

Acts 15:1-21

The Council at Jerusalem, Part 1

Jeremy Doan

Holly Hills Bible Church

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Say it ain't so

1 Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

- Events follow after Paul's first missionary journey¹
 - Paul and Barnabas were back in Antioch
- *Some men came down from Judea*²
 - *Began teaching* – imperfect tense, so they kept on teaching
 - See also Acts 5:42
 - *"Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."*
 - They are not prohibiting Gentiles from becoming Christians³
 - They are merely adding more requirements to the process

¹See supplement for time-line

²See other supplement for map

³or are they?

Let's work it out

2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

- *Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them*
 - *Great* – Greek construction is “not small”
 - *Dissension* – a contention, dissension, dispute
 - Can also mean riot – see Acts 19:40
 - *Debate* – the act of seeking or inquiring
 - Zodhiates: “Indicates an exchange of words rather than a true search”
- *The brethren determined*
 - *Paul and Barnabas and some of the others*
 - Did the others include the dissenters?
 - *Go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue*
 - Is this a precedent for ecclesiastical authority?

It wasn't me!

3 Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren.

- *Being sent on their way*
 - Def. to help one forward on their journey
 - The churches along the way were helping them⁴
- *Describing in detail the conversion of Gentiles*
 - Are they doing this to give glory to God, a la Peter in Acts 15?
 - Or are they doing to gather support for their position?⁵
 - Note they continue to do this even at the council – see v.4 & v.12
- *And were bringing joy to all the brethren*
 - Similar response in Acts 11:18
 - See also Philippians 1:15-18

⁴?

⁵ maybe both?

Cheers and jeers

4 When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

- *They were received by the church and the apostles and the elders*
 - Do we know who the elders⁶ were?
 - How many of the apostles were also elders?⁷
 - What position do James and Peter hold?
 - Galatians 2 calls James, Peter, and John pillars
- *But some of the sect of the Pharisees*
 - *Who had believed*
 - Their place in the church is not questioned
 - *"It is necessary to circumcise them..."*

⁶note the plural

⁷and how important is that distinction

What ever happened to civility?

6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter

- *Came together*
 - The reaction of the spiritual leaders is to gather together
 - What, if anything, does this say about ecumenical councils?
- *To look into this matter*
 - There seems to be a sincere search for the truth
 - The ultimate question is: is the church a separate people group?
- Some key things to look for in this doctrinal dispute
 - To what does their arguments appeal?
 - What is the tenor of this discussion?
 - What is the role of the leaders?
 - What is the role of consensus among the believers?

What God has joined together

7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.

- *After there had been much debate*
 - *Debate* is the same word used above
 - Notice there was “much” debate
- *Peter stood up and said to them*
 - *Brethren, You know*
 - Appeals to their fraternity
 - Appealing to their knowledge
 - *God made a choice among you*
 - Like in Acts 11 he indicates this is God's doing
 - *that...the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe*

X-ray vision

8 And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;

- *And God*
 - *Who knows the heart*
 - See also Acts 1:24
 - *Made no distinction between us and [the Gentiles]*
 - Knowing the faith of the Gentiles, God did two things:
 - *Testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit*⁸
 - *Testified* is *martyreō*, related to the word used in 1:8
 - *Cleansing their hearts by faith*⁹
 - *Cleansing* is *katharizō*, same word used in 10:15
 - As Peter said in chapter 15, who are we to stand in God's way?

⁸just as he had done for the Jews

⁹just as he had done for the Jews

Unbearable

10 *“Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?”*

- *Why do you put God to the test*
 - Do you really think God wasn't right about them?
 - See also Luke 4:2; 11:16; Acts 5:9
 - Who are they to question God's working?
- *By placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke*
 - We weren't able to bear it, so why should they?
- *But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus*
 - *Believe* is imperfect tense, so they keep on believing this
 - So why should they be any different
- What is the key human aspect of this dispute?

Open ears, closed mouth

12 All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

- *All the people kept silent, and they were listening...*
 - Enough said
- *...to Barnabas and Paul*¹⁰
 - P & B continue to speak as to what they had seen God do amongst the Gentiles
 - What things today corroborate the words of doctrine?
- Mid-debate review:
 - They appeal to the actions of God
 - The tenor of the discussion is one of inquiry¹¹
 - The apostles take a the lead in pointing to the works of God

¹⁰Won't these guys shut up?

¹¹Although fierce at times

The elders agree

13 After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, “Brethren, listen to me.

- *After they had stopped speaking*
 - They being P & B speaking about the works of God
- *James answered, “Brethren, listen to me”*
 - Listen is used 4 times in this chapter: vs.7, 12, 13, 24
- *“Simeon has related...”*
 - Notice the cooperation amongst the apostles/elders¹²
- *“...how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.”*
 - Does “a people for His name” have to specifically refer to the church?

¹²It is not based on one man's opinion

The prophets agree

16 With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,

- *With this...*
 - This is the fact that God has included the Gentiles in the church
- *...the words of the Prophets agree*
 - Throughout the book, we see the apostles applying OT prophecies to this new people group
 - What makes this an application, and not a fulfillment?¹³
- Quotes from Amos 9:11-12
 - Similar also to Isaiah 56:7-8; 60:2-3; Zechariah 8:20-23
 - All those passages indicate that God will include Gentiles in his plan
 - And none indicate the Gentiles must become proselytes

¹³and does it make any sense to work back from passages like this?

U-Turns

19 *“Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,*

- *Therefore...*
 - Because God has been doing wonders amongst Gentiles
 - Because this does not contradict what the OT prophets prophesied
- *...it is my judgment...*
 - *Judgment* – to judge in one’s own mind as to what is right, proper, expedient; to deem, decide, determine
 - James is presenting his informed opinion¹⁴
- *...that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles*
 - *Those who are turning* can mean “to turn around” or “to turn back”¹⁵
 - See Luke 1:16-17 & Acts 3:19

¹⁴a word which has lost so much meaning

¹⁵not exactly repentance

WWMD?

20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.

- *We write to them that...*
 - Rather than require circumcision, we should expect these spiritual manifestations
 - James lists four abstentions from pagan practices:
 - Things contaminated by idols
 - Fornication
 - Things that were strangled
 - Blood
 - Is this more law?
- *For Moses [is preached and is read everywhere]*
 - A call to unity—that is, they shouldn't unnecessarily upset the Jews



New Testament Chronological Overview

