

GATECITY CHURCH
THE BOOK OF ACTS, PT. 10
JERUSALEM COUNCIL, ACTS 15
MARCH 23RD, 2025 – BILLY HUMPHREY

I. Recap

- A. Last week we talked about how Antioch was the first church made up of Jews and Gentiles. It became the Apostle Paul's home church and the launching point for all three of his missionary journeys. Antioch provided the blueprint for Paul's church-planting ministry.
- B. We identified seven distinguishing marks of the church at Antioch:
 - 1. Multicultural
 - 2. Team Ministry
 - 3. Priestly Identity
 - 4. Spirit-Led
 - 5. Mission-Sending (Apostolic)
 - 6. Committed to Teaching
 - 7. Generosity

II. Introduction

- A. Acts 13:3-14 details Paul's first missionary journey which he and Barnabas carried out together. This journey lasted about 18 months.
- B. They ministered in seven different cities: Cyprus (Act 13:5), Paphos (Acts 13:6-12), Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14-50), Iconium (Acts 13:51-14:7), Lustra (Acts 14:8-20), Derbe (Acts 14:20-21), Pamphylia (Acts 14:24-25).
- C. There were churches established in at least four of those locations (Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe). All of these churches were in the region of Galatia. So, when Paul writes to the "churches at Galatia" (Galatians 1:2), he is writing to these very churches.
- D. In addition to the four churches that were established, several significant events occurred during Paul's first missionary journey:
 - 1. Paul performed his first miracle, the blinding of Elymas, the sorcerer (Acts 13:6-12).
 - 2. He faced His first recorded persecution at Iconium and Lystra (Acts 14:5).
 - 3. First mention of multiple signs and wonders performed through Paul (Acts 14:1-7).

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4. Paul was stoned and left for dead but miraculously raised up and recovered well enough to travel the next day to Derbe to continue preaching the Gospel (Acts 14:19 – 20).
 5. Elders were appointed in every church planted, and these eldership teams were dedicated to the Lord through fasting and prayer.
- E. Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch and stayed there an extended period of time (Acts 14:28), likely 6 months to a year.
- F. The first significant theological conflict arose in the New Testament Church when certain brothers came from Jerusalem insisting the Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved.

III. The Jerusalem Council

Acts 15:1-2 – “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.’ ² Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.”

- A. The Church was facing a critical question: Is Christianity just another form of Judaism, or was it God’s fulfillment of His promises to all people? If the Judaizers had prevailed, the Church’s identity would have been radically altered. Christianity would not have been a grace-filled movement for all nations, it would have merely been a splinter group of Judaism, requiring the Mosaic Law for salvation.
- B. The decision at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:6-29) was a defining moment in church history:
1. It ultimately secured the Gospel of grace
 2. It ensured the full inclusion of Gentiles
 3. It preserved the unity of the Church for all future generations.
 4. It set the foundation for the Church’s global mission.

Without this decision, Christianity as we know it may never have taken root beyond Judaism.

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- C. Paul and Barnabas, along with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, convened to determine what would be required of the gentiles for inclusion in the Church.
- D. Peter, Paul, and Barnabas testified of how God had worked among the Gentiles. After hearing their testimony, James (the Lord's brother and head elder in Jerusalem) responded by quoting Amos' prophecy about the Tabernacle of David.

Acts 15:15-18 – “¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: ¹⁶ '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; ¹⁷ 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.”

- E. James used Amos to affirm that the Gentiles were always meant to be included in the people of God.
- F. He linked their inclusion to the re-establishment of the Tabernacle of David, connecting Paul and Barnabas' ministry work in Antioch and missionary work in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe to the fulfillment of this prophecy.
- G. James saw this re-establishment of the Tabernacle of David as already beginning in the New Testament era before the Lord's return.
- H. He also tied this phase of the re-establishment of the Tabernacle to a great harvest of souls as Amos foretold, “SO THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, EVEN ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME.”

