

ACTS 15:2-7

Introduction:

Remember, certain men from Jerusalem took it upon themselves to go to Antioch to **cor**rect Body believers' doctrine of salvation. They said in Acts 15:1 that it was necessary to be circumcised to be saved.

They were trying to bring believers, saved by pure grace, back under the Law. They thought Paul's message was a soul-destroying **heresy.

1. Most miss the difference in change from Israel's ministry of Covenant Law to Paul's grace message. One said: "It would be like telling the Soviet citizens in the 1950's-60's that they now could enjoy all the freedoms and liberties of the American government." That would have been hard to comprehend, as it was with the Jews wrestling with going from Law to Grace. We are to remember: Romans 6:14 - [For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.]
2. In the Little Flock's Kingdom-Law thinking, they were questioning who had any right to move away from the Law that **God** Himself had established? Was it now right to think of uncircumcised Gentiles as being the people of God along with themselves?

At this moment, little information had been given to them that the Law (the middle wall of partition) had been **removed by the **cross**.

Ephesians 2:13-15 - But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 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;

3. No doubt, the Little Flock was mystified by how the Gentiles were then being saved by great numbers under Paul's new message of salvation by grace, with **out** the Law.

Acts 13:38-39 - Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: Acts 13:39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

4. *Paul and Barnabas were establishing churches even among the Jews, where the Law and circumcision were **not** required. This is what led these Jewish believers in 15:1 to come to Antioch to correct this **seem**ingly error. They were genuinely concerned and that moved them to begin teaching 15:1.

But

they were wrong!

A.

1. This caused quite a **con**troversy between these believing Pharisees and Antioch believers, who fol-

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.

lowed Paul's and Barnabas' grace gospel. Upon hearing these law followers (circumcision needed to be saved), grace believers were confused. Paul and Barnabas stood to **de** fend their uncircumcision message! Both parties argued, disputed, and quarreled - causing a great **ten**sion between them.

*Note: Many believe Paul is commenting about this in Galatians 2:4-5 - [And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: Gal. 2:5 To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.]

"False brethren" means that they believed Israel's kingdom message and being under law, where it was needful to be circumcised to **prove salvation.

2. The Church at Antioch (and the Lord) decided it was **best** to send Paul and Barnabas, with others (Titus), up to Jerusalem (the Little Flock Church and the 11 apostles) to settle this difference (a Pow-wow).
3. The matter to be resolved was: ❶ Do Gentiles have to believe in Moses and follow the Law? No believing Kingdom Jew would, at this point in time, deny Moses. ❷ Or should they believe in Paul as God's messenger - who not long ago was a villain?

It seems the deck is stacked against Paul's **new grace message.

- a. *Note: It is important to remember that these questions and issues needed to be discussed, because most believing Jews were zealous of the Law and thought **all** believers should be too!

Acts 21:20 - And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:

- b. These Jews would be inclined to think that the believing Gentiles should keep the Law of Moses. Also, know that Paul's going to the 11 apostles (James and elders of the Jerusalem Church) to settle this matter is **not** saying Paul was **subject** to them. It was not only the Church at Antioch that sent Paul, but also the **Lord** sent him for a very specific purpose.

Galatians 2:2 - And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

- (1) The Lord's purpose was to have Paul communicate to Jerusalem's leaders **his** gospel that he had been preaching to the Gentiles. If accepted or approved of, that might have them to acknowledge Paul's ministry publically and officially as the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:3). That would help **prevent** further tension from trying to pressure Gentiles to follow the Law!

Galatians 2:7, 9 - But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as *the gospel* of the circumcision *was* unto Peter; Gal. 2:9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

- (2) Paul already had full authority from the Lord, entirely **apart** from the 11 (Acts 9:15). Paul had already been used greatly by God, with great numbers of Gentiles coming to faith in Christ (Tarsus and his first missionary journey - Acts 9-14).

4. The reason Paul went to Jerusalem wasn't just for his sake, but for their sakes! As Paul would explain God's new revelation to them, he would tell how God had raised him to go to the nations. That would **free** them from Matt. 28:18-20 & Mark 16:15-16.

