

ACTS LESSON 15

Acts Chapter 15

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Memory verses for this week: *1 Th 5:24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.*

Introduction: In Chapter 14, we saw Paul and Barnabas complete the work that they set out to do on their missionary journey. At the end of the chapter, they returned to their home church and reported what God had accomplished in their efforts. This week we see some men coming in from Judea and attempting to teach false doctrine concerning salvation.

The first portion of Acts chapter 15 presents a major crisis which was coming to a head in the early church. The question at hand was whether Judaism, its rituals, rites, and ceremonialism should have any part in the early church and if so to what extent. A church council was convened in Jerusalem to deal with these matters. The leaders of the local New Testament Churches met to discuss the controversy.

The latter portion of the chapter deals with the council at Jerusalem. It concludes with the churches, by acclamation, agreeing to send a delegation out with a letter clarifying the controversy. At the end of the chapter is the historic parting of the ways between Paul and Barnabas. Paul and Silas begin the second missionary journey.

I. Men from Judea come to church in Antioch

Acts 15:1 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.

Word reached the church at Jerusalem how the gospel had not only flourished among the gentiles at Antioch, but also continued through the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas. It is noteworthy that Paul and Barnabas did not report to the church at Jerusalem upon their return from their missionary journey. Though the church at Antioch likely had no pretense of becoming the leader of the churches, perhaps some in the Jerusalem church were nervous seeing that it might.

It would seem that a question was looming, particularly for those in Judaea. Was Christianity to become primarily a gentile movement with some Jewish believers? Or would it remain as it originally had been constituted as a Jewish movement with a few gentile believers? It is clear there was a distinct party within the Jerusalem church who thought the latter. Recall the suspicion and reluctance of many in the Jerusalem church to accept the preaching of the gospel to the gentiles at Cornelius' household at Caesarea.

In Acts 11:2, reference is made to "they that were of the circumcision" contending with Peter on the matter. In chapter 15, this same party is referred to as "Pharisees which believed" (verse 5). These were people in the early church who evidently had been Pharisees prior to their conversion to Christ. They maintained that believers ought still follow the Jewish mandates detailed in the Law of Moses. Notable amongst those commands was that all Jewish men were to be circumcised. Certain representatives of this segment of the Jerusalem church traveled to the church at Antioch and taught, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved."

What immediately was at stake was if Christianity was to be an adjunct movement within Judaism keeping all the minutia, rites, and rituals of the Law. By extension, a greater principle was at stake. That is, was New Testament Christianity to be described by rites, ritual, and ceremony. Then the point of contention was of circumcision beginning at infancy. Later in church history the same type of heresy was transferred to infant baptism. For centuries, the Papal authority of Rome as well as most of the protestant reformers have held. 'Except ye be baptized after the manner of the church, ye cannot be saved.' Obviously, there was more at stake than just the transition of the church away from Judaism.

We see certain men coming down from Judea with the intention of teaching the church in Antioch that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Anyone who adds to the pure gospel of salvation by grace is an enemy to the gospel that God has given to us. These men wanted to add to the simplicity of the gospel of grace that Jesus provided when He died on the cross for our sins. Jesus is the one who brings salvation, and no man has to help God to save us. Jesus' death on the cross provided the perfect gift of salvation to all who come and accept Him as their Lord and Savior. These men claimed that one had to be circumcised after the manner of Moses.

Lev 12:3 And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

II. Paul, Barnabas, and others come to Jerusalem

Acts 15:2 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.

Acts 15:3 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.

Acts 15:4 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.

This course of action obviously provoked a significant controversy in the church at Antioch. “Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them” (the Judaizers). The word translated as dissension (stasis) literally refers to ‘insurrection’ or ‘sedition.’ It clearly implied that this heresy, introduced in the church, caused an uproar between the Judaizers, Paul, and Barnabas. The word translated as disputation (suzthesis) has the sense of a debate.

Paul and Barnabas immediately and directly challenged this heresy. In as much as the instigators of this error had come from the church at Jerusalem (though there is no evidence they were officially sent), the church at Antioch determined it must be further dealt with. The church decided to send Paul, Barnabas, and certain other of them to Jerusalem. Galatians 2:1 notes that at least one of these was Titus. Luke may likewise have been in the delegation.

