



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond

V28 N30

July 26, 2026

POWER AND PURPOSE

“United by the Gospel”

Acts 15:1-35

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Church

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish his purposes on earth today.

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

Ephesians 4:15-16



Is observance of the law required for *justification* or *sanctification*?

The unity of the church is important and is dependent on a shared understanding of the gospel—among other things. It's a unity produced by the Holy Spirit and maintained by keeping the peace (Eph 4:1-3). Regrettably, unity in the early church was threatened by a dispute over whether Gentile believers had to be circumcised in order to be saved (Ac 15:1). Put more fully, whether “it was necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses” (v. 5). The debate between the two sides pertained to both *justification*—how to obtain a right standing before God—and *sanctification*—how to live a holy life before God—in that circumcision entailed an obligation to obey the whole law. Paul educates the Galatians regarding the implications of accepting circumcision. He warns them: “I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law” (Gal 5:3). “By the way, only males were circumcised. Females were viewed as adopting the beliefs of their husbands, or their fathers if they were unmarried” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Acts,” 2026 ed., 290, soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/acts.pdf).

Apart from the importance of resolving the dispute for theological reasons, which Paul considered consequential (cf. Gal 1:6-9; 2:15-16; 3:1-6), there were the practical reasons. In the first place, the dispute affected all Christians. In the second place, as one commentator writes: “If the Jerusalem church supports the demand for circumcision and if no resolution of the dispute can be found, then the relation of friendly support between the churches in Antioch and Jerusalem will be gravely threatened” (Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke Acts*, vol. 2, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 183), thereby creating a schism in Christ's church, limiting its influence. “To have required circumcision and the Torah would have severely limited the appeal to Gentiles, perhaps even killed it” (John B.

Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 337). And in the third place, churches in which Jewish believers are convinced that Gentile believers have to be circumcised and live according to the law, and Gentile believers are convinced that Jewish believers need not circumcise their children and need not live according to the law, would be welcoming places for neither group. The dispute would unquestionably affect both. On one hand, Gentiles would face the demand to become Jews, and on the other, Jews would face the demand to exchange their Jewish way of life for a Gentile one (see Tannehill, 191); inevitably the unity of their churches would be undermined by the conflict between them.

Thankfully, the dispute was resolved. The Jerusalem Council decided that Gentiles do not have to become proselytes and live like Jews, nor do Jews have to forsake being Jews and live like Gentiles. Put differently, “Jewish believers are free to practice the faith in their way, just as Gentiles are not required to come under the law” (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 508). The decision of the Council was summarized in a letter addressed to Gentile believers, about which another commentator writes: “James is proposing that Gentiles be asked to abstain from certain things especially offensive to a Jewish sense of cultic purity so that Jewish Christians may remain in the fellowship of the church without being forced to give up their way of life” (Tannehill, 191). Gentiles are being asked to do this for the sake of the unity of the church—i.e., that they be united by the gospel. The letter specifies:

“For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell” (Ac 15:23-29). That's it; nothing more.

Read Acts 15:1-35

1 But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. 3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. 5 But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. 7 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. 8 And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, 9 and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. 10 Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

12 And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. 14 Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. 15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

16 "'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, 17 that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things 18 known from of old.'

19 Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, 20 but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. 21 For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues."

22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them

and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, 23 with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. 24 Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, 25 it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: 29 that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."

30 So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. 31 And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. 32 And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. 33 And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. 35 But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Highlight the quotations in v. 1 and in v. 5.
- Underline "the party of the Pharisees" in v. 5.
- Highlight Peter's question in v. 10.
- Underline "signs and wonders" in v. 12.
- Circle "a people" in v. 14.
- Circle "tent of David" in v. 16.
- Box "that" indicating purpose in v. 17.
- Box "Therefore" indicating result in v. 19.
- Circle "abstain from" in v. 19.
- Box "for" indicating reason in v. 21.
- Circle "some persons" in v. 24.
- Circle "Judas" and "Silas" in v. 27.

What one word would you use to describe the **TONE** of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. *Who* came down from *where* to *where*, and *what* were they teaching the brothers?

 2. A serious, consequential dispute followed. By what means did the brothers decide to resolve it?

 3. *What* did believers who belonged to “the party of the Pharisees” demand and *why*?

 4. On *what* basis did Peter argue that God made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles when it came to salvation?

 5. On *what* basis did Barnabas and Paul defend their ministry among the Gentiles?

 6. To *what* does “rebuild the tent of David” refer and to what *purpose* is the rebuilding linked (cf. “that” v. 17)?

 7. Summarize James’ “judgment” and the reason behind it (vv. 19-21).

 8. Describe the recipients’ response to the letter and explain why they responded the way they did.

 9. Describe what Paul and Barnabas did following the resolution of the dispute.

 10. **Discussion.** Talk about what made the resolution of the dispute regarding circumcision and keeping the law so important.
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Commentary On The Text

In connection with the preaching of the gospel to other than Aramaic speaking Jews—that is, to Greek speaking Jews, God-fearing Gentiles, and finally to pagan Gentiles—a dispute ultimately arose dispute that threatened the spread of the gospel and the health of the churches. It appeared first in Antioch, where God “opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (Ac 14:27). Luke describes the incident that triggered it in these words: “But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the Gentile brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (15:1). Then he uses a figure of speech called *litotes*—a deliberate understatement that expresses an affirmative idea by stating the negative of its opposite—to describe the outcome of their teaching. “Paul and Barnabas had *no small dissension and debate* with them” (v. 2). In other words, “Paul and Barnabas had a major argument and debate with them” (NET).

