

LESSON 9: ACTS 15:1-35
JUNE 15, 2016

OVERVIEW

- . Events leading up to the council meeting – Acts 15:1-3
- . Description of the council at Jerusalem – Acts 15:4-35, Galatians 2:1-10

EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE COUNCIL MEETING – ACTS 15:1-3

- . Influx of Gentile Christians into a previous Jewish Community – Acts 15:1-3
 - . Immediately following Pentecost (approx. 33 AD) all Christians were Jews
 - . This meant all the men had been circumcised
 - . They still kept food laws, not eating pork and other meats considered unclean
 - . Still kept the Sabbath on Saturday
 - . Also celebrated the Lord's Resurrection Day on Sunday
 - . Also very particular about keeping God's moral law (The Ten Commandments) in regard to godly and righteous living
 - . By the end of Paul's first mission trip (approx. 48 AD) non-Jewish Gentile believers were pouring in to the Christian community
 - . Many did not yet know the teachings of the Old Testament
 - . Most had not been circumcised
 - . Their everyday moral life and manner of living needed much correction
- . Conservative Jews (Christians) in Jerusalem heard about the Gentiles pouring in to the church at Antioch and were concerned about their ways being upended
 - . They realized that before long there would be more Gentile Christians than Jewish Christians
 - . They worried that the moral standards of the entire church could be weakened
 - . They had not yet come to realize that when one receives new life through faith in Christ, one is not only freed from guilt, one is also released from ritual
 - . They had not yet embraced the idea that with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit one is no longer a slave to the law
 - . Many of these ultra conservatives felt the only way to uphold moral standards was to insist the Gentile Christians conform to the old Jewish ways

- . They must be circumcised
- . They must agree to keep all the symbolic ceremonials of Jewish ritual
- . Peter had not insisted on any of this during his first trip to Antioch
 - . When invited in to the home of Roman soldier Cornelius, he accepted and sat and ate with all the Gentiles
 - . After a large number of Gentiles in Antioch received the Holy Spirit Peter did not insist that they be circumcised
 - . Later Paul and Barnabas, throughout their first mission, converted many to Christianity without circumcision every being mentioned
- . The conservative Jews saw themselves as zealous for the law and the "church" as a party within the boundaries of Judaism
 - . This group agreed with the apostles that Jesus was the Messiah and the fulfillment of all God's promises to Israel
 - . They also believed it was not just enough to believe in Christ, they must also keep all the traditions, ceremonies and rituals of Jewish practice
- . Judaizers travel to Antioch in Syria – Acts 15:1
 - . They traveled up from Jerusalem in order to impose their will and insist on the circumcision of all Gentile believers
 - . They said it was all right for Gentiles to believe in Christ
 - . However, in order to be truly saved, one must be circumcised and abide by the Jewish traditions and rituals
 - . They refused to eat meals with the converted Gentiles
 - . They said they came from "James" group, although James did not send them Galatians 2:12
- . Paul and Barnabas stand together against the Judaizers
 - . They saw the grave danger the church was in and the possibility of splitting
 - . The entire issue needed to be resolved at a "summit meeting" of the church and by the leading apostles
 - . The Antioch Christians selected a group to represent them, which included Paul, Barnabas and Titus
 - . The group sets out for Jerusalem and stops in places like Samaria along the way to visit with members of the new church
 - . Their visit was a joy to the churches in these new areas – Acts 15:3

DESCRIPTION OF THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM – ACTS 15:4-35.
GALATIANS 2:1-10

- . The first public session – Acts 15:4-5
 - . Paul and Barnabas were received open heartedly by the apostles, James (The council leader), and the group of Jewish Christians

- . As Paul was reporting on his mission the Judaizers raised the question of circumcision
- . Bitterness quickly entered the discussion and the apostles adjourned the public portion of the meeting
- . The private session – Acts 15:6-11
 - . Paul and Barnabas go into private session with apostles and Judaizers
 - . The uncircumcised Gentile, Titus, was a part of this session
 - . The Judaizers insisted that if Titus were to be a part of this session he must be circumcised
 - . Paul emphatically refused, for Titus was a test case as to God's requirement Galatians 2:3-5
 - . Three keys players in the group
 - . The Judaizers
 - . Predominately Pharisees appealing to the authority of the Old Testament without the spiritual understanding of how the symbols had been fulfilled in Christ
 - . Paul
 - . Paul also used the Old Testament, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, for his final authority
 - . Paul possessed also the indisputable authority of having witnessed God's transformation of human lives through faith in Jesus alone
 - . Peter
 - . Finally Peter arose and addressed the group
 - . He spoke of God's call to him to go to the home of Cornelius and to meet and eat with the Gentile followers
 - . He spoke of being an eye witness to the moment when the Holy Spirit came and indwelled itself in to the group of Gentiles gathered there
 - . All this happened despite their uncircumcised condition
 - . Secondly, he pointed out the already heavy burden placed upon the Jews with all their rituals
 - . Why impose this on the Gentiles when it isn't necessary in order to be born into a new life, through Christ and the Holy Spirit – Acts 15:11
- . The gathering of the whole church – Acts 15:12-21
 - . The church hears the final decision of the apostles and is pleased
 - . Now they sit back and listen to the conclusion of Paul's account of their first mission
- . James's summary of the apostle's decision
 - . God's will is seen in Cornelius' new birth
 - . Inclusion of non-Jews among God's people was prophesied in the Old Testament – Amos 9:11

- . James made it clear there were to be no more attempts to impose the Jewish rite of circumcision on Gentile converts – Acts 15:19
- . The way to salvation for the circumcised Jew or the pagan Gentile was the same
- . Adjustments were to be made on both sides
 - . In order for Jews and Gentiles to eat together, Gentiles must be willing to abide by the Jewish traditions
 - . Even to this day, Christians need to be selfless and willing to restrain from that which may cause another brother to stumble
- . After ratification of the council, Paul and Barnabas are sent on their way
 - . Judas and Silas, from the Jerusalem church return with Paul and Barnabas to further show their solidarity
 - . An official letter was written by the council for Paul to read to the church in Antioch and circulate amongst the new churches throughout Galatia
 - . Later, under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, Paul writes a much more in depth letter to the Galatians, helping them better understand the true strength and liberty that believers could find through the power of the Holy Spirit

NEXT LESSON: WEDNESDAY, JULY 6, 2016 - HEBREWS 1:1-2:4