing both. And He has never given His Spirit to a single disobedient Jew. Doesn't that tell us something about what God requires?

Barnabas: Yes, it does, Micah. You are not wrong in anything you said. There are many thousands of Jews now who believe, and every one of them is zealous for both the law and the Lord Jesus,⁹⁵ just as you say. But that is *in Israel*. God has also given His Spirit to Gentiles in many cities by the laying on of my hands, and Paul's, but none of them knew the law. So, I return your question; what does *that* mean? Doesn't *that* tell us something about what God requires?

I have told you that Paul and I never try to persuade Jews to forsake the law; we know that God requires it of us. We are only saying that God does not require the law for the Gentiles, and that is manifest, for otherwise, God would not have given them His Spirit, as He has done.

all are in sin

Paul: But even though we Jews were obeying the law, Micah, we still needed a Redeemer, did we not? God thought so, for He sent His Son down here to be tortured and executed to redeem us.

Council members: *Comments.*

⁹² 2Kgs. 5:17–19.

⁹³ Isa. 1:10; Ezek. 16:48–56; cp. Dt. 32:32; Jer. 23:14.

⁹⁴ Isa. 1:11–15.

⁹⁵ Acts 21:20.

Paul: And from what did Messiah redeem us who were obeying the law, if obeying the law made us perfect? What was it so powerful and evil that even the law of God could not deliver us from it? What was it so powerful and evil that God had to send His Son to conquer it for us? What was it so powerful and evil that we could not resist it, but by the power of the life of God Himself dwelling within us? I will tell you what it was – the corrupt nature in our flesh! We could not escape our bodies, with its passions and desires! And the law, being unable to deliver us from the dominion of our corrupt nature, could only act as the warden of the prison in which we dwelt. But what the law could not do, God did when He...

Hushai: The warden of our prison? The law, a *warden*? The law taught us the right ways of God, Paul! That is the way of a father, not a warden!

Hananiah: Brother Paul, you do not know what you are saying! David glorified God and said, “I love your commandments more than fine gold,”⁹⁶ and “your law is my great delight,”⁹⁷ and “had not your law been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.”⁹⁸ Does that sound to you like a man who saw the law as a warden?

Paul: But David had only our kind of life with which to understand the law; he knew nothing of receiving the Spirit.

Council members: *Comments.*

Hananiah: But David said, “I will live in liberty, for I greatly delight in your commandments and meditate on your statutes.”⁹⁹ David was liberated by the law, not imprisoned by it!

Hushai: And if David was freed by the law, Paul, why is it that you feel bound by it, and see God’s law as your warden? Could it be that you have a secret desire to be like the Gentiles that makes you feel imprisoned by a law which commands you not to be like them?

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: My only desire is to be like Messiah, and it was he who spoke through David, as David himself said, “The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue.”¹⁰⁰ And the law in which Messiah took such great delight, Hananiah, is the law I preach, the law of the Spirit of life. Messiah loves *God’s* law more than he loves the law of Moses.

Council members: *Comments.*

Hushai: You know that God said the law was His!

Paul: Yes, but He gave it to Moses, for He had another one, for more precious to Him, hidden in His Son, the law of the Spirit.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: But as for our need of a Redeemer, Messiah also said through David, “God looked down from heaven upon the sons of man. They all are turned aside; they are all, alike, become filthy; there is no one doing good, not even one.”¹⁰¹ And again, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray; every one of us has turned to his own way, and the LORD laid upon him the iniquity of us all.”¹⁰²

Now, brothers, whatever the law and the prophets say, they say to those who are under the law, which leads us to conclude that before the Spirit came, all men fell short of the righteousness of God. We were all, even if we kept the law, in bondage to our corrupt nature, and we needed God’s Son to

⁹⁶ Ps. 119:127.

⁹⁷ Ps. 119:77, 174.

⁹⁸ Ps. 119:92.

⁹⁹ Ps. 119:44–48.

¹⁰⁰ 2Sam. 23:2.

¹⁰¹ Ps. 14:2–3.

¹⁰² Isa. 53:6.

come and give us power to overcome the sinfulness of our flesh. That is why David was moved by the Spirit to plead with God to send Messiah to “fulfill your law from within!”¹⁰³

Council members: *Comments.*

Micah: And this is the revelation that you have received, that all of mankind has a sinful nature, and the law can do nothing about it?

Paul: In part, yes. The law can restrain man’s brutish nature with threats of punishment by the judges, but in this covenant, such threats are unnecessary because the Spirit makes us a new kind of men – creatures with fleshly, mortal bodies but with God’s kind of life within. And this new man is able to serve God the way Jesus said He must be served.

Hushai: Jesus possessed God’s eternal Spirit while he was here, Paul, and he served God well, keeping the law. He is the example to follow, and believers everywhere were happily following his righteous example before you began preaching your new gospel; then, men began following you instead.

Paul: I want no man to follow me except as I follow Jesus.

Hushai: Then, follow Jesus, and we will all follow you!

Council members: *Comments.*

Andrew: It is like this, Hushai. One day as we journeyed with Jesus, a man approached the Lord and said that he wanted to follow him, and he told Jesus that he needed to go home first, to bury his father. But Jesus said to him, “You follow me, and leave the dead to bury their dead!”¹⁰⁴ Jesus said other such things in those days, and it was puzzling to us at the time, but he was walking in the life of God, and we were dead to the wisdom and power of God that he possessed. We did not see ourselves as dead, of course, but we were dead to the things of God, and Jesus knew it. And he knew he had been sent by God to wake us from the dead, as the prophet said, “Arise! Shine! For your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you!”¹⁰⁵

Brothers, when the light comes, there is no more darkness! And children of the light rejoice in the light, not the darkness that used to cover them.

Hushai: You men call God’s law darkness?

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Micah: The law of God is our glory, Andrew, our testimony to the world of God’s love for Israel. Moses told Israel that keeping the law “will be your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations, and they will say, ‘Surely, this great nation is a wise and understanding people!’”¹⁰⁶ The law of our God is a light¹⁰⁷ to the whole world, and Israel was chosen by God to carry it.

John: Yes, Micah, but the true light came from heaven and dwelt among us.¹⁰⁸

Micah: Did the law not come from heaven, John? David said, “the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light.”¹⁰⁹

Barnabas: The light of the law is the Lord himself, Micah, and the law is but a pale imitation of him. The law has no light of its own; it is like shimmering water, reflecting the light of the sun, but when the sun is hidden, the water is dark.

Hananiah: Those who walk in the light of God’s law never walk in darkness, Barnabas.

Cleopas: The law gave us some light, brothers, and it did come from heaven, Micah, but the Lord said that he, not it, is the light of the world.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ Ps. 74:11.

¹⁰⁴ Mt. 8:21–22; cp. Lk. 9:60.

¹⁰⁵ Isa. 60:1, 2b.

¹⁰⁶ Dt. 4:5–6.

¹⁰⁷ Prov. 6:23.

¹⁰⁸ Jn. 1:7–9, 14.

¹⁰⁹ Prov. 6:23.

¹¹⁰ Jn. 8:12.

Micah: What Jesus actually said to us, Cleopas, is that he was the light of the world *as long as he was in the world*,¹¹¹ but he is no longer here, which means that we are now God's lights in the world, as Jesus also said.¹¹² Jesus shined most brightly, to be sure, but God does not have only one light. The law was shining out to the world when David said, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament displays the work of His hands."¹¹³ So, the law and nature were both lights, working together at the same time, leading men to God.

Maschil: And the prophets, too. Were they not shining lights along with the law they were keeping?

Council members: *Comments.*

Matthew: Consider this, Maschil. To whom did God send Messiah Jesus?

Maschil: Of course not. He sent him and all His prophets, and His law, to us, His chosen people.

Matthew: Yes, of course. Then, was not the prophet referring to us when he spoke of Messiah coming and said, "The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light, and on those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death, light has shined?"¹¹⁴

Maschil: Yes, I see that.

Micah: We all can see that, Matthew, you and others here are taking right things and stretching them beyond their ordained limits.

Council members: *Comments.*

Matthew: I think not, Micah. Messiah came to bring us a new kind of life so that we might come alive to the wisdom and knowledge of God and escape our darkness.

Paul: That is what Jesus taught me, Matthew. When we enter into God's kind of life – or rather, when it enters into us – all things become new to us, for God said, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, and my ways are not your ways."¹¹⁵

Micah: Who doesn't agree with that, Paul? But if God's thoughts and ways are not revealed in the law of Moses, then whose thoughts and ways were they?

Paul: Moses' law does indeed contain some of God's thoughts and ways, but not all of them, and reading about them in a book is not the same as knowing God's thoughts and ways within ourselves. In God's life, we feel God's kind of love, and possess God's kind of wisdom, and walk in His kind of righteousness – none of which things were by the law. In God's life alone is hope of salvation, and by this life, God has made Messiah Jesus our only means of salvation.

Uzziel

Uzziel: [*Uzziel rises.*] Men and brothers, I must speak.

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Hananiah gave prudent advice to us earlier when he cautioned us to beware carefully crafted words which arouse the emotions but cloud the mind. We can be led by our feelings, if we choose, but it is wiser just to believe the holy scriptures. In the days of Isaiah, when our fathers had strayed far from God's law, the Almighty spoke to them through the prophet and said, "Come, let us reason together." He did not say, "Come, let us feel excited together." And we can obey the invitation of God to reason together only if we remain within the bounds of Scripture and reject the tantalizing excitement of new ideas and high-sounding philosophy. My words may not excite you, brothers, but they will teach you.

Council members: *Comments.*

¹¹¹ Jn. 9:5.

¹¹² Mt. 5:14.

¹¹³ Ps. 19:1.

¹¹⁴ Isa. 9:2.

¹¹⁵ Isa. 55:8–9.

Uzziel: I, too, rejoice in the blessing of the Spirit. I was there in the beginning, the morning it fell, and it is truly a precious gift from God, purchased at great price. So, I beg you not to think that I mean to downplay the importance of Messiah's sacrifice or of God's testimony of him that I speak in defense of the law. And I must do so, for, after all, the law, too, is a precious gift from God. Hananiah's only contention, and mine, is that the law is *still* a blessing. And though it may not arouse in some men the passions which are aroused when they are reminded of wonderful experiences in the Spirit, the law remains a holy gift, a steadfast guide and friend of the soul – far from a warden over it.

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Of this, men and brothers, I would remind you – and you all know it is true: throughout our history, when our nation kept the law, God blessed us with prosperity and with security from our enemies, as God said to our fathers, “You shall carry out my statutes and keep my judgments and do them, and then you will live safely upon the land.”¹¹⁶

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Look what God did for King Hezekiah and for King Josiah when they led the nation back to the law! And when David was old, he prayed for Solomon his son, “The LORD give you insight and understanding, so that when He gives you command over Israel, you might keep the law of the LORD your God. Then you will prosper, when you are careful to carry out the statutes and the judgments which the LORD commanded Moses for Israel.”¹¹⁷

On the other hand, when God sent the Assyrians to destroy the ten tribes in the north, what reason do the scriptures give us for such terrible punishment from God? The man of God said it was because those tribes had “rejected God's statutes, and His covenant that He made with their fathers, and His testimonies, and they forsook all the commandments of the LORD their God. That is why the LORD was angry with Israel and removed them from His sight.”¹¹⁸ And when God sent Nebuchadnezzar to tear down the walls of this city, and burn down our temple, and take our people into captivity, what was it that provoked God to do that? The prophet said, “It is because they forsook the covenant of the LORD which He made with them when He brought them out from the land of Egypt.”¹¹⁹ Time and time again, God has sent foreign kings into this land to chasten this nation, and time and time again, it was for the same reason: failure to keep the law!

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Who were they, brothers, that lured Israel away from the law, repeatedly, century after century? Who were they whose words were so convincing that they caused God's people to lose sight of the bitter lessons of the previous generations? I will tell you who they were; they were trusted leaders and beloved fellow-Israelites who had drifted away from the sure testimonies of the law, and imagined that they had seen a better way. Many of them claimed to have a new revelation. That was certainly true of the friendly old prophet from Bethel who deceived the man of God and brought upon him deadly wrath from God.¹²⁰

Regardless of the details of false prophets' messages over the years, the result of their teachings was always – always! – that Israel became less obedient to the law and more like the heathen. That was the one result that followed every new doctrine about how better to serve God. **Yes, however much those false doctrines differed from one generation to the next, the evil, underlying purpose was the same: to lead God's people away from His law and toward fellowship with the Gentiles.**

This is truth I am telling you, brothers! You yourselves know this is the true history of our people!

¹¹⁶ Lev. 25:18.

¹¹⁷ 1Chron. 22:12–13.

¹¹⁸ 2Kgs. 17:13–18, excerpts.

¹¹⁹ Dt. 29:25.

¹²⁰ 1Kgs. 13:11–24.

We do not need to examine and debate the details of each false doctrine that comes against the faith; we need only ask the false prophet one thing: should we know the law and keep it? Wise men of God have always known that whatever is not of the law is false, no matter how true the false teachers make it sound. Whatever any man proclaims that is not the law is false! That is the standard, and to debate scriptures and doctrines with such men is vain.

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Now, men and brothers, no one denies that Barnabas and Paul have had genuine experiences with God and are well-versed in the scriptures. I am as thankful as anyone here for the mercy God has had on them, and us all. But let us reason together, brothers. Ask yourselves, which false prophet in our history has *not* had genuine experiences with God or been well-versed in the scriptures? Which false prophet in our history did not have a real connection with God before he became false? Search the scriptures. The title “false prophet” is not given to any man that was not first a servant of God. None of the heathen are called false prophets because they are dogs and blind from the moment of their birth; they have no relationship with God to begin with, and cannot be false to Him.

Wasn't Balaam a true prophet before he became false to God and gave himself to the service of Balak, King of Moab? Had he not had genuine experiences with God? Yet, look at the great damage that he did to this nation when he became a false prophet to the One who had made him great!¹²¹ And the elders of Jezreel were men of Israel, well-versed in the law, but they became false to God and sold themselves to Jezebel, craftily using their knowledge of God's holy law to justify the murder of righteous Naboth and his sons!¹²² And Caiaphas and his father-in-law, Annas, belonged to God, as men of Israel. They, too, were highly regarded and well-versed in the scriptures, but they became false to God, and look at what they did to Jesus!

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Our good experiences are only as good as our interpretation of them, and the holy scriptures are only as trustworthy as the men who use them. From the mouth of a wayward man, the holy scriptures are mixed with demonic craftiness and are transformed into deadly poison. But even at that, brothers, even at that! How many of the prophets did the well-versed Paul refer to when he said that all we need is our spiritual experiences, for only what Jesus does for us from heaven saves? If there were any such scripture, do you not think he would have used it? Surely, if his doctrine were of God, the prophets would many times have proclaimed such a wondrous thing! Surely, there would be a myriad of scriptures promising that Messiah would be so glorious that faith in him releases men from the duty to obey the law of God! But no! Paul used no scripture to prove such a claim because there is no such scripture! And there is no such scripture because the *scriptures* are true, not Paul!

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: I listened carefully, brothers, to Paul and Barnabas, and what did we hear but a new philosophy, a clever slant on a few scriptures, and long speeches based on claims of a new revelation! We heard that we are born with a sinful nature, based on the words of ... no prophet! And we heard that God's holy law could do nothing to change us, based upon the words of ... no prophet! And we heard of being a new kind of creature, and of a new kind of law, and a new kind of righteousness, all based on ... no prophet! And how does Paul claim to know such things without the law or the prophets? What did we hear? We heard that he and Barnabas know these things because they possess a new kind of knowledge!

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: I do not accept that kind of doctrine, no matter how glorious it may sound, and my refusal is based upon the solid rock of the law and the prophets. Eloquent speeches mean nothing; the eloquence

¹²¹ Num. 22–24.

¹²² 1Kgs. 21:7–13; 2Kgs. 9:26.

of the truth in God's law is what charms me, brothers. And I praise God for that, and bless His holy name!

Hushai, Lamech, Levi, Nadab: *Amen! Praise God! Etc.*

Uzziel: It was the knowledge of the Son of God that was hidden beforetime, Paul, not the knowledge of God Himself. Even Balaam had the knowledge of God, for when he prophesied for King Balak in Moab, it is written that his was "the voice of him who hears the words of God and possesses knowledge of the Most High!"¹²³ It is written, brothers! It is written! Now, where is our allegiance? To God or to Paul?

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: And King David, who himself knew God, told his young son Solomon, "If you cry out for discernment and lift your voice for understanding, then you will find the knowledge of God."¹²⁴ You may say that was vain advice for the young man, Paul, for you say that no one knew God, but when Solomon prayed for wisdom and knowledge, what was *God's* response? He said, "that wisdom and that knowledge are granted to you."¹²⁵ Furthermore, why would God have lamented through Hosea – twice – that there was no knowledge of God in the land,¹²⁶ except that the knowledge of God could have and should have been there? And after righteous King Josiah died, God said of him, "He judged the cause of the afflicted and poor. Then, it went well. Is this not the knowledge of me? says the LORD."¹²⁷ Our righteous fathers possessed the knowledge of God; to suggest otherwise is just wrong. It is based upon a kind of knowledge that denies the plain truth of the scriptures, and I do not want it!

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: As for how much glory and power Messiah has, or even how much power God Himself has, that is a subject for vain philosophical speculation; something the Athenians would discuss over wine, relaxing on their couches after an evening meal. Jesus told us that all power in heaven and earth has been given to him,¹²⁸ and that is all we need to know.

We all know that God's power cannot be measured. How much of it He has given Jesus is not the issue. The issue is, how has God chosen to use His power? God has always had the choice to save by His power alone. He could have saved Israel without the law if He had desired to do so. But what did He choose to do? He chose to save us by His power *and the law!*

Levi: ... which is what Isaiah said: "To the law and to the Spirit!" That is the only true gospel!

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Surely, God is in heaven this moment, grieving over this senseless division among us, saying to this Assembly what He said to Moses: "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?"¹²⁹ I would suggest that we stop right now and pray for the mercies of heaven, except that I have not forgotten the warning of Solomon, who said: "He who turns his ear away from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination!"¹³⁰ How can we pray for the God of the law to guide us when we are sitting here debating whether or not men should keep it?

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Were you mesmerized, brothers, with the crafty use of a few scriptures? Were you so swept up in the power of great, swelling words that your minds went altogether numb? Did you not ask yourselves how it could be that even if Messiah Jesus had stayed with us a thousand years, we would

¹²³ Num. 24:16a.

¹²⁴ Prov. 2:3, 5b.

¹²⁵ 2Chron. 1:12a.

¹²⁶ Hos. 4:1; 6:6.

¹²⁷ Jer. 22:16.

¹²⁸ Mt. 28:18.

¹²⁹ Ex. 16:28.

¹³⁰ Prov. 28:9.

never have been changed, as Paul said? Or when he said that we need only the law and the Messiah that are within us, were you so thrilled that you forgot the law that we read and the Messiah who is sitting at God's right hand? After all, *they are both outside of us!* God's Messiah being in my heart does not mean I no longer need Messiah who is at God's right hand! And God's law being in my heart does not mean that I no longer need the law that I read every day of my life! Tell me, brothers, if we need only what is inside of us, why do you worship a God who is outside of you?

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: This new doctrine is philosophical nonsense, the pabulum of spiritual children! I cannot fathom how such specious arguments, though from the mouths of friends, could blind such a gathering of godly men, men with whom I have labored many years now, striving for the faith and suffering for the faith with you! Barnabas is not the only one here who sold all that he owned and laid the proceeds at the your feet. He was following the example of many of us who were here before him.

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: And I am not complaining about having done that; I am glad I did it. The Lord has rewarded me many times over for it, as he promised to do. I am only warning this assembly to beware. I know how highly most of you esteem Barnabas and Paul, but do you think Israel in old time did not esteem the men who led them astray? Do you think false prophets were the rabble of the streets? No! Sons of Belial have never deceived this nation; the leaders of Israel's rebellions against God were always rulers, priests, and prophets whom the people respected. Who persuaded the people in the wilderness to turn against Moses, but "leaders of the congregation, chosen men of the Assembly, men of reputation"¹³¹ – Moses' cousin, Korah, being chief among them!¹³² God's people have never been and never will be deceived, but by men they love and trust.

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: If God performed mighty miracles among the heathen by the hands of Barnabas and Paul, I say amen. So be it. But if you look to miracles as proof of God's approval, remember why God told Moses He miraculously brought the law down from heaven with such thunderous, fiery darkness: "I am coming to you in a thick cloud," He said, "so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may believe in you forever."¹³³ And now, is Israel to forget Sinai and cease believing in Moses, and follow instead men who perform miracles, but declare a gospel that is not only contrary to Moses, but also to the prophets, and even to Messiah's own example!

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Men and brothers, in my judgment, excessive exuberance has carried Paul and Barnabas away from the established path of wisdom which the godly in Israel have always traveled. What they teach does not comport with either our history or the plainly revealed truth of Scripture. [*Uzziel sits.*]

Council members: *Comments.*

Daniel responds

Daniel: [*after a moment of silence*] Uzziel has thoroughly summed up the case for the need of the law for all men, including the Gentiles. I would answer him, but I will leave that to Paul and Barnabas, and I suspect they are well able to do so. Before that, however, I will emphasize an important truth which Uzziel brought to our attention, namely, that only men who sound right are in a position to mislead others. Uzziel, you warned us that although Barnabas and Paul sounded right, they did not use

¹³¹ Num. 16:2.

¹³² Num. 16:1 with Ex. 6:16–21. Also 1Chron. 6:16–22.

¹³³ Ex. 19:9.

many scriptures, and with that assessment, I agree. At the same time, I caution the men of this Council to note that Uzziel also sounded right, though using many scriptures.

Council members: *Comments.*

Daniel: And since both sides cannot be right, “sounding right” must not be the measure of truth, whether using many scriptures or few.

Council members: *Comments.*

Daniel: Furthermore, brothers, I ask you to remember that in his day, Noah had no scripture which could confirm for others God’s unheard-of command to build an ark. All he could do for his generation was to repeat what God had privately said to him. And father Abraham had no scripture to confirm God’s unheard-of command to forsake his homeland and kinsmen and to go to a place which God would only later show him. Nor did Abraham have any scripture to justify God’s unheard-of command to circumcise his sons; he had only a word from God, which, as in Noah’s case, came to him alone, out of all the men on earth. Likewise, Moses had no scripture by which he might confirm for Israel that the commandments he received while alone on the mountain with God had been truly spoken to him by God. And King David had no scripture to confirm for others the new instructions he received from the Spirit for temple worship.¹³⁴ So, my friends, remember that the absence of scripture does not necessarily equate to the absence of truth. God does not use scriptures; He creates them. He does not need them to justify His commands; when He speaks, He is His own authority.

Council members: *Comments.*

Daniel: With a living God, the only truth that exists is what God says today, regardless of what He said yesterday, for He guides us according to what we need, not according to what we once needed. Were it not so, Jesus would not have exhorted us to ask God for daily bread.¹³⁵ The Word of God is not a dead thing, carved into a stone or written in a book so that only the literate may know it. The Word of God is the life that came forth from His bosom and dwelt among us.

John: Amen, Daniel. Messiah is the life which was in the beginning with God, and God chose our generation to send that life to walk among us! We were chosen to hear with our ears the voice of him who made the stars, and to see with our eyes the one whom God had kept hidden from all generations, and to touch with our hands him who has now touched our hearts and sanctified us! Brother Daniel, what you have said is the wisdom of God. To have that life within us, leading us, is to be perfect with God, and we need nothing more than that.

Council members: *Comments.*

the knowledge of God

Hushai: As much as I respect all you elders here, I cannot agree with the opinion that a man’s use of the holy scriptures may or may not be relevant when demonstrating the truth. I believe that the holy scriptures are eternally true and that Jesus showed us to do as they say, and I can yield to no philosophy or new revelation that would turn me from them. I serve God in the gifts He has given; I make use of them; and I cannot forsake those gifts to chase after men who claim to have a deeper – and different – understanding from that of Moses and the prophets.

