

~ACTS~

Lesson 44- The Jerusalem Council Meeting

Acts 15:1-6

Today we start a new chapter and a new section in the book of Acts, chapter 15 and the Jerusalem Council meeting. This chapter could be considered the most important chapter in the book of Acts because it was at this Apostolic meeting that determined our liberty or bondage for all future ages to come. At this meeting, the question of how one is truly saved is brought to light and discussed in this important event. Without this meeting, and if it weren't for Paul's tenacious character to stand for Truth, the freedom of grace that we as Christians enjoy could have been overshadowed by Judaistic Legalism and Christians would still be bound under the Law. So this is a pivotal chapter in redemptive history. Let's begin by reading our text today, **Acts 15:1-6**.

These people, these "certain men who came down from Judea," Acts 15:1, they were what Paul calls Judaizers, believing Jews who were still bound under the Law, pressuring and persuading uncircumcised Gentiles to be conform to the Law of Moses in order to be saved. And they had traveled up from Jerusalem to Antioch to trouble these believers in the church. If you remember, Antioch of Syria was the first Christian church consisting of both Jews and uncircumcised Gentiles, coming together into one body, into one new man in Christ Jesus, Eph 2:15, and Antioch was just the beginning. Paul and Barnabas had just come back from a 2 year missionary journey establishing other Christian churches in the Galatian area that were made up of Jews and Gentiles as well. This was the manifestation of the revelation that the Apostle Paul received in Arabia and began preaching to the world. That no longer is there this middle wall of separation between Jew and Gentile, but all who believe are brought into the new covenant in Christ Jesus, Eph 2:14-16. And this was the revelation that Paul received from Jesus... *"That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ through the Gospel,"* Eph 3:6. Salvation by grace through faith apart from the works of the Law. And we see that this is what Paul was preaching in Galatia, **Acts 13:39**. This is the gospel of the revelation of Jesus Christ... the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, of which Paul had been preaching for the last 10 years (40-50AD) since he received this revelation in Arabia. But this gospel was rejected by the Legalistic Jews, even Jewish believers. Therefore, these Judaizers from Jerusalem made their way up to Antioch to falsely teach these uncircumcised Gentile believers that the only way to be saved was through the Law of Moses.

As we step back and look at the progression of the Gospel since Jesus death and resurrection and the Day of Pentecost, you remember that the Gospel went to the Jews first and it was only preached to the Jews for the first nine years after the cross, Acts 11:19; from 32ad – 41ad. The revelation that Gentiles could be brought into Salvation apart from the Law of Moses was a foreign concept to many Jews until it was revealed to Paul and Peter. In fact, the full revelation that the Law was fulfilled in Christ to bring in a better covenant with better promises to all who believe, to both Jew and Gentile, wasn't fully understood until Paul gained this revelation from Jesus in Arabia. But even after he received this revelation, it wasn't until Peter saw the vision in Joppa and the events of Cornelius which officially opened the door to the Gentiles revealing that uncircumcised Gentiles could be saved and come into the body of Christ, by grace through faith alone without following the Law of Moses, Acts 10:15, 28, 34, 43-48; 11:1-5, 17-18. Chapter 10 was such a pivotal event in redemptive history because it opened the door of faith to the Gentiles and Peter gained an amazing revelation which he describes in this Jerusalem Council meeting, **Acts 15:11**. This was revolutionary, and it begin revealing the understanding of this new covenant in Christ Jesus that there is no need for the Law of Moses for Salvation. But even though this concept was brought to light with Cornelius, it was easily forgotten and overrun by the Legalism of the Law and now we see there is still great debate even 18 years after the cross as to how someone is truly saved. So this is why the Jerusalem Council meeting is so important. The events of this meeting are also recorded in the

book of Galatians. So gain a fuller understanding of this, I want to overlay the first two chapters of Galatians with Acts chapter 15.

This letter to the Galatians was written in response to these same Judaizers infiltrating into the body of Christ and teaching a doctrine contrary to the revelation of the New Covenant. These Galatian churches were established in the same fashion as the church in Antioch. They consisted of Jews and uncircumcised Gentiles alike believing in Jesus by grace through faith. And just like in Antioch of Syria, there were Judaizers trying to tell uncircumcised Gentiles that the only way to be saved was through circumcision and following the Law of Moses. So after seeing this on his second missionary journey, Paul writes them a letter admonishing them to not be seduced by this false doctrine and fall back under the bondage of the Law and Legalism. And in Paul's letter to the Galatians, he refers to this Jerusalem Council meeting from Acts chapter 15 giving us more detail, **Galatians 1:6-2:10**.

Now with that backdrop, let's start looking at these first 6 verses leading to this Jerusalem Council meeting in Acts 15...

1) And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

These men are the Judaizers from Jerusalem. They are from the sect of the Pharisees who believed, v.5. Paul describes them in Galatians as false brethren who secretly came in to trouble you and pervert the gospel of Christ, Gal 1:7; 2:4. Paul doesn't have very nice things to say about these men because they are teaching blasphemous words that contradict true Christian doctrine... **Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.** This is why Paul is so adamant about rejecting this doctrine because it is the opposite of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. This is adding your own works to the finished work of the cross. It is saying that Jesus' sacrifice wasn't good enough. This is trampling the blood of Jesus underfoot and putting Him to open shame as Paul says in Hebrews 10:29 and 6:6. These warnings are not just for Judaism, it goes for any works based religion. There is not one thing we can do to add to Jesus' work on the cross and any effort to do so is blaspheming His Name. So notice the stir this creates in Antioch...

2) Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, (Galatians 2:5- we did not yield submission, not even for an hour...) they (the church of Antioch) determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

This is the first real confrontation with the Judaizers. Up until this point his confrontations were with unbelieving Jews, now even the believing Jews have come against him. So much that they are calling Paul an enemy of the Truth, **Galatians 4:16**. So the church of Antioch, being troubled by these sayings, Acts 15:19, decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to sort this matter out. And notice who is right alongside Paul... the son of comfort, Barnabas, such a faithful man and friend to the Apostle Paul. The church also appointed **certain others of them**, of which we know one of these to be Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile, Gal 2:3.

3) So, being sent on their way by the church, (Galatians 2:2- according to revelation) they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren.

Paul and company journey on foot, continuing to preach the Gospel to the cities of Phoenicia and Samaria as they travel down to Jerusalem. And as they travel they are describing, ἐκδιηγέομαι, describing in thorough detail **the conversion of the Gentiles**... He is preaching the Gospel to them making great joy to all the brethren.

4) And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them.

This was the third time Paul had come to Jerusalem and all three times Barnabas has been with him, but all three times it has been under great contention: **1)** After 3 years in Damascus and Arabia, but everybody was scared of him and he was only able to stay in Jerusalem for 15 days until the Hellenistic Jews tried to kill him, Acts 9:26-30; **2)** Famine relief and exhortation to the church in Jerusalem among the persecution from Herod, Acts 11:27-30; **3)** Jerusalem Council Meeting and disputes with the Judaizers about the Truth of Salvation, Acts 15:1-6. When Paul and Barnabas come to Jerusalem, they begin reporting **all things that God had done with them**. This is the same phrasing Luke used in Acts 14:27 when Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from their first missionary journey. They began bearing witness of all the things God had done in Antioch and on their first missionary journey to the Gentiles. No doubt telling them how the door of faith was opened to the Gentiles, Acts 14:27, and how the hand of God was performing miracles through their hands, bearing witness to the Word of His grace, Acts 14:3. This was physical proof of God's approval and proof of His Salvation because the Holy Spirit was performing supernatural miracles through them. But even after all these testimonies, the Judaizers began to dispute with Paul and Barnabas...

5) But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

This word "sect" is αἵρεσις- where we get the word heresy. Peter uses this same word describing false teachers infiltrating the church as well, **2 Peter 2:1-2**. Luke is describing these factions of heresies coming against the Truth. And he says these Pharisees, who were steeped in the traditions of Legalism, rose up. This word is ἐξάνιστημι- to rise up and out. I get the picture of a person standing, overbearing and proud, pointing the finger and standing up and out yelling at the Apostle Paul in hatred saying, **"It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."** Which as we have said earlier is blasphemy. This is adding works to grace; Legalism to faith; it is trampling the blood of Jesus and putting Him to an open shame.

This word "keep" is τηρέω- to hold fast. In the New Covenant we don't hold fast the Law of Moses, but rather we hold fast to Jesus and His Word. 1 John 2:5 says, *whoever holds fast His Word, truly the love of God is perfected in him*. The Law of Moses has no means of saving us or making us righteous, Acts 13:39; Gal 2:16. The Law was only given to expose our sin and show us the need of a Savior, Rom 3:20; 7:7. It's purpose is to display God's Righteous requirements and to show that we fall utterly short to his glory and Righteous standards, Rom 8:4; 3:23. There is only One man who upheld the Law perfectly. And His name is Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life in accordance with the Law and He fulfilled the Righteous requirements for our sin with His blood as a substitutionary sacrifice. Therefore, the only way to the Father is through Jesus, John 14:6. The Law was never meant to save us, it was meant to point us to our Savior, to Jesus Christ. Paul tells us the Law was a tutor to bring us to Christ, Gal 3:24. And when Jesus became the final sacrifice for sin, He fulfilled the Righteous requirements of the Law and ushered in the New Covenant in Him through His blood, Heb 7:18; 8:7-8, 13; 10:1-4, 9; Col 2:16-17. Therefore, this is why Paul is so adamantly opposed to these Judaizers because they are false brethren, teaching a false doctrine, leading the church astray from Jesus and his finished work on the cross, **Gal 3:1; 5:1-6**.

After both Paul and the Judaizers had spoken, the Apostles gather together to discuss these things in a private meeting...

6) Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.

This private meeting was with Paul, Barnabas, James, the Lord's brother, Peter and John. We see this in Galatians chapter 2. These were *"those who were of reputation," "those who seemed to be something, but added*

nothing to me,” the so-called “*pillars of the church,*” Gal 2:2-9. But Paul wasn’t concerned about getting their approval, his concern was to unify the church in one Gospel, the Gospel of the revelation he received from Jesus Himself... that all who believe in Jesus, by grace through faith, apart the works of the Law will be saved.

Next week we will see Peter then stand up and give his testimony about the Gospel going forth to the Gentiles by his hand to Cornelius...