



Principles for Interpreting Scripture

**Interpreting Old Testament
Narrative and Law**

April 23

Genre: Old Testament Narrative

Nearly *half* of the Old Testament is classified as narrative

Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Jonah, Haggai

Utilizes *sequential time action to develop a plot, setting, and characters*

Meaning is derived *primarily* from the actions of the characters

OT Narrative a *theological history*

Principles for Interpreting Old Testament Narrative

1) Understand the Meta-Narrative

- Genesis 1-3 (Creation, Fall, Promise to Crush Serpent's Head)
- Genesis 12:1-7 (Promises to Abraham)
- Genesis 15:1-20 (Personal, unilateral Covenant w/ Abraham)
- Exodus 19:1-9 (Corporate, bilateral Covenant w/ Israel)
 - Deuteronomy 28 (Blessings and Curses of Sinaitic Covenant)
- 2 Sam. 7:12-13 (Personal, unilateral Covenant w/ David)

Principles for Interpreting Old Testament Narrative

2) *Understand the Micro-Narrative*

- Plot (What? How?)
- Setting (When? Where?)
 - Promised Land is a key location
- Characters (Who?)
 - Characters are *complex*; be leery of “good guys” and “bad guys”
 - God is *THE* central character of Old Testament
- Viewpoint of Narrator
 - Meaning is often implicit but narrator will occasionally communicate explicitly
- Compassion/Contrast
- Irony
- Description vs. Prescription

Principles for Interpreting Old Testament Narrative

3) Ask Genre-Specific Questions in “Their Town”

- Where does this passage fall in overarching meta-narrative?
- What covenants were operative at this time in Israel’s history and how does this story relate to those covenants?
- Who? What? When? Where? How?
 - Remember to include God in this assessment; He is *THE* main character of Bible
- What is the narrator *showing us* about how we should live or not live in relation to God and one another?
- What is prescribed and what is simply being described?

Principles for Interpreting Old Testament Narrative

4) Make sure you deal with Old and New Covenant differences

Does Jesus and/or the conditions of the New Covenant transform, maintain, extend, or annul any covenant-specific aspects of the passage at hand?

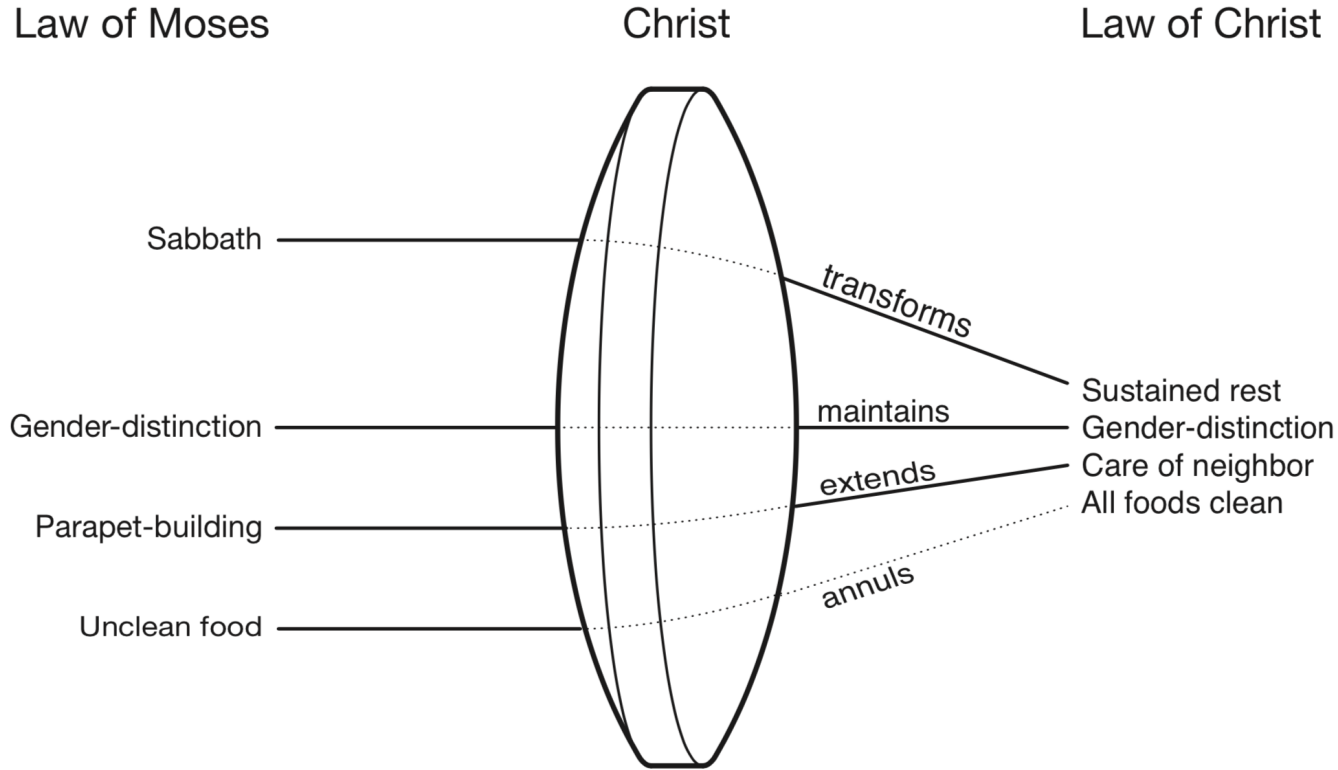
Principles for Interpreting Old Testament Law