As for Jeremiah, he did indeed say, as Paul told us, that every man is brutish in knowledge, but that is the very reason God gave us His law, to lift us up, out of our beastly ignorance, and to teach us His ways! The knowledge of God revealed to us in the law is the very thing which makes Israel superior to the heathen! Do you really think we are false teachers because we encouraged the heathen to join us in our God-given glory, the very thing that makes Israel, Israel?

¹³⁴ 1Chron. 28:11–20.

¹³⁵ Mt. 6:11; Lk. 11:3.

Council members: *Comments.*

Micah: I agree. Thank you, Hushai, for that insight. I have learned from you today.

Brothers, I do not – I could never – dismiss the wisdom of brother Daniel. However, I must, respectfully, add this to what has been said. It cannot be denied that we know God far better now than men did, even righteous men, before God’s Spirit was poured out from heaven. But this more perfect knowledge of God cannot have been intended to negate the knowledge of God that our fathers possessed. And they *did* possess it, for the scriptures tell us that there are but two groups that do not know God: the heathen¹³⁶ and the wicked in our own nation.¹³⁷ Based on that, brothers, I have a question that I would like to put to this Council, and it is this: have you considered that if righteous men of old did not know God, as Paul teaches, then when the prophets prayed for God’s wrath to fall upon those who did not know Him,¹³⁸ they were praying for wrath to fall upon the righteous, too? There is no need to answer; I would ask only that you think about that.

In the days of the prophets, seeing wickedness among this people, God said, “They bend their tongue, as they bend their bow, for deceit, and they are not strong for truth in the land. Indeed, they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, says the LORD.”¹³⁹ Now, brothers, even a child understands that if God was grieved with those who were doing evil, it was because they could have and should have been doing good. Then, if He was grieved with liars, it was because they could have and should have been speaking the truth. And if He was grieved with those in Israel who did not know Him, it was because they could have and should have known Him!

We believe in revelation; we know God still speaks. But, brothers, true revelation today does not contradict yesterday’s truth. Moses’ law did not make Abraham’s circumcision void, but incorporated it into itself. God’s commandments build upon one another, and justify one another. They do not contradict and cancel out each other.

Council members: *Comments.*

Hananiah: Barnabas, my friend, this strange doctrine is not the thing that touched your heart and brought you here from your native Crete. Cease from it! Return to the faith you once embraced, the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints!

Barnabas: What touched me, Hananiah, and brought me here the first time was the revelation of God’s Messiah, and I wish you could see that it is the revelation of God that has also brought me back to you with this message.

Eliezar: What has Barnabas done wrong, Hananiah, if he has heard from God?

Elkanah: To condemn the just is an ungodly thing.

Benjamin: Then why did Barnabas and Paul condemn these teachers who went to Antioch to help ignorant Gentiles?

Nahum: Patience, young men. God will make it known who has erred and who has not. Be still and wait, and if either Paul or Barnabas has a response to the things Uzziel has said, you will learn from it.

Paul: I will answer, sir.

Nahum: Then, may God give you wisdom, son, for as you see, it will be difficult to convince some that the Gentiles are not to submit to our law.

Paul: Yes, that much is very clear.

¹³⁶ Ps. 79:6; Ex. 5:2.

¹³⁷ Isa. 26:10.

¹³⁸ Ps. 79:6; Jer. 10:25.

¹³⁹ Jer. 9:3.

Nahum: And if our Jewish brothers are not persuaded of your doctrine, and yet, the believing Gentiles are persuaded, then there will be lasting division in the household of God, and Messiah's heart will break.

Paul: That is true, and it is a pain which I would spare our Savior. He has suffered enough.

Council members: *Comments.*

Nahum: Go ahead now, son.

Paul: Men and brothers, Uzziel scoffs at the notion that the Spirit has brought a new kind of knowledge into our hearts, but the knowledge which righteous men of old possessed was only the knowledge of things *about* God. It is akin to the knowledge that some animals have, which men use in training them to obey commands, the same way men are trained by laws to act as if they are good, even if they are not. That is not the knowledge of God. If Balaam had truly known God, Uzziel, he would not have prayed a second time, hoping that God would change His mind and allow him to prophesy against Israel.¹⁴⁰ And the wisdom that Solomon asked God for was only the wisdom to be a wise ruler of God's people, for he said, "Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I might go out and come in before this people, for who can judge this nation of yours, which is so great?"¹⁴¹ And had Solomon possessed the true knowledge of God, he would not have taken heathen wives and built altars for them to use to sacrifice some of their children – Solomon's children!¹⁴² And the lack of knowledge in this land which grieved God was the lack of knowledge of Moses' law, which was only knowledge *about* God, by which men were trained to act as if they knew Him. I say again, the law could never give us the knowledge of God, for God had hidden all the riches of His wisdom and knowledge in His Son, and no one on earth ever saw or heard that wisdom and knowledge until the Son came to earth with it.

Council members: *Comments.*

Lamech tries to divide Paul and Peter

Lamech: Brother Paul, I would ask you a question.

Paul: Of course.

Lamech: If I have understood you correctly, you would say that the Gentiles in Caesarea to whom Simon Peter went some years ago were made truly righteous only when they received the Spirit, for it brought a new kind of righteousness into their souls. Do I have that right?

Paul: The Spirit brought God's kind of righteousness into their souls, yes, and that was new.

Lamech: And afterwards, according to your gospel, God required nothing more of those Gentiles but to live upright lives, as the Spirit led them?

Paul: Yes.

Lamech: I thought so. But that puzzles me. I have thought on it often since you confronted me with your gospel in Antioch. Feel free to correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that brother Simon baptized those Gentiles *after* they received the Spirit, contrary to your doctrine, brother Paul.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: That baptism made the Gentiles no purer in God's sight. Jesus' baptism made their souls as clean as it can be.

Lamech: But what should we say to Cornelius, Paul, about brother Simon's decision to baptize him with water after Jesus had baptized him with the Spirit? Would you tell him that Simon had polluted *with a dead ceremony what God had cleansed?*

¹⁴⁰ Num. 22:5–35.

¹⁴¹ 2Chron. 1:10.

¹⁴² 1Kgs. 11:3–7.

Paul: I would tell them the truth, that God had not at that time revealed my gospel and that brother Peter did as he felt best. I have no criticism of him at all for that.

Lamech: But how could we repair the damage – unbaptized them, if there is such a thing – so that they might be clean again?

Paul: Dead things such as water have no power either to cleanse or pollute the soul. That baptism did them no harm, and Peter commanded nothing else for them.

Matthew: Jesus said that only what comes out of a man defiles him, Lamech. But I do think that you have raised a reasonable question. Simon, why did you baptize those Gentiles with water? I have never thought to ask that before now.

Simon Peter: What else was I to do? Jesus had given us no instructions for Gentiles. He didn't even forewarn us that he would baptize them with His Spirit, except in a vision which I understood only well enough to make me willing to go to that Gentile's house.

Lamech: But why baptize them? Why did you not command them to be circumcised instead? John's baptism was only for Israel. Why baptize the uncircumcised with our baptism? They did not even yet belong to our nation. To circumcise them, rather than to baptize them, was the proper order.

Simon Peter: I ... I don't really know, brothers. I had no instructions. It seemed to be the right thing to do, since God had given them His Spirit. But I do understand why you question it.

Paul: I will explain to you why Peter baptized those Gentiles. Simon, may I?

Simon Peter: Yes, of course.

Paul: When God baptized the Gentiles with His Spirit, Peter knew they belonged to God, for God had then borne them witness, that they had believed and repented. And since they belonged to God, Peter baptized them, as had always been required of God's people. God did not tell Peter to do that; Peter only assumed he should do it because God had always required it.

Lamech: God did not tell me to pray this morning, Paul, but I did. Did God have to tell Simon to do the thing that he already knew to do? Does God have to tell us everything, each day we live, in order for us to know what we should do?

Simon Peter: I learned from my experience at Cornelius' house that, yes, we must always be led by the Spirit to know what to do and what to say, and even what to think.

Paul: Knowing the law did not help Peter know what to do at Cornelius' house, Lamech. He went ahead with John's baptism because he thought he should, even though he knew that Jesus had already sanctified them. Peter was trying to figure it all out.

Simon Peter: I certainly was.

Paul: And if you recall, brothers, God had to force Peter to go to Caesarea in the first place because Peter did not understand the keys of the kingdom of God, which Jesus had given him.¹⁴³

Silas: And what do you say the keys of God's kingdom are, Paul?

the keys of the kingdom

Paul: When Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, what he was giving him was the authority to open the door of the kingdom of God to men, first to the Jews, later to the Samaritans, and lastly to the Gentiles. Peter used his first key, the key for the Jews, the day the Spirit first came, and when he used it, thousands of Jews believed and entered into the kingdom of God.

Benjamin: But to the Samaritans, God sent Philip, not Simon.

Paul: Yes, but Philip could not open the door for them; he could only tell them about the kingdom. Tell us, Philip, when the Samaritans heard your preaching, and saw the miracles God worked through you, and repented, why did you not lay your hands on them to receive the Spirit?

¹⁴³ Mt. 16:17–19.

Philip: I would have, but God would not allow it. The Samaritans were already circumcised, and I thought that since they had believed my preaching and repented, all I needed to do was to baptize them with water in the name of Jesus and they would receive the Spirit. But when I baptized them, the Spirit did not come.

Paul: And it did not come upon them because their door was not open, and the door was not open because Peter, the man with the keys, was in Jerusalem.

Joseph: Yes, when word came to us that the Samaritans had received the word of God from Philip, the Spirit led us to send Simon, and John with him, hoping that the Samaritans would receive the Spirit.

Philip: Which they did after Simon came, and he and John laid their hands on them.

Paul: The only thing that those Samaritans had lacked was the man with the keys. They were circumcised; they had believed the gospel; they had repented; they had been baptized with John's baptism – and all of that was required of them; but they could not receive the Spirit because their door was not yet opened.

Simon Peter: Until I came?

Paul: Yes, Peter. You had to be there because the anointing to open the door of the kingdom was given to you, not Philip.

Barnabas: And in that instance, Simon, your anointing to open the door worked not through your mouth but through your hands when you laid your hands on the Samaritans and they were baptized with the Spirit.

Maschil: But after that, many other Samaritans received the Spirit without Simon being there. Does that mean he had only to open the door?

Paul: Yes. And since the day Peter opened that door, any Samaritan who believes, and repents, and is baptized in Jesus' name, receives the Spirit.

Barnabas: And that is true of Jews, as well. Since Peter opened the Jews' door, any Jew may receive the Spirit, whether Simon is present or not. Both those doors are now open.

Simon Peter: But after that day in Samaria, there was one key remaining that I had not used, wasn't there?

Paul: Yes, Peter. You still held the key to the kingdom of God for the Gentiles.

Simon Peter: My God, I see it! That truly is what the Lord meant!

Paul: And when God forced you to go to those Gentiles, Peter, although you did not yet understand it and did not want to go, you went because you are a faithful servant of God.

Simon Peter: If I had known what the keys of the kingdom were, I would not have resisted going!

Paul: I know that; we all know that. And God knew it then. That is why He was patient with you, and why He interrupted you when you had said all that the Gentiles needed to hear. You had accomplished what God sent you to do, for the anointing that Jesus gave you unlocked the Gentiles' door when you obeyed God and preached to them. But Jesus did not anoint you to be the *teacher* of the Gentiles. That is my office.

Simon Peter: My Lord and my God! And I didn't even know what I was doing.

Paul: You didn't have to. God knew, and His love made up for your ignorance, and theirs.

Council members: *Comments.*

Kenaz: Brothers, I was in Joppa when Simon Peter came there and healed Dorcas, and I traveled with him to Caesarea when God sent him to Cornelius' house. To go there with Simon was not easy for me to do, as you certainly know, for we are forbidden by the custom of our fathers to enter into a Gentile's house. I can only speak for myself, but I feel sure that none of us who went with Simon would have gone, but for the vision that God gave him.

Council members: *Low conversation.*

Philip: Every man here would have felt the same way, especially since Jesus strictly forbade us to go to the Gentiles.

Elkanah: Yes, and we knew that. And none of us in Joppa knew why Jesus was sending Simon to Gentiles. The last thing we expected was that Jesus would baptize the heathen with the Spirit just because they believed Simon's message about Jesus.

Jether: That is so, but truthfully, I can't even say that it was the last thing I expected because I did not expect it at all!

Azariah: That's right, Jether. God receiving the heathen? It was unthinkable!

Jether: Impossible!

Eliezar: We were dumbfounded.

Azariah: I don't think I slept for two days. I would lie in bed and ask myself, over and over, "What just happened? What did we just witness?"

Elkanah: Yes. "What has God done?"

Eliezar: That's it. We knew it was the work of God, but what did it mean?

Joel: It appears that Solomon was finally proved wrong about something, for he said, "There is no new thing under the sun."¹⁴⁴ But for God to grant Gentiles – uncircumcised Gentiles! – remission of sins was certainly a new thing.

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: Simon, remind us of the warning God gave you before He sent you to Cornelius' house.

Simon Peter: The command He gave me in the vision I saw on Simon the tanner's rooftop?

Barnabas: Yes, that one.

Simon Peter: Very well. In a stern voice, God said to me, "What I have cleansed, don't you call common!"

Barnabas: In other words, brothers, if God bore witness to the righteousness of those Gentiles, giving them the Spirit, then who is any man to condemn them? It is God that justifies, not us. Messiah Jesus is good, brothers, and he does good to those who are good.¹⁴⁵

Benjamin: We are not saying that Jesus is not good, Barnabas!

Barnabas: But you *are* saying that Jesus is not good *enough*, that he needs help from Moses to save men's souls.

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Last year, I stayed in Corinth five days, while our ship was docked there, and I saw would-be philosophers gather every day to debate worthless issues, always hoping to hear some new thing. This conversation reminds me of that. This doctrine is just another new thing, brothers; it, too, will pass.

Paul: No Uzziel; this new thing is the new thing which God promised our fathers¹⁴⁶ and accomplished in His Son; it will never pass away. And this new thing is not explained by your gospel, for it still requires the old thing of the law. That is why those who went with Peter to Cornelius' house could not understand what God had done; none of the law's rites had been performed beforehand, which your gospel requires; and so, to them, the Gentiles were unfit for the Spirit. But God gave it! And it is *my* gospel alone which explains why God did that.

Council members: *Comments.*

Nathan: Perhaps this whole controversy is just a matter of emphasis, brothers, with Barnabas and Paul emphasizing the glory of Messiah Jesus more, and Hananiah and Uzziel emphasizing the law more.

Micah: It is much more than that, Nathan. Even if Paul and Barnabas have learned some truth from God, one truth can be stressed to the neglect of an equally important truth, and when that is done, the beauty of the whole is marred. What God has done in Israel is a beautiful thing, and He has crowned our history now with Messiah Jesus, perfecting His work forever.

¹⁴⁴ Eccl. 1:9.

¹⁴⁵ Ps. XX

¹⁴⁶ Isa. 43:19.

the law will end

Joseph: Paul, my son, there is an old saying, “The ear tries speech as the palate tastes food.”¹⁴⁷ And I remember a parable Jesus once told us about new wine tasting unpleasant to those used to the aged wine. These new things are not easy to swallow for those who have feasted their whole lives on ancient truth. Perhaps you should let these brothers hear your answer to this question, for it is in their hearts, though none of them have expressed it in this manner: if the Spirit was given so that all who believe, both Jew and Gentile, might “serve God in one accord”, as the prophet said,¹⁴⁸ and if Jesus prayed fervently for all believers to be as one, how can perfect unity ever be realized if we Jews are pleasing God by worshipping according to the law and the Gentiles who believe are also pleasing God by *not* worshipping according to the law?

Council members: *Comments.*

Micah: Yes, Paul – and thank you, brother Joseph. That question *is* in my heart. If both are pleasing God, how can either ever cease worshipping the way they do now? If there are two true gospels – and I am not saying that is the case – how will the difference ever be resolved?

Paul: The difference will not last, Micah. It will be this way only for a season.

Hananiah: What do you mean, “for a season”?

Paul: God loves and is very gentle with His people. Having commanded us to keep the law, He does not now command us to violate our conscience and stop keeping it. But in time, we will be required to grow in grace and understand that the law’s purpose has been fulfilled.

Micah: If what you say is true, Paul, then someone, at some point, will have to change if we are ever to be united.

Paul: Yes. That is true.

Micah: And whom will God command to change at the close of this “season”, brother Paul? We Jews or the heathen who believe?

Paul: We Jews.

Council members: *Talking loudly among themselves.*

Hushai: We know that God spoke through Moses and the prophets, and through Jesus, but we do not know where you have gotten the things you say, Paul. What prophet ever said, “No law! No circumcision! No sacrifice! No Sabbath!”

Council members: *Comments, pro and con.*

Nahum: Paul, my son, allow me.

Paul: Of course, sir.

Nahum: I was standing by the south gate when the rulers and men of the city dragged young Stephen out, past me. It was a terrible sight! When I asked someone what was happening, the man told me they were taking Stephen out to the valley to stone him. I asked him why, and he said that Stephen had said blasphemous things against Moses and God.

Maschil: What things, brother Nahum?

Nahum: He told me that several witnesses had testified they heard Stephen saying that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy Jerusalem and change the customs that Moses commanded us.¹⁴⁹ So, you must beware, Paul, where you speak these things. Outside this room, in the streets of this city, your words would provoke murderous wrath.

¹⁴⁷ Job 34:3.

¹⁴⁸ Zeph. 3:9.

¹⁴⁹ Acts 6:11–14.

Jacobus: That is certainly true, Nahum. But there is no danger here among us of such evil being done to a righteous man.

Council members: *Amen. Etc.*

Jacobus: Speak freely, Paul, and all of you.

Paul: I was present at Stephen's trial, brothers. I heard his testimony, and was as blind as anyone to the truth he spoke. I know how wrong God's truth can sound until God opens our ears. I was glad when the rulers dragged Stephen out of the city. And I was glad when the stones began to beat out his life. Would to God I had been in *his* place instead of the place I was in! But now I stand here, among brothers I am not even worthy to be among, and I am confessing to you the truth for which Stephen died!

Uzziel: Yes, Stephen died for confessing the truth, but what was the truth that Stephen confessed? He did *not* confess that our customs would change; that is only what the false witnesses accused him of saying.

Brother Nahum, the mob passed me, too, dragging Stephen out. It was indeed a gruesome sight. And I, too, questioned men who had been there and heard what Stephen said. What I learned was that the Sanhedrin did not condemn Stephen because of what the false witnesses said but for what Stephen himself said. He told the judges that they were stiff-necked and uncircumcised and that they had not kept the law God gave them. That's the point at which they began reviling him. They were hypocrites, and Stephen exposed them. Then Stephen – who kept the law – suddenly cried out that he saw Messiah Jesus – who also kept the law – standing at the right hand of God – who gave the law – and those wicked men who were not keeping the law dragged Stephen out of the city and stoned him.¹⁵⁰

But now, men and brothers, Paul would have us to believe that not keeping the law, like those wicked men, will soon be a righteous thing. So, Paul, how can you say that Stephen died for the gospel you preach?

Paul: I told you earlier that since the beginning of the world, God has been declaring my gospel through righteous men, though they themselves did not understand it. And they were hated and persecuted by wicked men who also did not understand it.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: I was there at Stephen's trial, Uzziel, and I heard him for myself. Fools consider it a crime to speak the truth, and Stephen spoke truth to a chamber full of them that day.

Council members: *Amen. Etc.*

Paul: What he told those wicked judges is not merely that they were uncircumcised, as you were apparently told, but that they were uncircumcised *in heart*. And when he told them they were not keeping the law, he meant that they were not keeping it *in heart*. And as for the accusation against Stephen, that he prophesied that Jesus will change the customs of Moses, that accusation may not have been a false one, for the Spirit could have moved Stephen to speak of my gospel. I don't know if God did that, but I do know Stephen was a prophet, and the Spirit moved the prophets often to speak of my gospel. And so, those false witnesses may have been testifying of something Stephen actually said. Did not the false witnesses who testified against Jesus at his trial repeat things he actually said, though they twisted his words to accomplish an evil purpose?¹⁵¹

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: I heard Stephen when he reminded the judges of Solomon's prayer to God at the dedication of the temple: "Behold, heaven – even the heaven of heavens – cannot contain you! How much less this house that I have built?"¹⁵² Stephen was very bold to declare before the Sanhedrin that God does not

¹⁵⁰ Acts 7:51–58.

¹⁵¹ Mt. 26:59–61.

¹⁵² 1Kgs. 8:27.

dwell in temples made by hands. He was risking his life when he reminded them of Isaiah's words, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth, my footstool. Where is this house that you would build for me?"¹⁵³ God's temple is in heaven, brothers, as the prophets said,¹⁵⁴ and by the Spirit, we have access into that temple, where our God is.

Council members: *Comments.*

Hananiah: But brother Paul, the righteous have always had access to God in heaven. Did not David say, "The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry?"¹⁵⁵ And did not the LORD say to Moses in the mountain, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and I have heard their cry?"¹⁵⁶

Paul: Yes, God heard us, and yes, God blessed us, but only on the condition that His Son would come and pay the price for it all. Everything depended on Jesus! But we had no inner connection with the heart and mind of God.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: There was atonement made for sin under the law, and forgiveness was extended to those who confessed their sins and turned from them. But none of the sins forgiven under the law were blotted out of God's book until the blood of His Son was shed for them, for the blood of goats and oxen can never take away man's sins.

Council members: *Comments.*

Micah: As often as the prophets spoke of Messiah, surely, if what you and Barnabas say is true, they would have said the things about him that you say. But they did not. But even if we lay aside all that is said in the law and the prophets, we still have the perfect example of Jesus himself, who walked uprightly according to the law. And he said, "You will stay in my love if you keep my commandments, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and stay in His love."¹⁵⁷ I want us to stay in the Father's love, Paul.

Council members: *Comments.*

Micah: One day when I was with Jesus, he commanded ten lepers to go to the priests to offer the sacrifices that Moses' law required for those healed of leprosy.¹⁵⁸ But only when they obeyed him and started walking toward God's priests were they healed. **Why would Jesus have given that commandment to obey the law if God sent him to do away with the law?**

Barnabas: God has often commanded His servants to do things which they later ceased from doing when God's purpose was accomplished. God commanded Moses to build a tent for His service in the wilderness, but later, God gave David the design for a temple to replace Moses' tent.

Hananiah: But that dealt only with the *location* of worship. God's law continued to be observed in the temple even though Moses' tabernacle was put away. Moses' sanctuary had to be a tent because the people were constantly moving, traveling with it from Egypt to this land. But once we were established in the land, God chose one place for His service, as He had promised, saying, "When you have settled in the land, there will be a place which the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling place for His name."¹⁵⁹ So, while God may give a new commandment for a specific situation, God commanded His law to be kept everywhere, whether in Moses' tent or in Solomon's temple, whether out in the wilderness or in Jerusalem, or anywhere else.

Barnabas: I see how you are looking at that, Hananiah, but...

¹⁵³ Isa. 66:1–2a; Acts 7:49–50.

¹⁵⁴ E.g., Ps. 11:4; Mic. 1:2.

¹⁵⁵ Ps. 34:15.

¹⁵⁶ Ex. 3:7.

¹⁵⁷ Jn. 15:10.

¹⁵⁸ Lk. 17:12–14.

¹⁵⁹ Dt. 12:10–11.

Levi: Whatever God commands stands forever!

