

9/9/07

Acts 15

The end of chapter 14 tells us that Paul and Barnabas having returned from the first missionary journey to south Galatia and continued to teach the disciple of Jesus at Antioch.

The next thing recorded for us is the first church council at Jerusalem marking a time of crisis and is one of the most important events in the book of Acts, as the early church decided what to do with the Gentile believers, whether they would be subject to the Mosaic law or not.

It has been said that the Chinese character for “crisis” means danger as well as opportunity, how true that is in most crisis of life and it will all have to do with how we handle the situation and the wisdom that is applied.

1. Many scholars see the council at Jerusalem as the same event that Paul writes about in Galatians but some argue that it is all together different. Acts 15:1-22; Gal. 2:1-10

* The account, though having distinct differences, must not be seen as contradiction of each other, as much as supplementing each other.

2. The account that follow in Galatians is when Paul confronted Peter for walking in hypocrisy, as

he was eating with the Gentiles and when some Jewish believers came, he tip toed to the kosher table, stumbling even Barnabas. Gal. 2:11-19

- a. Some say this took place before the church council but if so, that would make the matter of food the climax, against the Judaizers, rather than circumcision.
- b. Not only that, if it took place before the council, it would only confuse the Galatians regarding the chronological order.
- c. In fact the point is that Peter was rebuked sharply by Paul was due to the fact The Lord had made it clear in a vision to Peter by the Holy Spirit, not to call anything clean or common God had cleansed more than ten year ago as he was sent to go to the house of Cornelius and the Holy Spirit had given the decree against circumcision at the church council. He had no excuse!

15:1-5 The conflict over circumcision.

- 15:1** The false brethren came to Antioch.
- 1) The phrase “certain men” refers to Judaizers from Jerusalem.
 - a) They came in secretly to spy out the liberty of the Gentiles at Antioch. Gal. 2:4
 - 2) They were teaching circumcision as a requirement to be saved.

- a) The rite of circumcision was the seal of the covenant God had made with Abraham. Gen. 17:10-14
 - b) The Jews had come to misunderstand the rite thinking that it was a sign of righteousness rather than the seal of the covenant.
 - c) God had placed a great importance to the rite throughout the O.T. Ex. 4:24-25; Josh. 5:2-9
 - d) The rite of circumcision had been abused by Jacob's son when their sister was defiled sexually by Schekem. Gen. 34:3
 - e) Paul told the Romans Abraham could not boast before God for his faith was reckoned prior to circumcision. Rom. 4:1-3; 10-11
- 3) Any form of works or legalism in addition to the finished atoning work of Jesus Christ for salvation are man made burdens and unscriptural.
- a) All the Old Testament was a shadow of things to come, fulfilled by Christ. Rom. 14; Col. 2:9-10; 2:20-23
 - b) Grace and law are exclusively opposed yet the law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. Gal. 3:24; 5:11-12; 6:12-15; Phil. 3:2-3

- 15:2** The decision was to go to Jerusalem to settle the question.
- 1) The matter was very serious. vs. 2a-b
 - a) Dissension "stasis" means sedition or insurrection, the idea is one of rebellion against the present authority, the gospel.
 - b) Dispute "suzetesis" means disputing and questioning.
 - c) This became a big crisis, the expression "no small" is what is called a litotes, a negative indicating the opposite, "big".
 - 2) The disagreement was to be taken to Jerusalem. vs. 2c-e
 - a) The decision was that Paul, Barnabas and others from Antioch should go up to Jerusalem.
 - b) The disagreement was to be taken up with the apostles and elders. vs. 2c-e
- 15:3-4** The church of Antioch sent a delegation to Jerusalem.
- 1) They traveled down to Caesarea, to Samaria, nearly 300 miles, reporting all the accounts, in detail, about the Gentiles converted in the first missionary journey, all rejoicing. vs. 3
 - 2) They arrived and were received by the church at Jerusalem and reported all that

God had done with them, regarding the Gentiles. vs. 4

* Paul had gone up by revelation to speak privately to those of reputation first, there being no contradiction. Gal. 2:2

15:5 The Pharisees became the problem to the church.