The Judaizers had gone out unofficially. However, the church at Antioch sent an official delegation to the church at Jerusalem to take up the question. The phrase, being brought on their way (propempe), literally has the sense of ‘being sent on their way’—by the church. As they traveled through Phenice (Lebanon) and then Samaria, they paused at the various churches along the way, declaring the conversion of the gentiles, “and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.” It is evident that only some in the church at Jerusalem were nervous about the spread of the gospel into the gentile world. Other churches throughout the region rejoiced at the news.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, the delegation was received by the church there and they proceeded to report upon “all the things that God had done with them.” Notice that the apostles are again noted at Jerusalem. Evidently with the demise of Herod, persecution of the church subsided (Acts 12:24).

Paul and Barnabas took their stand on what they had preached at Antioch. They had never preached that it was a requirement to keep the law of Moses in order to be saved. What they explained was how that God had opened the door or salvation to all men (including the Gentiles), and that it was all by grace in the

Lord Jesus Christ. We see in verse 3 that the brethren had great joy in what the apostles had to say. We see that they were readily accepted by the church and the apostles and elders of the church, and they declared unto them all the things God had done for them.

III. The Question at Issue

Acts 15:5 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.

Acts 15:6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

As mentioned in notes on verse 1, “certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed” were Judaizers within the church. They took the position that the church ought be a continuation and extension of Old Testament Israel. Their view was that the church of the New Testament was to be an adjunct of Judaism, observing the Law of Moses, while still believing in Christ. A modern corollary is found in those holding covenant theology which essentially views the modern church as an extension of the covenants made to Israel. They view the church as having superseded Israel but still under the covenants God made to Israel.

Notably, most Protestant and Reformed type of churches hold that infant baptism is the New Testament equivalent to Old Testament circumcision. They hold that children are entered into a covenant with God by their parents when as infants they are ‘baptized.’ Then, at a later age they are ‘confirmed’ as a Christian into the ‘covenant of grace’ {i.e., salvation}. Such theology which is prevalent to this day is rooted in the error of the sect of the Pharisees which believed.

Some of the Pharisees which believed said it was needful to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses. This was the question that they were to discuss with all the apostles and elders.

Acts 15:7 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.

Acts 15:8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;

Peter reminded them that in the not-too-distant past (perhaps five years earlier); “God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the

word of the gospel and believe.” The idea literally is that God chose in (or through) Peter to bring the gospel to the gentiles (i.e., to Cornelius and his household). The Judaizers had grudgingly accepted that, perhaps, as an exception to the rule. However, what is at hand was that the propagation of the gospel to the gentiles, minus the works of the Law, was to become the rule rather than the exception. This is the last action of Peter mentioned in Acts.

In Verse 8, God made it clear that His blessing was upon this furtherance of the gospel by giving them a clear and objective manifestation of the Holy Ghost, “even as he did unto us.” Just as the Jewish believers at Pentecost spoke in tongues, giving irrefutable evidence of the work of the Holy Ghost, the same happened at the house of Cornelius as the gospel officially entered the gentile world. Once again, one major significance of speaking in tongues is set forth. It showed that God’s blessing was upon the gospel going not only to the Jew, but to the gentiles as well. It was a sign-gift directed specifically for the Jewish mind.

Of interest and out of the main context is that God knows what is in the heart. See II Chronicles 6:30. No one else, including the devil, knows what is in our hearts. Here, Peter adds this truth to his argument. God’s acceptance of men, both Jew and gentile, is predicated upon what is in the heart and not upon outer rite, ritual, or ceremony. The Judaizers placed great emphasis upon the latter. Grace looks more to the heart and the faith which emanates therefrom.

Acts 15:9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Acts 15:10 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?

Acts 15:11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

In Christ’ there is “no difference” (literally ‘no distinction’) between Jew and gentile, both are purified in their hearts “by faith.” The idea is that when one in simple faith trusts Christ, their sin is cleansed.

1Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Eph 2:14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

Eph 2:15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

Eph 2:16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

Eph 2:17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

Eph 2:18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

Peter rebukes the idea of adding the works of the Law with its rites, ritual, and ceremony to simple faith in Christ. The Roman Church as well as most mainline Protestant groups would do well to heed the same. Peter here briefly notes that the Law was a burden for even the Jews. He likens such to a yoke “which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.” Paul, in Galatians, will deal with this matter in greater detail.

Peter declares that this case has already been settled. He brings to mind the circumstances and what God did at the house of Cornelius. (Acts 11:1-18) Peter tells them that if they would investigate the facts they would find that God had already settled this matter. When you look at what God had done, there was no doubt that salvation was wholly of grace and that the law was impossible to keep in order to obtain salvation. The law is our school master to bring us guilty before God concerning our sins. If some law had been given that we could be saved, then Jesus would not have had to come and die for our sins. Peter declares several truths in these verses.