Barnabas: ... unless He gives a new commandment that differs from one He gave before. You know what happened to the man who refused to obey the prophet who commanded him by the word of the LORD to strike him. For over a hundred years, all Israel had known that God strictly forbade anyone to harm His servants, for God had commanded through David, “Do not touch my anointed ones, and do not harm my prophets!”¹⁶⁰ There was no question about that being the command of God. So, when God sent a prophet to this man, he obeyed God’s old command and refused to strike the prophet, and God sent a lion to kill him for his disobedience.¹⁶¹ And you know what happened at Kadesh-barnea when Moses obeyed God’s old commandment to strike the rock¹⁶² instead of obeying God’s new one to speak to it;¹⁶³ that error cost Moses dearly.¹⁶⁴

Council members: *Comments.*

Lamech: Yes, Barnabas, but those are minor things that were for a specific time and place. Striking a prophet or a rock is not to be compared with the eternal covenants of God. What is a grain of sand to a mountain?

Barnabas: I was responding to the comment that “whatever God commands stands forever.” That is manifestly not always the case.

Andrew: Was God’s commandment not to drink any manner of blood a minor thing, Levi? For to break that commandment would cost a man his soul. God said, “If any man of the house of Israel, or any stranger who dwells among them, consumes any kind of blood, I will set my face against that soul who consumes the blood, and I will cut him off from among his people.”¹⁶⁵

Lamech: I know where you are going with this.

Andrew: You should. You were there the day Jesus told us that the only way to have eternal life is to drink his blood.¹⁶⁶

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: Brothers, God has commandments yet to give us which may sound as strange to our ears that as one did, and who knows what we will be called upon to do?

Lamech: You men are just engaging in intellectual gymnastics. Jesus was speaking only of eating and drinking spiritually, Andrew; those who did not understand that left him that day and never came back. He was not saying what you are saying! The truth of God is supported by Scripture, but what you are saying is supported by nothing. Many prophets have declared the law is forever.

I have not forgotten Daniel’s wise admonition, not to base our judgment of a man on his use of many or few scriptures, for God may indeed command a new thing, as He did to Noah and Abraham. But we can at least agree that no prophet ever said such things as this! That Israel must cease from the law is unthinkable! It is not a small matter, a mere afterthought which God happened never to mention in the prophets.

Council members: *Comments.*

Levi: I am not imagining that God said, “Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the commandments of this law by doing them.”¹⁶⁷ And He commanded all Israel to say amen to that curse, Paul.¹⁶⁸ Do you and Barnabas say amen to the word of God?

¹⁶⁰ Ps. 105:15.

¹⁶¹ 1Kgs. 20:35–36.

¹⁶² Ex. 17:6.

¹⁶³ Num. 20:8.

¹⁶⁴ Num. 20:12.

¹⁶⁵ Lev.

¹⁶⁶ Jn. 6:53–58.

¹⁶⁷ Dt. 27:26a.

¹⁶⁸ Dt. 27:26b.

Hushai: I say amen to it!

Uzziel, Nadab, Lamech: *Amen! We do! Yes! Etc.*

Paul: Far be it from me to say to any Jew that he should forsake the law, as long as it pleases God for us to keep it. I believe God will indeed curse whoever among us would dare forsake it; indeed, every man who is circumcised must keep the law, every element of it, just as it is written. I myself keep the commandments, and I have done so from my youth.¹⁶⁹

Levi: But you know in your heart that your ultimate aim is to have us to cease from it! Be honest, Paul! David said, “Rivers of waters run down my eyes because they do not keep your law,”¹⁷⁰ but you and Barnabas weep for those who do keep it! Brother Jacobus! John! Simon! You are good, godly men! Do you truly believe that the law will die which nurtured us in righteousness?

John: I believe the law was dead to start with, Levi, and we were dead with it, and I believe that Messiah brought us life, just as he said: “I am come that they might have life, and have it abundantly.”¹⁷¹

Jacobus: “Die” is just a term, Levi. The point is that something greater than the law has come, and Paul’s message is that the “something” greater than the law is Messiah Jesus and that he is so much greater than the law that he, by the Spirit of God, does for our souls all that God now requires.

Council members: *Comments.*

Simon Peter: Levi, be slow to judge these things; brother Paul says things that are hard to understand, I know, but he has received something from God that we need to hear.

Barnabas: And I emphasize again, Levi, that Paul and I acknowledge the gospel you preach, as long as you preach it to the Jews. And we will preach our gospel to the Gentiles. Paul and I have said we know that God is pleased that Jews keep the law now. Indeed, we keep it with you, being of the stock of Israel. But the One of whom the law spoke has come, and a new and living way of worship is taking the place of the old one.

Council members: *Comments.*

Benjamin begins to see

Benjamin: Brother Paul, God told Moses that the high priest was to “light the lamps at twilight and burn it as a continual incense before the LORD *throughout your generations.*”¹⁷² And God told Moses that the children of Israel were “to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a covenant forever.”¹⁷³ How can you say that we, not the Gentiles, will have to change?

Paul: [*slowly, discerning something*] Do you think Barnabas and I contrived all this, Benjamin? Do you think our gospel was *not* given to us by Jesus?

Benjamin: [*hesitates*] Well, I ... What I think is irrelevant, brother Paul. What you think is irrelevant, too. What any man thinks is irrelevant. Can’t you see what Uzziel said, that we must judge all things by the measure which we all know came from God, the truth spoken by Moses and the prophets?

Paul: Is that all that has come to us from God, Benjamin? Hasn’t His Spirit also now come from God, and doesn’t the Spirit gives us wisdom that is beyond Moses and the prophets?

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: Yes, Jesus has liberated us from having to make judgments based on our understanding of handwritten material. Listen to what the Spirit is saying to you, Benjamin! The Spirit is bearing witness to your heart right now to the truth. The Lord is talking to you, Benjamin. Believe him.

¹⁶⁹ Acts 26:4–5.

¹⁷⁰ Ps. 119:136.

¹⁷¹ Jn. 10:10.

¹⁷² Ex. 30:8.

¹⁷³ Ex. 31:16.

Lamech: Such psychological tricks may work among the Gentiles, Paul, but they won't work here.

Paul: It is no trick, Lamech. Jesus is showing the truth to Benjamin; I can see it. And he will soon be free from reliance upon things he can see with his eyes, and will learn to look rather to what cannot be seen. That is the faith of Abraham, who looked to the invisible God. Everything that can be seen will pass away, but that which cannot be seen is eternal.

Philip: Amen, Paul. Jesus commanded us to judge by the Spirit, and not to judge by what we see or what we hear.¹⁷⁴

Nadab: And you think that includes the law?

Paul: Can you see it?

Nadab: I can see you; does that mean you are dead and gone?

Paul: Yes, it does. What you see of me, my fleshly body, and what I see of you, *is* dead – dead to God – and it will soon be altogether gone, just as the law will be.

Council members: *Comments.*

one or two?

Paul: Believe me, men and brothers! God will call upon us, in His time, to cease altogether from the law and to trust in Jesus alone. We may then, at last, be of one faith with the Gentiles, walking together in the law of the Spirit, and there will be one fold and one Shepherd.¹⁷⁵

Hushai: There is already one fold – Israel! – and the uncircumcised are not in it! And there is already one shepherd – Jesus! He is Lord over us all, Jew and Gentile alike, and we must serve him alike!

Brothers, we do not diminish the value of the Spirit, or the price that was paid for it. We know that the Spirit is God's testimony of His Son, and we praise Him for it, just as you all do.

Barnabas: Oh, but you do diminish the value of the Spirit in men's hearts when you add something to it.

Hushai: But how have *we* added the law to the Spirit? You yourself admitted earlier that God added the Spirit to the law! The law came first, not second.

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: The law had to be first because it was a testimony that God's Son was coming; but now, the Spirit has been given as a testimony that he came. You are trying to add to that new testimony the old one that has been fulfilled. What need have we of a testimony that Messiah is coming? He has already come! What men need now is God's witness that Messiah was here and that he is coming again!

Micah: I just don't see it your way, Barnabas. Men need both God's law and God's confirmation of it. That is no more than what God has plainly commanded us: look to both the law and the Spirit! Yes, men must receive God's testimony to His Son's sacrifice, and we do not condemn the Gentiles who have received it. But God said to tell men to look to both the Spirit and the law, not just to the Spirit alone.

Maschil: Every man here thanks God for giving us such a sure testimony to His Son as the Spirit. But it is impossible to believe that God's pouring out of the Spirit requires that we should cease from His other witness, the law. It seems more reasonable to me to say that God sent the witness of the Spirit to *assure* the observance of His law, not to end it. Brother Barnabas, I have always esteemed you as my elder, but you are talking riddles to me.

Council members: *Comments.*

Lamech: If the doctrine taught by Barnabas and Paul had truly been God's plan all along, as they say, then surely, Jesus would have prepared us better for it. When did Jesus tell us that circumcision

¹⁷⁴ Jn. 7:24.

¹⁷⁵ Jn. 10:16.

would be no more, that the feasts would cease being observed, or that the Sabbaths would no longer be kept? No, my brothers, if Jesus had anticipated this doctrine, he would have told us that it was coming.

John: But Jesus did suggest such things, Lamech. We just could not understand him.

Philip: And it was a good thing that we did not understand him, for if we had, it would have been too much for us, and he plainly said so the night before he died.¹⁷⁶

Hushai: But haven't we all learned much since the Spirit came? Jesus was not referring to the things Barnabas and Paul teach when he said he had other truths to teach us.

Matthew: Don't speak too soon, Hushai. God does all things according to His own will, and whenever His will changes, we must change with it.

Micah: If God changes, we certainly must change with Him, Matthew, but we must first be sure that God has made a change.

Council members: *That is true. Yes. Etc.*

Micah: But a change like this is more than I can see God making. God's ways are straightforward and clear; this new doctrine seems convoluted to me. It stirs up strife and debate.

Nadab: The truth cannot be simpler. We are to keep the commandments of God. That is as fundamental to righteousness as can be!

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Amen! The meaning of what God said to our fathers could not have been clearer when He said that the law is "an everlasting covenant" and that only the wicked do not keep it.¹⁷⁷ How much clearer could He be? How could God have been any plainer when He said, "If you can break my covenant of the day and my covenant of the night, so that there is no day and night, then my covenant with the priests who minister before me may also be broken."¹⁷⁸ Yet, Barnabas has now returned to men who loved him and who taught him the right ways of God, proclaiming that God will break His covenant with the day and with the night, and that day and night will cease, for the law will be no more!

Council members: *Comments.*

Micah: What would make God's everlasting law "everlasting", Paul, except that it is to be everlastingly kept by His people? It seems unreasonable to think that the coming of the Spirit would bring an end to the law, when God Himself called the law an "everlasting covenant".¹⁷⁹

Barnabas: Righteous men of old did say that the law is everlasting,¹⁸⁰ however, God later spoke of another covenant, saying in Jeremiah, "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day I took them out of the land of Egypt. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them and write it on their heart."¹⁸¹

Uzziel: Your handling of the scriptures does not hold up to scrutiny, Barnabas. It sounds good and right to some men, but what you are saying is neither good nor right.

Council members: *Comments.*

Jacobus: What do you mean, Uzziel?

Uzziel: Did you not hear the prophecy, Jacobus? Did any of you hear what Jeremiah said? What did Barnabas himself just tell us that Jeremiah said about this new covenant? He said, "I will make a new covenant *with the house of Israel.*" God said nothing at all about making a covenant with Gentiles.

¹⁷⁶ Jn. 16:12.

¹⁷⁷ Isa. 24:5.

¹⁷⁸ Jer. 33:20–21.

¹⁷⁹ Isa. 24:5, et. al.

¹⁸⁰ E.g., David, in 1Chronicles 16:17 (cp. Ps. 105:10).

¹⁸¹ Jer. 31:31–33.

There is one fold, Israel, and one shepherd, Jesus the son of David! As Ezekiel said, “I have exalted one shepherd to be over them, and he will feed them.”¹⁸²

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: God spoke through Moses and described this land, the land of Canaan, as the land of rest for Israel, did He not, Barnabas?¹⁸³

Barnabas: Yes.

Uzziel: But after our fathers had dwelt here for many generations, God warned the righteous through Micah, saying, “Rise up and leave, for this is not your rest! It is polluted.”¹⁸⁴ And about that same time, God promised yet another rest, the holy Spirit, which we have now received. For Isaiah said, “He will speak to this people with stammering lips and another tongue, to whom He said, ‘This is the rest with which you will cause the weary one to rest,’ and, ‘This is the refreshing.’”¹⁸⁵

Nadab: But Isaiah was prophesying of the foreigners that God sent to chasten our nation.

Uzziel: Yes, but God often used ancient events as parables for what He would do at a later time.

Barnabas: That is true.

Simeon: Yes, that is true. That is true. He is the God of all the earth, who shapes nations as He will.

Nadab: But why would He call this land our rest if it really was not?

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Because it *is* our rest, Nadab.

Nadab: Oh.

Uzziel: God only *added* the rest of the Spirit to it. Men and brothers, this land has provided our people great rest and safety from our enemies, just as God promised. And even though God has added to us this precious rest of the Spirit, the land is still here, is it not?

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: And by the mercies of God, we are still in it, are we not?

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: So, tell me, brothers. Has this land of rest been *replaced* by the spiritual rest Jesus purchased for us, or has a sweet rest only been added to the rest God already gave us?

Levi, Hushai, Lamech, Nadab: *Added. Etc.*

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Yes, it has been added to that rest, and it is wrong not to think so.

Levi: And that is not all the safety that this land has provided us, Uzziel. Being given our own land not only provides us with safety from foreign enemies, but safety also from enemies within our borders. For God said, “In the Assembly, there shall be one ordinance for you and for the foreigner who dwells among you, an ordinance forever throughout your generations. As you are, so will the foreigner be before the LORD. There shall be one law and one custom for you and for the foreigner who dwells with you.”¹⁸⁶ So then, having the law and the land enables us to govern the land according to God’s law, and to condemn transgressors and rid ourselves of them. This is what God has commanded! “You shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear of it, and fear.”¹⁸⁷ The prophets said nothing about our land being a mere symbol of the spiritual rest which Jesus brought us. No, brothers. We do not discard what God said yesterday just because He says something more today.

Council members: *Comments.*

¹⁸² Ezek. 34:23.

¹⁸³ Dt. 12:9.

¹⁸⁴ Mic. 2:10.

¹⁸⁵ Isa. 28:11–12.

¹⁸⁶ Num. 15:15–16.

¹⁸⁷ Dt. 21:21b.

Uzziel: Consider what I say, brothers, for it is indisputable truth. In ancient time, God made a covenant with Noah and with his sons, that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood. And He sealed that covenant with a rainbow, saying, “This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between me and you and every living soul that is with you, unto all generations.”¹⁸⁸ Then, many years later, when God made a covenant of circumcision with father Abraham,¹⁸⁹ did that covenant do away with the covenant God had previously made with Noah?

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Do we not still see God’s rainbow in the sky, assuring us of His continued commitment to the covenant He made with Noah? Yes, your own eyes have seen God’s rainbow in the heavens, testifying that God keeps His covenants and that a new covenant does not void older ones.

Levi: Amen, Uzziel!

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Now, brothers, we all give thanks to God for the atoning work of Messiah Jesus. But how is it that the atoning work of him who kept the law does not lead all men to keep it? No, brothers! Jesus suffered and died to confirm the law so that all men everywhere would know that the law is of God and to obey it. Didn’t Jesus warn us not to think he had come to do away with the law, but to fulfill it? Some of us heard him with our own ears say, “Do not think I have come to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill.”¹⁹⁰

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: The addition of the Spirit to our worship is not the only addition that God has ever made to our worship. You said earlier, Paul, that God gave David a revelation concerning how to build the temple, and that is true. And in that revelation, God expanded our praise in music and instituted the order of priestly service that is practiced to this day.¹⁹¹ But when God made that great change, no one took David’s revelation to mean that God’s revelations to Noah, or Abraham, or Moses were thereby voided. Every one of the changes God made to our worship through the centuries were momentous, but none of them did away with the law; they only made the law more perfect. This is what Jesus meant when he said he had come to fulfill the law. He has made our worship as perfect as it can be when he sent us the Spirit to perfect us who were keeping the law, so that we might serve God more perfectly.

This is precisely what God promised that Messiah would do, saying in Ezekiel, “I will put a new spirit within them so that they may walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments and do them.”¹⁹² Listen to those words, men and brothers! “I will put my Spirit within them so that they may walk in my statutes”! Is not God saying that the very reason He gave us the Spirit is to empower us keep His law?

Simeon: Oh, that is so good! Amen. Jesus baptized us with the Spirit to give us power for service.

Hananiah: And in that same place in Ezekiel, God promised that He would give us something else when He sent the Spirit. He said, “I will give them one heart,” and that is not a blessing to be held in light esteem, brothers. I remind you, yet again, that God’s people were enjoying perfect unity before this troublesome doctrine arose! We were all serving God together with one heart and soul. But now, look! Our sweet harmony has been destroyed!

Council members: *Comments.*

John: Our harmony and peace will not change, Hananiah, if we but acknowledge one another’s work in the Lord. Jesus has sent Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles; let’s leave them to their task, and we will continue to minister in Israel. We did not send you and the others to Antioch as we sent

¹⁸⁸ Gen. 9:8–13.

¹⁸⁹ Gen. 17:9–11.

¹⁹⁰ Mt. 5:17.

¹⁹¹ 1Chron. 23:5; 28:11–19; 2Chron. 7:6.

¹⁹² Ezek. 11:19–20.

Barnabas. You went on your own, and you erred by teaching those Gentiles that they must obey Moses' law. That message is true only among us, and it remains true only so long as it remains among us.

Hananiah: Let me try to make my point another way. Nicodemus, may I ask you about your private visit with Messiah?

Nicodemus: Certainly.

Hananiah: Did Jesus not tell you that we all must be "born again"?

Nicodemus: Yes, he did.

Hananiah: Well, sir. What happened? Did something go wrong?

Nicodemus: I do not follow you.

Hananiah: You heard Barnabas say, in so many words, that Messiah's new covenant is replacing the first one, did you not?

Nicodemus: Yes.

Hananiah: Then, why did your new birth not replace your first one?

Nicodemus: What do you mean?

Hananiah: You were born of God when you were baptized with the Spirit in that upper room. Is that not so?

Nicodemus: Yes, of course.

Hananiah: But you still have the hands that your first birth gave you. Why were they not replaced when you were born again? Why do you still eat and drink the fruit of the fields? Why has God not replaced that first body of yours with a new body?

Nicodemus: I believe that He will, in time.

Hananiah: So do I, sir. So do I – but *in the resurrection*, not here in this life! Your first birth with its fleshly body is still here, just as the law is still here. Isn't that true?

Nicodemus: [*slowly*] I suppose so, yes.

Hananiah: Thank you, sir. Barnabas, my friend, do you now see? This new covenant did not replace the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai any more than the new birth replaced our first one; it was only added to it, fulfilling it and making it perfect. The coming of the Spirit confirmed, first, that the law is of God, and second, that the righteous were the ones who were keeping it. I have already reminded you that every soul on whom the Spirit fell when it first came was keeping the law, and it has been that way since, except for the ignorant Gentiles, *who should be taught better!*

Uzziel: The truth is proved by every measure given to us, that God's will is that man keep His law. Based on the scriptures, what we are telling you is as logical as truth as can be!

Council members: *Comments.*

Hushai: We are not insensible to your arguments, Paul. We are reasonable men. But one can see why your message appeals to the heathen and not to the chosen people of God.

Paul: It is not meant to appeal to Jews because it was not given for them.

Hushai: But what are we to believe, Paul, when so many scriptures contradict you and Barnabas, or when you say illogical things that have never been heard in Israel?

Paul: I cannot make you see; that is God's place. I can only testify to the revelation that Jesus has given me.

Levi: And we can only wait for you to tell us which prophet or wise man said the entrance of one covenant means the end of the previous one.

Daniel intervenes

Daniel: My friends, logic is a useful tool; I wish more people were able to use it. However, logic is useful only in matters pertaining to this life. In the kingdom of God, revelation is reason, and faith is the

logic of God. Some of you will remember how logic miserably failed us when we were trying to understand and follow Jesus before the Spirit came.

Apostles: *Oh yes. We certainly do. Etc.*

Daniel: Did it seem logical to any of us that Messiah should be abused and die?

Silas: No, it did not. We found it so illogical that, when he died, we gave up hope that Jesus was our Messiah.

Council members: *Comments.*

Daniel: Who among us went to Jesus' tomb on the third day to see him rise from the dead?

Andrew: Nobody. Not one of us believed he would rise from the dead.

Cleopas: You all know what Lemuel and I did on the third day. We bade you farewell and left town, certain that it was all over. Oh, I still believed that Jesus was a great prophet, to be sure, perhaps the greatest prophet ever. But Messiah? That was impossible. He was dead.

Philip: That's how it was for all of us. Jesus told us he would meet us in Galilee after he rose from the dead, but after his crucifixion, none of us went to Galilee to meet him. We didn't believe Jesus would be there because, well, because he was dead.

Simon Peter: We never understood what Jesus meant by "rise from the dead,"¹⁹³ because he was Israel's Messiah and the prophets said Messiah would live forever. So what did Jesus mean when he said he would rise from the dead? We just could not figure it out. And when he died, that ended all our hope in him.

Cleopas: We didn't even believe those excited women on the third day when they rushed in, saying they had seen Jesus alive again. I just assumed they had seen a vision in their excitement, and Lemuel and I went on and left town.

Andrew: And later that day, Cleopas, the rest of us didn't believe you and Lemuel when you returned and told us that you had seen Jesus, too.

Cleopas: But I understood why you didn't believe. After all, we had not believed the women. We just could not take it in, that a tortured and crucified man could be the unconquerable Messiah who would destroy the wicked and reign forever over the whole world. We were all utterly dejected, and afraid. It was all so completely illogical.

Daniel: So, my brothers, you see that logic cannot lead us in the realm of the Spirit. It is revelation alone that rightly leads the children of God.

Council members: *Comments.*

Nahum: That is certainly true, Daniel. Whenever there was no vision in Israel, as in the days when the prophet Samuel was a boy,¹⁹⁴ matters went poorly for us. Nevertheless, the objections which Hananiah and Uzziel have raised should be answered, for many in our nation will ask such things.

Daniel: Agreed.

Nahum: Barnabas, or Paul, what do you say to their objections?

Barnabas and Paul respond

Barnabas: I will show how those objections are flawed, Nahum.

Nahum: Very well.

Barnabas: Jesus said that heaven and earth will pass away.¹⁹⁵ Then, if this land is our rest, as Uzziel has said, where will our rest be when God destroys heaven and earth?

Hananiah: It will be with Messiah, wherever that may be.

¹⁹³ Mk. 9:9–10.

¹⁹⁴ 1Sam. 3:1.

¹⁹⁵ Mt. 24:35.

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Besides that, Barnabas, the future is not the point. Jesus said that as long as heaven and earth endure, “not one iota or serif of the law will by any means pass away until all things have come to pass.”¹⁹⁶ So, the real question is this: Why do you and Paul teach that the law will pass away before heaven and earth are destroyed, when Jesus said it would not? Whatever happens after they are destroyed is not our concern right now.

Levi: Yes, as long as heaven and earth are here, not one iota of the law will be done away with, just as Jesus said.

Barnabas: You are right in saying that our earthly future is not the point, Uzziel. But eternity *is* the point because that is where our rest must be, for Jesus told us plainly that this heaven and this earth will be destroyed. So, my question remains, where will your rest be when heaven and earth are destroyed? If your rest is the Spirit of God, you will be safe forever, but if you put your hope in a carnal thing, such as this land, you will be destroyed with it.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: Messiah’s new covenant is eternal because it is spiritual, but the law of Moses cannot be eternal because it is in the flesh, requiring natural water, fire, garments, and sacrifices, and such. The law and all its works will perish with this earth. The Spirit is God’s eternal life, and the law of His Spirit, written on our hearts, has replaced the law of temporal, earthly commandments!

Council members: *Comments.*

Hushai: But where are your scriptures, Paul? You sound like an Athenian philosopher! Logic may be of little worth when reasoning about divine things, but philosophy is worth even less. By your philosophy, when Messiah gives us to drink of living water from heaven, we should stop drinking water from our wells because that kind of water is “in the flesh”. It just doesn’t hold up, Paul.

