

## ~ACTS~

## Lesson 45- The Edict of the Jerusalem Council Meeting

## Acts 15:7-19

We are continuing to look at chapter 15 and the Jerusalem Council Meeting and last week we laid the foundation for the purpose of this meeting. This meeting was so pivotal in our Christian history because it answers the question of how one is truly saved. Are we saved by grace through faith or through the Law of Moses? And it was at this Apostolic meeting that determined our liberty or bondage for all future generations to come, and it was because of Paul's unstoppable perseverance to stand for Truth even in the midst of persecution that determined our freedom in Christ that we enjoy as Christians today. So by way of review lets read **Acts 15:1-6** to set the context for our lesson today.

Verse 6 ends with the Apostles and elders coming together in a private meeting to discuss this question of how one is truly saved. And in the book of Galatians Paul tells us that Peter, James the Lord's brother and John are at this meeting as well as Paul, Barnabas and possibly Titus, Gal 2:9-10. Now verse 7 seems to begin another meeting that is held publicly to the Jerusalem church congregation as a whole...

**7) And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.**

This was not an easy meeting. There was great contention and much dispute on this question about how one is truly saved. Up in Antioch Luke tells us in verse 2 that Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with these Judaizers. Then they come to Jerusalem and the Judaizers rise up against Paul in verse 5, and now after the Apostles and elders have this private meeting, there is much dispute again. So Peter begins speaking to the congregation and begins recounting the events of Cornelius from Acts chapter 10 to prove that this is the hand of God and he says...

**7-9) <sup>7</sup> ..."Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago (about 9 years ago, 41AD) God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup> So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, <sup>9</sup> and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith."**

Nine years ago, in 41AD, God chose Peter to be his vessel to open the door to the Gentiles. And it had to be Peter, because he was the common witness that God used to remove all the barriers in order to bring the Gospel of Salvation to the world. Peter was there on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out on the Jews in Jerusalem, Acts 2:1-4; he was there when the Spirit was poured out on the Samaritans, Acts 8:17; and then Peter was there when the Spirit fell on the uncircumcised house of Cornelius, Acts 10:44-46. Notice the progression of the outpouring of the Spirit is exactly the same as Jesus' marching orders... "You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth," Acts 1:8. And notice Peter was there on each occasion as God's witness to these things as verification that this is the hand of God at work. And notice who God is pouring out His Spirit to... humble hearts and expectant ears, verse 8...

**8) So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us,**

God is the knower of hearts, καρδιογνώστης. He knew Cornelius' heart and sent Peter to Caesarea to preach the Gospel to him and his family. And after they heard the Word and believed, they were born again and filled with the Spirit. And Peter says God **acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit**. This word "acknowledged" is μαρτυρέω, to bear witness. God bore witness to their humble hearts **by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us**. This is why God chose Peter, so that he could come back to Jerusalem and bear witness that the Gentiles have received salvation just as we did on the Day of Pentecost. And Peter goes on in verse 9...

**9) and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.**

God has made no distinction, διακρίνω, between uncircumcised Gentiles and Jews. διακρίνω- to thoroughly judge and make a distinction based on someone's outward appearance. This was the revelation that Peter received on the rooftop in Joppa, "what God has cleansed, you must not call common." Therefore, Peter says, "God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean," Acts 10:15, 28. And Peter recounts this event again with the Jews in Jerusalem in Acts 11:9-12 and uses the same word, διακρίνω, when he says in verse 12, "The Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing, διακρίνω, "not making a distinction." And God made no distinction by... **purifying their hearts by faith**. Salvation is a heart issue. God is the knower of all hearts and those who believe and have faith in Jesus, God purifies their hearts, by grace through faith apart from the works of the Law. Notice Peter makes no mention of good works or the Law. Only that the Gentiles received the gospel message by faith, and they were born again and filled with the Spirit.