The Old Testament contains over six hundred legal commands/prohibitions
God gave to the nation of Israel

Most of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, half of Exodus, portion of Numbers

Moral, civil, and ceremonial laws?

Use the “Lens of Christ”



Keep the “Why” of the Law in Mind

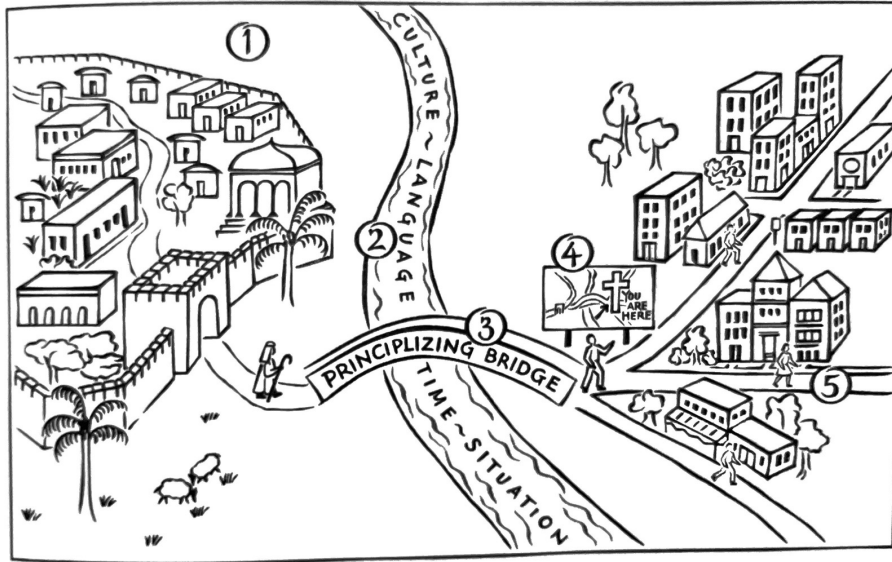
“you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Ex. 19:6)

“For I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.” (Lev. 11:45)

The Interpretive Journey

Step 1: Grasping the text in “their town”

What did the text mean to the biblical audience?



- What is the genre of the passage?
- What are some guiding principles for this genre?
- Where does this passage fit within the large, overarching story of the Bible?