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: Brothers, please! Jesus has given us something good for His children, not something evil!

Levi: Is it good that Moses said the law “is not a vain thing for you,”¹⁹⁷ but you and Paul want us to say that the law *is* a vain thing? Moses commanded Israel to “apply your hearts to all the words of this law. For it is your *life*.”¹⁹⁸

Paul: The Spirit is life, Levi; the law is lifeless.

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: If the Spirit is life, then when it writes the law on our hearts, it makes the law alive in us!

Paul: Not so. It makes *us* alive, and when we come alive to God, we see that the law is a dead, carnal thing. God’s law is a living, spiritual law!

Uzziel: God’s law has *always* been spiritual.

Paul: Yes, but *we* have *never* been spiritual. We never had anything but our carnal nature with which to serve God before Messiah brought us God’s life.

Uzziel: We had God’s law!

Paul: Which was dead!

Uzziel: Was it dead, and yet it promised life to all who kept it? For God said, “You must keep my statutes and my judgments, for the man who does them shall also live by them.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Mt. 5:18.

¹⁹⁷ Dt. 32:47.

¹⁹⁸ Dt. 32:46–47.

¹⁹⁹ Lev. 18:5.

Paul: Those who lived under the law will be judged by the law, and if they have been faithful to the law, then they *will* live forever. God was not speaking of us, who will be judged by the perfect law of liberty from dead carnal things.

Barnabas: Brothers, who can think that a *living* God intended for man to perform *lifeless* works forever?

Uzziel: We do! God said so, Barnabas! Dozens of times in the law, God said He had given us statutes that would continue forever.²⁰⁰ How many scriptures will it take to persuade you to believe what is irrefutably the word of God instead of clinging to whatever it was you think you heard from Jesus?

Levi: The works of the law are lifeless only if men do not put life into them! *Not* keeping them is what makes them dead, Barnabas! When we perform the holy rites, they live! You and Paul are the ones who would kill the law, not God.

Paul: How can we kill what was never alive? And if we give our lives to dead things, they will kill us, for David said of idols, “Those who make them become like them, as well as everyone who trusts in them.”²⁰¹

Levi: Do you make God’s holy law equal to idols?

Paul: Of course not. The law is holy; we know that. But when God finishes with it, it will become no more than an idol to those who continue in it.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: The law has been a precious gift from God to Israel, a blessing, a guardian to prepare us for the coming of...

Levi: First, a warden, and now, a guardian, a hireling! What other vile title will you give to the thing Moses said is our life? No wonder you and Barnabas rely so little on the law to teach your doctrine; it is not your life; it is just your “guardian” – or used to be. You’ve outgrown it now, or so you think. How can a man outgrow God? Look at the multitude of scriptures that testify against you! Do you and Barnabas think that you and your little group are the only ones right and the whole Assembly of God is wrong?

Paul: We do not say that we are right. Nor do we say that you, or any man, is right. We say that God is right. And He has authority to forbid today what He commanded yesterday, to make wrong today what was right yesterday. My gospel justifies no one but God, and we glory in nothing but His work through His Son.

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: Men and brothers, as God lives! Can you not see what is happening? First, Paul and Barnabas argue that the Gentiles would do wrong by keeping the law, and now, when they have seen that most of you agree with that error, they are emboldened to state their true purpose – to cause Israel to cease from it! I warned you of what they were up to! Barnabas, why have you and Paul turned against your own nation?

Paul: My nation is the nation whom God has chosen and sanctified for Himself by His Spirit.

Maschil: But God chose Israel as His nation! Have you forgotten what David said: “The LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, and Israel as His peculiar treasure”²⁰²

Paul: Not all who are in Israel are part of the Israel of God. God is creating for Himself a new Israel, a nation made of people born of His Spirit, as David said, “They shall declare His righteousness to a people that shall be born.”²⁰³

²⁰⁰ In the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.

²⁰¹ Ps. 115:8; 135:18.

²⁰² Ps. 135:4.

Hushai: You are clever, Paul. The Greeks would revel in this verbal sparring of yours, straining at gnats and swallowing camels, just as Jesus said about other blind guides.²⁰⁴ As for me, I am growing weary of it. This nation has suffered terrible judgments from God because of the crafty men who persuaded our fathers to forsake His law. And now, you would bring upon us the same condemnation!

Paul: There can never be any condemnation to those who walk in the Spirit with Jesus.

Hushai: There will most certainly be condemnation on those who forsake the law! God said so! You know the scriptures! How many times does God have to say it before you will believe it?

Paul: To every earthly thing, there is a time, Hushai, and the law's time will soon end.

The need for revelation

Micah: But do you or Barnabas have any revelation concerning when the law will be no more acceptable?

Barnabas: No. God has not shown us when, only that the time will come. It may or may not be in our lifetime. God makes His own plans.

Council members: *Comments.*

Micah: And until that time comes, you say that we Jews must continue in temple worship?

Barnabas: Yes.

Micah: But in some unknown time in the future, all who believe will worship God without the law of Moses, and nothing will remain but your new gospel.

Barnabas: Yes. And then there will be unity in faith and practice among all believers, provide that all walk in the Spirit. It is foretold in the prophets.

Daniel: To understand the scriptures, Micah, requires the same anointing that it took to write them. We understand nothing without revelation. Even with the Spirit, we understand nothing if the Spirit reveals nothing, for nothing of God is understood without it. Every generation must have fresh revelation because every generation must learn God for itself. The greatest curse is silence from heaven, which brings upon men the greatest sickness: confusion of heart.

Micah: I need a revelation, then, brother, for what Barnabas is saying seems... But perhaps I should only repeat something Jesus said to the rulers one day in the temple when they questioned how he came to possess such great knowledge of the scriptures without being trained. He told them he received his doctrine from God, and then added, "He who speaks on his own is seeking his own glory."²⁰⁵

John: Yes, that was during a Feast of Tabernacles, Micah. I noted that, as well. And on the last day of the Feast, Jesus told his accusers that he was not seeking his own glory.²⁰⁶

Micah: I know Jesus wasn't doing that, and I want to be like him. And I very much want God to help me see who is seeking his own glory here, today, in this meeting. Somebody is.

Council members: *Comments.*

Hushai: How can there be any question as to who that is, Micah? Whose doctrine contradicts the law and the prophets? Whose doctrine has never been heard of? Who is it, Micah, who is speaking on his own?

Council members: *Comments.*

more arguments against the law ending

²⁰³ Ps. 22:31.

²⁰⁴ Mt. 23:24.

²⁰⁵ Jn. 7:18a.

²⁰⁶ Jn. 8:50.

Hananiah: Brothers, this new doctrine, that even we who are circumcised will cease from God's holy law, is astonishing; it grieves my Spirit, and I believe God's as well. Let me try to reason with you who believe this thing, in the simplest terms I can muster.

Moses' law is holy because the God who gave it is holy; likewise, it is eternal, seeing that He is eternal. Solomon said that everything God does is eternal and that nothing can be added to or taken from it,²⁰⁷ though many have tried to do so. But they have all failed, thanks be to God, and this new doctrine will fail, too. Uzziel has pointed out how many times God said His statutes were eternal. David, for one, said in the Spirit that God "has sent a ransom for His people; He has commanded His covenant forever."²⁰⁸ And this is what God has done, dear brothers; He has sent His Son to ransom us and to establish forever the covenant God gave to our fathers. God said it, and He did it. That is the sum of what we are saying, and it was all that we were telling the Gentiles in Antioch before Barnabas and Paul stopped us.

Benjamin: And what about our history, brother Paul? Every time Israel ceased keeping the law, God cursed the nation.

Paul: That was because the Son had not yet fulfilled the law, Benjamin. It was not time to cease from keeping it, and until God finishes with it, it will be sin for us not to keep it.

Benjamin: I agree. But as to what Hananiah said, why would Solomon declare that whatever God does is eternal? Men construct houses that collapse; men make laws that are overridden; men build kingdoms that are overthrown, but not God.

Lamech: That's good, Benjamin. God is eternal, and all His works are eternal. Keep your eyes on the scriptures, son. They are the bedrock of genuine faith.

Benjamin: Oh no, sir, I'll never forget the scriptures. But what about what I am feeling? My heart is telling me there is something good and right in what Paul and Barnabas are saying, and John, and the others. I just can't make out the whole picture.

Lamech: Let me see if I can help you. Consider the act of prophecy itself. The prophets prophesied of Messiah's coming, and yet, we still prophesy, do we not?

Benjamin: Yes.

Lamech: Then, if we still prophesy *after* Messiah has come, Messiah's coming did not do away with prophecy, did it?

Benjamin: No, it did not.

Lamech: But the law also prophesied of Messiah; the only difference is that the law prophesied in works while the prophets prophesied in words. And yet, these men teach that Messiah is doing away with the law.

Benjamin: That is right!

Paul: But there is a difference, Lamech. For there are prophecies yet to be fulfilled and events still to be prophesied about, and the LORD would still have us to know what lies ahead. But there will never again be a handwritten law of rites and rules for God's people. There is a difference.

Uzziel: There is also a difference, Paul, between clever manipulation of the scriptures and revelation of their true meaning. One glorifies God, and the other glorifies the cunning of men. Did the Spirit not reveal the law? Was there no revelation in the prophets who were moved by the Spirit to speak? God's statutes and judgments were revealed to point us to the Son of God, who has engraved those statutes and judgments on our hearts. Everyone who trusted Moses before Messiah came was righteous in God's sight, and Jesus said that whoever believed in Moses would believe in him, for Moses wrote about

²⁰⁷ Eccl. 3:14.

²⁰⁸ Ps. 111:9.

him.²⁰⁹ That was Jesus' gospel, and it is ours! Every man in this room was given grace to believe in Jesus and partake of this new covenant because we believed in Moses first and partook of his covenant!

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: But which covenant is eternal, Uzziel?

Uzziel: They both are. God said so a hundred times!

Micah: If the law is not eternal, Barnabas, why did David say, "I will keep your law always, for ever and ever!"²¹⁰ And why did God say to Moses, "O that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always"?²¹¹ Of the Passover, God said, "You shall keep this festival forever, as a statute for all your generations."²¹² And of the Sabbath, God said, "It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever."²¹³ And He whose breath made the heavens declared Aaron's priesthood to be "an everlasting priesthood",²¹⁴ saying to Moses, "You shall gird them, Aaron and his sons, and the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever."²¹⁵ And when Solomon lifted up his voice at the dedication of God's temple, and declared before God, "I have built you a majestic house, an established place for you to dwell in forever and ever,"²¹⁶ what was God's response? "I have heard your prayer and your supplication which you have made before me, and I have sanctified this house that you built, to put my name there forever, and my eyes and my heart will always be there."²¹⁷

Barnabas: But "forever" can mean for an appointed length of time, Micah.

Uzziel: What prophet ever said that? You have no authority to re-define "forever", just so you can justify your doctrine.

Barnabas: If God said of Aaron the high priest that his priesthood was forever, and yet, Jesus is now our high priest, I don't need a prophet to tell me that "forever" means only for the time appointed by God.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: If a change is made in the priesthood, there must be a change made in the law.

Levi: There has been no change made in God's earthly priesthood! Jesus is a high priest in heaven! That is a lie!

Hananiah: Levi, no. Please, brother.

Levi: Do you hear this man, Hananiah? It is outrageous!

Hananiah: I know. I know. But please, brother, let me respond.

Paul, there is some truth in what you say, Paul, but truth carried beyond the boundaries set by God becomes something other than truth, and can be poisonous. We all know that Jesus is our high priest in heaven, but Jesus never presumed to act as a priest here on earth. He acknowledged God's priesthood on earth and began his ministry as our high priest only after he ascended into heaven to offer himself to God.

Barnabas: And that being done, what need have we for an earthly priesthood? There was purpose in Aaron's priesthood before Messiah came, but Jesus has now fulfilled its purpose.

Hananiah: But with God, all things are eternal, even His purposes, and if everything God does is eternal, then all we need to find out is what He has done. And one thing God has done is to tell father

²⁰⁹ Jn. 5:46.

²¹⁰ Ps. 119:44.

²¹¹ Dt. 5:29.

²¹² Ex. 12:14.

²¹³ Ex. 31:17.

²¹⁴ Ex. 40:15.

²¹⁵ Ex. 29:9.

²¹⁶ 1Kgs. 8:13.

²¹⁷ 1Kgs. 9:3.

Abraham, “Every male among you shall be circumcised throughout your generations. And an uncircumcised male shall be cut off from his people, for he has broken my covenant.”²¹⁸

Barnabas: But God counted Abraham righteous before he was circumcised.²¹⁹

Micah: ... as well as *after* he was circumcised. What you are saying is *our* point, Barnabas, not yours, and it is what Hananiah and the others were teaching the Gentiles in Antioch when you and Paul stopped them. They were telling them to follow Abraham’s example and receive circumcision as God’s sign of their righteousness. *Would that Cornelius had been told to follow that example!*

Barnabas: But the point, Micah, is that God gave circumcision to Abraham *because* he was a righteous man, not in order to make him one.

Uzziel: Of course, Barnabas! But did Abraham become unrighteous by receiving circumcision? The truth we were teaching the Gentiles in Antioch aligns perfectly with Abraham’s experience. They are righteous, and they need circumcision to *continue in righteousness*, just as Abraham needed it.

Paul: But ask yourself, what did Abraham need circumcision for if he was already righteous?

Uzziel: I just told you! He needed circumcision in order to *continue* in the will of God. He had obeyed God before then; why should he have stopped obeying him? You would have the Gentiles to stop obeying God as soon as He bears witness of them, that they *have* obeyed Him. Do you not remember what the Lord said, “He who endures to the end shall be saved”?²²⁰

Paul: No, I have not forgotten. But can you tell me *God’s* purpose for commanding righteous Abraham to be circumcised?

Simeon: I can. God gave Abraham circumcision as an outward expression of an inward experience.

Bartholomew: Where in the world did you get such an doctrine, Simeon?

Simeon: It just came to me.

Hushai: Maybe it’s another new revelation, Bartholomew. Don’t you believe in that?

Micah: Brothers, I think there is truth in what Simeon said. After all, isn’t it the same with the law? And even John’s baptism? God gave baptism to John as confirmation of the righteousness of people *before* they receive his baptism, as a sign that they had truly repented.

Uzziel: That’s why John refused baptism to the unrighteous when they came to him.²²¹ They were unworthy of it.

Levi, Nadab, Hushai, Lamech, Hananiah, Benjamin, Maschil: *Amen. That’s right. Etc.*

Simeon: I mean, what good is an inward experience without any outward expression of it?

Paul: It is no good at all without *any* outward expression. In that, you are right. But the outward expression of an inward experience in this covenant is holy living, not a dead ceremony.

Jacobus: Amen, Paul. Faith without works is dead.

Paul: And you men are wrong about circumcision and baptism being outward expressions of an inward experience. God gave circumcision as an outward expressions of Abraham’s *lack* of an inward experience. Circumcision of the flesh was a testimony that Messiah had not yet brought in his circumcision of the heart. And to continue in that dead prophetic work after Messiah has come is to deny him, for the Spirit alone bears witness that he came and that it was Jesus.

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: Amen, Paul. God likewise sent John with his baptism of the flesh because Messiah had not yet given his baptism of the Spirit. But when Jesus began baptizing with the Spirit, God’s purpose for John’s baptism was fulfilled, making it unnecessary.

²¹⁸ Gen. 17:10, 14.

²¹⁹ God judged Abraham to be righteous in Genesis 15:6 but made the covenant of circumcision with him in Genesis 17:10.

²²⁰ Mt. 24:13; Mk. 13:13.

²²¹ Mt. 3:7.

Uzziel: But your conclusion is unjustified, Barnabas. Nothing that you or Paul has said forces the conclusion that Jesus' circumcision made Abraham's circumcision null and void, or that Jesus' baptism made John's baptism null and void. John's baptism was a prophetic symbol, yes, but God still commands it of everyone who believes, and every man in this room has received it. Peter preached the one true gospel the day the Spirit first came, and it is still the one true gospel: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Messiah Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit!"²²² Why won't you and Paul hold up the standard for the Gentiles that God held up for you and for all of us?

what carnal means

Paul: Uzziel, works of the law are not eternal because they employ carnal things, and as sons of God, we are no more subject to carnal rites and rules than Jesus is now, in heaven.

Benjamin: Forgive me, Paul, for interrupting, but what exactly do you mean by "carnal rites and rules"?

Paul: I mean anything that is of this world.

Benjamin: Anything natural?

Paul: Yes; natural, earthly, fleshly – anything not of the Spirit.

Benjamin: And John's baptism, because it uses a carnal substance, water.

Paul: That's right.

Benjamin: What about the temple, and the sacrifices God gave us in the law?

Paul: It is the same. Messiah has been sacrificed for us.

Benjamin: And the Passover feast?

Paul: Jesus is our Passover Lamb, and we live by eating of him and drinking of the Spirit.

John: This is what Jesus meant, Benjamin, when he said that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood if we would have eternal life, just as he ate of the Father and lived by Him.²²³

the spiritual and the natural

Micah: We can agree with all that, John. Uzziel's unanswered question is, why not do both? Jesus did. Did you and I not eat with Jesus at the feasts, and make our offerings at the temple that the law requires? John baptized us both with water and Jesus baptized us both with the Spirit. So, why should we think that the coming of the spiritual does away with the carnal? It seems to me that the natural and the spiritual should dwell together in peace. That is how Jesus lived, under the law and in the Spirit, and that is how we have been living these past decades, in peace with one another.

Council members: *Comments.*

Micah: I do not doubt our brothers' testimony of being sent to the heathen. Indeed, I am glad for it. But it seems to me that they have carried whatever it was that Jesus showed them too far. We can do that sometimes, in an excess of exuberance.

Jesus' glory

Paul: Everything that God ever used as a light for men was a harbinger of the light of His Son.

Maschil: What do you mean?

Paul: Let me ask any of you who were baptized by John before Jesus went to him to be baptized. When John baptized you, in whose name did he baptize you?

²²² Acts 2:38.

²²³ Jn. 6:53–57.

Joseph: Why, in Jesus' name, just as we do now.

Paul: I mean before John ever saw Jesus. In whose name did he say he was baptizing? What did he say to you?

Joseph: Oh, I see. Well, he didn't use a name, of course, but he did say things like, "I baptize you in water, but someone is coming after me who is greater than I am. He will baptize you with the holy Ghost and fire."

John: John told us all plainly that he did not know who it was that was coming after him, until he saw a heavenly dove descend and light upon Jesus. After that, he started baptizing in Jesus' name, but before that, he never did.

Paul: Andrew and Simon, you were baptized before Jesus came to John, were you not?

Andrew and Peter: Yes. Not long before, yes.

Paul: And did John baptize you the way he baptized brother Joseph, not using a specific name? Is that how he baptized you?

Andrew and Peter: Yes.

Paul: But after Jesus came and was baptized by John, and John saw the dove and knew Jesus was Messiah, how did his baptism change?

Joseph: His baptism was the same; only the words changed. After he knew who Messiah was, he told the people, "I baptize you in the name of Jesus of Nazareth."

Paul: And is that how John baptized you, Hananiah? You were baptized after Jesus was, if I heard right.

Hananiah: That's right.

Paul: Did John say, when he baptized you, "I baptize you in Jesus' name," or did he continue to say, "I baptize you in the name of the one who is coming after me?"

Hananiah: He said, "In Jesus' name," of course. And that is how John's baptism has been administered from the day he met Jesus until now.

Council members: *Amen. That's true. Etc.*

Paul: Yes, that is how Ananias baptized me, too, in Damascus. For we all knew by then who Messiah is.

Council members: *Amen. That's true. Etc.*

Paul: Now, I have a question for those of you whom John baptized before he met Jesus. After John started saying that he was baptizing in Jesus' name, did you feel that your baptism was somehow not good enough and go back to the Jordan to ask John to re-baptize you, or did you feel satisfied that God's will had been fully done?

Joseph: I would have felt ashamed to ask him. I knew it was done. And I am certain that John would not have re-baptized us, even if we had asked him. John baptized only as he was directed by the Spirit; he never baptized the wrong person. If the Spirit did not approve of a person, John sent them away, he always knew who had truly repented. What John did was irreversible, as was Isaac's blessing on Jacob. The Spirit moved Isaac to bless him, and Isaac could not take it back after he learned he had blessed Jacob instead of Esau, as he had intended.²²⁴ So it was with John's baptism; once the Spirit moved him to baptize someone, it was sealed in heaven.

Paul: And I ask you, in whose name was it sealed in heaven?

Joseph: Why, I suppose in the name of Jesus, even if John did not say it.

Paul: I agree. John's baptism was done in Jesus' name because God knew His Son's name, even if John did not.

Council members: *Comments.*

²²⁴ Gen. 27:30–37.

Paul: Men and brothers, every gift that God has given to man since the foundation of the world, every prophecy, every wise saying, every miracle, has been given in the name of Jesus. God never mentioned the name of His Son because He was keeping him hidden until our time, but God knew him, and God was the One enabling and inspiring men to do the work. Just as every man John ever baptized was, in truth, baptized in the name of Jesus, so every man who ever followed the law was following Jesus – and the fact that the men who kept the law did not know the name of Jesus made no difference, for the God who gave the law knew. Moses did not know the name of Jesus, but he, like John at the beginning of his work, told Israel he was preparing them for another who was coming after him. He said, “A prophet like me shall the LORD your God raise up for you, from among your kinsmen; to him, you must listen!”²²⁵

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: At the foundation of the world, when the Spirit of God moved over the face of the deep, it moved in the name of Jesus. At God’s command, Joshua conquered this land in the name of Jesus! What difference did it make to God what Joshua knew? God knew His Son was coming to live in it! The Spirit of God came upon Elijah to judge the prophets of Baal, and he slaughtered four hundred of them in the name of Jesus.²²⁶ The Spirit anointed David to sing in Jesus’ name, and David sang, “My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me? They pierced my hands and my feet!”²²⁷ The Spirit moved Isaiah to prophesy that a virgin would bear a son and that the virgin’s son would be called Immanuel!²²⁸ Was that not done in Jesus’ name? And Isaiah again, without knowing Jesus’ name, cried out, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, and the LORD has laid upon him the iniquity of us all.”²²⁹ Was Isaiah prophesying in his own name? No, brothers, no more than John was baptizing in his own name before he met Jesus.

In truth, brothers, mine is no new gospel. It is the first, and the only gospel of God. Noah preached it with his ark; Samuel preached it to Agag when he hacked that wicked king into pieces.²³⁰ Elisha’s dry bones preached it to a dead man whose corpse was thrown on them, and the dead man awoke from the dead and stood on his feet;²³¹ and Daniel preached my gospel to the lions, and it shut their mouths so that they could not harm him. All those things were done in Jesus’ name by the God who knew his name.

Now, Noah did not have the Spirit within him, brothers; it only came upon him and gave him the wisdom and power to accomplish his mission from God. And Samuel and the prophets did not have it; they were only moved by the Spirit to say and do the things God appointed to them. Neither did Moses have the Spirit, but it was upon him, as God said to him in the wilderness, “I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them.”²³² But the night before Jesus suffered, he told you disciples that the Father would send the Spirit to dwell *within* you – the same Spirit that moved over the waters has filled us with the righteousness and peace and joy of God! Why do some of you now, as sons born of the Spirit of the living God, want to continue forever to act as if you do not have the Spirit, performing worthless rites, like men playing with children’s toys? Grow up! Why do you want to act like Moses, who did not even know the name of Jesus, or like Abraham, bound in his ignorance, longing for the day the Chosen One would come?²³³ What is so great about their ignorance that you are not satisfied with

²²⁵ Dt. 18:15.

²²⁶ 1Kgs. 18:22, 40.

²²⁷ Ps. 22:1a, 16b.

²²⁸ Isa. 7:14.

²²⁹ Isa. 53:5–6, 8b.

