

Sunday Lesson – May 2, 2021

GOSPEL: Acts 15: 1 - 18

Council at Jerusalem

Background

“In the earliest days of the Christian church, the church was comprised predominately of Jews. In Acts chapter 8 the gospel spread to the Samaritans (who were ethnically mixed Jews-Gentiles), and many Samaritans received Jesus Christ as Savior. In Acts chapter 10, the apostle Peter was the first to take the gospel specifically to the Gentiles, and many received Christ as Savior. In Acts chapters 13—14, Paul and Barnabas had a very fruitful ministry among the Gentiles. All of these Gentiles turning to faith in Christ caused concern among the Jewish believers, first expressed in Acts 11:1–18, and the issues that caused concern were ultimately decided upon at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). The issues centered on two questions: Do Gentiles first have to become Jews before they can become Christians? Do Gentiles have to observe the Mosaic Law after they become Christians?” *(Excerpts from gotquestions.org/Jerusalem-Council.html)*

Insight

“It is interesting that the issue the Jerusalem Council was dealing with is still very much an issue in the church today. There are groups still teaching that Christians must obey the Old Testament Law. The specific goal of the Jerusalem Council was to decide what aspects, if any, of the Old Testament Law Christians must observe. There was no mention of the Sabbath whatsoever. Further, the Jerusalem Council made it abundantly clear that these rules were not requirements for salvation by reaffirming that salvation is by grace for both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 15:11). How many arguments would be solved if the



church today would simply follow the principle set by the Jerusalem Council—limit your liberty for the sake of love?” *(Excerpts from gotquestions.org/Jerusalem-Council.html)*

Gospel Reading

“It wasn’t long before some Jews showed up from Judea insisting that everyone be circumcised: “If you’re not circumcised in the Mosaic fashion, you can’t be saved.” Paul and Barnabas were up on their feet at once in fierce protest. The church decided to resolve the matter by sending Paul, Barnabas, and a few others to put it before the apostles and leaders in Jerusalem. After they were sent off and on their way, they told everyone they met as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria about the breakthrough to the non-Jewish outsiders. Everyone who heard the news cheered—it was terrific news! When they got to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas were graciously received by the whole church, including the apostles and leaders. They reported on their recent journey and how God had used them to open things up to the outsiders. Some Pharisees stood up to say their piece. They had become believers, but continued to hold to the hard party line of the Pharisees. “You have to circumcise the pagan converts,” they said. “You must make them keep the Law of Moses.” The apostles and leaders called a special meeting to consider the matter. The arguments went on and on, back and forth, getting more and more heated. Then Peter took the floor: “Friends, you well know that from early on God made it quite plain that he wanted the pagans to hear the Message of this good news and embrace it—and not in any secondhand or roundabout way, but firsthand, straight from my mouth. And God, who can’t be fooled by any pretense on our part but always knows a person’s thoughts, gave them the Holy Spirit exactly as he gave him to us. He treated the outsiders exactly as he treated us, beginning at the very center of who they were and working from that center outward, cleaning up their lives as they trusted and

believed him. “So why are you now trying to out-god God, loading these new believers down with rules that crushed our ancestors and crushed us, too? Don’t we believe that we are saved because the Master Jesus amazingly and out of sheer generosity moved to save us just as he did those from beyond our nation? So what are we arguing about?” There was dead silence. No one said a word. With the room quiet, Barnabas and Paul reported matter-of-factly on the miracles and wonders God had done among the other nations through their ministry. The silence deepened; you could hear a pin drop. James broke the silence. “Friends, listen. Simeon has told us the story of how God at the very outset made sure that racial outsiders were included. This is in perfect agreement with the words of the prophets: After this, I’m coming back; I’ll rebuild David’s ruined house; I’ll put all the pieces together again; I’ll make it look like new so outsiders who seek will find, so they’ll have a place to come to, all the pagan peoples included in what I’m doing. “God said it and now he’s doing it. It’s no afterthought; he’s always known he would do this.” The Message

What It Could Mean?

“After the sounds of debate that underlie the previous verses, Acts 15:12 begins with silence. Readers should notice the presence of this silence in verses 12-13, as it is the pivot point of the narrative. During this pause, Paul and Barnabas tell the stories of actual people, but also of God’s outbreking among those people, underscored by signs and wonders. “Signs and wonders” in Acts always points to the presence of God (see 2:19, 22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3). Their appearance among Gentiles marks God’s presence at work.

After the silence, James speaks, using the words of the prophet Amos (Amos 9:11-12) as found in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the scriptures of Israel. The prophecy that Luke chooses here promises God’s divine rebuilding of

Jerusalem after its destruction. Part of that restoration will be that both the remnant that has survived, along with the Gentiles whom God has called, will seek God.

Luke’s audience, hearing this story at least a decade or two after the Roman demolition of Jerusalem, would surely have heard in the words of Amos the promise that God would again restore Jerusalem. Moreover the Gentile conversions would have been seen as a sign affirming that eventual restoration.

Here the scripture for this Sunday ends, but the decision of the church is already evident. The Gentiles will be brought in as Gentiles, marked as holy and beloved by prophecy, the testimony of God’s signs and wonders, and the gift of God’s Holy Spirit. The doors of the church are open.” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org by Margaret Aymer)*

Readings for Further Study

- [Galations 2:16/Ephesians 2:8/Romans 3:28](#) *Justified by faith through grace*
- [Romans 14:1/3/15:7/John 13:35](#) *Accept other believers..do not quarrel/do not treat with contempt/Accept one another/Love one another*

Thought for the Day

“Every witness will rejoice at the work God did. This is God’s goal for you. This is your inheritance: more victory than defeat, more joy than sadness, more hope than despair.” ~ *Max Lucado*

A Prayer

Lord of all, in Jesus you have made us all sisters and brothers in Christ. There is no distinction between Gentile and Jew. There is no separation that can remove any from fellowship in Christ’s community. Blind us to our differences so that in unity we may proclaim your truth to all, for the sake of Jesus Christ in whom there is harmony and peace. **Amen.**