-Read and observe the text carefully

-Synthesize the original meaning of the passage in one or two sentences

Literary Context

On the author, audience, situation, and themes of Leviticus...“God through Moses addressed a neonatal nation of freshly liberated slaves in the Sinai Desert sometime during the latter half of the second millennium b.c. In this light, the initial purpose of the book was to establish and maintain enduring patterns of divine-human and human-human interaction that are appropriate and necessary for a holy tribal community centered in the divine Presence...it is about God’s call to a life of holiness in relation to himself and other members of the community of faith.”

-Roy Gane

¹ And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them, ² “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, These are the living things that you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth. ³ Whatever parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat. ⁴ Nevertheless, among those that chew the cud or part the hoof, you shall not eat these: The camel, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. ⁵ And the rock badger, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. ⁶ And the hare, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. ⁷ And the pig, because it parts the hoof and is cloven-footed but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. ⁸ You shall not eat any of their flesh, and you shall not touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you.

Historical-Cultural Context

On the reason for the prohibition of specific animals...“It is disturbing to interpreters that Leviticus 11 does not provide an explicit rationale for the division of animals into clean and unclean categories. For the Israelites, this was not an issue because the main point was to do what the Lord said, whether or not he offered an explanation... Aside from showing that the Lord is concerned with details of everyday human life, such as diet, Leviticus 11 reminds us that he does not always provide detailed explanations for his commands... ”

-Roy Gane

Literary Context

On the contents of Leviticus 11...“Leviticus 11 places species belonging to the domains of land, sea, and air in the three categories (“pure,” “impure,” and “abomination”) by criteria and/or list as follows: land animals (vv. 2–8)...sea creatures (vv. 9–12)...birds (vv. 13–19)...winged insects (vv. 20–23)...*impure* carcasses that convey uncleanness by touch (vv. 24–40)...land swarmers.”

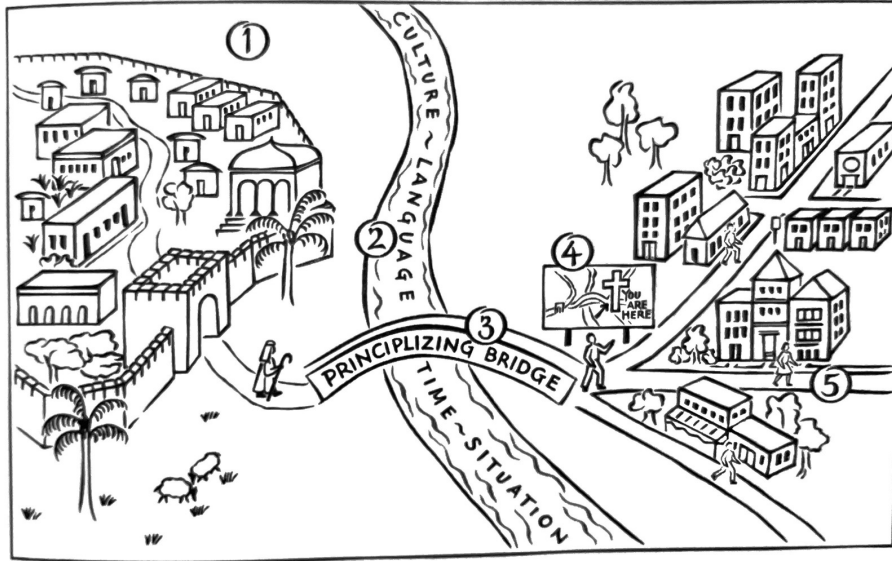
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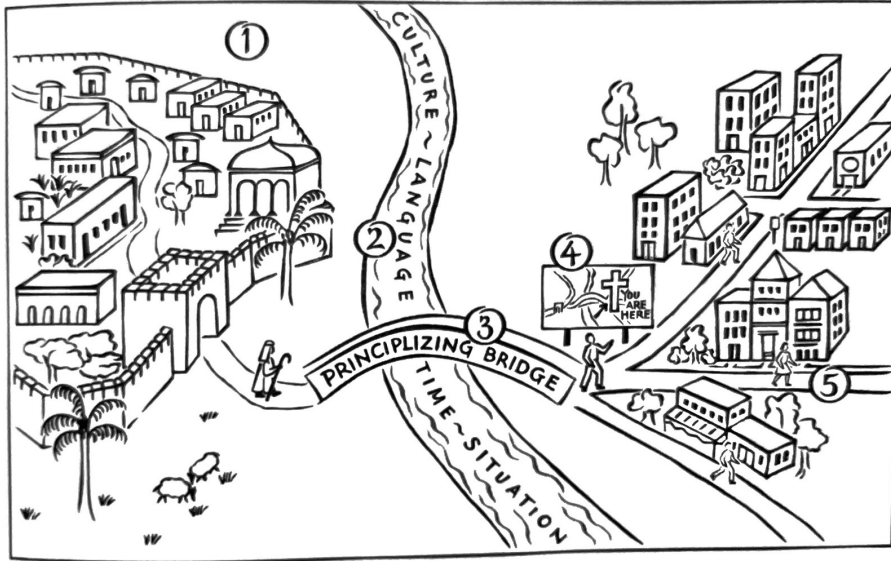
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The Israelites could eat any land animal that both chewed cud and had a divided hoof, but they disobeyed God and became ceremonially unclean if they ate an animal that did not fit these criteria, or if they even touched the carcass of such an animal. These dietary restrictions preserved Israel's covenant faithfulness and made them a holy reflection of their holy God to the surrounding nations.