- 1) They were believers, born again, but they wanted the Gentiles to also keep the law.
 - a) The Pharisees had added 613 commandments by their traditions.
 - b) They failed to recognize that the law condemn man, not save them.
 - c) The Law was added to the promise, not the reverse. Gal. 3:19; Rom. 3-4
- 2) The date of the church council is not agreed on, some put it a 49 B.C.
 - a) Paul was saved on the Damascus Road in 35 A.D.
 - b) Paul went to Jerusalem three years after his Arabian education, in 38 A.D.
- 3) Paul says he went up to Jerusalem 14 years after Arabia. Gal. 2:1
 - a) If we add 14 and 38 A.D. when he fled Damascus to Jerusalem, it gives us 52 A.D. for the First church council.
 - b) To confirm this, Paul spent 6 years in Tarsus, 1 in Antioch, 5 to the first

mission journey, 2 year for the journey, equals 14 years.

15:6-21 The council at Jerusalem.

15:6 The apostles and elders considered the matter not the entire church.

- 1) The church welcomed them at their arrival and the church equally joined in the final decision to send chosen men with the letters. vs. 4, 22
 - a) Peter spoke first. vs. 7
 - b) Barnabas and Paul spoke second. vs. 12
 - c) James spoke third. vs. 13
- 2) Some again see a contradiction with Paul's account in Galatians, "to meet privately with those of reputation", the seeming pillars of the church. Gal. 2:2c, 9
 - a) Again is supplementary, having met privately, then the public declaration was given. Acts 15:4, 6, 12
 - b) The phrase "of reputation" in Galatians identifies chosen leaders of the Jerusalem church, James, Peter and John, four times in chapter.

15:7-11 The testimony of Peter at the council.

15:7 The apostle Peter was commissioned by God to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

- 1) Peter being the central figure in the first 12 chapters of Acts and the one who opened up at Pentecost.
- 2) Now Peter declared how God had at the beginning called him to preach to the house of Cornelius. Acts 10-11

15:8 The evidence of their salvation.

- 1) God who alone knows the heart of man acknowledged them as genuinely repentant.
- 2) Peter states that God confirmation of their son ship by giving them the Holy Spirit.

15:9 The oneness of Jew and Gentile.

- 1) God made no distinction between the Gentile and the Jews. Gal. 6:14-15; 3:28; Col. 3:11
- 2) God purified their hearts by faith alone not law or works. Acts 10:15; Rom. 10:17

15:10 The sin of the Judaizers was against God.

- 1) They were testing “peirazo” God by their demands, challenging God on what He required alone for salvation.

- 2) They were putting a yoke that was heavy on the lives of the gentiles in contrast to the easy yoke of Jesus. Matt. 11:29-30
- 3) The Gentiles were disciples of Jesus in every sense of the word.

15:11 The conclusion of Peter at the council.

- 1) “But we”, the elders and apostles from Jerusalem and Antioch.
- 2) The Jews would be saved by Grace alone, also, apart from the works of the Law. Eph. 2:8-9

15:12 The apostle Paul and Barnabas confirm the work of God to the Gentiles.

- 1) The multitude kept silent, the implication was conviction and comprehending that to require circumcision for salvation is a great error.
- 2) The multitude then listened to the testimony of Barnabas and Paul regarding the miracles and wonders God worked through them among the Gentiles as they preached the gospel and were saved. Heb. 2:4
* At Cypress and the churches of Galatia. Acts 13-14
- 3) This is the shortest record, confirming they had met privately, this being the public declaration for the decree.

15:13-18 James now ties everything together and makes application to what has been said.

* Pillars of the church in Jerusalem. Gal. 2:9

- 1) James declared how Peter had stated that God visited the Gentiles first to take out a people for His name. vs. 13-14
 - a) They became silent by the evidence of God's work among the Gentiles. vs. 13
 - b) The phrase "a people for His name" was unique of Israel till now, the Gentile were also the people of God. vs. 14
* Ex. 19:5; 1Pet. 2:10
 - c) James was the Lord's half brother and did not believe in Him before the resurrection and later Jesus appeared to him. Jn. 7:5; 1Cor. 15:7
 - d) James seems to be the head leader of the church at Jerusalem, not Peter, this is the last time he appears in Acts.
- 2) James declared God's prophets verify what Peter declared, quoting the LXX. vs. 15
* Isaiah, Jeremiad, Ezekiel, Daniel etc.
- 3) James declared God after choosing the Gentiles, will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down. vs. 16
* James understood the promise referred to Jesus in fulfillment of both by

