

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 15:12-35 | Session 39 | No Greater Burden

Paul and Barnabas have traveled from Antioch to Jerusalem for a meeting with the Apostles. The purpose of their visit is to solve a dispute between Paul and the Judeans which concerns what happens to a Gentile when they believe in Jesus Christ by grace through faith. Paul says they are justified fully, but the Judeans say these so-called believers are not saved unless they are circumcised (that is, keep the Law of Moses). A council is convened in Jerusalem with the James (the Lord's brother, not the Apostle) presiding. A group of believing Pharisees take the side of the Judeans, but the Apostle Peter stands in defense of Paul and states, in verse 11, there is "no difference between us (Jews) and them (Gentiles)...through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." Peter's statement was stunning, the Jews will be saved even as the Gentiles, that is, by grace through faith and not of works of the Law (See Acts 13:38,39).

Verse 12—

Now, as those in attendance of the council listen in silence **Paul and Barnabas** give a full recap of what happened to the **Gentiles**, and **what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them** (Paul and Barnabas).

Verse 13-18—

James answered by reminding the council that **Simeon** (i.e., Peter) **did visit the Gentiles** (See Acts 10). Salvation came to the Gentiles by belief in Jesus Christ, but they had to repent, be baptized, and keep the Law of Moses in order to be accepted into the coming kingdom. Notice verse 16 is a prophetic passage dealing with the **tabernacle of David** that will be in **ruins** but later God will **set it up**. James seems to be making the point that in the Kingdom of God which will come when Jesus **returns**, it will be made up of both Jew and Gentile. Some Jews may have wondered, or even questioned the salvation of Jews, but James says, in verse 18, **Known unto God are all his works...** In other words, God knows what He is doing!

Verse 19—

Paul has just shared with the council how the Gentiles are now being saved by grace through faith and not by following the Law of Moses (Acts 13:38,39), and Peter has acknowledged the same (Acts 15:11). Now James pronounces the sentence **that they trouble not them** (with matters of the Law of Moses), **which from among the Gentiles are tuned to God**. This had to be another shocking statement for the Jews to hear. If the book of James was written before this, then James has changed his theology, because in that epistle he wrote **faith without works is dead**, and certainly, for Jew or Gentile saved under the gospel of the circumcised (Galatians 2:7), that would have been true. But it is not true under the grace gospel.

Verse 20—

It seems we should be clear that James's *sentence* that the Gentiles should **abstain from pollutions of idols, and fornication, and things strangled, and blood** were not things to do in order to *get saved* or to *stay saved*; but they were things to accommodate peace between Jew and Gentile in order for the two ethnic groups to be able to fellowship together without any strife. In other words they are cultural accommodations to help Gentile believers avoid offending Jews

who revere the Law of Moses. Paul was a peace maker between Jew and Gentile as seen in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; whatever it took for the ***gospel's sake***.

And by the way, this is significant for us today. The social context you choose to participate in is quite critical to your testimony and your fellowship with others of like precious faith. All things are lawful, but not all things are expedient (1 Corinthians 6:12). We should be wise in where we hang out and what we do and who we hang out with.

Verse 21—

The reason for abstaining from the things above is because in **every city**, and **in the synagogues**, the Law of **Moses** was **preached**. There is no sense in preaching the gospel of grace in the Jewish synagogues if the actions of the Gentiles repelled the Jews. Our actions can keep our message from being heard.

Verse 22—

It pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send: Decisions should not be made in a vacuum. It shouldn't be one person who decides everything for the church (like in the Catholic church), rather the whole body should work together as one (e.g. Congregational). We are also introduced for the first time to **Silas** who was one of the **chief men among the brethren**. **Silas** will accompany Paul in his second *grace* missionary journey (Acts 15:40). We will discuss it later, but why would Paul not choose a Gentile to accompany him? It appears Judas and Silas go back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas to help encourage the Gentiles believers there who were undoubtedly confused about their salvation and who most likely needed to be encouraged and strengthened (vs. 32).

Verses 23-29—

The council drafted a letter to those **Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia...** Included in the letter was the fact that the Apostles and the assembly in Jerusalem had not sent the men who were **subverting your souls, saying Ye must be circumcised, and keep the Law: to whom we gave no such commandment**.

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Verses 30,31—

The Gentiles and the entire assembly in Antioch had to have been waiting with bated breath for the return of Paul and the others to find out what they must do, and when they heard the letter read, **they rejoiced for the consolation**. The word **consolation** means *comfort*. They were comforted by the words they heard.

Verse 32-35—

We see here why **Judas and Silas** went along. As **prophets**, they were able to **exhort the brethren** (the Jews), **and confirmed** the **words** that were written. After the good news had been delivered (maybe they had a church potluck!) The group from Jerusalem headed back, but **it pleased Silas to abide there still**. And **Paul and Barnabas continued their teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also**. Others were teaching the grace message now.