The Interpretive Journey

Step 2: Measuring the width of the “river of differences”

What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?

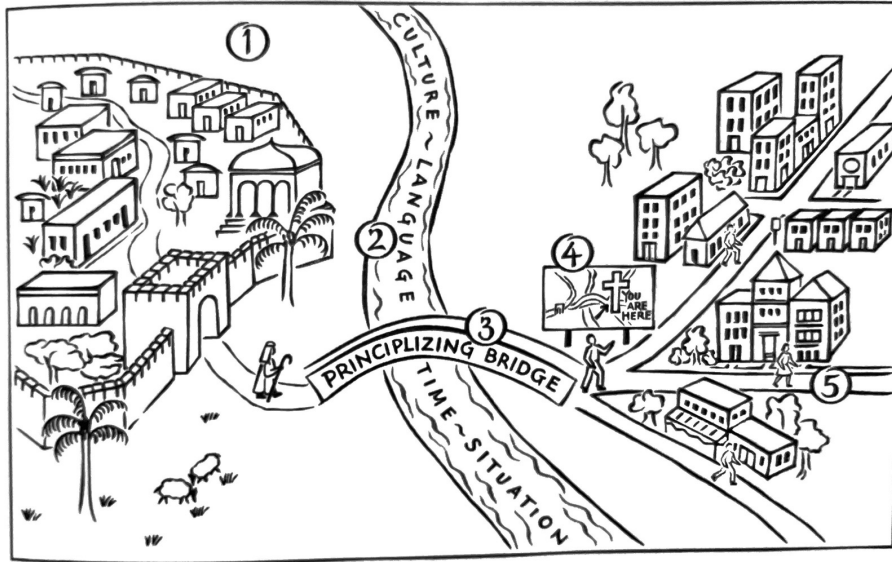


- Culture, language, situation, time, covenant?
- What are the similarities between the biblical audience and us?

The Interpretive Journey

Step 3: Crossing the “principlizing bridge”

What is the theological principle in this text?



- What is the theological principle in this text?
 - It should be reflected in the text
 - It should be timeless and not tied to a specific situation
 - It should not be culturally bound
 - It should correspond to the teaching of the rest of Scripture
 - It should be relevant to both the biblical and the contemporary audience
- This principle becomes the “principlizing bridge” for crossing river of differences

God is holy and he wants his people to be holy.

In the OT holiness involves separating righteousness from sinfulness, clean from unclean.

In the OT Law God instructs the Israelites that all aspects of life must be lived in terms of separation (i.e., clean and unclean) so that they will always be conscious of God's holy presence. This even includes what they eat.

