

>>>>>> Acts - Lesson 26 <<<<<<<

- 1) Well, we have heard from Peter and James and Paul and Barnabas.
- 2) Deliberations have taken place.
- 3) So, what is the verdict?

Acts 15:22-35 (NIV)

The Council's Letter to Gentile Believers

²² Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers. ²³ With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

²⁴ We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. ²⁵ So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. ²⁸ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹ You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

³⁰ So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. ³¹ The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. ³² Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers. ³³ After spending some time there, they were sent off by the believers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. ^[34] ³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

- 4) Let's spend a few minutes discussing this letter.
- 5) However, before we get started, let's hit a couple of items:
 - a) As far as we are told, this letter which was produced by the Jerusalem Council was not circulated beyond the churches in Syria and Cilicia. However, I believe it probably was.

- i) As we proceed, we will see that Paul on his second missionary journey tells the churches in Galatia of the results of the council (16:4).
 - (1) Barnabas and Mark probably also told the churches in Cyprus.
- ii) Considering the importance of the decision and proclamation it makes they would have been remiss not to get it to the other churches.
- b) During these past two discussions, we have gone back several times to the Galatian letter.
- c) That being said, we should probably make sure we know where it fits in this discussion.
 - i) To be perfectly clear, we do not know the date of Paul's letter to the Galatians.
 - ii) If you attempt to google it you will find it many varying opinions.
 - (1) Truthfully, all dates around this period are murky.
 - iii) My take is that it was obviously written after the 1st missionary journey (no churches to write to). I also believe it was written before the Jerusalem council.
- iv) REASONS:
 - (1) First, if it were written after the council, it would have undoubtedly contained reference to the findings and results of that council.
 - (a) Perhaps even a copy of the letter produced by the council itself.
 - (2) Second, as discussed in the last lesson, the trip to Jerusalem of Galatians 2 was, in my opinion, definitely NOT a reference to the Jerusalem council.
 - (a) Ref Acts lesson 25, page 109 item 15 a) and following.
 - (3) I also believe the tone of the conclusion of the meeting of Galatians 2 paved the way for the Antioch church to send Barnabas and Saul on the first missionary journey.
 - (4) Finally, as I mentioned a moment ago, we will see in chapter 16:4 that one of the things Paul, Silas, and Timothy do on the second missionary journey is to deliver the results of the council.
- 6) So, all that being said, we probably have a reasonable perspective on the dispersion of the results. So, ...

What do you find encouraging about the letter?

- 7) Personally:
 - a) First, the apostles and elders own up to the fact that these men that started this were not authorized by them to go to Antioch.
 - i) It also appears that after hearing about this, despite Luke's saying they were from Judea (non-specific), the indication here is that they were from the church in Jerusalem – not authorized but, from that group anyway.
 - ii) All of this is tacitly saying that they (the apostles and elders) did not agree with what these men were teaching.

- b) Second, they recognize the value and work of Paul and Barnabas.
 - c) Finally, the apostles and elders definitely want some backup for what Paul and Barnabas will say and for the validity of the letter itself. This will be through the voices of Judas and Silas.
- 8) One interesting fact that came out in the initial Antioch situation was that they not only sent Paul and Barnabas but vs. 2 of chapter 15 indicates others as well.

Acts 15:2 (NASB 2020)

² And after Paul and Barnabas had a heated argument and debate with them, *the brothers* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

- a) When I first read this I thought that it was perhaps a mixture of those on both sides of the issue.
- b) However, considering that the council was sending Judas and Silas along with the letter, the group that came to Jerusalem may have all been of Paul and Barnabas' persuasion and so verification from the apostles and elders would be in order on the return trip.

What, if anything, do you find disturbing about the letter?

- 9) Personally:
- a) The first thing I see that is a bit disturbing is that the actual issue – circumcision as a requirement for salvation – is NOT directly addressed.
 - b) By omission, the default position would be that it was not required. Just found it is a bit strange that it was not mentioned directly.
 - c) I found the requirements they did set forth in the letter a bit strange when taken at face value.
 - i) abstain from food sacrificed to idols.
 - ii) from blood.
 - iii) from the meat of strangled animals.
 - iv) and from sexual immorality.
- 10) So, I did a bit of research into what scholars seem to think this portion of the letter from the council really means and why it was phrased as it was.
- 11) First, Luke does not tell us what these 4 requirements are based on.
- a) Two common theories are:
 - i) Noachian laws – these are actually a part of the Talmud which was written well after this letter. (more on that in a minute).
 - ii) Lev. 17-18 which can be correlated to all four prohibitions.
 - b) The seven Noahide or Noachian laws as traditionally enumerated in the Babylonian Talmud:
 - (1) Not to worship idols.

