

The Jerusalem Council

We saw in the last session how in Acts chapters 13 & 14 you have a period of about 7 years. In Acts chapter 12 you have the record where Herod was eaten up of worms which happened in 44A.D. Then in Acts chapter 15 you have the record of the Jerusalem council and that happened about 51A.D. In between there you have a period of about 7 years. That doesn't mean Paul's first itinerary took that long. It may have only taken a year or two or maybe 3 years. It says at the end of chapter 14 that he was in Antioch for a long time.

Acts 14:28:

And there they abode long time with the disciples.

It doesn't say how long it was. It could have 2 years. It could have been 5 years. It could have been 6 years.

Before we go into the Jerusalem council, I want you to remember that a lot of his first itinerary was taken up by his time that he spent at Antioch, in Pisidia, at Lystra in Laconia and then over in Derbe. This whole region in here is called Galatia. It's to this area that Paul later, under God's guidance and direction, wrote an epistle to the people. That was the epistle of Galatians. This epistle was written to correct the doctrinal error that had crept into the church in Galatia. The doctrinal error: meaning the error that resulted from not walking by the revelation as we know it in the book of Romans. In other words, Paul had taught them the greatness of what he later recorded in Romans.

They knew they were justified by believing, by God's grace. It wasn't justification by the law. They were justified by grace. They had started getting off of this. Why do you think they had started getting away from that? Who do you think was in there prompting some of this? The Judi-izing Christians. Some of them were just plain old Jews. The Judi-izing Christians were Christians who were born again but still zealous for the law hanging on to their old traditions and especially on some of the traditions like circumcision. They wanted to hold on to some of these laws. Then, they not only practised this in Galatia but they started incorporating it as doctrine; that you had to be circumcised in order to be saved. In Galatians, he writes them some time later. I'm not covering tonight when but this happened sometime later because it takes a little time for practical error to become doctrinal error, normally speaking.

Galatians 1:2:

And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia:

Galatians 1:6:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

“another” – *heteros* – another of a different kind. Another gospel of a different kind.

“soon removed” – how soon is soon? If it was one year, would it be soon? Yes. If it was 20 years, would it be soon? It sure would. That’s too soon. The soon-ess is relative. How soon, it doesn’t say. Whatever it is, it was just too soon to suit God.

Removed away from grace and when you get away from grace you get into law.

Galatians 1:7:

Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

“another” – *allos* – another of the same kind. It’s not even similar. It’s *heteros*; of a totally different kind. It’s not another of the same kind.

Galatians 1:11-12:

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

He sets the record straight; where the Word came from. It was not his word. It was God’s Word, by revelation. He’s writing to these people that he had visited originally back here in Acts 13 & 14.

Galatians 2:15-16a:

We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law...

That’s the same thing he told them in **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.

The same thing he told them back at Antioch in Pisidia of Galatia, he’s now writing back to them because they’re in doctrinal error.

Galatians 2:16:

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we

might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Galatians 2:21:

I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

What does it mean to frustrate the grace of God? To say we're justified by the law and not by grace.

Galatians 3:8:

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen [Gentiles] through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, *saying*, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

He reached among the Gentiles in Galatia. What happened at Lystra? That's where they had the temple to Jupiter and they were going to do sacrifice and Paul stopped them. He taught the Word there. The other cities also had Gentiles in them and the region round about all these cities.

Galatians 4:8:

Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

Remember, they did service to Jupiter.

Galatians 4:9:

But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

Why do you want to go back to offering all these garlands and stuff in the temple of Jupiter?

Galatians 4:10-17:

Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

I am afraid of [for] you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

Brethren, I beseech you, be as I *am*; for I *am* as ye *are*: ye have not injured me at all.

Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first.

And my temptation [your proof] which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel [messenger] of God, *even* as Christ Jesus.

Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if *it had been* possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.

Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?

They zealously affect you, *but* not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them.

“They zealously affect you” – the ones bringing them to a *heteros* doctrine.

Galatians 4:18:

But *it is* good to be zealously affected always in *a good thing*, and not only when I am present with you.

See the problem that developed later because they accepted the *heteros* doctrine.

Galatians 5:1-4:

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. [frustrating the grace of God]

Galatians 6:10:

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.[the family]

When Paul and Barnabas had finished this first itinerary, they started back; from Derbe, back to Lystra, back to Antioch in Pisidia, then down to Perga, Italia and over to Antioch of Syria.

Acts 14:22:

Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in

the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

“continue in the faith” – what’s he tell them when he writes back to them? ...especially good to the household of faith.