OT context specific (Lev. 11). Holiness involves avoiding unclean food. Very specific: Don't eat pork.

In the NT holiness involves separating righteousness from sinfulness, clean from unclean.

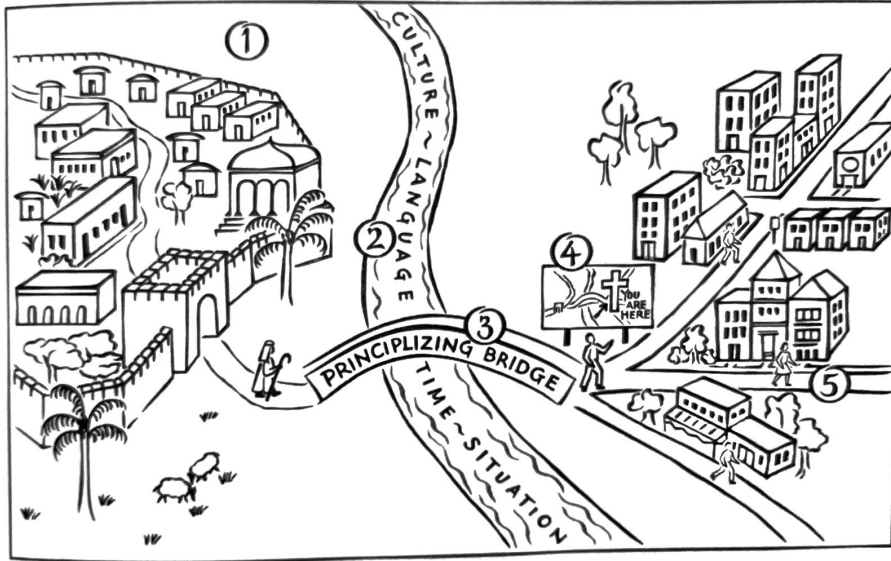
In the NT Jesus explains that clean and unclean is based on not what one eats, but what one does and says (Matt. 15:1–20).

NT context specific (1 Pet. 1:13–22). Holiness involves one's manner of living. Very specific: Be self-controlled; be obedient to the truth; love one another.

The Interpretive Journey

Step 4: Consulting the “biblical map”

How does our theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible?