**10) Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?**

Peter is speaking directly to the Judaizers and James the Lord's brother when he says this. He is telling them that God has clearly given them salvation apart from following the Law, so why do you test God to do something different by putting these Gentiles under the bondage of the Law. Peter is beginning to understand the freedom of the New Covenant, not just for Gentiles but Jews also because he admits that we Jews can't even follow the Law of Moses, no one can. Before the New Covenant in Jesus, when Gentiles wanted to follow the One True God, they became Proselytes and they conformed to the Jewish faith and followed the Law of Moses. But zealous Pharisees took this way too far and put a yoke of bondage of these Gentiles that no one could bear. And they would use these Gentile proselytes as a way to boast about how good they were. They didn't care about the Gentile's soul, only boasting in their good works.

Look at what Jesus says about the process of making a Gentile proselytes, **Matt 23:4; 15**. But instead Jesus tells us to take His yoke instead, **Matt 11:28-30**. Don't put on the yoke of bondage, but rather yoke yourself and connect yourself to Jesus and rest in His finished work of the cross. Then Peter continues and makes this revolutionary statement in verse 11...

**11) But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.**

What an amazing statement that Peter says. It is through His Grace that we Jews can be saved in the same manner as these uncircumcised Gentiles... completely by grace through faith apart from the works of the Law. You can tell that Peter is gaining the understanding of the freedom we all have in Christ, Jew and Gentile alike. This is the liberty we have in the New Covenant in Jesus. But there is something I want to point out that many Christians miss as they are reading this chapter. Peter just made this statement that should have changed how the believing Jews viewed the Law. He just made this statement that told the Jews that you don't need the Law anymore for Salvation. But unfortunately, because of their deep traditions, many of these Jews, including James, can't seem to get passed this bondage of the Legalism. Because we will find that as chapter 15 unfolds, the Jerusalem church makes the decree that Gentiles don't need to follow the Law unto Salvation, and that's great, however they miss the point that Peter is making... that even Jews don't need to follow the Law. But it seems this concept went right over their head and these believing Jews still feel the need to follow the Law. There are several examples of this in Scripture, one of which is in **Galatians 2:11-16**. Notice that up in Antioch, the Jews from James are still applying pressure to follow the Law of Moses, even after the Jerusalem Council meeting. They are putting pressure on their fellow believing Jews to still follow the Law. Notice they're not pressuring Gentiles, but Jews to follow the Law. So much pressure that Peter and Barnabas cave and give into this persuasion. But

don't you love Paul and his boldness. He never compromises and never gives in, but rather he stood for Truth even under this intense persecution. Peter understood the freedom we have in Christ, and even though he may have waived up in Antioch, he stood boldly in this Jerusalem Council meeting. After Peter spoke, Paul and Barnabas stand up and give their testimony...

**12) Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.**

God continually bore witness of the Word of His grace and Salvation to the Jews and Gentiles by giving them miracles, signs and wonders. This was undeniable proof that God was giving His Salvation to all who believed, solely by grace through faith without following the Law of Moses. And notice the reaction of the crowd, including the Judaizers... **Then all the multitude kept silent.** And Luke repeats this reaction in verse 13...

**13) And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me:**

No one can argue with the testimonies of Peter, Paul and Barnabas. And this is why it was so important that they have this meeting. Because if it weren't for this meeting, there could have been a massive schism within the body of Christ between Jews and Gentiles; between the Jerusalem church and the other churches that Paul had established. This is why Paul went to Jerusalem... to make sure that his efforts for the Gospel weren't in vain, Gal 2:2. That the body of Christ was united under one Gospel.

So then James the Lord's brother steps up to speak. James was the leader of the Jerusalem church and had asserted himself it seems even above the Apostles because Peter seems to even be subordinate to James. Which I find very interesting. I believe James was a Christian and we will see him in heaven. And he obviously had a place in God's plan because Jesus personally met with him after He had risen from the dead, 1 Cor 15:7. But I personally believe that James was leading the Jerusalem church astray because of his zeal for the Law. It seems he could never gain the concept of our freedom in Christ, and I think it was harmful to the Jerusalem church.

