Acts of the Apostles – 15

I. The Inspired History
- A. Converted Pharisees Promote Gentile Circumcision (1-5).
  1. The heresy introduced and resisted (1-2).
  2. The heresy renewed in Jerusalem (3-5).
- B. The Council of Jerusalem Called to Settle the Matter (6-29).
  1. Peter introduces the conversion of Gentiles (6-11).
  2. Paul and Barnabas give testimony (12).
  3. James settles the matter by the Spirit (13-21).
  4. The Council sends its Resolution (22-29).
- C. The Council's Resolution Presented in Antioch (30-35).
  1. Antioch rejoices at Gentile liberty (30-32).
  2. Silas remains with Paul and Barnabas (33-35).
- D. The Separation of Paul and Barnabas (36-41).
  1. Paul and Barnabas separate over John Mark (36-39).
  2. Paul takes Silas and begins second trip (40-41).

II. The Sense and Meaning
- A. Visitors from Judea introduce Judaizing to the Church of Antioch and are resisted (1-2).
  1. They came "down" from Judea only in altitude, for Antioch lies due north of Judea.
  2. Judaizing is false application of Old Testament ordinances on New Testament saints.
     a. It was a serious problem in the New Testament (Rom 2:17-29; 14:5-6; Galatians; Phil 2:3-4; Col 2:16-17; I Tim 1:3-11; Titus 1:10-16; Heb 9:8-14).
     b. Circumcision initiated the Old Covenant, placing boys under Moses' law.
     c. The Jews trusted their national heritage much, so it was hard to reject it.
     d. It was common for the Jews to trust in Abraham (Matt 3:7-12; John 8:31-45).
     e. Salvation without Moses was hard for Jews to take. They had to add to Christ.
  3. Paul and Barnabas opposed them vigorously, for they taught grace in Christ alone.
     a. The Spirit had led them to forgiveness and justification in Christ (13:38-39).
     b. They had been directed by the Spirit to the Gentiles with no such requirement.
     c. It is our Christian duty to earnestly contend for the apostolic faith (Jude 1:3).
  4. The brethren at Antioch determined to send Paul, Barnabas, and others to Jerusalem.
     a. The preeminence of the apostles in Jerusalem was well established (5:12-16).
     b. Since the certain men had come from Judea, they chose to deal with the source.
     c. Again we see the plural "elders": prophets, evangelists, bishops, and deacons.
- B. The controversy is renewed in Jerusalem after Paul and Barnabas present their history (3-5).
  1. Supported by the Antioch church, they travel and tell the Gentile story to much joy.
  2. The only occurrence of "conversion" – turning around – is found here in this place.
  3. The Jerusalem Church and their officers received both Paul and Barnabas gladly.
     a. Paul and Barnabas had been in this church before (9:26-28; 11:22-30; 12:25).
     b. They declared their call of God and gospel success among the Gentiles.
  4. Some converted Pharisees rejected their testimony to defend Moses and circumcision.

C. Peter opens the council by reminding the apostles and elders of Cornelius's conversion (6-11).
   1. Recognizing a serious doctrinal controversy, the apostles and elders consult together.
   2. After much disputing, Peter reminds everyone of God's blessing upon Cornelius.
      a. Of all the apostles, God chose Peter to preach the gospel to Cornelius.
      b. The Gentile family of Cornelius heard the gospel from Peter and believed.
      c. God confirmed these converts with the Holy Ghost (10:44-48; 11:15-18).
      d. God gave them the same faith we have, which eliminated the differences.
   3. Peter then accuses these Judaizers for tempting God with the impossible law of Moses.
      a. Tempting God denies His revelation and power to complain or exalt your way.
      b. Your Judaizing requirements reject His testimony and deny their godly hope.
      c. The law could not give life; it was unbearable to all men (Gal 3:21; Ro 7:7-11).
   4. In a remarkable summary, he states apostolic hope to be saved by grace like Gentiles.
      a. Final salvation with perfect righteousness and glorification is by Christ's grace.
      b. Both Jews and Gentiles must be saved by grace, for the law can save no man.
      c. We refer the pronoun "they" to the Gentile "disciples" rather than "fathers."