- a. God knows the hearts of all men.
- b. *Jer 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? Jer 17:10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*
- c. God bare them witness at the house of Cornelius.
- d. God gave the Holy Ghost unto the Gentiles as He had the Jews.
- e. He no longer put a difference between the Jews and the Gentiles.
- f. All men are purified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- g. Since neither their fathers (the Jews) were able to keep the law, why should they try to put this yoke of bondage upon the Gentiles.
- h. All men, both in Old Testament times and New Testament times, were saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith.

IV. Paul and Barnabas Testify

Acts 15:12 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.

Each party was granted an opportunity to speak. First, the Pharisees which believed had spoken. Peter was next. Afterwards, Barnabas and Paul rose, “declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.” The congregation quietly listened to what they had to say. The mention of “miracles and wonders” which God had wrought through them no doubt was to add credence to the authenticity of their testimony. Just as God had verified his blessing at Cornelius’ household by an obvious manifestation of the Holy Ghost, He likewise verified His blessing upon Paul’s ministry to the gentiles by the miracles He did through him.

The multitude listen as Paul and Barnabas told about the miracles that God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. James backs up Peter’s statement concerning the Gentiles.

Acts 15:13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:

Acts 15:14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

Acts 15:15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

Acts 15:16 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:

Acts 15:17 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.

Acts 15:18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

Finally, James addressed the church. This is James the Just who was the half-brother of Jesus (Galatians 2:19). Paul refers to him as an apostle in Galatians 2:19. After the death of James the brother of John, he evidently had moved into a position of leadership of the church at Jerusalem. In verse 4, that leadership was referred to as “the apostles and elders.” Though James may not have been part of the original twelve apostles, he evidently had become one of the elders or assistant Pastor of the church.

James was held in esteem by all and no doubt by even the Judaizers. He perhaps may have sought to soften what he had to say against the Pharisees by referring to Peter as Simeon which was the Hebraic way of pronouncing his

name rather than Simon which was the Greek way. James begins by indicating that God's blessing was evident upon Peter taking the gospel to the gentiles.

Notice that in so doing, God was taking out of them "a people for his name." He then proceeded to quote from Amos 9:11-12. There the prophet foretold that God would someday rebuild "the tabernacle of David." This likely is a reference to the restoration of the monarchy of the lineage of David which ultimately of course is the Messiah. Then he points out from Amos 9:11-12 that "all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called might seek after the Lord."

In so doing, James clearly points out that it was prophesied in the Old Testament that God would ordain for the gentiles to seek Him. The concluding thought made in verse 18 is that God from ages prior has made known His purposes. The point is that God foretold centuries earlier that He would welcome the gentiles as noted in Amos 9:11-12.

Amo 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:

Amo 9:12 That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this.

God had let them know through the prophecy of His Word, His divine plan and purpose. The Judaizers resisting the gospel going to the gentiles should have understood this.

We know that James was the half brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he was the pastor of the church in Jerusalem. He was one of the more influential men among the Hebrew Christians in all the world. In J. Vernon McGee's commentary on Acts, he states: "James completely agrees with Peter. They state the plan of God for today. Is God saving the whole world? No. Is God bringing in His Kingdom? No. Then what is God doing today? He is visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. We learn in Revelation that standing before the throne of God there will be those of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. The Word of God is to go out into the world. There will be opposition to it and there will be apostasy, but the Word of God is to go out to all the world because God is calling out a people for His name."

James explains that what Simon Peter had said was backed up and confirmed by prophecy. That prophecy stated that God would visit the Gentiles to take out a people for His name. Verse 15, James declares that the prophets were all in agreement with this. At the first of verse 16, James states "after this." After what you might ask... After the time of the Gentiles, God will return and build again the tabernacle of David. He is going to reestablish the throne of David and Christ will come and reign on that throne.

Luke 21:24 And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

*Luke 1:32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:
Luke 1:33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*

God knew exactly what He was going to do from the very beginning of time.. even in eternity.

V. Letters to be sent unto the Gentiles

Acts 15:19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

Acts 15:20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

Acts 15:21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

James' sentence (i.e., verdict, judgement, or opinion) was to "trouble not them which from among the Gentiles are turned to God." He thereupon suggested that they write a letter to their gentile brethren indicating only four things they should avoid. The pollution of idols as further detailed in verse 29 which pertained to not only idolatry but even the association with anything offered to idols. Fornication is translated from the word (porneia) porneia. In its broader sense, which seemingly is implied here, it refers to sexual immorality of all forms.