We have already seen in Galatians that Paul mentions the "men from James" who came from Jerusalem to pressure Peter and Barnabas in Antioch, Gal 2:11-14, but notice the kind of pressure James puts on Paul when he returns to Jerusalem from his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey, **Acts 21:17-25**. Isn't it disturbing how hard James pushes the customs of the Law of Moses on Paul? It is clear that James realizes from this Jerusalem Council meeting that Gentiles don't need to follow the Law, but he never gained the revelation that Jews are also free from the Law as well. So James stands up and begins to speak to the congregation...

**14) Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.**

James acknowledges Peter's testimony to the Gentiles. That at first, God visited Cornelius through Peter to bring His Salvation to the Gentiles. And God received all those who believed and they were brought into His Name, into the body of Christ. I don't like the English translation "to take out of them..." Because it gives the impression that God is just taking whomever He chooses. A better way to translate λαμβάνω, is "to receive." God receives those who have faith in Him and brings them into His Name.

**15-17)<sup>15</sup> And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: <sup>16</sup> 'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; <sup>17</sup> So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things.'**

James quotes Amos 9:11-12 as his proof text for the Gentiles being brought into the faith. The Holy Spirit impresses this upon James to quote this, and it's a great prophecy, but I personally don't believe that James fully understood what Amos was saying. I think James is quoting this with the idea that Gentiles still need

to come under the means of Judaism to be saved, but that's just my own opinion. But when you truly understand this prophecy of Amos, it speaks of Jesus who was the promised Seed of David and that through Him and in Him we have our Salvation. It is because of His death and resurrection that the Gentiles, and even all of mankind can be saved.

Amos wrote this prophecy sometime between 800-750BC. By this time the tabernacle of David was no longer in use because Solomon had built the temple. So God says He will return and rebuild the tabernacle of David. This tabernacle that is being rebuilt is referring to Jesus body and the building of His Church. This word "tabernacle" is σκηνή. John uses this same word in John 1:14- *And the Word became flesh and dwelt* (tabernacled, σκηνώω- the verb form of tabernacle) *among us...* In the second chapter of John Jesus foretells of His death and resurrection in association with rebuilding the temple, **John 2:19-21**. And this building up of God's dwelling place is explained in **Ephesians 2:14-22**. And then this is all foretold in **Isaiah 54:2-3**. Isaiah, along with Amos, are prophesying of the Promised Seed of David expanding its tabernacle, lengthening its stakes, and through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we the church are being rebuilt into a Holy dwelling place of the Lord in Christ that would include Jews and Gentiles alike in one body in Christ.

In verse 17 it is translated, **all the Gentiles who are called by My name**. This gives the impression that God is calling only certain Gentiles to Salvation. But this phrase "are called" ἐπικέκληται, is translated as a perfective passive, as in God is doing the calling and the Gentiles don't have a choice. Giving the impression that they are being passively called into the kingdom. But we know that God has called everyone into His kingdom, but it's only those who apprehend and receive His calling by faith that have Everlasting Life. This word ἐπικέκληται can also be translated as a perfective middle, meaning that the Gentiles are doing the calling for themselves. And I prefer this translation because this is what Joel said and Peter quotes this in Acts 2:21- *whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*. We call upon His name in faith and He receives us and saves us by His grace. So I think a better translation would be, "**All the Gentiles, those who call upon My name.**" And it is **upon those whom the LORD does all these things** and these things He does were known to Him before the foundation of the world... verse 18

### **18) Known to God from eternity are all His works.**

In God's infinite foreknowledge, He knew the plan of redemption and the work of the cross before the world began. And for 4,000 years God worked out this plan to bring His Salvation to the world through His Son.

Now after quoting Amos, James makes his determination to the council.

### **19) Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,**

James has asserted himself as the leader of the Jerusalem church and it seems that he is leading this council. But even with his zeal for the Law, he makes the right determination (possibly begrudgingly) to not trouble these believing Gentiles by putting them under the Law of Moses.

So James comes up with four commands to give to the Gentiles that we will look at next week. And then we will see the Jerusalem church send Paul and Barnabas along with some other Jewish representatives from Jerusalem back to Antioch with a letter stating the decision of this council.