“The debate in Jerusalem revolved around the issue of how Gentiles were to be accepted into the Christian fellowship. The more conservative Jewish Christians felt that they should be received on the same basis that Jews had always accepted Gentiles into the covenant community—through proselyte initiation. This involved circumcision of the males and all proselytes taking upon themselves the total provisions of the mosaic law. For all intents and purposes, a Gentile proselyte to Judaism *became a Jew*, not only in religious conviction but in life-style as well. That was the question the conservative group of Jewish Christians raised: Should not Gentiles be required to become Jews in order to share in the Christian community” (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 321). In a nutshell, Gentiles had to become Jews and live like Jews to become Christians. Happily, the Council rejected the views of Christians belonging to “the party of the Pharisees” (v. 5).

After describing the dispute and the setting of the Jerusalem Council (vv. 1-5), Luke recorded the Council’s deliberations (vv. 6-19)—containing the testimony of Peter, Barnabas and Paul, and James—and documented the Council’s letter to Gentile believers (vv. 22-29) before describing their response to the letter and the further activities of Paul and Barnabas (vv. 30-35).

Peter justified inclusion of the Gentiles sans circumcision based on his experience with Cornelius (10-11). Regarding that encounter, Peter says that God made no difference between Jews and Gentiles “by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us” (v. 8), and by “having cleansed their hearts by

faith” (v. 9), and concludes that both Jews and Gentiles are saved by faith apart from the law (v. 11). Barnabas and Paul speak briefly, arguing for the inclusion of the Gentiles based on the fact that God performed “signs and wonders” among them, resulting in them coming to faith. And finally, James links Peter’s testimony that “God has visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name” (v. 14) to the testimony of the prophets. He quotes Amos 9:11-12, which links the rebuilding of David’s dynasty to this purpose, namely, “that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name.” James relates this prophecy to the resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, and his seating at the right hand of the Father, having been made “Lord and Christ” (Ac 2:36) and to God taking from among the Gentiles a people for his name. He surmises that Gentile salvation is anticipated by the Old Testament, for Amos, representing the prophets, prophesied their inclusion in the people of God.

Next James recommended that Gentiles neither be required to be circumcised nor to obey the law of Moses. Instead, they should be told to simply avoid four things especially repugnant to Jews: “things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood” (v. 20). One commentator explains: “James is proposing that Gentiles be asked to abstain from certain things especially offensive to a Jewish sense of cultic purity so that Jewish Christians may remain in the fellowship of the church without being forced to give up their way of life” (Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, vol. 2, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 191). After all, to do otherwise would alienate Jews everywhere who hear Moses read every Sabbath in the synagogues.

Finally, he summarized his recommendations in a letter to Gentile believers. In it, he clarifies that the men who provoked this dispute in the first place operated without the authority of the Jerusalem church. What they taught, they taught on their own authority. And what they taught was wrong. So no greater burden would be laid on Gentiles beyond the requirement to: “abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality” (v. 29). Gentile believers would do well to abstain from these things.

When the letter was delivered, the church at Antioch “rejoiced because of its encouragement” (v. 31). Judas and Silas returned to Jerusalem, but Paul and Barnabas remained in the city, perhaps for six months or so, “teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also” (v. 35).

Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 *unless you are . . .* “There were many Gentiles in the church at Antioch (cf. 11:20f.). There is no indication that they had been circumcised when they joined the Christian fellowship. This was disturbing to some Jewish Christians who came from Judea and insisted that circumcision in strict obedience to the Jewish law was necessary for salvation . . . The group evidently represented the strict Jewish viewpoint that there was no salvation apart from belonging to the covenant community, the people of Israel” (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 323).

v. 5 *party of the Pharisees* “It was perhaps some of their group who had first stirred up the controversy in Antioch. The at least shared the same viewpoint: Gentiles who become Christians must undergo Jewish proselyte procedure. They must be circumcised. They must live by the entire Jewish law . . . The ritual aspects of the law presented a problem. These were the provisions that marked Jews off from other people—circumcision, the food laws, scrupulous ritual purity” (Polhill, 324).

v. 10 *test* “This is really a declaration not to test God” (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 500). To test God is “to act against God’s declared will, to see if God really meant what he had already shown in accepting Gentiles apart from the law” (Polhill, 327). “Requiring that Gentiles become Jews before God would save them would ‘test’ God in that it would question the rightness of His action in giving the Spirit to Cornelius” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Acts,” 2026 ed., 292, soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/acts.pdf).