²³⁰ 1Sam. 15:32–33.

²³¹ 2Kgs. 13:20–21.

²³² Num. 11:17.

²³³ Jn. 8:56.

the knowledge of the Son of God? Jesus said that to know the Father and the Son is eternal life.²³⁴ What does this holy life lack, that you cling so tightly to death?

In great mercy, God is tolerating our superstitious fear by allowing Israel to continue in the ways of our fathers who did not know His Son's name. But He will not allow Moses and the prophets to share in His Son's glory forever, and if God ever opens your eyes to see His Son's majesty, you will marvel that He is even allowing us this much time to continue in the dead works of the law.

Lamech: It is not superstitious fear that motivates me to keep the law, Paul, or anyone else who loves God.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: I understand how you men are looking at this. What you are thinking is what I once thought. But Jesus taught me truth that I did not expect, and wasn't even asking for!

Hananiah: He may have, Paul, but truth can be put to a wrong purpose. I mean no comparison with you personally, but you know that Satan used truth during the Temptation of Jesus.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: No offense taken, Hananiah. But I would say that Satan *abused* truth during the Temptation, rather than used it.

Hananiah: I agree with that, but my point is that to simply proclaim this or that to be true, the way Gentile philosophers do, or to craftily pick out a few scriptures the way Satan did in the wilderness, instead of relying upon the whole counsel of God is not the way of God. It is the way of those who do not know Him and His law. Some of your reasonings are appealing, but then I have to ask myself, what false teacher ever gained a following without appealing words?

Council members: *Comments.*

Hushai: Yes, however appealing your doctrine sounds, Paul, unless it is a reflection of the law and the prophets, how can we think anything but that you have been influenced by the Gentiles to devise a new philosophy, or as Hananiah suggested, inspired by Satan to teach a doctrine of demons? The law and the prophets testified of Messiah Jesus, and we can see him clearly in them. But where are you and Barnabas in the law? Where are you and Barnabas in Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or the other prophets?

David was not speaking of a heavenly temple when he said, "O LORD, I love the site of your house, even the place of the tabernacle of your glory!"²³⁵ And what city but this one could David have been speaking about when he said to God that "your servants take pleasure in her stones and favor her dust?"²³⁶ Heaven has no dust! I hear the good things you men say about Messiah Jesus; I see your passion for serving God. But you have taken things much too far, beyond the bounds of all reason.

And you have yet to explain to us why Messiah would bring about the end of the law – and now, not only for the Gentiles, but for us Jews as well!

Paul: My gospel is no philosophy, Hushai. And Satan has no part in it. If my gospel seems to be against reason, it is only because you are trying to understand the things of God with a carnal mind, which cannot fathom the things of God. My gospel came by revelation, and I see it in the law and all the prophets. But even if I did not see it there, I would still know it is true because Jesus opened my eyes to see it in *him*! Jesus ministers salvation with spiritual, not earthly things, and his glory makes all earthly things worthless for salvation. When we were re-created as God's sons, we were freed from reliance upon fleshly things, liberated to serve God in spirit, as Jesus serves Him now.

Lamech: How far should we take this philosophy, Paul? If we are to be as Jesus is now, we should stop eating and drinking, since Jesus no longer consumes carnal food and drink.

²³⁴ Jn. 17:3.

²³⁵ Ps. 126:8.

²³⁶ Ps. 102:14.

Paul: The kingdom of God is not in food and drink, Lamech, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in God's holy Spirit, and whoever serves Messiah Jesus in those things is acceptable to God, whether circumcised or not.

the law of the Spirit

Micah: If we love God and do what His law demands, we are living the way God commanded us to live, Paul. He asks nothing more, for the prophet said, "What does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"²³⁷ Do you think the prophets lived contrary to the way Moses commanded?

Paul: They loved the law, and they obeyed it, but they were not transformed by it. They were never "born again", as Jesus said men must be. But the Spirit has come now, and it has made us new creatures who can sense what God's will is without a set of rules to tell us what it is. And if that is done, what need is there for the set of rules?

Maschil: If the Spirit has made us able to fully comprehend and to do God's will, then why stop keeping the law that says to do it?

Paul: Because we do not need a handwritten law to declare to us what the Spirit is already saying in our hearts. God's new creatures do not need a handwritten list of rules; they walk by the law of the Spirit.

Levi: Men and brothers, can you not see how foreign this doctrine is to all that God has ever shown Israel?

Lamech: What is this "law of the Spirit" that you keep talking about? Which prophet ever declared the Spirit would bring a different law with it when it came?

Paul: Not a different law, but the same law in a different way.

Levi: What prophet ever promised that?

Paul: All of them did, if you have eyes to see!

Levi: I see Jesus in the prophets; I do not see your doctrine!

Council members: *Comments.*

Nathan: You can rest assured, Barnabas and Paul, that we honor your zeal and your great efforts to spread the good news of Messiah Jesus. Don't we, brothers?

Paul: I am not here to receive honor. I am here to give honor to the Son of God.

Hananiah: We have agreed with you, Paul, that when we receive the Spirit, God writes His law in our hearts. But by writing His law in our hearts, isn't God confirming the law for us and making us doubly bound to keep it? Why would God write a law in our hearts that He does not want us to keep? But Barnabas and Paul teach men who receive the Spirit to forsake the very law that God writes in their heart!

John: How can we ever forsake it, Hananiah, if God has written it on our hearts?

Levi: But that is precisely *our* point! How can we forsake something that God has written on our hearts? It would be unnatural.

Council members: *Comments.*

Andrew: You are looking at it the wrong way.

Hushai: What Paul and Barnabas teach contradicts too many of the scriptures! And so far, their chief response to the law and the prophets has been a philosophical exposition based upon your claim of a revelation. And you still have not explained why the coming of Messiah, however great God has made him, means that the law and the prophets who foretold his coming must be cast aside.

²³⁷ Mic. 6:8.

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: Brothers, please. Paul and I are only testifying to what we have heard from the Lord.

Levi: That will be for this council to decide!

Paul: I did not come here for this Council to decide if my gospel was of God. I came to hear them tell you that it is. My gospel is not just a debatable possibility. If an angel were to come out of heaven with a gospel contrary to my gospel, I would consider him accursed!

Council members: *Amen! What? What boldness! Etc.*

Barnabas: Brothers! Brothers! Paul is only saying what must be said! We mean disrespect to no one, but the gospel Jesus gave us is not of ourselves. It came from heaven!

Council members: *Comments.*

Hananiah: But Barnabas, your message is contrary to the law and the prophets.

Barnabas: It is not contrary to them at all in our eyes.

Apostles: *Nor to ours. Amen! That's right. Etc.*

Jesus and the law

Uzziel: Men and brothers, if Jesus was the prophet of whom Moses spoke when he said, “A prophet like me will the LORD your God raise up for you, from among you, from your kinsmen,”²³⁸ then, tell me, how is Jesus like Moses if he is *not* like him? Moses commanded men to keep the law forever, but the Jesus that Barnabas and Paul preach commands men not to keep it!

Lamech: That is not the Jesus that any of you knew and followed.

Levi: Amen! I followed the Jesus who knew and kept the law, and I still follow him!

Benjamin: How can I justify abandoning the law, brother Barnabas, if God commanded even His Son to become a Jew like us?

Barnabas: I understand, Benjamin. But tell me, my friend, what makes a man a Jew?

Benjamin: Circumcision, of course.

Barnabas: Then, if as Jesus said, children of the resurrection do not marry,²³⁹ do you think that a glorified body has a member that *can* be circumcised? Or is such a glorified body neither male nor female, like God?

Benjamin: I would think it is like God.

Barnabas: Then, if circumcision makes a man a Jew, how is Jesus still a Jew, if he has a glorified body instead of a circumcised one?

Benjamin: I see.

Barnabas: That is why we teach that the Israel of God are they who walk in the Spirit, whether their earthly bodies be circumcised or not. No earthly condition defines the children of God in this covenant; the Spirit defines us when we receive it.

Paul: We are to follow Jesus as he is now, not as he used to be.

Benjamin: What do you mean, Paul?

Paul: We have known Jesus as a man, subject to death and the elements of this world, but we will never know him that way again. He will never again subject himself to carnal things; he is the end of the law for us who believe.

Simeon: Forgive me, Paul, but it sounds as if you think that you and your Gentile disciples have gone deeper than Jesus.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: We need only go as deep as Jesus is, Simeon, and then we will see the truth.

²³⁸ Dt. 18:15.

²³⁹ Lk. 20:34–36.

Benjamin: But why would God have given us circumcision and the law to make us what His Son was not, and then send His Son down from heaven to make him what we are? If God would have us to follow in His Son's footsteps, what does it mean that God made His Son a Jew?

Paul: God gave us the law that spoke of His Son to prepare us for His Son; then, He sent His Son here to be like us so that through him, we might become sons of God as he is. God's purpose was not to make His Son forever like us, but to make us forever like His Son.

Benjamin: I am sorry, but your answers confuse me.

Lamech: Confused men give confusing answers, Benjamin, and the most confused men give the most confusing answers. Your question was a good one, for it penetrates the haze of this philosophical wrangling.

Barnabas: It is no philosophy, Lamech.

Lamech: Then, where are the scriptures for these things? We are asked to believe things that no man of God has ever said, even Jesus himself!

Barnabas: If Jesus opens your eyes, as he did mine, you will see what we teach in the scriptures.

John: Lamech, after our last meal with Messiah, he prayed earnestly that the Father would restore him to the glory he had with Him from the foundation of the world.²⁴⁰ What does that mean, except that he wanted to return to his former state – when he was not subject to the ordinances of the law or to the sufferings of this life?

Paul: And when the Father welcomed him home and glorified him again, Messiah found himself again in the form of God, as he had been since before the world began, neither Jew nor Gentile. The only difference now is that he has tasted of our kind of life, and he did that only so that he could die and become a sacrifice for our sins. And from the day Jesus made his sacrifice in heaven, sacrifices of animals became useless for salvation. How can an ox compare with the sacrifice of God's Son? That is truth that Jesus revealed to me.

Hananiah: I understand that in his glorified form, Messiah is not observing the forms of the law, for the elements of earth are not in heaven. But Messiah was neither Jew nor Gentile when God commanded Abraham to be circumcised. And he was neither Jew nor Gentile when God commanded Israel to observe the law. So, what does Messiah's being neither Jew nor Gentile *in heaven* have to do with us who are here on earth? God commands men *on earth* to be circumcised and to keep the law because that is what men on earth need. What God demands now of Jesus in heaven says nothing about what we who are on earth must do.

Regardless of Messiah's present or past state in heaven, no one can deny that God's commandments applied to him when he was on earth. The issue is not whether or not Jesus is keeping the law now, in heaven. The issue is, what did God require of Jesus while he was here on earth, that he might attain to the state he is now, in the presence of God? And the answer is clear; he attained to his great glory by obeying God's law. And that is what God requires of all men!

Benjamin: That is what I was trying to say. We are not heavenly beings, Paul; we are men.

Paul: Messiah observed the law because God sent him to Israel, where the law was. If God had sent him to Egypt, He would not have commanded him to do that.

Hananiah: But God did not send him to Egypt, and for good reason; there was no light of God there. Instead, He sent him to Israel, to His law, that His Son might be an example to the heathen, as the prophets said, "I will give you for a covenant for the people, for a light of the nations."²⁴¹ And if Messiah kept the law as a light to the heathen, who will be their light now if none of us keep it?

Paul: Whoever walks in the Spirit is a light for all men, Hananiah.

²⁴⁰ Jn. 17:5.

²⁴¹ Isa. 42:6.

John: Jesus was the light of the world because the life of God was in him.²⁴² His flesh was not the light of the world. That is why nobody knew who he was; men only saw the flesh that the Son of God had taken upon himself.

Micah: But, John, Jesus told us at the start that *we* were the light of the world,²⁴³ and that was years before we received the Spirit.

John: But before the Spirit was given to us, walking by the law made us lights. Besides, we must judge all things by the perfect light which Messiah brought into this world. He is the light of God, and compared to his glory, all things that came before and spoke of him are nothing but darkness.

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: This is wrong-headed, brothers. I am warning you! God is trying our hearts with all this, to see who will be faithful to Him and who will be drawn away! In spite of the right-sounding things that have been said, there is poison in the pot! David prayed, “Give me understanding, that I might keep your law;”²⁴⁴ then, a lack of understanding leads men not to keep it.

I do not mean to sound harsh, but by all that is holy, brothers! If “the law is truth,”²⁴⁵ then how can a man who turns men from it be telling the truth? And how can anyone who loves God not cry aloud against this doctrine? Should not the righteous feel as righteous King David felt when he cried out, seeing God’s law being forsaken, “Hot indignation took hold of me!”²⁴⁶ Say what you will, I will not be persuaded. I love God’s law and find peace in it. Hear me, brothers! God tested Jesus’ heart in the wilderness by sending Satan to him, armed with scripture. And this is a test of our hearts that God has sent to prove us!

The foundation of our lives is the law and the prophets; without them, we are not ourselves! We are not God’s chosen people! And “if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?”²⁴⁷ I am beginning to despair. Don’t let these men do this to us!

Hushai: It is not at all that we oppose God’s calling of the Gentiles to His grace, and we are pleased for Paul and Barnabas to go to them if that is their calling. But nothing that Paul and Barnabas have said, or what you have said, brother John, has proved that God’s calling of the Gentiles releases them from the duty of keeping His law. There was no exclusion made for Gentiles when Isaiah said the gospel would summon men to both the law and the Spirit.

Council members: *Comments.*

John: Barnabas and Paul are saying no more than what the Lord once told a Samaritan woman. Jesus told her that the time was at hand when true worshippers would worship the Father neither in Samaria nor in Jerusalem, but in spirit and in truth.²⁴⁸ God was never worshipped that way by our fathers, for the Spirit had not come to make it possible, but now, God demands it.

Micah: We understand that God demands that we worship Him in the Spirit. I have never questioned that, brother John, since the day you told me Jesus said it. But we are worshipping spiritually and truly now, John, when we worship according to the law. Wasn’t Jesus worshipping God spiritually and truly when he observed the law?

Paul: Yes, and his worship was acceptable, as yours is now, because it was God’s will for him to keep the law, as it is also His will for you and I to keep it.

Maschil: But that does not explain why you say that God will bring an end to the law.

²⁴² Jn. 1:4.

²⁴³ Mt. 5:14.

²⁴⁴ Ps. 119:34.

²⁴⁵ Ps. 119:142.

²⁴⁶ Ps. 119:53.

²⁴⁷ Ps. 11:2b.

²⁴⁸ Jn. 4:23–24.

Micah: We can see that Jesus has brought about the day of which he spoke to that woman, John, but worshipping God spiritually and truly is what Jesus always did, and it is what we are doing when we do as he did.

Paul: We agree with that, Micah. Nothing we teach contradicts what you just said.

Levi: But it does! For you say it will soon be wrong for Jews to live the way Jesus did. How can it ever be evil to do *anything* the way Messiah did, whether it be to heal the sick, honor the Sabbath, or be circumcised? Messiah was sinless! How can we be wrong to follow his sinless example?

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: Jesus' example was only to do the will of God, Levi, whatever that was, for when he left the Father to come into the world, he said, "I go to do your will, O God!"²⁴⁹ And we follow his example by doing the will of God for us, in our time, whatever His will is for us. Barnabas and I still look to Messiah as our example, and we are following His example only when we follow the Spirit.

Benjamin: Then why did Jesus even bother with keeping the law, and bringing all this confusion into the world? I know I sound frustrated, but what you are saying sounds so complicated.

John: Brother Benjamin, if Messiah had lived on earth without the law, the way he had lived with the Father in heaven since the foundation of the world, even we who were his closest disciples would not have followed him.

Uzziel: And rightly so. Why would we follow a man who did not obey the commandments of God?

Benjamin: Are you saying, John, that Jesus kept the law just to keep Israel from rejecting him?

John: What other reason could there be?

Benjamin: I am dumbfounded. Did Jesus ever talk like this with you disciples while he was here?

Matthew: Other than in parables, no. If he had spoken then as plainly as we do now, we would have misjudged him and gone away.

Bartholomew: We would have thought he didn't love the law.

Philip: But he certainly did love it.

Matthew: Yes, he did.

Paul: And it is good and right for us to continue in the law for the time being, for if *we* cease from the law before God's time, what hope will our fellow Jews have of believing in Jesus? We would be stumbling-blocks to them, instruments of their destruction, not salvation.

Barnabas: The gospel that Jesus preached, and which we all still preach to the Jews, is holy and good, but it will be of no more use when God finds no more in Israel who will hear it, for that gospel will never be for the Gentiles.

Benjamin: If this is the truth, I cannot see it.

Levi: You can't see it because it is not the truth, Benjamin. You should be thankful you don't see it.

Barnabas: Brothers, let me just ask you this. Could the Son of God, who was with God, rejoicing with Him before the world began, daily His delight,²⁵⁰ have delighted the Father or been able to rejoice with Him if he had not been righteous?

Levi: Of course not.

Barnabas: Well, where was Moses' law then?

Levi: The law was in him! For he said through the prophet, "I delight to do your will, O my God! Your law is within my heart."²⁵¹

Barnabas: And that is my point, Levi. Because the Father's law was in his heart, it was his *nature* to walk in holiness. The Son of God did not need to come down to earth, be circumcised, and submit to

²⁴⁹ Ps. 40:7.

²⁵⁰ Prov. 8:30.

²⁵¹ Ps. 40:8.

the law in order to be made righteous. He came down here and did all of that for us, and he did it only because it was the Father's will that he do it.

John: Jesus' food was to do the will of God; he lived on that bread. He said that to us once, but at the time, none of us knew what he was talking about.²⁵²

Uzziel: Men and brothers! Where are the prophets' voices in any of this? Jesus kept the law because he loved God and wanted to please Him, not us! He was not just making a show for our sakes. Every righteous man since the days of Moses has loved and kept the law.

Paul: And what made them righteous, Uzziel, but doing the will of God? Barnabas and I have acknowledged that it pleased God for our fathers to keep the law.

Hananiah: But you say that it is *not* God's will for the Gentiles to keep it and that it will soon not be His will for us to keep it, either! Have you not heard about what Jesus said on the Mount of Olives, that "*this* gospel of the kingdom must be preached in all the earth for a witness to all nations."²⁵³ He said nothing about a different gospel being preached to the nations; he said "this gospel", and that must be the gospel he was preaching!

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: Hananiah, the only difference between our gospel for the Gentiles and yours for the Jews is that our gospel excludes the carnal elements of the law. Other than that, ours is the same gospel that Jesus preached.

Uzziel: Is the gospel Jesus preached not perfect? Does it not still heal and save? The gospel of Jesus needs no adjusting to accommodate the heathen. Don't tinker with it, Barnabas!

Council members: *Comments.*

Benjamin and the Samaritan woman

Paul: Let me try to explain it this way: Jesus did more than die for us; he also lived for us. He was circumcised the eighth day for us; he kept the feast days for us; he honored the Sabbath for us; and those who believe in him do not need to do those things any more than they need to die for their own sins. Whoever is baptized with the Spirit is baptized into him, and if we are in him who kept the law for us and died for us, then we, through him, have kept the law and died, in the sight of God.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: In Jesus is everything! In him we are born in spirit, circumcised in spirit, baptized in spirit, and enjoy the true Sabbath in spirit! In him, we are crucified, we are dead, we are buried, and we are raised to sit with him among heavenly beings! We who are in Messiah do not need to keep the law in the flesh any more than we need to be nailed on a cross; Jesus did all that for us! In him, we are complete; we need no handwritten law when we are led by the Spirit.

Council members: *Comments.*

Benjamin: This is very difficult to take in. It seems to glorify Messiah Jesus, but does it really, if it is contrary to the law, and if the prophets say nothing of it?

Paul: It seems contrary only when your mind has not been fully purged from dead works to serve the living God.

Benjamin: But I have never wanted to be purged from the law. How could I ever want such a thing?

Paul: When you and I keep the law, Benjamin, we are following Jesus' footsteps because we are being good examples for our fellow Jews, as he was. But even after God closes the door on the law – and He will do it – we will still be able to follow Jesus if we walk in the Spirit because that was all he

²⁵² Jn. 6:34.

²⁵³ Mt. 24:14.

was really doing while he was here; it is all that he has ever done. What is carnal cannot last forever, Benjamin, but what is in the Spirit is eternal.

Benjamin: But the scriptures ... I just don't know any more.

Matthew: Benjamin, do you remember the woman in Samaria that John mentioned earlier?

Benjamin: Yes.

Matthew: We had stopped to rest at a well near Sychar. Jesus was so weary that he stayed at the well while we went into the town to buy food, and that's when she came out to draw water. When she saw that Jesus was a Jew, she began arguing that Jerusalem was not the only acceptable place of worship because Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob worshipped in the high places, and God accepted them.

Benjamin: But the scriptures say...

Matthew: Wait, please. You and I know what the scriptures say, but this is what I want you to do. I want you to put yourself and that woman back in King David's time, if you will. Can you imagine that for just a moment?

Benjamin: I suppose so. Yes, I will.

Matthew: Now, let's say that you are David, and the Samaritan woman approaches you, as she approached Jesus at the well, and she begins arguing with you, saying that worship in the high places was still acceptable to God, as it was in Abraham's day, and that Jerusalem is not the chosen place to worship. What would you say to her? But remember, God revealed to David that He had chosen Jerusalem as the place for His worship; David did not read that anywhere.

Council members: *Comments.*

Matthew: The scriptures that you started to refer to a moment ago, the ones that say God chose Jerusalem, were *written* by David and the prophets after him after David's revelation. So, you cannot point this woman to any of those scriptures. How would you, as David, convince her that Jerusalem is the only acceptable place for worship? What would you say?

Benjamin: [*slowly*] I don't know.

Matthew: But think on it. For whatever you would say to her is what you need to hear from us, and we are trying every way we can to say it.

Benjamin: I see what you are saying. You are saying that King David could only tell the woman that God had spoken to him. All he had was his experience, his testimony of hearing from God.

Matthew: That's right.

Andrew: And beyond that, Benjamin, in that conversation at the well, Jesus told the woman that the one acceptable place of worship in this covenant is the heart, for the Spirit would come and dwell in us, making us the temple of God. I know how that may sound to some, but do you remember how it sounded to the Sanhedrin when Stephen reminded them of what God once said through Isaiah: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth, my footstool. Where is this house that you would build for me?"²⁵⁴

Benjamin: They flew into a rage.

Andrew: ...because they preferred their temple made of stones to the honor of becoming living temples of God.

Benjamin: I looked up to Stephen as one would an older brother.

Andrew: I know you did, and Stephen loved you. But he had caught a glimpse of Messiah's glory, and his testimony provoked those proud judges. Messiah's glory will always provoke the proud to envy because they sense they can have no part in it. But we have been given a part, Benjamin! We have been given a part in the kingdom of God! The Spirit has come and made us temples of God! Think of it! How can we praise him enough for grace *to be* the temple of God instead of having to go to it! We can make acceptable sacrifices to God right here in this room!

Council members: *Amen! Thank God! Praise God! Etc.*

²⁵⁴ Isa. 66:1.

Benjamin: It is a wonderful thing, brother Andrew. That feels good and right.

Andrew: It seems that I can still hear that sound from heaven, rushing down upon us the day the Spirit came! When I think of it, I am overwhelmed!

Council members: *Amen! Thank God! Praise God! Etc.*

Lamech: [*calmly, letting the feelings subside*] We were there, too, Andrew, when that sound came from heaven. We saw, with you and the others, the tongues of fire, and all of us felt the glory together. How holy an event that was! I am still in awe of it. I praise God with you, Benjamin.

But did God intend for that wonderful experience to become the be-all and end-all of life? Is the Spirit of God only within the bodies of those who believe? Is it not also in the temple? And if it is not there, why do you men still go to the temple to pray? No, wait. Don't tell me. It is only to be a good example for our fellow Jews, lest we cause them to stumble.