"Things strangled" may be a reference to the injunction in Leviticus 17:10-16 and 22:8, prohibiting eating of animals which died apart from bloodshed. Curiously, except from reiterating this in verse 29, no mention is ever made of this injunction again in the New Testament.

There is no other reference in the New Testament against the ingestion of blood, though there clearly is command against violence or murder. In summary, the suggested commands were against idolatry, immorality, bloodshed, and possibly one element of the Jewish dietary code.

James' concluding thought was that in every city there were rabbis which essentially taught the Law of Moses. With the exceptions noted, the church need not concern itself with teaching the practice of the Law.

VI. Church at Jerusalem sends Delegation to Antioch

Acts 15:22 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:

Notice how the resolution of the matter pleased not only the apostles and elders, but also the “whole church.” What might be assumed is the Judaizers, at the least, held their peace. As coming church events will reveal, these Judaizers though presently quieted evidently were not convinced. There may have been a church vote with the Judaizers abstaining or there may have been more likely open consensus of which there was no dispute by the Judaizers.

The reference to ‘apostles and elders’ are terms of leadership in the Jerusalem church. The elders (presbuterov presbuteros) were the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek bishop (episkopov episcopos). As the focus of the ministry shifts to the gentile world, the terminology will gradually shift from elders to bishops. Both refer to the same office, today commonly called ‘pastor.’

The plurality of elders is a simple reference to the fact that larger churches had more than just a senior pastor. One obviously was the leader (James here). Others were his assistants. The church along with its leadership chose a party of four to convey their judgment in the issue to the church at Antioch—“Paul and Barnabas” along with “Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief among the brethren.” Little is known about this Judas. Silas (which is an abbreviated form of Silvanus) may have been the Silvanus to which Peter makes reference in I Peter 5:12.

1Pe 5:12 By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.

The council agrees that the issue concerning circumcision in regards to salvation had been settled, and that they would not burden the Gentiles with this old testament rule. They send letters and representatives to Antioch to declare the decision on the matter. Silas and Barsabas were chosen to testify the truth of the letters with Paul and Barnabas.

W. A. Criswell in the Believers Study Bible summed up the happenings of Ch. 15

Significantly, the conference discussed throughout this chapter was

precipitated by the success of the first foreign missionary tour in 13:1–14:28. During that tour, the apostles taught that the Gentiles were saved by faith in Christ alone. The Judaizers' beliefs reflected a serious legalistic flaw in that form of Judaism, which was exposed by Christ during His earthly ministry. They held tightly to their provincialism. The church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas, together with other believers, to Jerusalem to discuss and settle the matter. This prompted what is now known as the Jerusalem Conference. In the proceedings, over which James the half brother of the Lord presided, testimonies came from able men like Simon Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James himself. James's statement is all the more commendable because he was a strict Palestinian Jew, not influenced for the most part by Hellenism. On the basis of O.T. Scripture, he sided with the apostles like Peter and Paul, whose experiences had led them to a more universal concept of the gospel. The action of this conference, after hearing the testimonies from church leaders, was the issuance of "decrees", in 16:4), reaffirming the gospel of salvation by faith in the grace of God as manifested in Christ. The whole church participated in the action, ratifying unanimously the recommendation of the apostles in v. 22. ¹

Acts 15:23 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:

Acts 15:24 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:

Acts 15:25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

Acts 15:26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 15:27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.

The leadership of the church composed a letter (probably by James, the pastor). Notice that it includes not only the leadership of the church but also the brethren therein. It is addressed to the brethren of the gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Syria was the region in which Antioch was located and Cilicia was the adjoining region to the west. It, however, may be well assumed the intent of the letter was for all gentile believers wherever they might be.

¹W.A. Criswell, *Believer's study Bible [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1991 by the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies.

Acknowledgment is made that the Jerusalem church was aware that some from their midst had gone (without church approval) to Antioch and had troubled the church there. The word translated as subverting (anaskeuazw anaskeuadzo) has the sense of plundering or ravaging. It is a strong word and gives insight into how the church at Jerusalem had come to understand that some of their own (the Judaizers) had caused havoc in the sister church at Antioch. The Judaizers who had come to Antioch had caused great mental as well as spiritual upheaval by their advance of fallacious doctrine.