- (2) Not to curse God.
 - (3) Not to commit murder.
 - (4) Not to commit adultery or sexual immorality.
 - (5) Not to steal.
 - (6) Not to eat flesh torn from a living animal.
 - (7) To establish courts of justice.
- 12) *All that being said, we still can trust the overarching conclusion and what is happening big picture wise.
- a) Paul and Barnabas and others in Antioch have taught properly.
 - b) The absolute regarding those from Judea was, from the first line of the letter, those who were “troubling your minds by what they said” were not from the Jerusalem church, the elders or the apostles.
 - c) In other words, their teaching was NOT to be accepted!
- 13) Also, we really need to address the go forward position we should have regarding the 613 Laws of Moses.
- a) As a body of work, it is the Torah.
- 14) Let’s first take a look at what Jesus himself said about the Law.

Matthew 5:17–19 (NASB 2020)

¹⁷ “Do not presume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter shall pass from the Law, until all is accomplished! ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever nullifies one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

²⁰ “For I say to you that unless your righteousness far surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

15) The NLT adds, I think, some clarity to this passage:

Matthew 5:17–20 (NLT)

Teaching about the Law

¹⁷ “Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. ¹⁹ So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God’s laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

²⁰ “But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!

16) Okay, let’s tackle three questions from this passage.

First – Is Jesus speaking only of the Law of Moses? To ask it perhaps another way, what is included when he says, “Law or the Prophets”?

17) This is actually, according to most, a reference to the entire Old Testament.

What does he mean when he says **until all is accomplished** or **until its purpose is achieved**? When will this happen or when did it happen?

18) The accomplishment or achieving of purpose was Christ Himself.

19) This is summed up in Romans when Paul attests to it in Romans 10:4.

Romans 10:4 (NASB 2020)

⁴For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

20) Christ fulfilled the Law and Prophets in three distinct ways:

- a) Obviously, He fulfilled the predictions of the Prophets concerning the Messiah from His manner and place of birth thorough and including His death, burial, and resurrection.
 - i) In fact, everything God had ever said about Him.
- b) He upheld the standards of the Law by living a perfect life.
 - i) He was the epitome of living a life that exceeded the righteousness of the Pharisees.
 - ii) In that, he fulfilled the keeping of the Law which had never been done before.
- c) Finally, He fulfilled the entire ceremonial system by making the ultimate sacrifice.
 - i) The perfect unblemished lamb – the Son of God – was sacrificed so that sin could be conquered through faith in Him once and for all.
 - ii) No more sacrifices of any kind were necessary.

21) The Hebrew writer brings this final point into focus for us.

Hebrews 9:11–14 (NASB 2020)

¹¹But when Christ appeared *as* a high priest of the good things having come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made by hands, that is, not of this creation; ¹²and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all *time*, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

22) In fact, much of Hebrews before and after these verses attest to the fulfilling of the Law by Jesus our ultimate High Priest and the ultimate Sacrifice.

23) Then, of course, there is Galatians.

- a) Paul absolutely makes it clear that we are no longer under the Law.

Galatians 3:23–25 (NASB 2020)

²³ But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Law, being confined for the faith that was destined to be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the Law has become our guardian *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

24) So, what can we conclude from all this?

We can just do whatever we want when we want right???

NOT!!!!

So, how does this fit where we are and where the Apostles, elders, and church should have been?

25) Bottom line is, we live by the Spirit not the flesh. Christ showed us how we should live.

- a) We no longer need the “checklist” of the Law.
- b) The Law showed us what sin was – Jesus showed us that sin resided in our hearts and that to live by the Spirit we must replace the sin in our hearts with the intent of the Law.
- c) When we do that, we are free from the Law and able to live as God intends.

26) We won’t read this now but if you go back and look at the Matthew passage 5:21 ff.

- a) As you read beyond where we stopped, you will see that Jesus is really giving examples of how their (and our) righteousness should exceed that of the Pharisees.