Council members: *Comments.*

limited power

Lamech: Where is the evil in acknowledging the two temples of God, our bodies and the temple? That is how it was before these days, and there was peace.

Paul: We can continue in peace, Lamech, if we acknowledge one another's calling. You had no authority from God or this Assembly to come to Antioch and tamper with the souls that God had placed in our care. I know you thought you were doing God service, but you did not know what you were doing. That is why I stopped you. What you were doing contradicted the fundamental truth I pointed out to you in the beginning: the unique power of Jesus to save.

Hushai: We know that Messiah is great, Paul, but God is greater.²⁵⁵ Jesus has no power to undo anything God has done. He did not undo God's curse on Adam's race. Men are still appointed to die, and after that, they must all still face the Judgment.

Council members: *Comments.*

Hushai: And he is not so great that he undid the distinction that God Himself made between us and the Gentiles. In Egypt, when God determined to spare Israel from a plague, He told Moses, "Against none of the children of Israel shall a dog wag its tongue, so that you may know that *the LORD makes a difference* between Egypt and Israel."²⁵⁶ But, now, this Council seems to be asking us to believe that when Jesus ascended to heaven, he did away with the difference that *God made* between us and the Gentiles – people whom Jesus himself called dogs!²⁵⁷

Paul: What you say is true, Hushai. Jesus did not undo the curse of death on our flesh or the fleshly distinction which God made between us and the Gentiles. But that was not why God sent him here. What God sent Jesus to do was to make of us two, Jew and Gentile, one new nation, and in the Spirit, he has done it. He has done away with that unscalable wall which God had erected between us. And in this new nation, this new Israel of God, nothing of the flesh accomplishes anything for the soul. Jesus alone is Savior, and he saves by the Spirit alone.

Council members: *Comments.*

Micah: But if the law ends, Paul, the Gentiles can never come join us, as the prophets all say will happen. What would they join? Without the law, Israel will not be Israel, but will be like the Gentiles, and God has always forbidden us to do that.

²⁵⁵ Jn. 14:28.

²⁵⁶ Ex. 11:7.

²⁵⁷ Mt. 15:22–26.

Maschil: Yes, will it please God for us to be like the Gentiles, when He has commanded us not to learn the way of the heathen, nor do as they do?²⁵⁸ What you men are saying frightens me. You are pressuring us to do something God has expressly forbidden, something that will bring upon us His fierce wrath!

Paul: Our message is not that God will make us like the Gentiles, or that He will make the Gentiles like us. It is that by the Spirit, God has re-created us all, Jew and Gentile alike, to be like His Son. Yes, God commanded us not to be joined to foreigners, but Gentiles who are born of the Spirit are *not* foreigners to us, nor we to them; we are citizens together of the kingdom of God. Those who do *not* believe, whether Jew or Gentile, are foreigners, for they have no part in God's new Israel. We all are one in him who died for us.

Council members: *Comments.*

John: Amen.

Philip: Well said, Paul.

Barnabas: And we do not teach that Israel should live according to the statutes of the Gentiles, but that men should live by the dictates of the Spirit. Brothers, brother Paul and I are only testifying to you of the gospel Jesus revealed to us. If you refuse our testimony, you will certainly continue in the law after God finishes with it, and God will forsake you and leave you with your law.

Uzziel: It is not our law, Barnabas! It is God's law.

Paul: It will be yours when God finishes with it. And He *will* finish with it and leave it to the rebellious, as He said, "I am leaving. I am returning to my place until they admit their guilt and seek my face."²⁵⁹ And in that day, those who refuse the truth, He said, "will call on me, but I will not answer. They will seek me early, but they will not find me, forasmuch as they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD."²⁶⁰

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: I think Maschil was right. You are trying to seduce us to do something God has strictly forbidden. And I think I am beginning to see now why it is that Jesus said Jerusalem will be destroyed and the nation so horribly crushed. It will be because of you! He must have foreseen the rise of your doctrine, Paul, and foreseen it winning over these apostles and elders, who then would persuade the saints to forsake the law, and bring upon this nation the fearful wrath of God. Was that what David saw in the Spirit when he said, "It is time for the LORD to work. They have made your law of no effect"?²⁶¹

Council members: *Comments.*

Levi: Yes, that may well be what Jesus foresaw, Uzziel. God commanded Israel not even to wear a cloak made from two kinds of cloth,²⁶² lest the stronger cloth cause the weaker to give way and our nakedness be exposed. And He commanded us not to yoke an ox and an ass together,²⁶³ for the stronger beast will work the weaker one to death. How then do we dare be yoked to the heathen and their ways? Let them come to us and fulfill the scriptures, and bring upon us the blessings and favor of God instead of His curse!

Council members: *Comments.*

Jesus divides

²⁵⁸ Jer. 10:2a.

²⁵⁹ Hos. 5:15.

²⁶⁰ Prov. 1:28–29.

²⁶¹ Ps. 119:126.

²⁶² Dt. 22:11.

²⁶³ Dt. 22:10.

Silas: We understand your feelings, brothers. We understand why Paul's gospel seems wrong to you. I would think as you do, and I once did, but Jesus has opened my eyes to see what God is doing, and it is wonderful to behold. You are saying, are you not, that if God commanded us to keep the law, and we did it, and then God rewarded us for doing it, how could keeping the law ever become sin?

Micah: Yes. God commanded Israel not to forsake His law for anything in this whole world!

Silas: But that was only because there was nothing in this world holier than the law, Micah, and anyone who forsook it was going downward, toward destruction. Not only was it sin to forsake the law before Messiah came; it was madness! Who in his right mind would want something less than the holiest and best that God has given? But the Son of God is Lord even of the law, Micah; to go to him is to go upward, toward God. Paul is only saying that something greater than the law has come, and that God has given us His Spirit as proof of it. Of all that has ever been in the world, Messiah Jesus is the only thing that has ever been worthy of greater honor than the law.

You mentioned, a little while ago, the day Jesus commanded ten lepers to go to the priest to perform the rite for those who are cleansed of leprosy. And you noted that they were not healed immediately, but only after they started on their journey to the priest were they healed. However, you will remember that when one of them, a foreigner, saw his leprosy was gone, was so thrilled that he forgot about the law – and Jesus' commandment to obey it – and he ran back to Jesus and fell on his face, thanking him. Do you remember that, Micah?

Micah: Yes, I do.

Silas: And do any of you who were there remember what Jesus said to that Samaritan leper who did not keep the law, but returned to thank Jesus for healing him?

Bartholomew: I do. And Jesus did not rebuke him and say, "Why didn't you obey Moses and me?"

Silas: That's right, Bartholomew. Instead, he said, "Where are the nine? Were there none found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?" Consider that, Micah. Jesus was pleased with that Samaritan for not keeping the law, and he wondered why the Jews who were also healed did not also return to thank him and give God glory.

Council members: *Comments.*

Silas: It was not sin for that Samaritan to honor Jesus above the law, if only for that moment, and I believe Barnabas and Paul are telling us the truth when they say the day is coming when God will demand that we no longer divide our hearts between Moses and Jesus, but serve God and His Son in the Spirit alone.

Hushai: But surely, Silas, you can see that with so little support from the prophets for this doctrine, and with so much in the prophets contradicting it, it is impossible for reasonable men to embrace it. This is not the way of righteousness; it is the way heathen philosophers talk – everything based on something within a man instead of something God has given to men. We have the law, Silas; we have the prophets; we have our history; we have Jesus' own example. Look at what we have from God!

Micah: And if God has uttered a curse on whoever refuses those things, does the thought of that not frighten you? I am grieved by all of this, brothers! And I tell you, Barnabas, if what you teach is truly the revelation of Messiah Jesus, then Jesus has chosen to exclude me from the light. And that thought frightens me as much as the other. I am torn. This gospel of yours is tearing my soul apart!

Levi: It will tear every soul apart who loves the law and Messiah Jesus. Where in this new doctrine is the peace Jesus said he would give us? Where is the joy in it? This new doctrine has destroyed the peace and harmony we once enjoyed! Barnabas, you have to admit that this gospel of yours has not brought peace to the household of God, but division. Look at us here today! Is *this* what Jesus died for?

Paul: No, but it may be what he is living for. It is necessary, Levi, for divisions to come, that God might make known who is hearing His voice and who is not.

Lamech: I am so tired of clever answers to sincere questions, answers which no man of God has ever said, or ever would say.

Daniel: Lamech, we were together the day Jesus warned us that he had not come to bring peace, but to bring trouble and division.²⁶⁴ He knew what lay ahead for us who loved him. And what hatred we have endured!

Council members: *Comments.*

Daniel: God has a time for all things, my friend, and He makes everything beautiful in its time.²⁶⁵ How blessed is the man who says with David, “All my times are in God’s hands.” As for your torn heart, Micah, let me remind you that Jesus only uses the bread that he has broken.²⁶⁶ God tries our hearts, and when He sees us bound to anything more than to Him, He sends revelation like a sharp knife to cut the cords that bind us, for He is a jealous God.²⁶⁷ No pruning of the soul is pleasant, but when expertly done, it produces better fruit.

Maschil: But will God divide His own people from one another?

Cleopas: Haven’t we who believe been divided from the rest of Israel and become outcasts in our own country for his name sake?

Maschil: I see. Yes, we have.

Silas: Jesus said, “I’m the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. He takes away every branch in me that doesn’t bear fruit, and He prunes every branch that does bear fruit so that it might bear more fruit.”²⁶⁸ So, our choice, as branches on God’s Vine, is only to be cut off or be cut on. If we refuse His pruning of unprofitable branches, God will, in time, cut us off with them.

Council members: *Comments.*

Silas: Jesus said that we will either fall down and be broken upon the Stone which God has laid, or the Stone will fall on us and crush us to pieces.”²⁶⁹

Joel: That parable, I always understood to be showing the difference between believers and unbelievers.

Silas: No, he was speaking of his own house. A few days before he suffered, Jesus told us a parable which he said applied to the kingdom of God. In God’s kingdom, he said, there were ten virgins waiting for the Bridegroom to come, five of them wise and the other five, foolish. The wise are those children of God who hear His voice and fall down, to be cut on and broken, but the foolish are God’s children who resist His voice and persist in their own ways, but they will certainly be crushed and cut off. So, yes, Maschil, God will divide His own people. And He has done so, many times, throughout our history.

Daniel: Know this, son, and prepare your heart: if you serve God well, as I believe you will, God will prune you so that you may serve Him better. And if you do not serve Him according to His will, He will certainly cut you off from the Vine. Always remember that no man is ever so holy or wise that God cannot make him holier and wiser, but that God will do so only to the man who humbles himself to be cut on and broken. For us, to be increasingly like the Son of God is the greatest blessing in life, and that blessing will be an eternal one, for God will never cease either from increasing His Son’s glory or from making us more like him.

Council members: *Comments.*

a new nation

Lamech: Brother Paul, allow me to ask you something.

²⁶⁴ Lk. 12:51.

²⁶⁵ Eccl. 3:11.

²⁶⁶ Thanks to one of my elders, Joseph H. “Uncle Joe” Murray for that insight.

²⁶⁷ Ex. 34:1, 11.

²⁶⁸ Jn. 15:1–2.

²⁶⁹ Lk. 20:18.

Paul: Of course.

Lamech: You say that the Gentiles who believe, yet are not circumcised, are fellow-citizens with us in a new Israel.

Paul: Yes. We are all one in the family of God, circumcised in heart by the Spirit.

Lamech: ... even though Jesus called the Gentiles dogs?

Paul: But what were we? Do I need to recount the ways God has described Israel in the past? “Stiff-necked”, “Not-my-people”, “Sodom”, and a hundred more such titles?

Bartholomew: I would rather Jesus call me a dog, and then answer my prayer, as he did that Phoenician woman,²⁷⁰ than to call me a stiff-necked sodomite. What’s so bad about being a dog? Just bark and roll over; Jesus will feed you.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: Whatever any of us were in the past means nothing now if God has forgiven and cleansed us.

Hushai: Jesus did not feel the kinship with the heathen that you do, Paul.

Simon Peter: Paul should feel kinship with anyone Jesus has loved. God told me before sending me to the house of Cornelius not to condemn any man if He has cleansed him.

Lamech: We don’t condemn the Gentiles who believe, but we certainly warn them that God will condemn them if they do not obey His law. The God that met with Moses on Mount Sinai said, “I am the LORD thy God; I change not!” So, let the Gentiles change and be circumcised so that there be no division!

Uzziel, Hushai, Nadab, Levi: *Amen!*

Paul: That circumcision is in the flesh, Lamech, and it will perish with your flesh. Messiah ministers an eternal circumcision by the Spirit of God.

Levi: When did God ever say that His covenant of circumcision with father Abraham was temporary? If God has not said it, I will not believe it.

Paul: You know the promise Moses made when he was about to die: “The LORD your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live.”²⁷¹

Levi: Moses was saying that God would circumcise the hearts of His circumcised people! And God has done so, for now, the Spirit has circumcised the hearts of many in Israel, and every one of them, as Jacobus said earlier, is zealous for the law.²⁷²

Paul: And they should be, for they are Jews.

Levi: It is impossible to get a straight answer from you!

Paul: Listen, Levi. My whole life, I was as devoted to the law as any man in here. And I thought, as you do now, that the law would remain forever the way into eternal life. But Jesus changed that. *He* is our life now, by God’s decree, not the law of carnal commandments. That law is behind us, as glorious as it once was, and the Spirit is not leading Gentiles to it. And soon, the Spirit will lead believing Jews completely out of it!

Philip: Why would we even want to yoke the believing Gentiles to our law? They believe, and it is enough. Let us bear our own burden.

Paul: More than that, why would we seek to convert the converted? The Gentiles who believe are Jews already in God’s eyes, citizens with us in the Israel of God.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: Hosea once said of the Gentiles, “In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘You are sons of the living God.’”²⁷³ That was His promise to the

²⁷⁰ Mk. 7:25–30.

²⁷¹ Dt. 30:6.

²⁷² Acts 21:20.

Gentiles! And in that promise, God spoke nothing of circumcision or the law, for God is a judge of the hearts, and where He finds humble, obedient hearts, there He will be!

Nadab: Are you saying that God will choose sinners of the Gentiles *instead of* His own people?

Paul: Did God not warn Israel He would do that when He commanded Hosea to name his son, “Not-My-People”? God told Israel that He gave that name to Hosea’s child “because you are not my people, and I will not be your God.”²⁷⁴

Hushai: Aha! I knew we would catch you if you kept trying to use holy scriptures for your unholy enterprise. You have completely misrepresented Hosea’s words, Paul. Anyone who has read Hosea knows that God was speaking of *Israel* no longer being called His people, and then returning to Israel after he called them, “Not-My-People”. God was not speaking of the heathen or of calling them instead of us. You are found out!

Paul: I wish I was found out, Hushai. It is hard, having a vision that others cannot see. Many times, as Uzziel said earlier, the prophets’ words had double meanings, coming as they did from the wisdom of God. When Isaiah prophesied of the Babylonians invading our land with their foreign language,²⁷⁵ he was prophesying of Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion of this land, yes, but he was also prophesying of the outpouring of the Spirit, which moves men to speak in languages foreign to them when it enters their temple. Yes, God was speaking of Israel being put away and then reunited with the Lord. I was only telling you God’s other, hidden purpose for those words. I wish you could see it the way Jesus showed it to me.

Barnabas: We can only sow the seed, Paul; God chooses which seed to water.

Hushai: Keep your seed and your water! I want no part of it.

Council members: *Comments.*

a new standard

Micah: Barnabas, my friend, this division between us is painful. You know me. You know that if I believed God wanted me to cease from the law, I would cease from it this moment.

Barnabas: Yes, Micah, I believe you would, and so would I. But the time to do that has not come. And when it comes, it will be sin for us not to leave the law behind.

Council members: *Comments.*

Silas: God forewarned us of that time, Micah, when He said in Isaiah, “The slaughtering one of the herd will be like killing a man; sacrificing one of the flock, like breaking a dog’s neck; offering up a gift, like offering up blood from a pig; burning incense, like blessing an idol.”²⁷⁶

Council members: *Comments.*

Micah: So, you interpret Isaiah to mean it will someday be sinful to perform the holy rites?

Barnabas: How else could it be interpreted?

Maschil: God many times condemned those who performed the law’s rites while transgressing His moral commandments. We know that. It has always been sinful for the wicked to perform the law’s holy rites.

Silas: That is true, Maschil, but in this case, Isaiah was speaking of a time when God would no longer accept such worship from anyone, for he went on in that same prophecy to foretell of our time, when God has created a new nation of saints by the Spirit coming from His temple in heaven with the

²⁷³ Hosea 1:10.

²⁷⁴ Hosea 1:8–9.

²⁷⁵ Isa. 28:11–12.

²⁷⁶ Isa. 66:3.

sound of a storm-wind, saying, “A sound from the temple! Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be born in one day? Shall a nation be born at once?”²⁷⁷

Barnabas: Jesus has founded a new nation; he is our new father Abraham! Our new Adam, the first of a new race of men!

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: It is not those who have inherited Abraham’s kind of flesh who are God’s children, but those who possess Abraham’s kind of faith, whatever nation they are from. For in Messiah Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but having God’s life does! God is not looking for circumcision, brothers; He is looking for faith in His Son. He looks at the heart of man, not his flesh!

Didn’t John the Baptist say as much when he rebuked the hypocrites who came to be baptized by him? Didn’t he tell them not to justify themselves by saying that Abraham was their father, for God was able to raise up children to Abraham from stones if He chose to?²⁷⁸

Lamech: Unlike you, Paul, I heard John preach, and he never said that *any* man of *any* nation who believes in Messiah Jesus is free from the law. John himself kept it!

Hushai, Uzziel, Levi: *Amen! That’s right. Etc.*

Barnabas: But if John had not kept it, none of you would have believed him and repented at his preaching.

Uzziel: Enough of that, Barnabas! The next thing you will say is that King David kept the law just so the people would accept him as Israel’s King.

Paul: No, David kept the law because it was of God and he loved it, just as Moses and all the prophets loved it.

Levi: So did Jesus! My! How you can twist things!

Paul: I am twisting nothing. Messiah has made the righteousness of God, not our righteousness, the law in His new nation, and keeping Moses’ law no longer makes men righteous in God’s sight; in fact, to keep it will soon be condemned by God as rebellion against Him. God’s eyes are now only on His Son – and not His Son as a Jew, but as the Son by whom He made the worlds. No one comes to God but by him, and without him, all men are in bondage to their own thoughts and ways, whether keeping the law or not.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: Jesus alone makes men righteous by the Spirit, brothers. Moses’ law is no longer the standard! Those who trust the law to keep them sinless should heed the warning of God through Jeremiah: “Behold, I will plead my case against you for saying, ‘I have not sinned.’”²⁷⁹ I tell you that all have sinned, Jew and Gentile alike, and all have fallen short of God’s righteousness.

Lamech: Then you are saying that God’s holy law is not perfect because those who keep it are still sinners.

Paul: God found fault with His people, not with His law.

Hananiah: It will be a difficult task, Paul, for you to persuade Israel that someday, God will call on them to cease from the perfect law that God gave us. Our hearts know no other way to love Him but to keep His law.

Paul: Yes, we know that. And God knows that. That is why He does not require our nation to cease immediately from it. But, Hananiah, God will not call upon all of Israel to do that, but only those of us who have first obeyed His call to believe in His Son. We are the ones whose conscience the Spirit will purge from works of the law so that we are free from fear to live without them. The rest of Israel, those

²⁷⁷ Isa. 66:6, 8.

²⁷⁸ Mt. 3:9; Lk. 3:8.

²⁷⁹ Jer. 2:35.

who have rejected Messiah Jesus, will be cursed with the law, to live and to worship their own way instead of God's way.

Council members: *Comments.*

Hananiah: To bring about such a change in our conscience will take a mighty work of the Spirit, Paul.

Barnabas: Yes, but then, it takes the power of the Spirit to do anything rightly in this covenant, doesn't it?

Hananiah: I understand what you are saying.

Levi: I also understand what Barnabas and Paul say, and that is why I oppose it. Hananiah, are you and Micah falling under the spell of this man? How can keeping the law with a pure heart ever be wrong?

Paul: When God finishes with the law, no pure heart will keep it. All the righteous in every place will trust in Messiah alone to save them, and he is able. To refuse His grace and continue in Moses' handwritten law will lead to death, but God's Spirit sanctifies us and gives us life.

Lamech: Nothing that is truly from God would lead men away from His law.

Uzziel: Your doctrine, Paul, puts God's people in a position of having to choose between you and the Jesus with whom we walked.

Micah: How do you answer that, Paul? To teach that Jesus will, at whatever point in time, make it evil to continue in the law God gave Israel would seem to make Jesus evil. And I hesitate to say it, but it makes you seem evil, too.

Paul: No need for you to hesitate, Micah. I know your heart. And I know how my gospel sounds to my fellow countrymen, and I know what I seem to be to them. But I am just a sheep in wolf's clothing.²⁸⁰ The truth often seems to be an enemy, until we learn the mind of the Father. On the other hand, the Deceiver often has disguised his deceit and seemed good by using something God has done or said. You will remember that God allowed Abraham to build an altar under a grove.

Micah: Yes, in Beersheba.²⁸¹

Paul: That's right. But in later generations, after God had forbidden groves to be planted near His altar,²⁸² false prophets justified worship under groves by proclaiming, "The manner of Beersheba lives,"²⁸³ because Abraham had worshipped there. But they lied. The manner of Beersheba was dead. God had changed the acceptable place of worship to His temple.

Micah: I see that, yes.

Paul: And in not too long a time, this will be the same. Jesus kept the law, but when God finishes with it, false teachers will again rise up, but this time, they will proclaim, "The manner of the law lives" instead of the manner of Beersheba because Jesus kept it.

Levi: This is blasphemous!

Paul: Was Isaiah blaspheming when he said that one day, making sacrifices according to the law will be all the same as cutting a dog's neck?

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: Brother Levi, I understand the concerns that you and your companions have, being shepherds of the flock of God, and I confess that when Messiah took me into the third heaven, I heard things unlawful to be said. But...

Levi: So, Paul, you admit that your revelation teaches what the law condemns! You admit that you are a false prophet!

²⁸⁰ Thanks to my father, George C. "Preacher" Clark, for this and other witticisms in this work.

²⁸¹ Gen. 21:33.

²⁸² Dt. 16:21.

²⁸³ Amos 8:14.

Paul: Silas has already explained to you that false prophets were considered false only because they led God’s people away from the holiest thing God had given at the time, the law. But now, a holier than the law has come, and we are not leading men *away from* the holiest thing, but *to* it: the Son of the living God.

When the Spirit came, Levi, it changed everything, and yet, God has given us Jews a little season to adjust to this new thing and to prepare our hearts to walk in the newness of life. If you refuse the light, and choose rather to continue in the flesh, you will die. But if you live in the Spirit, you will live forever. Whoever worships God in the Spirit of truth, anywhere on this earth, worships God well. God has not merely chosen a new place for worship. He has created a new way to worship, fulfilling His purpose for the law and bringing it to its intended end.

Council members: *Comments.*

Lamech: [*calmly*] An intended end for an eternal law. If that is not a heathen philosophical concept, meant only to provoke debate and promote oneself, such a thing does not exist.

Council members: *Comments.*

Lamech: I congratulate you, Paul, you and Barnabas. Really, I do. This new doctrine of yours is very tightly woven. Almost impossible to unravel. Without a firm grasp of the law and a deep love for Messiah Jesus, with whom I walked when I could, I don’t know that any man could successfully resist you. Look at the men whom you have already taken in! And I know you can sense that you are about to take in a few more, who at the start of this meeting were determined to be faithful to God and His law. I really do congratulate you. Few men could ever accomplish what you have accomplished here.

Paul: Lamech, wrangling over these things will never reveal the mind of the Spirit to you. The knowledge of God is revealed to a man, or it is never understood. I can testify to what I have received, but I cannot open a heart to receive it; that is the work of God. He wrought that work on me when He sent Jesus to arrest me on the road to Damascus – Jesus, who alone knows the Father and who has revealed the Father to me. And I praise Him for it! I rejoice in his light!