v. 12 *signs and wonders* “That God would work miracles in the midst of the Gentiles is another divine indicator for Gentile inclusion (‘it shows divine approval’; Barrett 1998: 721)” (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 502). “Barnabas emphasized the ‘signs and wonders’ that ‘God’ had performed because these would have persuaded the Jews that God had been at work in their ministry (cf. 1 Cor. 1:22)” (Constable, 293).

v. 14 *a people* “James used the word *laos* to describe the Gentiles, a term usually applied to Israel . . . In Christ God brings Jew and Gentile together into a single *laos*, a single people ‘for his name’” (Polhill, 329). “In 15:14 ‘from the nations’ (*ex ethnōn*) indicates the origin and nature of those being chosen. They are Gentiles, not Jews, yet they are now God’s people . . . The Gentiles now turning to God are God’s people in the full sense that Israel is, for the God who long ago chose a people for communion and mission is doing the same now among the other peoples of

the world” (Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, vol. 2, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 187).

v. 16 *tent of David* Cf. “the fallen house of David” (NLT). The prophecy of Amos anticipates the salvation of Gentiles in connection with the rebuilding of the dynasty of David, which takes place in connection with the coming of Messiah. “The passage declares the rebuilding of the dynasty of David, fulfilled here in Jesus’s messianic arrival, along with the current inclusion of Gentiles. God is acting to perform his work of restoration through Jesus, much as Acts 3 declared . . . The goal of this rebuilding work is to allow the rest of humanity, not just Jews, to seek God” (Bock, 504). “The seating of Jesus on David’s throne and installation as royal Son of God have already taken place through Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of God” (Tannehill, 189). Some argue that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father but not yet seated on the throne of David. They see the kingdom as “not yet” rather than “already but not yet.”

v. 19 *abstain from* “If Gentiles were not being required to observe the Jewish ritual laws, how would Jewish Christians *who maintained strict Torah observance* be able to fellowship with them without running the risk of being ritually defiled themselves? . . . Gentiles should be directed to abstain from four things: from food offered to idols, from sexual immorality (*porneia*), from the meat of strangled animals (*pnikton*), and from blood (*haima*)” (Polhill, 330).

v. 24 *some persons* “The men who had come to Antioch from Jerusalem, advocating circumcision (v. 1) had ‘no instruction’ to do so from the Jerusalem church (v. 24). They spoke on their own authority and had caused confusion” (Constable, 301).

v. 27 *Judas and Silas* “These two **leaders**, also ‘prophets’ (v. 32), may have represented two groups in the Jerusalem church—**Judas**, probably a brother of Joseph (cf. 1:23), for the Hebrew section; and Silas, a Roaman citizen (cf. 16:37, for the Hellenists” (Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 396). Judas is not mentioned again in Acts, while Silas becomes a major figure given his partnership with Paul on future missionary journeys.



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THIS PASSAGE

The Jerusalem Council affirmed that Jews and Gentiles alike are saved by grace through faith apart from circumcision and keeping the law.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does the author of this passage want me to *know*?
2. What does the author of this passage want me to *do*?
3. What does the author of this passage want me to *be*?



PARENT CONNECTION

So many times, we try overcomplicate the Gospel. We twist it around, embellish it, or stuff it in a box to make it fit exactly what we want it to be. But the Gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus is really quite simple. Jesus paid it all. Not some. Not a little bit. Not mostly everything except that thing you did when you were 17. By His death and resurrection, He fully paid the debt for our sin—all of it: past, present, and future. When the Holy Spirit leads us to surrender our life to Him, that debt of sin is fully removed, released, wiped away, gone and remembered no more (Jeremiah 31:34). What's more, there is nothing we need to add to make ourselves more fully Christian than our surrendered heart to the Lord. The Gospel isn't Jesus plus good works, generosity, church attendance, baptism; it's simply Jesus. As parents, we have the incredible opportunity to share this truth with our kids. God's love is never something we have to earn. While we want to teach our kids to obey, serve, and make wise choices, we should help them understand these are responses to God's grace, not a way to earn it. We shouldn't desire to raise perfect kids, because how else will we teach them to run to the Savior except through mistakes and hardship? When our kids fail, gently remind them to run to Jesus' forgiving arms. This week, remind yourself and your family that Jesus is enough. Keep pointing to Him and trust that He is fully at work in your lives. We're praying for you!

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Acts 15:1-35.

1. What were the men from Judea teaching the Gentile brothers?
2. How did the leaders correct this wrong teaching?
3. What requirements were listed in the letter?

What Do You Think?

Why is it important to follow correct teaching?

What Do You Do?

Being at church helps us understand the teaching of Jesus. This week, attend church with your family.

CORE COMPETENCY: Church

I believe God uses the people in the church to do His work.

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 19:1

"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRAL Kids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- _____ I completed my Bible Study
- _____ I memorized this week's verse
- _____ I brought my Bible to church
- _____ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) from 1986 to 1998 and Spiritual Formation Pastor at Central Bible Church (Fort Worth, TX) from 1998 to 2022. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have five children: Elijah, Levi, Bo, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

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**CENTRAL
BIBLE CHURCH**

8001 Anderson Boulevard
Fort Worth, Texas 76120
817-274-1315
wearecentral.org

OUR MISSION
Making God known by making disciples who are changed by God to change their world.