IV. Key Points of the Letter from Jerusalem

A. Clarification and Reassurance

1. The letter begins by acknowledging that some individuals (Judaizers) had gone out without authorization from the apostles and elders, troubling the Gentiles with their demands (v. 24).
2. This reassures the Gentile believers that the apostles and elders did not send these Judaizers, and their teaching was not binding.

B. The Authority of the Decision

1. The apostles and elders, in unity with the Holy Spirit, had reached a collective decision (v. 28).

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2. The letter emphasizes that this was not merely human judgment but was guided by the Holy Spirit, giving divine weight to the ruling.
- C. No Burden of the Mosaic Law
 1. The Gentiles were explicitly told they did not need to be circumcised or follow the Law of Moses to be saved (v. 24, 28).
 2. This reaffirmed salvation by grace through faith alone rather than by adherence to Jewish customs.
- D. Four Abstentions for Unity's Sake - The apostles and elders asked the Gentile believers to abstain from four specific practices (v. 29):
 1. Food sacrificed to idols – Avoiding idolatrous practices.
 2. Blood – Avoiding eating blood, likely linked to Jewish dietary laws from Leviticus.
 3. Meat of strangled animals – Again tied to dietary laws; animals not properly drained of blood.
 4. Sexual immorality – A broad term that could include various illicit sexual practices common in the Greco-Roman world.
- E. These instructions were not requirements for salvation but rather guidelines to maintain holiness and foster peace between Jewish and Gentile believers. Many Jewish Christians still observed these laws, and Gentiles avoiding them would help foster unity.
- F. Encouragement and Conclusion
 1. The letter ends by reassuring the Gentiles that these instructions were given for their benefit and that following them would lead to peace and harmony (v. 29).
 2. It closes with an encouraging phrase: "You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell." This makes it clear that these were not salvation issues but recommendations for unity.

V. Re-Establishment of the Tabernacle of David

- A. James' use of Amos' prophecy is a critical thought for the New Testament Church. By quoting Amos 9:11, James highlights both the inclusion of the Gentiles as well as the restoration of Davidic worship.

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- B. If James only meant to speak about Gentile inclusion, he could have chosen dozens of other Old Testament passages. The explicit reference to David's tabernacle suggests that James saw a connection between the Gentile mission and the ongoing worship-centered reality of the early Church.
- C. The Jerusalem Council's debate was about Gentile inclusion. James could have quoted passages like Isaiah 49:6 ("I will make you a light for the Gentiles") or Zechariah 2:11 ("Many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day"). Instead, he chose a passage about David's fallen tent being restored. This strongly suggests that the new Gentile-inclusive Church was not just fulfilling God's promise to bring in the nations but was also participating in a restored Davidic worship model.
- D. The context of James' quote is significant. He speaks after Paul and Barnabas report on their missionary journey, including their time in Antioch. The timing of his statement suggests that he is interpreting their church-planting work as part of the fulfillment of Amos 9:11.
- E. If James saw Paul's mission as a fulfillment of Amos 9:11, and Paul's churches reflected Antioch, then Antioch itself was an expression of the restored Tabernacle of David.
- F. This carries huge implications for the New Testament Church:
 - 1. Antioch's worship-centered model was not incidental—it was prophetic, a blueprint for the rest of the New Testament Church. In Antioch we see an emphasis on worship and prayer at the center, which reflects the rhythms of the Tabernacle of David.
 - 2. The Church is called to be a worshiping priesthood, not just a teaching and evangelism movement. Just as the priests ministered before the Lord in the Tabernacle of David with night and day worship, so too is the church called to minister to the Lord through worship and prayer, which fuels evangelism, teaching, discipleship, fellowship, and mission.
 - 3. At least a first phase of the Tabernacle of David is being restored in our day in the Church through the centrality of the Church's worship and prayer (Altar), its unity and love expressed in community (Table), and its mission and outreach (Road). This is where we got the idea for our discipleship framework, Altar – Table – Road.