

Part 39 The Jerusalem Council

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Wednesday, June 15, 2016

† Acts 15:1-31

1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

Well, you know it had to start, dissension inside the Church. These “certain men which came down from Judea.” These were those staunch died in the wool Jews. They had lived their lives sticking to the very letter of the law and they weren’t about to give it up. They were so steeped in their religion they couldn’t see past the end of their noses.

“Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” The Jews looked back to the covenant between God and Moses. It was a very important part of their history and they clung to it. We read about it in **Genesis 17:9-14**

9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.

10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.

11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.

12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed.

13 He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.

“ye cannot be saved.” That was a pretty strong statement and this doctrine was not taught by Jesus or the Apostles, despite the fact that they were all Jews.

2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

Then a dispute breaks out between these “certain men from Judea,” and Paul and Barnabas concerning this false teaching. You can only imagine how this teaching would confuse the new Gentile believers because they have been taught that by repenting of their sins and having faith in Jesus was all they needed to do to be saved. So Paul and Barnabas needed to take care of this matter before things got out of hand. If this false doctrine got started in the Church it would lead to all kinds of problems.

3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

So Paul and Barnabas along with many of the Church members start making their way to Jerusalem to bring this issue up with the Apostles and Church leaders. On their way they declared the great news of the salvation of the Gentiles in Phenice and Samaria, which caused great joy in everyone.

4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

They finally arrive in Jerusalem and are greeted by the church there and the Apostles and elders that resided in Jerusalem. They discussed with them everything that has been going on. From the salvation of the Gentiles to the issue of circumcision.

5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. 6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

Here we have some of the Pharisees that had trusted Jesus as Savior, but they still wanted to cling to the law and declared that all of the new converts needed to be circumcised and also follow the Law of Moses. In other words they wanted to throw that yoke of bondage back on them.

This conflict between the Jews and the Gentiles was a pretty severe one Turn with me to: **Galatians 2:11-15** But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. 12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. 13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

Now, there are two schools of thought on this incident. Some believe that this happened sometime AFTER the Jerusalem council but others, including myself, believe that this was an incident that occurred just before the Jerusalem council. I believe these men Paul is talking about that **came from James**, are also the “**certain men**” that Luke is writing about in our opening text in **Acts 15:1: And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren.**

I believe that Peter was already in Antioch when these men arrived and that he had been there for some time and had gotten friendly with the Gentiles and was eating with them all the time. But when these religious men from Jerusalem show up he gets intimidated by them and leaves the Gentile’s table and joins his fellow Jew’s table. Not only was he intimidated by them so was Barnabas and some other Jews that were there at the time.

Well, this was more than Paul could take and he knew he needed to do something about it fast. So, as he says in Galatians 2:14 **But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? 15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,**

We don’t read anything about Peter disputing with what Paul said. I’d say his face was as red as a beet when Paul called him out in front of all of these religious Jews. He obviously took the criticism well and repented of his wrongful behavior because as we continue in our text in Acts we read this:

7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; 9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

So obviously Peter got over his uneasiness around the other Jews concerning the Gentiles. He boldly stood and declared the truth to these Jews. He reminds them that it wasn't very long ago when he preached and the Gentiles heard the Gospel and were saved by faith. And, he mentions the fact that making them keep the law was like putting a yoke around their necks and he also mentions the fact that neither their forefathers nor even they themselves were able to bear the yoke of the law.

Peter knew, and everyone listening to him knew that if there was anyone able to speak about the saving faith of Christ it was Peter because he was the man preaching when the first Gentiles were saved.

12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

Then it was time for Paul and Barnabas to speak and they relayed everything that had happened on their missionary journey through the Gentile lands and how so many of them had been saved and the Lord had worked many signs and wonders among them.

13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:

Now the verdict is going to be declared. James, of course, was considered to be one of the Church Fathers. He may have been the Bishop or Pastor of the Church of Jerusalem. He is also known as James the less, or James the son of Alphaeus, or James the brother of our Lord. He appears to be the head of this Jerusalem council.

14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

Notice that Simon Peter's name is spelled differently here. Don't let that alarm you. Some people have gotten so crazy about it that they declare this to be someone other than Simon Peter, but it isn't. James is addressing a Hebrew audience and he uses the proper Hebrew pronunciation of his name.

15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: 17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. 18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. ---

James here is referring to the words of the Prophet Amos; **Amos 9:11**: In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old.

19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

The verdict from James is pronounced. There will be no more of this talk of grace plus works, or grace plus circumcision to the Gentiles. It has been proven by Peter, Paul, and Barnabas that the Gentiles were saved solely by grace and not because of works or circumcision.

20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. 21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

Alright, don't let these verses confuse you. James isn't putting the yoke of the law on the Gentiles. This was not something they had to do to insure their salvation. These things he says that they must abstain from are things that the Gentiles did in their pagan false god worship. They would make bloody sacrifices of animals and engage in sexual acts and they would drink blood as part of their worship and covenant with their gods. Of course the eating of blood for the Jews was expressly prohibited because it represented life.

22 Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: 23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:

So the whole council agrees with James' recommendations and they form a committee to go and inform the Gentiles of the council's decision. "**Silas**" this is the first mention of Silas but it definitely will not be the last!

24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: 25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; 29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

The content of the letter that was sent by Paul and the other chief men was short and to the point.

30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: 31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

The Gentiles received the news with gladness. "**Consolation**" means **with comfort**.

† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version