Peter: I join you, Paul!

[Some] Council members: *Amen! Praise God! Etc.*

walking out

Levi: Go ahead, brothers! Go ahead and rejoice with these men if you like. Be carried away with their revelations and their exploits among the heathen. “Mighty works,” they say, and so they may have been, but God warned Israel to refuse the man who would lead us away from His law, *even if that man performed miracles!*²⁸⁴

Council members: *Comments.*

Levi: And what did God say to do with such a man, brothers?

Hananiah: Levi, wait...

Levi: Wait for what? For this Council to take a vote on what God said? I did not come here for men to decide on what God said any more than Paul came here for men to decide on what he says. Every one of you knows that God commanded the judges to put such a man to death, not just to refuse his doctrine, “for he has spoken apostasy against the LORD your God, the One who brought you out from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to thrust you out from the way that the LORD your God commanded you to walk in.”²⁸⁵

Council members: *Quiet.*

²⁸⁴ Dt. 13:1–4.

²⁸⁵ Dt. 13:5.

Levi: Why so silent, brothers? No stomach for the law of your God? When the rulers brought to Jesus that woman caught in adultery, did Jesus tell them not to stone her? No! He agreed with the law that she was worthy of death, and he told them to stone her! He only said that the appropriate men should do it, which was also according to the law. The fact that those rulers were wicked and could not stone her does not mean that Jesus thought the law was wrong and she should not be stoned.

Jacobus: Would you have wanted to stone her, Levi?

Levi: What I want means nothing. God's will is what matters, and God commanded such a woman to be stoned. False doctrine always, sooner or later, forces God's people to this crossroads: should I do God's will, or should I do my will, as in the days when Israel had no judge and every man did what was right in his own eyes.²⁸⁶ But what did God's servant Moses command Israel when they were in the wilderness? Or does it any longer matter to you what Moses said?

Uzziel, Lamech, Hushai, Nadab: *It matters to me. Moses was right. Etc.*

Levi: Moses said, "You shall not do as all of us are doing here, today, each man doing whatever is right in his own eyes."²⁸⁷

Jacobus: Levi, Jesus has given us no authority to punish the wicked.

Levi: He did not have to, because God has already given us that authority in His law. You men keep forgetting the law! What has happened here? At the very least, you should be able agree that Moses' commandment was of God and that it reveals what God thinks should be done to a man who would turn Israel from the law.

Council members: *Comments.*

Joseph: To execute judgments on sinners is not the way of Jesus, Levi.

Levi: Jesus was no more sent to be a judge on earth than he was sent to be a priest on earth. But if it is not the way we should live, then tell me what the prophets meant when they said of him, "He will smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips will he slay the wicked"²⁸⁸

Paul: Jesus will do that when he returns, Levi. When he returns.

Lamech: And until then, we are to do nothing in the face of evil? Did Jesus not tell us to "take care of things until I come"²⁸⁹ Levi's point, harsh though it sounds, is in perfect accord with what God commanded Moses. Did not God command the judges to destroy those who led Israel away from the law?

Paul: [*resignedly*] Yes. Yes, He did, Lamech.

Lamech: And if your doctrine takes root in the Assemblies in Judah, you would eventually lead thousands of Jews away from the law!

Paul: Not I, but Jesus. We are just following his lead in this new covenant.

Council members: *Comments.*

Lamech: Has God ever made an old covenant? I know this is a new covenant, but every time God has ever made a covenant, it was new when He made it. The law itself was the new covenant when God first gave it. When answers are not answers, they are bait for more debate. Your answers are not answers, Paul.

Council members: *Comments.*

Nadab: Do we not have good reason to be suspicious of you, Paul of Tarsus? Some say that since you failed to destroy the faith from the outside ...

Levi: He seized my mother and father and dragged them before the Sanhedrin!

Nadab: ... you are now trying to destroy it from the inside with this new religion of yours!

²⁸⁶ Judg. 17:6; 21:25.

²⁸⁷ Dt. 12:8.

²⁸⁸ Isa. 11:4b.

²⁸⁹ Lk. 19:13.

Jacobus, Apostles, and others: *Stop! That is not right! Etc.*

Barnabas: I will answer that. Brother Paul has risked his life for the name of Jesus. I have seen him endure suffering for the Lord in as great a measure as he ever inflicted it on others. He has proved his love for all the saints to be greater than the hatred he once bore toward us. He has suffered hunger and thirst; he has been cursed by men, jailed, beaten and left for dead, slandered and despised, and yet he has borne all things with humility and patience.

Paul: Brothers, in none of those things do I boast. I am worthy of worse suffering than any that I have endured. I am the least of all the saints, and am not worthy to be an apostle. But by the grace of God, I am what I am.

Micah: Barnabas and Paul, I apologize for my companion's fervor, but you must be able to see why we cannot accept your new revelation. It is a danger to the well-being of the Assemblies of God, whom we love. Your new revelation is outside the flow of our history.

Levi: "The legs of the lame man are unequal; so is a parable in the mouth of fools."²⁹⁰

Barnabas: Though we be fools, if you would listen, you would become wise.

Paul: What else can be said? All that remains is for us who belong to the Lord to prepare ourselves for the changes that God will soon make, lest we stumble at the stumbling-block which God has laid for this people. Messiah is a sanctuary for the humble, but for those who resist his will, he will be "a stumbling-stone, a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many of them will stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken."²⁹¹ Then, the door for the Jews to enter the kingdom of God will be closed for a season, and the truth will be only among those who have listened to His voice, as Messiah said again through Isaiah, "Bind up the testimony! Seal the law among those who are taught by me! And I will wait for Jehovah, who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob."²⁹²

Uzziel: We are not resisting the Lord Jesus! We are resisting you!

Paul: Prepare yourselves, I say! God will not long tolerate two gospels of His one Son.

Levi: There *already* are not two gospels, for yours is no gospel at all!

Paul: There *is* a gospel for the uncircumcision! And the day is coming when the gospel I preach will be the only gospel recognized by heaven.

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: Listen to Paul, brothers! God destroyed Jerusalem in the days of Nebuchadnezzar because the people refused to hear His prophets. Do you think He will not use the Romans to do the same if you refuse the truth? And when God does that, brothers, when He destroys this holy city again, how will you explain that to your children? Whom will you blame!

Uzziel: You prophesy to us? No! You hear my prophecy, Barnabas, and all of you! If and when Jerusalem's destruction comes about – and it will come if Jesus said it will – it will come because this people forsake God's law and do not reject false teaching. That has always been the source of Israel's troubles. So, if and when that dreadful destruction comes, it will come because Barnabas and Paul's doctrine is accepted by this people, as most of you seem to have done already!

Nathan: God would have spared even Sodom if he had found but ten righteous souls in that city.²⁹³ Surely, there is hope that He will not destroy the city where He has poured out His Spirit upon thousands!

Paul: That is what the false prophets taught, Nathan. Be careful that you don't become one of them. If those thousands who believe continue to follow Jesus, they will learn the truth, just as he promised,²⁹⁴ and they will be spared. Otherwise, they will be cut off with the city.

²⁹⁰ Prov. 26:7.

²⁹¹ Isa. 8:14–15.

²⁹² Isa. 8:16–17a.

²⁹³ Gen. 18:23–32.

²⁹⁴ Jn. 8:31–32.

John: Uzziel! Nathan! Brothers! Paul is telling the truth. It grieves me, too, but the truth is the truth, and just men choose to see the truth and suffer, rather than deny it to postpone the pain. Jesus saw it and grieved deeply over it. The last time he came here, when he saw the city from the hill across the Kidron, he broke down and wept, and cried out, “O Jerusalem! If only you had known the things which lead to your peace! But now, they are hidden from your eyes, and the days shall come upon you when enemies will raze you to the ground because you did not recognize the time of your visitation!”²⁹⁵

Council members: *Comments.*

Uzziel: But it will be the fault of these men, John! This blindness is maddening!

Barnabas, I say there will be a great reward from heaven for the men who trace your footsteps in every city where you have preached, and repair the damage you have done to those ignorant Gentiles whom God has called! Father Jacob said that God’s Messiah would be the Lawgiver,²⁹⁶ but you men would make him the Law-taker instead. We cannot accede to this doctrine of yours; it is contrary not only to the law and the prophets, but also to the Spirit of God! Without obeying the law, even Messiah Jesus would have been unrighteous, but you say anyone can be righteous without it.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: I beg you to hear me. My gospel was given to me by Messiah. I did not expect it any more than you did.

Barnabas: We are telling the truth.

Hushai: Then there are two truths, Barnabas, and one contrary to the other! And that cannot be, unless – God forgive me for saying it! – there are two Gods! Paul, recover yourself from this madness!

Paul: This is not madness, Hushai, unless Jesus is mad, for he revealed it to me.

Hananiah: I am utterly speechless at this... this teaching.

Lamech: Paul, your father was a Roman, was he not?

Paul: A Roman citizen, yes.

Lamech: And through him, you no doubt became more acquainted with the ways of the heathen than, say, a Jewish child living here, in this land.

Paul: I adhered to the strictest sect of the Pharisees from my youth. I was a Pharisee, like you, with zeal similar to yours for the traditions of our fathers.

Lamech: We are aware of your great devotion to the law as a young man sitting at the feet of Gamaliel.²⁹⁷ But your doctrine certainly didn’t come from that part of your background. Might it not be that your father’s heathen associations introduced you, however inadvertently, to the Gentiles’ philosophic frame of mind?

Paul: I have told you, I did not receive this doctrine from man. It came by revelation from Messiah Jesus.

Lamech: I know. I know. I heard you. But, Paul, think back. Try to remember how many times, when my colleagues here exposed you as being in error, instead of reasoning together, as brother Uzziel pleaded with you to do, you resorted to “Messiah told me”, and then proceeded to say things no one has ever said, even Jesus! Does that sound reasonable to you? Who can reason with a man whose principal response is to claim private revelations and to say things that no one has ever heard of? I know, men and brothers, that revelation is necessary. I thank God for it. But God is the one who first called us to reason together, not Uzziel; therefore, there must be a place in our lives for reason, too.

Let us not forget the man of God whom God sent to Bethel to condemn the king’s idolatry there. God straitly commanded that prophet to return to Judah immediately after delivering His message, and to stop nowhere in the apostate north. After he prophesied at Bethel, the king in the north invited him to

²⁹⁵ Excerpts, Lk. 19:41–44.

²⁹⁶ Gen. 49:10.

²⁹⁷ Acts. 22:3.

his palace and be refreshed, and receive money for his labor, but he told the king, “Even if you give me half your house, I will not come with you, nor will I eat bread or drink water in this place. For thus it was commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying, ‘You shall not eat bread, and you shall not drink water, and you shall not return by the road that you came.’”

And yet that good man, so determined at first to obey the commandment of God, like brother Paul in his youth, proved to be a fool. For an old prophet in Bethel heard of him, and he caught up with him, and deceived him, and persuaded him to come to his house and not to continue on his journey home! And how did that false prophet persuade him? By claiming that he had received a revelation from God and that God had changed His will for that man of God!²⁹⁸ That foolish man of God knew what God had commanded, but he trusted in a new revelation instead of obeying what he knew was from God.

Now, brothers, hear me! Barnabas and Paul are not the only men to have arisen in Israel, declaring new things contrary to what we all know God commanded. And they are not the only men to have interpreted scriptures in novel ways in order to gain a following. If any of us has wondered how Israel could have been fooled so often in the past, after knowing of God’s judgment on those who were lured away from His law, this is your chance to learn. This is how it happened. This is what false teachers sound like; very convincing and very insistent that you trust them and their new revelation instead of trusting what you know is from God.

To this point today, I have, for the most part, avoided engaging in the verbal combat in which these men obviously thrive, for the wisdom of God has taught me not to answer a fool in his folly lest I become like him.²⁹⁹ There is no point, brothers, in debating with men who will not hear the law. One wonder of the truth is that it refuses to be the subject of angry debate; it vanishes from strife like smoke in the wind and leaves debaters quarreling over two wrong ways.

“To the law and to the testimony” is not a clever catch-phrase invented by a man; it is the command of God, and it is non-negotiable. You should be reproofing these men, not encouraging them.

That said, I will take my leave now of this Council and this Assembly, for there is no room here for the things I believe, and I will neither say nor hear any more quibbling over the simple truth of God. [*Lamech leaves.*]

Jacobus, John, Silas and others: *No, Lamech! Lamech, don’t go. Stay, brother Lamech. Etc.*

Paul: [*after Lamech is gone*] That man speaks pretty well to be as wrong as he is.

Maschil: How can such plain truth be wrong?

Paul: I’ll tell you, Maschil. That old prophet from Bethel who deceived the man of God was a false prophet because he claimed that God had spoken to him when He had not. The man of God should not have listened to him. And if Messiah Jesus has not spoken to me, I am false, too, as false as Lamech thinks I am, and you should not listen to me, either. But Jesus *has* spoken to me, and because that is true, you *should* listen to me because the words I speak are not mine, but his, and they are judging you; you are not judging them. You can’t. And neither can any other man.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: Continuing in the law after God’s Son has come leaves the impression that God hasn’t exalted Jesus quite high enough to be the only Savior. Only my gospel, by excluding the works of the law, makes it clear that Jesus alone is our hope of salvation, not Jesus and the law!

Levi: You love the law, and yet, you teach salvation without it? You are an apostate!

Paul: I am not an apostate. Why should the Gentiles keep the law? For whom would they be doing so? Their fellow Gentiles, to whom the law is unknown? No! I will tell you who they would be keeping the law for – you! – so that you can boast about how many converts you have made, when in truth, you will have only made a name for yourself, and robbed God of His glory!

²⁹⁸ 1Kgs. 13:1–32.

²⁹⁹ Prov. 26:4.

Levi: Robbed God of His glory by obeying His command to keep the law? Impossible!

Paul: God warned us through Malachi that He would smear the law like refuse on your faces, once He is finished with it, saying, “I will smear offal on your faces, the offal of your festival sacrifices, and one will lift up your faces to it”³⁰⁰

Levi: Do you hear this, brothers? Paul, you truly have gone mad!

Paul: I am not mad. This is the word of the Lord in my mouth to you, brother! To every one of you! Nothing is holy unless God is in it, and when He moves out of a thing, as He once moved out of the high places, that thing becomes worthless as dung for salvation. And I am telling you that the law, with all its holy ceremonies, and Jerusalem itself, will become as dung when God finishes with them, and it will not be long.

Council members: *Comments.*

Paul: Beware – all of you! – that God does not smear that dung on your faces!

Levi: Your gospel is dung, Paul of Tarsus, and I will have none of it on my face or in my heart! We have no fear of your vain threats. Your gospel is a stench to the righteous.

Paul: If the truth offend, then let it offend! According to you, Barnabas and I are reprobates, but not according to God.

Uzziel: This whole matter comes down to this: are we to believe God or Barnabas and Paul? Do we believe that God’s judgments are everlasting, as God said a hundred times, or do we believe these men, who says they are not? Lamech was right. It is foolish even to ask such a question. But that is the degrading place that this Council has come to.

Paul: Barnabas and I are doing nothing but what Moses and the prophets foretold would be done. And though we love you all, I consider his revelation to me to be more precious than my life, and I will yield it to no man! No, not for one hour!

Uzziel: Then yield to Jesus! He straitly commanded us not to go to the Gentiles!

Paul: Then don’t you go to them! But he did not forbid *me*!

Uzziel: We would forbid nothing if you would tell the Gentiles the truth!

Paul: If I preached your gospel to the Gentiles, I would be lying to them!

Hushai: Then God sent Peter to Cornelius’ house to preach a lie?

Paul: God sent Peter there to preach the gospel, and God decided that day what the gospel would be, not Peter, who preached it, and I believe every word Peter preached. You are the one who would condemn God and change it! You taught false doctrine to the Gentiles in Antioch by saying to them what Peter had planned to say to Cornelius, but God interrupted him, and I interrupted you. Peter thanked God for stopping him, Hushai. And when your heart is purged from your pride, you will thank me.

Nadab: Jesus preached our gospel.

Paul: You fool. Have you learned nothing? Jesus preached what he preached because God sent him to the Jews. God forbade him to go to the Gentiles.

Council members: *Comments.*

Barnabas: Friends, God did not forbid Messiah to go to the Gentiles because He hated them. He sent him to us first in order to fulfill His promises to our fathers, whom He loved. From the foundation of the world, God planned to call the Gentiles, but to call them *by our gospel*, not yours.

Hushai: There is one gospel, Barnabas, and it is true at all times and all places! And we will go with it to the Gentiles, with this Council’s approval or not, and we will save them by doing so!

Barnabas: Hushai! Do you think that God was like an impatient child at Cornelius’ house, that He baptized them with His Spirit on credit, expecting them to become Jews or be damned in the Judgment?

³⁰⁰ Mal. 2:3.

Paul: The gospel you preach justifies both Israel and God because it demands both the law and the Spirit. That is why you love it so. But that will cease, and God alone will be glorified – by *our* gospel, not yours!

Messiah prayed through David that God would avenge him of those in this nation who would not forsake the works of the law to walk with him in the light of life. He prayed that God would turn those works of the law, which God gave Israel for a blessing, into a curse for those who would not acknowledge my gospel, saying, “Let their table become a snare for them, and their peace offerings, a trap.”³⁰¹

Uzziel: Men and brothers! Messiah was not speaking through David about Paul!

Paul: No, he was speaking through David about you, and all who would cling to a dead thing when the Son of God has brought us life! That is my gospel, and it glorifies nobody but God and His Son!

Uzziel: I am going to serve God the way that Messiah Jesus served God! We will answer to God, not man, for the path we choose. “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!”³⁰² “I took an oath, and I will perform it, to keep His righteous judgments.”³⁰³ And though I am troubled by this Council’s refusal to hear us, I will not fear man, for God said, “Hear me, you people in whose heart is my law! Do not fear the reproach of man, for the moth shall eat them like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool.”³⁰⁴

This new doctrine will bring God’s wrath on you who are taken in by it. Beware, you who are wavering! “He will come like an eagle against the house of the LORD because they have rebelled against my law.”³⁰⁵ Hear the word of the Lord, O men of God, who are seduced by strange men who have turned you from my word! “Behold, I will bring evil on this people because they have not attended to my words, and my law, they have also rejected.”³⁰⁶

If you do not heed that voice, my brothers, you will not heed anything that I have to say. [*Uzziel leaves.*]

Council members: *Uzziel! Come back. Etc.*

Hushai: My God, did no one here feel the authority in what Uzziel was saying? Do you men really not see what God is saying to you?

John: I can see that Jesus is well able to cleanse a soul and save it without help from Moses.

Andrew: ... and Paul’s gospel makes that truth perfectly clear, Hushai, whereas ours does not.

Philip: And I can see that if men are persuaded by Paul and Barnabas to believe that their salvation depends on no such works as we Jews are required to perform, then they will trust in Jesus alone to save them. The only question then is, does the foundation of Paul’s gospel stand? Is Jesus alone the Savior of mankind? If he is, then Paul’s gospel came from God, and it will outlast ours.

Levi: I can hear no more of this!

Paul: To the endangerment of your soul will you not hear it.

John: Brother Levi, I beg you...

Peter: Brother Levi, it is not wise to speak evil of things that you do not understand.

Levi: God commanded us under penalty of death to expose anyone who tries to turn men from the law, even if it be the dearest person to us on earth!³⁰⁷ I understand *that!*

Counsel members: *Comments.*

³⁰¹ Ps. 69:22.

³⁰² Josh. 24:15b.

³⁰³ Ps. 119:106.

³⁰⁴ Isa. 51:7–8.

³⁰⁵ Hos. 8:1.

³⁰⁶ Jer. 6:19.

³⁰⁷ Dt. 13:1–11.

Levi: As God lives, if He gives me strength, Paul and Barnabas, I will expose your heresy to Israel and to all the Gentiles who believe! This is not the love of God for them; nor do you honor Jesus by your foul doctrine! You two devised this doctrine to draw away disciples after yourselves, and I will not dishonor God by sitting here and hearing any more of it! I am with Uzziel and Lamech! [*Levi leaves*]

Nadab: So am I! [*Nadab leaves.*]

Hushai: God forbid that we should allow such a “gospel” as yours, Paul, to go unchallenged among the Gentiles. We will teach them the wondrous things of the law!

Paul: If, after today, you go again to the Gentiles with the gospel that God gave only for the Jews, you will be doing a wondrous evil! And the dead works you cling to will become your prison and your curse!

Hushai: [*suddenly, calm and quieter*] Doing evil by teaching the law of God to those who do not know it? I think not.

Paul: Teach them the law all you want; I do that myself. But do not require them to keep it, Hushai, lest you make yourself the enemy of God.

Hushai: [*again, calmly*] Your threats bore me, Paul. I will take my leave now, brothers. I can stand no more of this. [*Hushai leaves.*]

Counsel members: *Comments.*

conclusion

Hananiah: Men and brothers, I sincerely regret this division. I had hoped for better when the day began. But let me remind you of what I said in the beginning. We who are devoted to God’s law did not bring this trouble and strife upon God’s saints. Ours is the faith with which we all began; in it, we followed our sinless Lord Jesus to the very great benefit to our souls, for in doing that, we were blessed with the Spirit.

I do understand what Paul and Barnabas are saying. Perhaps that is the test, that I understand it. If I did not understand it, I would probably be inclined to stay and hear more, in hope of understanding it. But as it is, brothers, I cannot. It certainly gives me pause to see that most of you, my respected brothers and elders, embrace this new doctrine. Nevertheless, I must cast my lot with those of like judgment with me, even if their harshness is not of my liking. And so, I bid you an affectionate farewell.

Jacobus: Hananiah, I beg you to re-consider.

Hananiah: Jacobus, I have done nothing but consider this matter for many days now.

Philip: We walked with Jesus together, Hananiah.

Hananiah: So did brother Uzziel, and Hushai, and Levi. They walked with us, too. So, tell me, who divided us? Did Uzziel bring a new doctrine into the Assembly? Did Hushai? Or Levi?

Benjamin: Or me? Am I the guilty one?

Hananiah: Benjamin, thank you, but you do not have to leave with me. Do as your heart tells you, my young friend.

Benjamin: But I have always been with you.

Silas: Brothers, all that unity requires is that we acknowledge one another’s calling and be content with our own place.

Benjamin: Silas, sir, I am with Hananiah, and for the same reasons he has said. I feel compelled to leave with him. And I believe that you would do as we are doing if you felt as we do.

Daniel: Show Benjamin the way, Hananiah. Fellowship is worth the price of patience. You knew at the start that we elders and apostles believed the testimony of Barnabas and Paul concerning their calling.

Hananiah: Yes, that was evident from the start.

Daniel: But we elders have not interfered much with your examination of them, though it was difficult at times for some of us to hold our tongues.

Council members: *Comments.*

Daniel: As an elder and brother in the Lord – if you see me as such – I entreat you to stay, and hear Barnabas and Paul once more. I believe that Jesus will do something for those who remain. But if after that, you still desire to go, you may go, though our hearts will be grieved for it.

Council members: *That is right. Yes, we would. Etc.*

Nahum: It would be good, Hananiah. It is right that you stay.

Hananiah: Other than in this matter, I have never doubted the wisdom of you elders. Nevertheless, I have learned by experience that I do well when I lay my thoughts aside and take yours in. I have been healed by doing that. So, I am content to do as you ask. I will stay and give ear to whatever it is you think I need to hear.

Micah: I am glad you have chosen to stay, Hananiah. We are not finished here, and I believe that we will profit by what we will hear.

Nathan: It is good for you to do this, Hananiah, and you, Benjamin.

Jacobus: Very well, then. Where should we begin?

Silas: I have been watching Benjamin and Maschil, Jacobus, and I think they have deferred often to their elders when they had something to say. Why not let them speak, if they want to?