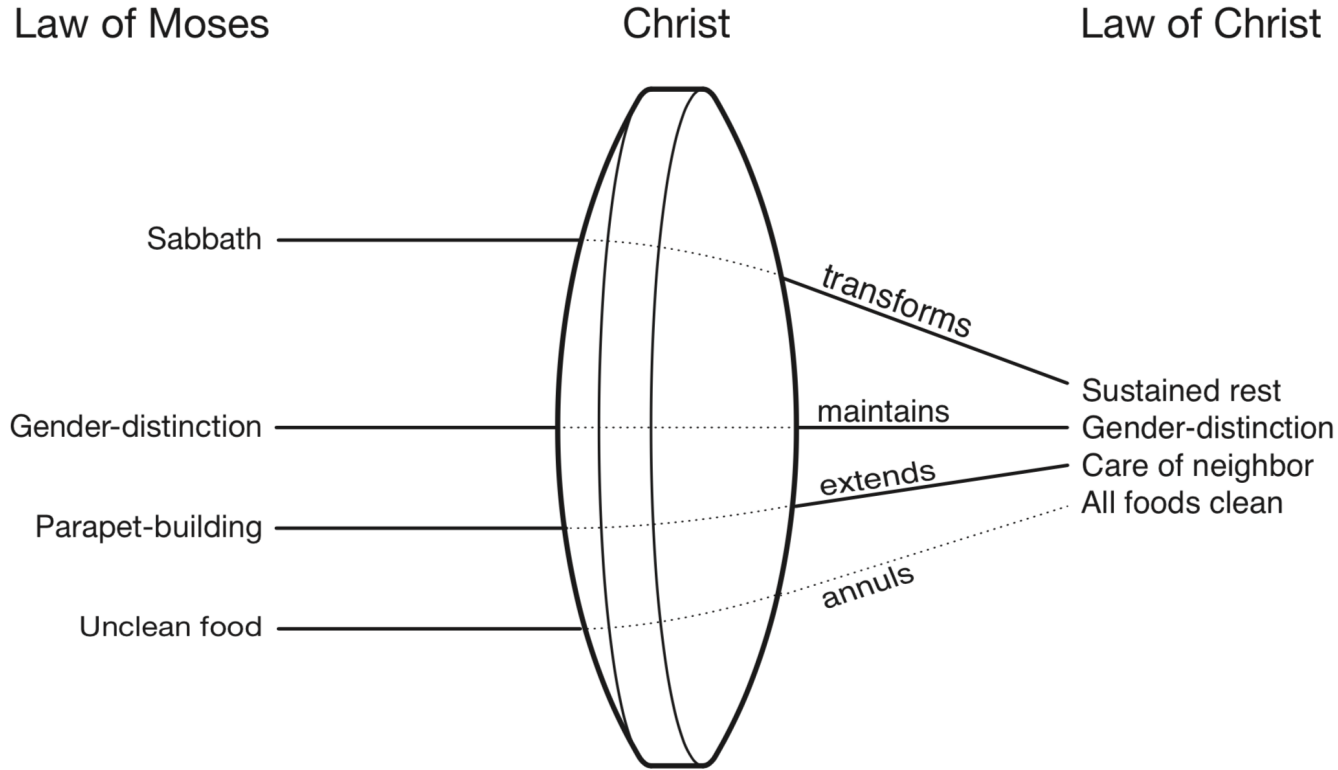


- Reflect back and forth between this teaching and rest of Scripture (Analogy of Scripture)
- Is this teaching consistent with rest of Scripture?
- Do other portions of Scripture add insight or qualification to this principle?
- Reword your theological principle, if necessary, to ensure it fits with rest of Scripture

And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.” And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Mark 7:14-23

Use the “Lens of Christ”

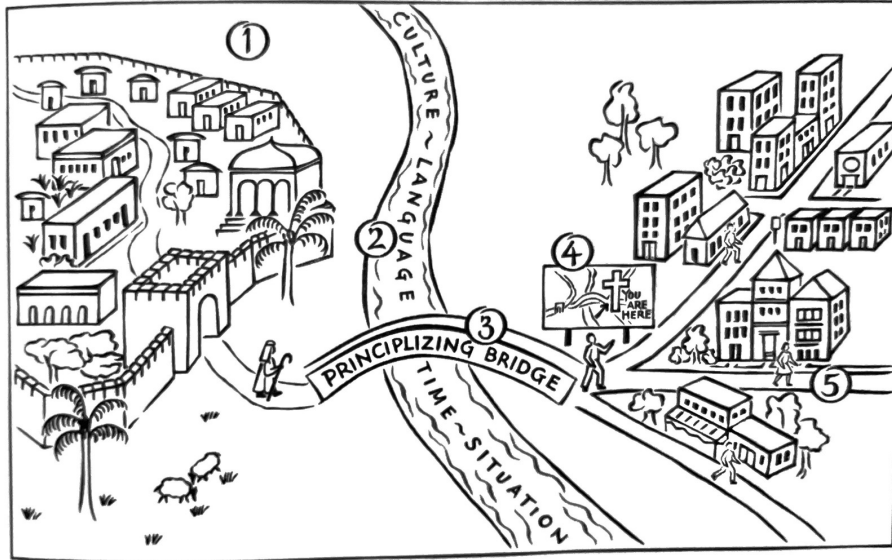


1 Peter 1:14-16 - “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

The Interpretive Journey

Step 5: Grasping the text in our town

How should individual Christians today live out this theological principle?



-How does it apply to real-life situations today?

-While there will usually be only a few (and often only one) theological principle in a single passage that is relevant for all Christians today, there will be numerous applications of that principle in the lives of people

And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.

Acts 15:7-9

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