- a. *Paul would be proclaiming the grace gospel to the heathen (all lost), entirely apart from the Little Flock's participation. They would **remain** to help the Jewish Kingdom Messiah believers then, and those after the Rapture through their **writings** (Heb.-Rev.).
 - b. This separation of Messiah believers from Body believers was the **result** of Israel's rebellion, rejection, and unbelief of Christ. But, it was important that the Little Flock would understand that the Gentiles in the Body were their brethren in Christ, **without** keeping the Law. This, no doubt, was Paul's prayer and hope.
5. Of those who accompanied Paul and Barnabas, only Titus is named (Gal. 2:1). The choice of these two (Barnabas and Titus) was a **God** thing! Barnabas originally belonged to the Jerusalem Church and was a Levite by birth. Titus was an uncircumcised Greek-Gentile.

Acts 4:36 - And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, *and* of the country of Cyprus,

Galatians 2:3 - But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:

- B. *On their way to Jerusalem, they go through Phenice and Samaria sharing how the Gentiles were turning

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.

to Christ. Many of these believers were Jewish, but they rejoiced that a door of faith had now been opened to the Gentiles by God that was **supernatural** and **undeniable**.

- C. 1. As Paul and his group arrived at Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and its leaders. Their

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.

hearts received Paul, but their **minds** needed understanding concerning his grace message.

2. The Jerusalem Church was growing again. Many of the Jewish believers who had been scattered because of the persecution from the apostate religion (Acts 7-8), and some even by **Saul** of Tarsus, were returning. Having their own church right in Jerusalem gave them comfort.

Saul-Paul's conversion was no longer in **question, and he received a hearty welcome as a servant of Christ.

3. The meeting here was the public meeting and greeting. But Paul gave the 11 apostles and leaders the courtesy of meeting with them privately **first**.

Galatians 2:2 - And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

- D.

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.

*As Paul and Barnabas publically gave their report or defense of the gospel of grace, and told them of all that God was doing in grace among the Gentiles, there were some who were less than convinced. Believing Pharisees spoke up in favor of Moses and the Law. They felt that the Gentiles must approach God through Israel's Law beliefs in order to be saved. They (Gentiles) must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses or their so-called faith was in **vain**.

Isaiah 56:6-7 - Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Isa. 56:7 Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.

E.

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

1. A special

meeting is called of the apostles and elders to discuss and resolve the matter between Antioch and Jerusalem.

- a. To even be talking about circumcision versus uncircumcision shows the **decline** and passing away of the Pentecostal Kingdom offer program. **Remember**, Peter and the other apostles had been given authority to represent Christ officially in His **absence** (Matt. 16:19, 18:18-19).

*The fact that all the leaders at the Jerusalem Church also had come to exchange their views and feelings and to dispute much, indicated the passing of the Kingdom program. Authority had shifted as we will see **James** (the Lord's half-brother) making the final decision as pastor of the Jerusalem Church. Apostles had authority elsewhere.

- b. Also present at this special meeting were the "false brethren" (Gal. 2:4-5). At this time, we will say they are wrong **dispensationally** - but some could be personal church operators who had **infiltrated** the meeting. We know how Satan works to prevent truth. Also present were Paul, Barnabas, Titus, and others to defend the gospel of grace and to keep the issue the

issue!

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.

F.

1. Now they are back at a public meeting with everybody. Through this whole ordeal, they had several meetings going from private back to public.

Acts 15:12, 22 - 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. 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:

*Now the leaders are ready to make the decree-judgment on the matter.

2. We will see the **last** act of Peter here in the book of Acts. He stands as the chief leader of the apostles.
 - a. **Remember:**

Matthew 16:15-19 - He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Matt. 16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Matt. 16:17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. Matt. 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matt. 16:19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Acts 2:14 - But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all *ye* that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:

*Peter stands up as the **official** leader of the Kingdom Church and head of the apostles. As his last act in Acts, he helps the transition to take place as we will see him endorse Paul, his message, and ministry to the Gentiles. Peter publically, for the **record**, will state the change in the program with Paul's new ministry.

- b. In Galatians 2, Paul helps us to have **insight** as to what took place in this meeting in Jerusalem.

Galatians 2:6-7 - But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me: Gal. 2:7 But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as *the gospel* of the circumcision *was* unto Peter;

*Those at Jerusalem could not add anything to Paul's message, but Paul certainly was able to tell them some **new** things they did not know about. Paul had **advance** revelation, something new that **superseded** the Kingdom Program, that they had not heard yet, about what God was doing. That is why Paul is there, to communicate that God had a **new** program and God was dealing with the Gentiles in a **new way** - **apart from them**.

- * No doubt, this would be hard for favored Jews (1500 years) to adjust to. So Peter is awakened
- * by God about his encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10, and Peter stands up to help these
- * brethren as to what is happening.