quoting Amos. 1Sam. 7:12; Is. 11:10; Amos 9:11-12

- 4) James declared God, then through Israel will reach the rest of the Gentiles. vs. 17
* Is. 2:2; 11:10; 60:5, 7; 66:23
- 5) James declared that known to God are all His works. vs. 18
- 6) The council of God is the proclamation of His work which are known to Him from the beginning.
 - a) He had revealed them before they happen.
 - b) He would bring them to pass in their appropriate time.
 - c) He had done so in the salvation of the Gentiles, as part of His eternal council of His will.
* "Tell and bring forth your case; Yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A just God and a Savior; There is none besides Me. Is. 45:21

15:19-21 The conclusion was declared by James.

- 1) Don't trouble the Gentile, stop annoying them! vs. 19
 - a) The "I" is emphatic, confirming his authority in Jerusalem.
 - b) James is agreeing with the Holy Spirit. vs. 28
- 2) The reason being, they are turning to God. vs. 19
- 3) The requirements for the gentiles were four. vs. 20
 - a) Abstain from things polluted by idols. 1Cor. 8-9
 - b) Abstain from sexual immorality, fornication. 1Cor. 6:9,13; 1Thess. 4:3
 - c) Abstain from things strangled.
* Pagan animal sacrifices.
 - d) Abstain from blood. Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:11-13
- 4) The Gentiles were under the same requirement, not stumble the Jew. vs. 21
 - a) James was saying that if a Jewish Christian wanted to keep some of these rituals, they were free to do so, but not to required them for salvation.
 - b) James was also saying the Gentile Christian must not judge the freedom of the Christian Jew.

15:22-29 The unified agreement of leadership and church.

- 15:22-23** The unanimous agreement of the council.
- 1) The church wanted to demonstrate to the believers at Antioch that Jew and Gentile were one by sending Jewish men back to Antioch, namely Barsabas and Silas. vs. 22
 - 2) The church wanted to back this up by letters to the various churches in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. vs. 23

15:24-29 The specifics of the letter.

- 1) They cleared their name from having any part with those who went out to trouble them. vs. 24
- 2) The entire council was in one accord. vs. 25
- 3) The men being sent are Christ like not considering their own lives. v. 26
- 4) The men from Judea will confirm their words, Judas and Silas. vs. 27
- 5) All agreed with the Holy Spirit as to the decision. vs. 28
- 6) These are the only requirements we expect. vs. 29

15:30-35 The return journey to Antioch.

15:30-31 The delegation return.

- 1) They delivered the decree letter. vs. 30

- 2) The gentiles were encouraged by the letters and rejoicing. vs. 31
- 3) Judas and Silas encourage the people being prophets. vs. 32
- 4) Those of Jerusalem returned but Silas remained in Antioch. vs. 33-34
- 5) Paul and Barnabas continued their ministry of teaching and preaching. vs. 35

15:36-41 The second missionary journey and contention over John-Mark.

15:36 The apostle Paul asked Barnabas to accompany him.

- 1) The motive for the second journey was to see how the new converts were doing. 52-55 A.D.?
- 2) Paul was interested in discipleing believers.

15:37 Barnabas wanted to give John Mark another chance.

- 1) Barnabas had already made up his mind.
- 2) John-Mark was his nephew.

15:38 Paul did not want to take John-Mark.

- 1) Paul did not want to take a chance on him.
- 2) He had not gone with them to the work but departed. Acts 13:13

15:39-40 The missions were doubled.

- 1) The contention was great, the word appears two times in the New Testament. Heb. 10:24
- 2) Used in the LXX for God's righteous anger against disobedient children. Duet. 29:28, Jer. 32:37
- 3) Later John Mark was restored. Col. 4:10; Phil. 2 4; 2Tim. 4:11
- 4) Barnabas and Paul also were reconciled. 1Cor. 9:6
* The missionary trip was doubled in outreach.

15:41 The route of the Second mission journey.

- 1) This time they went north to Syria and Cilicia through the Tarsus range. vs. 41a
- 2) They went strengthening the churches. vs. 41b
* Possibly it could of included the churches Paul had established earlier, in his seven years ministry prior to Antioch but it is not stated. Gal. 1:21