

THAT WAS THEN, THIS IS NOW
Christianity In The Making: From Jerusalem To The South Bay
Acts 15

For discussion with your small group, an accountability partner, your spouse, or for your own reflection.

1. Looking back at this week's teaching on the *Great Debate* in Acts 15, was there anything that particularly caught your attention, challenged or confused you?
2. What were some of your family rituals growing up that you inherited and are repeating in your family?
3. Who contributed to your spiritual beginnings? How so?
4. When did the message of God's grace become real for you? What impact is it having on your life right now?
5. What experience have you had worshipping where the style was quite different from what you are used to? (Catholic, Pentecostal, Traditional Protestant, Contemporary, African-American, International)
6. What difference would it make if you had to earn your way to God by keeping the Jewish laws? Conversely, if you were a self-made person who lives to see everyone pay their own way or earn their fair share, how does the gospel of unmerited favor strike you?
7. Bill said that the Old Testament reveals God's character, heart, power and plan. Which one of these do you tend to tune into more when thinking about God or reading the Bible?
8. In the church circles you grew up in, what were some of the extra-biblical rules imposed on you, or what cultural manners and morals were expected of you?
9. What roles do theology, experience, and practical considerations play in the decision making of the early church? Any issues you can think of that could be resolved by keeping these three realities in mind?
10. Is there some area in your faith where you feel like Peter where you go back and forth in your mind because you are not sure what is right? How could Acts 15:11 relate to this concern?
11. From the debate, the resulting letter, and the way in which it was delivered, what do you learn about the way to solve disagreements either like or unlike the way the issue was handled in Acts 15.
12. Was there an experience that showed you that keeping rules was not the way to obtain God's mercy?
13. Where in your life is one person's freedom another's stumbling block: To drink or not to drink? To wear certain styles of clothes? To listen to certain music or not? To pursue a certain standard of living? To be involved in certain political issues?
14. On issues where you have been on the "weak" side, how did you feel toward those who ignored your concerns?
15. Do you think it is the person who has been a Christian the longest who is the "weaker" brother/sister or is it the one who is a new Christian?
16. Share some of your insights from your own personal study.
17. How can the members of your small group, or your accountability partner, or spouse pray for you this week?

Digging deeper in personal study and reflection.

Having a clear understanding of the Old Testament is important in gaining a full picture of who God is and His plan for us. King David, the Apostle Paul and Jesus can each give us a healthy perspective of the Old Testament and its laws.

Read the following passages and jot down notes on each man's perspective:

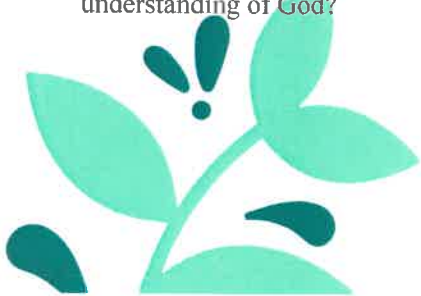
David: Psalm 1:1-3, Psalm 19:7-11

Paul: Romans 3:19-24, Romans 7:7

Jesus: Matthew 22:34-40

In what ways can these passages help you understand the Old Testament and its influence on your relationship with God?

One well-known place in Scripture where we see God's laws are the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-17. Read through these verses. Pick out a few commands and write down how God's character, heart, power or plan is revealed in each command? What catches your attention about who God is and how he relates to you? How does this affect your understanding of God?



Acts 15:1 says some Jewish Christians were teaching you had to be circumcised to be saved. What are some other things thing might say are necessary for the Gentiles to do?

Check out: Acts 15:5, Mark 2:16, Mark 2:18, Mark 2:24, Mark 7:1-5

If you were a Gentile hearing that these regulations are required, how would you feel about your faith? As a strict Jew, why would these be important to you?

What is the main issue as Paul sees it?

Acts 15:2

Galatians 2:21

Galatians 3:5

Galatians 3:10-14

How would you describe Peter's struggle with this issue?

Acts 15:7-11

Acts 10:28

Acts 10:34-35

Galatians 2:11-13

How does Paul's teaching in Galatians 2:15-16 show its influence on Peter?

Knowing Paul's Pharisaic background (Acts 26:5) and Peter's desire to keep the law (Acts 10:14) how would their testimony carry the day?

What was James position on this matter? What led him to change his mind?

Acts 15:13-21,

Galatians 1:19

What was the significance of the Council's decision in light of Acts 15:8?

Why were the conditions in Acts 15:20 added?

Paul dealt with a similar controversy in 1 Corinthians 8. What was the issue and how was it addressed?

How would things be different if those in Acts 15:5 won out?

How does Paul's appeal in Galatians 3:1-5 validate what he argued in Galatians 2:15-16?

How does each Old Testament quote in Galatians 3:10-13 expose the problem of trying to be right with God by trusting in one's ability to keep the Law? If you actually have read through these questions, would you email Bill this week. His Email address is in the bulletin. He's trying to discern if this is a valuable tool or a waste of time and paper.

How does Jesus solve the problem for us? Galatians 3:13-14

We may be tempted to abuse our freedom when we hear we no longer need to follow the Old Testament laws. How do the following verses help us not fall into this trap and instead live as God calls us to live?

Galatians 5:13-15

1 Peter 2:13-17

Romans 6:22-23

Which of these is most helpful for you when it comes to living out God's grace and freedom?

Looking back at this week's teaching and your personal study what was most helpful in applying the content of the Old Testament to your life?