

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 15:1-11 | Session 38 | Saved, Even as They

Paul and Barnabas set out from Antioch, Syria, and have now completed what I am calling, their first *grace* missionary journey; taking the gospel of grace to the uncircumcised (that is, the Jews) throughout areas of Cyprus, Pamphylia, and Galatia (See your map). It appears the reason for their journey was to spread the message that “By Jesus all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (13:39). Those words were spoken by Paul in Antioch Pisidia, and is the very first recorded mention of the grace gospel; it was met with a mixed response. Throughout the rest of their journey, Paul and Barnabas suffered persecution for the gospel they preached. Now, safely back in Antioch, Syria, there is no indication that the *church* there had any issue with what they had preached, and that is because the church, guided by the Holy Spirit, had sent them out for that very reason (13:2; 14:26). We left off at chapter 14:28, where Paul and Barnabas, having fulfilled their mission, “abode long time with the disciples” in Antioch.

Chapter 15:1—

Recall there is a Jewish assembly in Jerusalem in which the some of the other apostles, e.g., James, Peter, were a part of. These **certain men** were not part of that assembly and were not sent by them. Notice 15:24, these **certain men** are said to be *subverting your souls*. This chapter corresponds with Galatians 2:4, Paul calls these **certain men**, *false brethren...who came in to spy out our liberty*. These men came to Antioch and taught, **except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved**. This flies in the face of Paul’s declaration in Acts 13:39.

Verse 2—

How long these men were in Antioch before Paul and Barnabas confronted them, we don’t know. These men came to stir the pot and **Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension** (Greek: *stasis* = Literally means, *insurrection*; yet it can also be, *a standing*: that is, Paul and Barnabas took a stand!) **and disputation with them**, they didn’t back down; they strongly reasoned and questioned, and had a vigorous discussion; I think that is the idea of **no small discussion**.

They determined, is one Greek word, *tasso* which can be translated as, to appoint or put in order. The word **they** doesn’t appear in the Greek. Remember our rule of interpretation, “When the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense” Here, it wouldn’t make sense that **they** would be the *certain men*. Why would these *false brethren* want Paul and Barnabas to **go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question**? Therefore, we should seek another sense and probably take the **they** as the leaders in the church of Antioch who sent Paul and the others **to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question**. In fact, the next verse lends support to that.

Verses 3,4—

And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles. They never stop preaching the gospel. When a person truly hears the grace message there is **great joy**. Arriving in Jerusalem, like they had done in Antioch upon their return, **declared all things that God had done with them**.

Verse 5—

Pharisees which believed. They believed the Kingdom gospel that Peter had been preaching, that is, they believed Jesus was Messiah, and that one must repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. These Pharisees were not troublemakers, rather they were espousing the only gospel they knew. They did not know the new revelation that Jesus had given to the apostle Paul; Acts 13:39. In a sense they were saying the correct thing with the limited knowledge they had. Up until the gospel of grace, a gentile had to **keep the Law of Moses** if he had any chance of getting into the Kingdom of God. Paul’s gospel given to him by revelation (Ephesians 3:1-9) was the opposite of what the Pharisees here believed.

Verse 6—

Today we rather flippantly say, “People were always saved by grace through faith, let’s move along, nothing to see here!” But that simply is not correct. **The apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter**. What they were considering was ALL NEW.

Verse 7-9—

And when there had been much disputing. In the real world, a problem is solved by both sides **disputing** and presenting their point of view. Both sides needed to be weighed...something we seem to have lost in our society where there is only one side and if you don’t agree with it, tough.

Peter, while not the leader of the assembly in Jerusalem (James was), was respected as an apostle and was often the spokesman, **rose up, and said unto them** and relates his **choice** by **God** that he should go to the **Gentiles** and **by his mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe**. This, no doubt, is referring to his visit to *Cornelius* back in chapter 10. Like the Jews who believed, the Gentiles received **the Holy Ghost** (Acts 10:44).

Verse 10—

Peter’s point in verse 10 is, I think, if there is new revelation given to Paul, and Gentiles are being saved, why heap the Law upon them? The Law was a difficult **yoke...which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear**.

Verse 11—

This verse, like 13:39, is a pivotal passage in understanding a new dispensation. These are the last words of Peter that are recorded in the book of Acts. I think what this verse shows is that Peter recognizes there is a new dispensation of grace...

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

Note that Peter does not say, the Gentiles will be saved like us, rather, we the Jews shall be saved as the Gentiles are saved.

Peter, it appears, understood the grace gospel and the transition that was taking place. In fact, Peter’s second letter bears that out in several places (2nd Peter 1:2; 3:14-18). Earlier in Acts, Peter never used the term *grace* in his kingdom gospel sermons.