The Jerusalem church sought, therefore, by means of the noted delegation to smooth the troubled waters. Notice that Barnabas and Paul are noted as beloved. They had journeyed to Jerusalem to confront the problem. Now they are being sent back with the answer. Also, notice how the Jerusalem church acknowledged that they were men who had “hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The word translated hazarded (paradidwmi paradidomi) is most commonly translated as ‘delivered.’ The word translated lives here (quch psuche) is the word commonly rendered as ‘soul,’ though often as ‘life’ as well. The greater thought is that they had given their lives altogether for the name of Jesus Christ. Their surrender and dedication was such, they were willing to face, and had in fact faced, opposition bordering upon death.

Recall Paul at Lystra as well as his opposition at Jerusalem and Damascus. The delivering of their lives was not by recklessness on their part. Rather by such dedication they were willing to preach the name of Jesus Christ even in the most dangerous of situations. Comment is further made that Judas and Silas likewise will confirm by mouth what had been written.

Acts 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;
Acts 15:29 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 heart of the epistle was that they believed the Holy Ghost would not have them lay a greater burden than what is noted. Peter noted in 15:10 that the Law was a yoke which “neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.” The fourfold injunction was not a commandment or law from the church at Jerusalem. Rather, it was their considered judgment or advice. They, therefore, as noted in verse 20, urged their gentile brethren to abstain from the following. The word translated as abstain (apecomaiapechomai) is not an order, rather advice to refrain from the following.

It is not set forth as an imperative and hence is not a command. There are several matters of note. No church in the New Testament ever had authority over another. Moreover, in moving away from the mentality of keeping the Law, the statement “under grace” was of sound godly advice based upon truth.

Clarification is observed from verse 20 wherein it is noted to abstain (1) “from meats offered to idols.” Paul would later address this same issue in I Corinthians 8. There, he addressed it not so much as an absolute but rather as a matter of testimony, if the source of the meat was announced. Often meat would be left over from sacrifice to idols and was sold in the market at discounted prices. It became a point of controversy and testimony amongst gentile Christians in the first century. Should or should they not eat such meat.

As noted in comments on verse 20, the blood noted here may be a reference to bloodshed rather than eating meat with the blood remaining (which was prohibited by Jewish law). The “things strangled” evidently is a reference to Leviticus 17:10-16 and 22:8. However as noted earlier, this admonition is never mentioned again in the New Testament. The mention of fornication of course is addressed on several occasions in the New Testament. It refers to sexual immorality of any sort. As the church was evolving from a largely Jewish body to a primarily gentile body, the only matter which is forcefully addressed in the succeeding New Testament epistles is immorality.

The other things, being largely Jewish in nature, seem to fade from significance. The final comment is instructive. “From which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well.” As reiterated in Deuteronomy on several occasions, (4:40, 5:29, 5:33, 6:18, 6:24). Adherence to godly standards of holiness, righteousness, and separation from the world, in reality, is for our own good. The advice of the church at Jerusalem to their brethren at Antioch was for their benefit, particularly in the current transition from a Jewish to gentile church.

Acts 15:30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:

Acts 15:31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

Acts 15:32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

Acts 15:33 And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

Acts 15:34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

Acts 15:35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

The epistle was thereupon duly delivered to the church at Antioch. The church at Antioch was assembled. The epistle from Jerusalem was read. And “they rejoiced for the consolation.” The word translated as consolation (parakhsiv parakleisis) has the sense of ‘encouragement.’ The crisis, at least for them, was over. The controversy had been resolved. They need not be concerned with attempting to keep the law ceremonially. They were under grace for which they rejoiced.

It is noted that both Judas and Silas were prophets. This, of course, was one of the interim gifts of the Holy Spirit granted to the church in the absence of a New Testament. The practical effect is they were preachers who were given special revelation by the Holy Spirit. This office faded like that of the apostles with the fulfillment of the New Testament canon.

1Co 13:8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

1Co 13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

1Co 13:10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

They therefore “exhorted the brethren with many words and confirmed them.” The word translated as confirmed (episthrizw episteridzo) has the sense of ‘strengthening’ or ‘firming up’ their faith. After some unspecified time, they were given a farewell by the church at Antioch. The phrase translated as were let go {apoluwapoluo} has the sense of ‘being sent away.’ No doubt, a formal farewell was held. However, Silas decided to remain at Antioch.

Paul and Barnabas likewise remained at Antioch, “teaching and preaching.” . What is clear is that Paul and Barnabas focused their preaching at Antioch in preaching the gospel (i.e., in preaching salvation). They preached evangelistically and they taught the Word of God. There is a pattern for churches to this day. Also noted is that “many others” also there did the same.