Council members: *Yes. I agree. Etc.*

Benjamin: You are perceptive, sir. I have had things to say, and questions.

Maschil: I'm so confused that I have forgotten what my questions were. But I think the thing that has made this so difficult for me is that I have always equated faith in God's law with faith in God. But what Paul and the rest of you are saying is driving a sharp wedge between those two things. And it is a painful divide.

Jacobus: I understand completely, Maschil. But as Daniel wisely said, "Fellowship is worth the price of patience," and we will stay as long as it takes to resolve your questions so that we may attain to fellowship.

Council members: *Yes. I agree. Etc.*

Maschil: I just don't see why this new covenant would do away with the law, or turn it into a spiritual law, or however I should say it. Why do you say that the two covenants are mutually exclusive?

Paul: Excellent question, Maschil, and this is the answer. The covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai was altogether, as I say it, "in the flesh". Under the law, the flesh got everything. The feasts of God fed the flesh; the holy garments adorned the flesh; the Sabbaths gave rest to the flesh; even the wars of that covenant were wars against men in the flesh. But in this covenant, our spirits get everything. Our spirits feast on manna from heaven; our sacrifices are our thanksgivings to God, rising from pure lips and a sanctified heart; our garments are the garments of praise and righteousness; our Sabbath is rest from the dominion of sin; and our warfare is only against the invisible powers of this age, not against flesh and blood. The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty from dependence on the arm of flesh, liberty from the law of carnal commandments, liberty from sin, and liberty from death itself.

John: That is beautiful, Paul. This will help you Maschil, and Benjamin. The night Jesus was arrested, he told us he had overcome the world.³⁰⁸ I did not understand him then, because I knew he rarely crossed the border of our country. But the Spirit has since taught me that he had, indeed, overcome the world because all that is in the world is covetousness, lust, and pride, and when he conquered those things in himself, he had conquered the whole world.

³⁰⁸ Jn. 16:33.

Barnabas: And consider this. Jesus did not suffer and die for something we already had or could already do. If we already had it or could do it, he could have stayed in heaven and spared himself much suffering. No, Jesus suffered and died to make a new way that was *impossible* for man before he came, and that new and living way is what God always had in mind, from the foundation of the world. Men without the life of God can perform the law's rites; they have been doing it for over a thousand years. But in this covenant, what God requires, requires God.

Andrew: We asked Jesus one time who could be saved, and he said, "With men, it is impossible."³⁰⁹ We didn't know what he meant then.

Philip: It frightened me.

Cleopas: It frightened all of us.

Andrew: But now we understand. If any man does not have the Spirit, he can only worship "in the flesh", as Paul says. Such a man cannot worship God acceptably, even if he prays and praises Him all day long. That is what Jesus was telling the Samaritan woman. Worship from an unsanctified spirit is unsanctified worship, and God will not accept it. That is why Jesus said we must be born again, in a new way.

Benjamin: That really makes sense to me.

Micah: Yes.

Maschil: But the law also requires God, doesn't it? We could not have conceived of such a just and holy law. I apologize if I sound argumentative again, but I had this question.

Daniel: A good question is as much from God as a good answer, Maschil, and just as refreshing.

Benjamin: Daniel, sir, could you help us understand this?

Daniel: I will try.

Benjamin: I want to understand it, if it is really the truth.

Daniel: I know you do. Then, let me ask you, son, what is it about the truth that makes it the truth? What is it that is true about the truth, and why does it even matter? Have either of you young men ever considered that?

Benjamin: No, sir.

Maschil: I never had such a thought.

Daniel: You should, Maschil. The roots of any man's faith are deep and wisdom digs into them and discovers the source of their strength. The roots of our faith reach into the very heart of God, and you are being invited by the Spirit to come into that holy place and search them out. Wisdom asks why God loves the truth so much that He will damn every soul that denies the truth or defies it. Do you young men know why the truth matters that much to God? (*pauses*)

Benjamin and Maschil: No, sir.

Council members: *Quiet.*

Daniel: Then I will tell you why. The truth matters that much because God's Son *is* the Truth, and God dearly loves His Son. Jesus, then, is what makes the truth the truth; he defines it, for there is no truth without him, and there is no truth apart from him. That is why whoever refuses Jesus does damage to his own soul. All who hate him love death,³¹⁰ and they will have it.

Jesus told us when he was among us that he was the Truth,³¹¹ but we did not understand him. However, after the Spirit of God came to us, we learned that it is the Son of God that makes the truth, the truth, because he himself is the Truth of God.

Before the Son was revealed, God gave men hints about His Son until the appointed time, when He would reveal him, and those holy hints were the only truth we had. Nevertheless, God loved His Son so

³⁰⁹ Mk. 10:27; Lk. 17:1.

³¹⁰ Prov. 8:36.

³¹¹ Jn. 14:6.

much that He demanded that we reverence the hints. He did not intend for us to reverence the hints forever, for He knew the time would come when His Son would shine upon us and the way would be revealed. The law and the prophets were hints about the Son, though neither Moses nor the prophets knew that is what they were. Creation itself was a hint about the Son because God created all things through him, but no one in creation understood this because no one in creation knew the Son even existed before God sent him to us.

No lies were hints about the Son, and every lie was a lie against him; therefore, God gave us a law that forbade lying. Nothing proud was a hint, no murder, no wicked thought or desire, no false witness, and no trouble maker.³¹² Whatever was not a God-given hint about His Son was not the truth, and God despised it, and He destroyed those in Israel who did not fear Him but lived contrary to the hints He had given us.

Benjamin: But why, if the hints were not God's Son, did He destroy even those who walked contrary to *them*?

Daniel: Excellent, son! A question is wisdom's spade.

With the law, God painted for us a perfect picture of His Son, to prepare us to recognize him when he came, and God was indignant, for our sakes, when any man dared tamper with the picture He had painted. He struck Nadab and Abihu dead for our sakes when they offered strange fire at His tabernacle, and He cursed King Uzziah with leprosy for our sakes when he defied God's priesthood and entered into the temple to offer incense himself. Indeed, He destroyed this nation and carried them into captivity for our sakes when they refused to walk according to His hints as He had commanded, and refused to listen to His prophets and their calls to heed the hints. Refusing the hints that God gave of His beloved, but as yet hidden Son is what made transgression of the law sin; whatever was contrary to the hints God gave was rebellion against His Son because those hints were about the Son, though men knew nothing of him.

Now, men and brothers, in this new covenant, though you have heard that God hates the wicked who walk contrary to Moses' law, I say to you that God considers them wicked who walk contrary to His Son, and hates them! God now hates *whatever is not* His Son instead of hating whatever is not a hint about him. For the Son has come to us as that Spirit which God sent from heaven,³¹³ and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty from all hints, for Truth has come! Everything that is acceptable to God has always been only in His Son; the hints God gave Israel were holy only because they spoke of the Son.

The gospel is not something *about* the Son, as all the hints were. The gospel of God is in power, not talk, for the gospel is the Son himself, and whatever is not in the Son is not the gospel. Every wise man counts all things as dung, even what was once holy, for the treasure and great honor of knowing the Son of God! The Son means everything to God and everything to us! *Jesus* is our "law and prophets"; Jesus is our life; he is our circumcision and baptism, and our one great hope. He is our Passover, and we are his first-fruits to God. The Son is our "song in the night"³¹⁴ which God has given us, and it is sin to sing any other song in God's Assembly. The hints God once gave us were other songs, for they were songs *about* him, but now, he himself sings his song through the Spirit among the brothers! As he begged the Father through David before he was revealed: "Let me declare your name to my brothers! In the midst of the congregation, let me praise you!" And now, God has allowed him to sing, and every other song in the Assembly is a lie! Every man is a liar if the Spirit is not confessing the Son through him when he sings in the Assembly. As the scripture said, "I have believed; therefore, I have spoken!"³¹⁵ We

³¹² cp. Prov. 6:16–19.

³¹³ Jn. 14:23.

³¹⁴ Job 35:10; Ps. 77:6.

³¹⁵

believe! Therefore, we speak! The Son was once the Father's best-kept secret, and now, the Son is His greatest revelation!

Council members: Comments.

Daniel: Under the law, whatever was not *about* the Son was sin; now, sin is whatever is not the Son himself! No sin and darkness is in the Son, and outside the Son is nothing but sin and darkness, and God has sworn to destroy it all.

Council members: Comments.

Daniel: Now, brothers, Jesus the man is in heaven, sitting at the Father's right hand. Nothing is holy any longer on this earth except the holy Spirit that God sent. Whatever is not in the Spirit is not of God, including living according to the ancient hints that God gave; to live that way now is rebellion against the Son; it is to deny him. The revelation of the Son has made even those glorious hints about him vain, for *they* are not *him*. How much better it is, brothers, to have the Son dwelling in our hearts than for us to still be dwelling in the shadows of his light, waiting for him to come – shadows that we never even understood were shadows until he came and told us!

Council members: Comments.

Daniel: Abraham worshipped God as was right in his own eyes, for there was no law to guide him. God had not yet given that hint. The law was added later to deal with sin, to warn men of the Judgment to come and to foreshadow the hidden, righteous Judge into whose hands God had given all judgment.³¹⁶ Now, by the Spirit, we again are free to worship as we will, with this one great difference: the Son has given us an anointing to know the will of God, so that what is good in God's eyes may also be what is good in ours.

Benjamin: That is a frightening liberty, sir, to be free to do as we will.

Daniel: Yes, but good hearts, like Abraham, lived according to the hints God gave, before He gave them. Joseph, too, had no law from God that said, "Do not commit adultery." That young man could have committed adultery with Potiphar's wicked wife and, as many no doubt did, tried to hide his guilt and defend his sin by saying, "God has not commanded us not to commit adultery." But even when the law came, what did we find? Under the law, sinners kept sinning, but this time, hid their sin behind *obedience* to the law. They hid their sin in the holy shadow of God's Son! So, before the Son was revealed, sin always found a hiding place because man himself was not free from sin, no matter how holy God's hints were.

But now, brothers, sin has no more hiding place, for the Son has made whatever is of God – His power, and goodness, and Truth – freely available in the Spirit. Therefore, sin has no more excuse, and no more hiding place. There is nothing more frightening to ungodly souls than liberty without excuse, and Jesus has brought in perfect liberty and done away with all excuse for sin. That is why Jesus was hated in this world, and those who are like him will be likewise hated. As Jesus said, "If men have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household?"³¹⁷

Do you young men understand me?

Benjamin: I think so, yes.

Maschil: Yes sir, we do.

Barnabas: Amen, Daniel. So, the law was holy, Maschil, but it was still just a carnal thing, and it will pass away with all else that is carnal.

Maschil: Yes, I remember hearing Paul say that, earlier. I suppose that we need truths to be repeated when they are so new to us.

Barnabas: We all understand that.

³¹⁶ Jn. 5:22.

³¹⁷ Mt. 10:25.

John: One thing in particular that Jesus said reveals the difference between the covenants as well as anything I know. In the old covenant, as you know, God commanded Israel to be holy “*because I am holy*”,³¹⁸ but Jesus did not say that. He commanded us instead to be holy *as God is holy*.³¹⁹ Nothing in the law could make us holy *as God is holy* because it was a dead thing, all of it. But the Spirit of God makes us holy *the way God is holy*, for, as was said earlier, it makes us partakers of God’s holy nature.

Maschil: That is an astonishing thought.

John: Yes it is. But as He is, so are we now, in this world.

Maschil: [*quietly*] Praise God.

Benjamin: But why did God wait so long to send His Son if what He wanted the whole time was only what is spiritual? Four thousand years is a long time.

Paul: God’s life, and His Son who was filled with it, of course, is so foreign to fallen man that God had to prepare men for His Son’s coming. Can you see that? We were so sinful and rebellious that it took God four thousand years to make things ready.

Benjamin: Yes.

Paul: It was only because of the influence of the law and the prophets on Israel, Benjamin, that Jesus was able to survive on earth as long as he did, once he started preaching. Any other nation on earth would have killed him much sooner. As bad as we Jews may have been, this nation was the safest place on earth for God to send His sinless Son because our spirits had been tempered by the law.

Micah: Hananiah, I think our students ask better questions than we do.

Hananiah: Agreed.

Nahum: Brothers, do you understand what these men have told you?

Micah: I think I have always understood, at least to some degree.

Barnabas: Do you understand that our gospel for the Gentiles does not condemn your gospel for the Jews, as long as it is preached to the Jews?

Micah: Yes, you and Paul have made that very clear.

Hananiah: Yes, very clear.

John: Brothers, I can’t help but think about Uzziel, how he and the others left. It brought back to me the day Jesus told some Pharisees whom you know, Micah, that if they were children of Abraham, they would behave the way Abraham behaved . . .³²⁰

Philip: . . . and that if God was their Father, they would love him. Jesus told them that.³²¹

John: That’s right.

Micah: I remember that day, John, and my friends and I discussed it later.

John: What did your friends say?

Micah: Did you remember that Uzziel and Levi were also there?

John: No, I had forgotten.

Micah: Yes. Well, we had a long discussion, and we three decided that, yes, Abraham would have loved Jesus, and so do those who are like Abraham. The others criticized us for believing that. But we just did.

Bartholomew: The grace of God was with you.

Micah: God help Uzziel and Levi, and Hushai, too. We have had some wonderful times together.

Council members: *Yes, we have. God, help them! Etc.*

Benjamin: Brothers, may I ask another question?

Council members: *Please do. Of course. Etc.*

³¹⁸ Lev. 11:44; 19:2.

³¹⁹ Mt. 5:48.

³²⁰ Jn. 8:39.

³²¹ Jn. 8:42.

Benjamin: Just to be sure, brother Paul. You say that the uncircumcised who believe are children of Abraham, who was circumcised, while the circumcised who do not believe are not Abraham's children?

Paul: Yes, because they are uncircumcised in heart. A man is no longer a Jew in God's eyes because of anything outward; nor is the circumcision of God outward in the flesh. But one becomes a Jew in God's eyes by receiving Jesus' circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit. Men will not praise you for receiving that truth, but God will.

Council members: *Comments.*

The law of God after Jesus returns

Hananiah: I would ask one more question. It is one to which I have not yet heard a satisfactory explanation. God said of Messiah, "He will not fail, nor be discouraged, until he has established justice on the earth, and the isles will wait for his law."³²² Now, isn't the law that the Gentiles will wait for the same law that Messiah kept while he was here?

Benjamin: Yes, and to say that such will be the case only after Jesus returns does not satisfy me, either, for some reason. Why teach the Gentiles to serve God apart from the law now if Jesus will command them to serve God under the law when he returns?

Nathan: Perhaps, brothers, since we agree that Jesus will send forth the law from Jerusalem when he returns, it would be good for believing Gentiles to learn to keep the law now, *before* the Lord returns. That way, when Jesus arrives, believing Gentiles will already have learned to serve God the way Jesus will command them to.

Barnabas: That is not the solution, Nathan.

Nathan: Oh.

Barnabas: As we have said, the law of this covenant is an internal standard set by God in the hearts of his children. It is the nature of God, and Jesus will govern us forever by it, who have partaken of that nature. We are submitting to that law when we walk in the Spirit; we are being governed by it every time that gentle voice speaks in our hearts, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."³²³ That is how the Son of God has always lived with the Father, and there has never been a shadow of division between them. And if we walk in the Spirit together, there will never be a division between us, either.

Hananiah: I can see that, but my question concerned the time after Jesus returns.

Barnabas: After Jesus returns, the nations of the earth will not have the Spirit. They will not know God's will by nature, and so, Jesus will have to issue them commands that they can understand and obey without having the Spirit.

Micah: So, Jesus will continue to communicate God's will for us through the Spirit after he comes, but he will communicate God's will to the nations by giving them commandments that they can comprehend without having the Spirit?

Barnabas: Yes, just as the prophets said. The nations will come to Jerusalem to honor Messiah, and he will give them his law, and they will be judged by the law he gives them.

Hananiah: And the laws that Jesus gives the nations at that time will be the laws as Moses wrote them?

Barnabas: I would assume so, for what law could be more perfect than that one?

Paul: Still, we will have to wait and see. He will do as he will.

Barnabas: Yes, we cannot speak with perfect certainty about things not yet known.

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³²² Isa. 42:4.

³²³ Isa. 30:21.

This is only a suggested version of the Acts 15 Council in Jerusalem, but I am confident that it reflects at least some of the thoughts and passions involved. The matter of Gentiles and the law was of supreme importance to the body of Christ, and yet, it was one for which there could be no resolution based solely on the scriptures, since men on both sides could make effective arguments from them. Which side the listeners took depended entirely on their hearts. Where there was pride in being a Jew, or fear of not being one, Paul's gospel would find no place.

At the very end of the meeting, after all arguments had been made, Peter arose, and when all voices were still, he spoke. Peter quoted no prophet and brought up no point of law. Nor did he refer to anything Jesus said or did while he was on earth. Peter only testified again of what God did through him at Cornelius' house, and his simple, sincere testimony left everyone with nothing else to say:

Peter: Men and brothers, you know that a good while ago, God made choice among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles were to hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore them witness, giving them the holy Spirit just as He gave it to us, and He made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now then, why would you tempt God by placing a yoke on the neck of the Lord's uncircumcised disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? No! We believe we will be saved the same way they will be – through the grace of the Lord Jesus.³²⁴

Micah: I have nothing to add, brothers. It is the work of God.

Hananiah: Yes, and I thank you all. Barnabas, I hope to have more time with you and Paul, and the brothers who traveled here with you, before you return to Antioch.

Paul: As God wills, yes.

Barnabas: That would be a pleasure for us. Benjamin and Maschil, have your questions been answered?

Benjamin: I think so, yes. My spirit is not troubled as before.

Maschil: Yes, sir. I believe they have been, though I feel there is much yet to be learned.

Silas: That is true for us all, Maschil. And if God grants us the humility to take in the wisdom He gives, we will behold together the glory of His Son.

Daniel: Fellowship in the light of Jesus is the sweetest shadow cast by God's love. It is a great blessing, and greatly to be desired.

Counsel members: *Comments.*

Nahum: So now, men and brothers, we must teach these things to the Assemblies in Judah. And we must teach them soon, for I fear that if we do not, much trouble lies ahead for the saints of God.

Paul: We should pray, brothers, for the Assemblies of God everywhere.

Micah: ... and for our friends. They have much zeal, but without understanding the truth, they will do much harm, and subvert the faith of many.

Council members: *Amen. God help us all. Etc.*

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After that, the Council listened in silence as Paul and Barnabas told of the miracles and wonders God had worked among the Gentiles by their hand.³²⁵ Paul's wisdom and vision of the unity which God purposed in Christ, the unity which God creates through the Spirit, is given no better expression than that found in Ephesians 4:4–6. Let us imagine, then, that Paul shared the wisdom contained in those verses with the Jerusalem Council that day:

Paul: Men and brothers, hear my final word before we ask leave of you to return to Antioch to bring them the report of this meeting, for they are most anxious to hear it.

³²⁴ Acts 15:7–11.

³²⁵ Acts 15:12.

David prophesied that Messiah would prepare a feast and send forth his servants to proclaim, “Whoever is unwise, let him turn in here. Come and eat of my bread, and drink of the wine I have mixed. Forsake the foolish, and live! And walk in the way of understanding!”³²⁶ To this feast, I invite you all today, as I invite all men everywhere.

By the Spirit, David also said the household of God would be built upon seven pillars.³²⁷ He said The first of the seven pillars of the house of God is the one GOD who is above all. The second pillar is the LORD of heaven and earth, Jesus. The third pillar is the SPIRIT by which we were all baptized, Jew and Gentile alike, into the family of God. That BAPTISM is the fourth pillar, and that family is the fifth pillar, the BODY of believers. Everyone in that body shares the HOPE of eternal life, the sixth pillar. And the right understanding of these six pillars is the seventh: the FAITH that will endure forever, the only gospel that is not divided against itself – my gospel for the Gentiles! This is the feast God has prepared for us, and upon this foundation alone is the household of faith securely built up. This is the new and living way created by God through Jesus, and only in this way will God’s children ever be made one in the unifying bond of God’s peace.

In the gospel for the Jews, however, the gospel which applies to every one of us here today, being, as we are, of the stock of Israel, there are two of all these things, and by such a gospel, the saints can never attain to the seamless unity for which Jesus prayed the night before he died.³²⁸ The gospel for the circumcision which you men must preach in Israel recognizes two bodies as being of God: the Israel descended from Abraham’s flesh, and the Israel of God who are born of the Spirit out of every nation. Every one of us in this Council today belongs to both of these bodies, but only one of them will endure forever. The gospel for the circumcision also recognizes two baptisms: the baptism of the flesh that God sent John to preach to Israel, and the baptism of the Spirit that Jesus ministers from heaven to men everywhere who believe. Only one baptism will endure; the other will soon pass away. Also in the gospel of the Jews are two Lords: one on earth, that is, the high priest of Israel, and one in heaven, our High Priest who sits at the Father’s right hand. We Jews acknowledge the authority of both, and submit to both for the time being, but only one Lord will continue forever. The other priesthood will soon pass away. In the gospel for the circumcision, there are also two hopes: The first is the hope which you who walked with Jesus thought he had come to give us, namely, an earthly kingdom. The second hope is the hope of eternal life, for which he actually came. In the Jews’ gospel, two spirits lead men, for the spirit of man can worship using rites of the law, but in God’s kingdom, acceptable worship is worship in His Spirit, not ours. In the Jews’ gospel are also two faiths: faith based on the law, and faith based on the power of God. And finally, brothers – hear me well! – for any who continue in Peter’s gospel after God finishes with it, there will soon be two Gods! For just as those who continued to worship in high places after God chose Jerusalem were actually worshipping demons and not God, so when God finishes with the law, those who continue to worship in it will also be worshipping demons and not God.

That is what Messiah taught me. Beware that you listen for his voice and that you do not continue in the thing God leaves behind, when that day comes!

Now, my dear brothers, we bid you farewell, and we commend you to God until He grants that we return to be among you again.

Jacobus: We look forward to that time, brother Paul. And Barnabas, we look forward to your return to this, your adopted home. We bid godspeed to you and the elders from Antioch, and you, brother Titus. And we send our love to the brothers in Antioch. But first, stay and let us conclude our business.

Men and brothers, Simon Peter described how God first intervened to take from the Gentiles a people for His name. And to this, the words of the prophets agree, for God promised that He would

³²⁶ Prov. 9:2–6.

³²⁷ Prov. 9:1.

³²⁸ Jn. 17:11, 22.

raise up His Son Jesus from the dead and restore him to his former glory³²⁹ “so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, says the LORD who is doing all these things.”³³⁰ Therefore, my judgment is that we not trouble those from the Gentiles who turn to God, but that we write to them to keep away from the pollutions of idols, and from immorality, and from what is strangled, and from blood, for the sake of the conscience of the Jews who live about them. For from early times, Moses has had in every city those who preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.³³¹

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Jacobus’ judgment pleased the apostles and elders, and the whole Council decided to send Paul and Barnabas, along with two other trusted men, back to Antioch with a letter confirming the Council’s judgment. Their letter to Antioch contained this message:

Scribe: “The apostles and elders, and the brothers, to the Antiochan, Syrian, and Cilician brothers who are of the Gentiles. Greetings. Inasmuch as we have heard that certain men among us, to whom we gave no charge, went out from here and troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying you must be circumcised and keep the law, it seemed good to us, being of one mind, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of Messiah Jesus. So, we have sent Judas and Silas, and they will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the holy Spirit, and to us, to put upon you no greater burden, except for these necessary things: abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood and what is strangled, and from immorality. Keeping yourselves from these things, you will do well. Farewell.”³³²

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That letter put the controversy to rest – *for that day*.

³²⁹ Amos 9:11.

³³⁰ The origin of this quote is unknown. Perhaps it is a combination of several verses from the prophets.

³³¹ Acts 15:13–21.

³³² Acts 15:23–29.