

Acts #28  
The Council At Jerusalem  
Acts 15:1-41

**On the first missionary journey of Paul there were attacks on his body.** Satan thought with *enough stoning* and with *enough beating with rods*, Paul would quit the ministry. None of these stopped this great man of God, so the Devil was going to have to go back to the drawing board. **So, he tapped some of the Jews at Jerusalem on the shoulder and got them to teach a false doctrine.** So, in Paul's second missionary journey there was not so much of an attack on his body but on his message. **The false doctrine centered around circumcision. It was an intrusion on the message of Paul that he would have to battle for the rest of his life.** Paul even wrote a book to speak against legalism, the book of Galatians.

**Now if would have been nice if Paul could have had a peaceful journey after the rugged first one.** But the enemy never leaves God's servant alone for any length of time. We can see this as we study Acts 15.

Look at verses 1-2, "And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question."

**Whenever God's work is progressing, Satan begins to oppose it; and he usually works through lies.** The reason many churches are ineffective today is because they believe the devil's "religious lies" instead of God's Word. I have said on many occasions that it is much easier to preach tradition than it is to preach the Word of God.

**Certain Pharisees from the Jerusalem church (verses 5 & 24) had gone to Antioch and told these Gentile Christians that their salvation was not valid apart from circumcision and the Law of Moses. Certainly Paul had not preached any such thing.** Paul and Barnabas disputed with them, and it was decided to take the issue to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

**This was a purely voluntary decision and does not in any way teach a "denominational hierarchy" that governs the affairs of the local church.** Actually, Paul was expressly commanded by God to go to Jerusalem according to Galatians 2:1-2, "Then fourteen years after, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but

privately to them who were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.” In other words, God wanted to give Paul the assurance that the place of the Gentiles, in His program, was going to be settled.

Look at verses 3-21, “And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day.”

**It appears that there were at least four different meetings involved in this strategic conference:** (1) a public meeting during which the church welcomed Paul and his party, Acts 15:4; (2) a private conference between Paul and the key leaders, Galatians 2:2; (3) a second public meeting at which time the strong Jewish party presented their case, Acts 15:5, and Galatians 2:3-5; and (4) the council proper which made the final decisions, Acts 15:6 ff.

**The debate continued and no progress was in sight until Peter arose and made his speech.** Peter reviewed God’s dealings with him relative to

Cornelius (Acts 10-11), emphasizing that God Himself had accepted the Gentiles by giving them the same Spirit He had given the Jews at Pentecost. They were saved by faith (15:9) and grace (15:11).

Notice what Peter says in verse 11, “We (the Jews) shall be saved even as they (Gentiles).” Notice that Peter did not say, “They should be saved the same way we are,” but just the reverse. Peter is saying, “Not only is the keeping of the Law not necessary for the Gentiles to be saved, it is also not necessary for the Jews to keep the Law to be saved.” In other words, all men, everywhere, are saved through simple faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ!

**Then James took the floor and gave the final decision.** This James is the Lord’s brother who evidently had become the leader of the Jerusalem church in Peter’s place. His word in Acts 15:14-21 must be understood as the church is to carry on God’s program in this age. **But what is God doing through the Church?** He is taking out of the Gentiles a people for His name.

Look at verse 22, “Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren.”

**The council agreed with this decision and wrote letters concerning it to the Gentile churches, sending these letters with Paul and his associates.** These admonitions were not “official dogmas” handed down by a superior body; but were wise suggestions that spiritual men had concluded as led by the Holy Spirit that would help the Gentile Christian in their relationship with the Jews.

**It was right that Paul and his associates should carry this report back to their home church.** After all, God had used them to open a door of faith to the Gentiles? They had risked their lives for the Gospel’s sake. When they returned, they met with the entire church, and there was much rejoicing over this decision.

Look at verses 36-41, “And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.”

**It is sad when brethren agree doctrinally but not personally.** Since he was related to Mark, Barnabas felt like he had an obligation to him; but Paul felt that the young man was a failure. Perhaps both were too severe; for later Paul accepted Mark (2 Timothy 4:11) and God used him to write the second Gospel. While Paul and Silas were ministering at Antioch, Peter came up and he and Paul debated again about the Gentiles, according to Galatians 2:11-12.

**You will notice that differences between God's two servants did not cause God's work to be hindered.** Remember this, if you find yourself in disagreement with another Christian, make sure that you do not allow your differences to cause the work of our Lord to be hindered. May we always seek to master the fine art of disagreeing, while not being disagreeable!

If you have never been saved, why not tonight?