It is quite possible that at this juncture, the unfortunate events described by Paul in Galatians 2:11-21 took place. There, he recounts how Peter came to Antioch to see the work. Initially upon his arrival, Peter had mingled freely with the gentile Christians. However, when others from the Jerusalem church arrived, Peter suddenly stopped fellow-shiping with them, associating only with Jewish believers. (The infection of the Judaizers was still at work.) Even Barnabas is noted as being caught up in this error. Paul confronted Peter and rebuked him as recorded in Galatians 2:14. As a result, both Peter and Barnabas were returned to a proper position by Paul’s admonition.

The apostles declare that they gave no such commandment as the brethren from Judea had claimed. You notice that the church was in one accord concerning this issue. The decision was reached by letting the Holy Spirit guide and direct them. They were encouraged to abstain from meats offered to idols and from blood and things strangled. They were to also avoid fornication. When the epistles were received, the disciples rejoiced in the truth. We see Judas returns to Jerusalem while Silas remained in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas continued to teach and preach in Antioch.

VII. Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Acts 15:36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

Acts 15:37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

Acts 15:38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

Sometime thereafter, Paul related his desire to Barnabas to return again and visit the cities where they had “preached the word of the Lord.” Here the word (katagellw) kataggello’ in distinction to (euaggelizw) euangelidzo (as in verse 35) is used. Its thought is of preaching in its more generic sense, summarizing their entire ministry in their first missionary journey. In short, Paul had a burden to see how these young converts and churches were doing. Fulfilling the Great Commission involves more than just winning people to Christ. Paul desired to return and strengthen those whom he had won to Christ.

Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them once again. Paul, however, remembered how John Mark had “departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.” He had basically turned back. In essence, he had fainted in the day of adversity (Proverbs 24:10). He had quit when the going got tough. Barnabas, perhaps following his heart, wished to give him another chance.

Perhaps, Paul thought it not wise to take someone that had previously turned back to such a crucial mission as strengthening the young churches. Paul had enough opposition to face without having to contend with a proven foot-dragger and quitter.

Acts 15:39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed

asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; Acts 15:40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. Acts 15:41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

The controversy produced a parting of the ways between Paul and Barnabas. Here, evidently, two strong godly leaders had a sharp disagreement. The Holy Ghost does not allow Luke to comment on who was right. Barnabas' ministry after this disagreement is not again noted in the New Testament. The focus remains upon Paul. In later years Paul spoke kindly of Barnabas in I Corinthians 9:6, indicating their strained relationship had been restored.

Likewise, Paul would later write well of Mark in Colossians 4:10 and II Timothy 4:11. It should be inferred that despite controversy and disagreement, there was not animosity, bitterness, or personal vendetta on the part of Paul toward Barnabas. The evidence is to the contrary. They simply multiplied their ministries by dividing. Barnabas therefore "took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus."

It should be noted that Cyprus was both Barnabas' home area as well as where he and Paul had begun their first missionary journey. He returned there to strengthen the work already begun. Paul and Silas and "went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches."

For his part, Paul, along with Silas, returned to the other portion of his first journey. His purpose was to confirm the churches. In so doing, young converts would be strengthened over the long run. Notice the emphasis upon the churches. The focus of the New Testament is upon local churches rather than some mysterious, invisible, universal church. The importance of the local church is thus made clear. Notice also that Paul's second missionary journey was "recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God." The word translated as recommended (paradidwmi paradidomi) has the sense of being delivered—it is in the passive voice. (Recall also that it is the same word used in verse 26 of 'hazarding' their lives.)

Here, they were delivered to the "grace of God." The brethren (i.e., the church) committed them to God's protective care called here, His grace.

Heb 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

As a closing footnote, it is noteworthy the same is not said about Barnabas. What is implied is that the church took the position that Paul was right in the controversy about John Mark. What the church may also have known and is not

recorded is the attitude with which Barnabas departed. If it was less than righteous, it may be why they did not place their blessing upon him. I have no doubt that if there was any wrong doing that Barnabas repented of it and continued in the grace of God. In the end, all of God's will was observed and accomplished.

You notice that it was Paul's desire to return to the churches that they had established on their first missionary journey to see how they were doing. When Paul refused to take Mark it caused contention between he and Barnabas. We see that God worked this out by allowing both men to go, with Paul going with Silas and Barnabas going with John Mark. They went throughout the land recommending the grace of God to the brethren. This built up and confirmed the churches.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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