D. Paul and Barnabas confirmed Peter's testimony with further evidence of the Gentiles (12).
   1. The multitude was silenced by Peter's firsthand report and interpretation of events.
   2. Paul and Barnabas described God's mighty testimony of the Gentiles by miracles.

E. James summarizes the situation and gives an inspired interpretation and conclusion (13-21).
   1. God used Peter first to call by the gospel some Gentiles to be the people of God.
   2. He quotes Amos 9:11-12 as Bible prophecy of these events of Gentile conversions.
      a. "Prophets" are a section of the Old Testament (13:40; Rom 3:21; Luke 24:44).
      b. Restoring the kingdom of God under David (Jesus) would be with Gentiles.
      c. This new kingdom under Christ would be of the rest of the world seeking God.
   3. He has no surprise for acts of God in time were purposed from eternity (Is 46:9-10).
   4. He concludes the council should not resist the eternal purpose of God with Gentiles.
      a. This summary conclusion is not James naturally but by the Holy Spirit (28).
      b. Let us not trouble these Gentile converts by requiring unnecessary burdens.
      c. Let us simply condemn idolatrous meat, fornication, and bloody meat eating.
         (1) "Pollution of idols" is explained as eating meat offered to idols (29).
         (2) Gentiles were gross idolaters; Paul later modified this (I Cor 10:23-33).
         (3) Gentiles were gross fornicators; so the warning here (I Thess 4:1-8).
         (4) Blood was important ceremonially and indicated Gentile paganism.
         (5) Strangled meat does not allow for the blood to run out of the meat.
      d. It is important to remember they were in the time of reformation (Heb 9:10).
      e. He gently reassures the Jews of how Moses is available in all Gentile cities.

F. The council puts its resolution in writing and sends it to the Gentiles by several men (22-29).
   1. The whole church, now in agreement, sends forth Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and Judas.
   2. Only Syria and Cilicia are mentioned, for it was at Antioch the heretics had taught.
   3. False doctrine about our salvation in Christ is a subverting of the soul (II Tim 2:14).
   4. These unauthorized teachers from Jerusalem did not have apostolic approval.
   5. By the Holy Spirit, the apostles, elders, and brethren had become of one accord.
   6. Rather than just Paul and Barnabas (already correct), they sent Judas and Silas also.

G. The Gentile saints at Antioch rejoice to hear their liberty in the gospel of grace (30-32).
   1. Paul and Barnabas assemble the whole church to hear the written resolution.
   2. Imagine believing the gospel of grace and then hearing you must keep Moses' law.
   3. Judas and Silas further confirmed the disciples in the truth with their gifts of prophecy.

H. Silas remains at Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, when Judas returns to Jerusalem (33-35).
   1. When the church had received their ministry, they freed Judas and Silas to return.
   2. It pleased Silas to remain there, and the Holy Spirit will soon use him with Paul.
   3. The church at Antioch had many teachers, beside Paul, Barnabas, and Silas.

I. Paul and Barnabas separate over Mark as they begin their second evangelistic trip (36-39).
   1. Paul purposed by the Spirit to revisit the Gentile churches to confirm them in the truth.
   2. Barnabas desired to take John Mark with them again (13:5 cp 13:13).
   3. John Mark was the nephew of Barnabas by his sister Mary (12:12; Col 4:10).
   4. Paul was offended with Mark's lack of perseverance on the first trip (13:13).
   5. Paul and Barnabas separate over this matter, so Barnabas takes Mark to Cyprus.

J. Paul chooses Silas to replace Barnabas and starts his second trip in Syria and Cilicia (40-41).
   1. The Antioch church chose Paul's position in the matter and commended him to God.
   2. He first visits the churches in Syria and Cilicia, which were near to Antioch.