“tribulation” – pressure – the pressure because of the adversary and his work

Acts 14:27:

And when they were come, and had gathered the church together [this is back at Antioch], they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

Yet they were so soon removed; got into doctrinal error and he said, “Be especially good to the household of faith.” That wasn’t written till quite a few years later but it was too soon as far as God was concerned. Whenever anyone gets off the Word, it’s too soon; in practical error, not to speak of doctrinal error.

All these things that caused them to get into doctrinal error were beginning to build. They were building while Paul was there. There were people wanting to circumcise everybody. And they get back to Antioch; you’ve got the same problem.

Acts 15:1:

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

They were saying you couldn’t even be saved unless you’re circumcised. The whole problem was legalism versus grace. The basic problem you’ve got today. They wanted to put the Christians back under the law; circumcision. This stemmed basically from the Pharisees that were converted because the Sadducees didn’t believe much anyway to begin with. The Pharisees were those who were really hot on tradition and on law, legalism. When they got converted they said, “Yes, Jesus Christ saves, BUT if you really want to be saved, you’ve got to be circumcised.” Today, among most Christians, it’s not circumcision it’s baptism. “In order to be saved, you’ve got to be baptised.” Same trip; legalism versus grace. We’re not under law; not under bondage.

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.

This then in chapter 15 is the first what they call council of the Christian church. The second council was in Nicaea in 325 A.D. When they talk about councils in Christianity, they always speak of this as the first council. It’s the Jerusalem council.

The third one was at Constantinople in 381 A.D. Then you've got others in history. This first one brought all the "heads" together over the question of legalism versus grace.

It says certain other went with Paul. It doesn't say who all the others were.

Galatians 2:1:

Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with *me* also.

One of those others was Titus, who was a Greek. It says that this visit to Jerusalem was 14 years after his first visit to Jerusalem when he only stayed 15 days. If this was in 51 A.D., then his first visit would have been around 37 A.D. And if he was converted 3 years prior to that, he would have been converted around 34 A.D.

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.

There's a tremendous principle; you never blab everything you know as a leader. The only reason people blab what they know is it puts them on a big pedestal. Some things you'll never tell anybody.

Galatians 2:11:

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

Where in the book of Acts does it say that Peter went to Antioch? It doesn't say in the book in the book of Acts when Peter went to Antioch. This could have happened in **Acts 15:1-2**. Remember they were in Antioch long time and maybe Peter came up for a visit.

Galatians 2:12-13:

For before that certain came from James [in Jerusalem], he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

In Acts 15 it says that Paul and Barnabas disputed with them but Barnabas could have been swayed away until Paul took a stand and said, "Look, you're justified by believing not by law." Then Barnabas is right back in there with him.

Galatians 2:14:

But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of

the gospel, I said unto Peter before *them* all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

So, this could have happened there. There's a very strong possibility. It's very unlikely, but not impossible, that it happened after the Jerusalem council because that's where they made the decision of circumcision. That's where they said it's grace not law.

Another question: is this Antioch in Syria or Antioch of Pisidia of Galatia? It's written to the Galatians. Nobody ever considered that, that I've ever read. They always put it Antioch of Syria. If so, there's another possibility quite later in **Acts 18:22-23**:

And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.

And after he had spent some time *there*, he departed, and went over *all* the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

Antioch in Syria was a well known Antioch. It was the third largest city in the Roman Empire and very prominent city as well as being the second established headquarters of the Christian church. It's hard to say. I would tend to think that this record agrees with Acts 15:1-2 but again it doesn't say that Peter came to Antioch there.

Galatians 2:2b:

...but privately to them which were of reputation [apostles and elders], lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

Galatians 2:3:

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

“being a Greek” – he was a Gentile Greek not a Hellenized Jew

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:

To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

Acts 15:2b-3:

...Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

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.

“through Phenice and Samaria” – from Antioch to Jerusalem that is the route they took. While they went they didn’t keep their mouths shut; they declared the conversion of the Gentiles. Every place they went, they stopped in route, had a meeting with the believers, telling them all the great outreach that was going on. They didn’t tell them the problem they had with legalism. They just told them about the conversion of the Gentiles.

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.

They didn’t “blow” about the legalism.

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.

Paul and Barnabas didn’t dispute with them there.

Acts 15:6:

And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

Those who were of reputation came together privately. There you have the beginning of the council meeting. I want to read the Galatians side of this first then we’ll read through this record in Acts 15.

Galatians 2:6-8:

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:

But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as *the gospel* of the circumcision *was* unto Peter;

(For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)

The ministry of the circumcision was committed to Peter. The ministry to the uncircumcision was committed to Paul. That's why they had really established two headquarters; one at Jerusalem, one at Antioch.

Galatians 2:9-10:

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.

Only *they would* that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.

This really shows you that there was more set at this Jerusalem council than what's covered in Acts 15. Galatians really adds to that and shows the greatness of Paul's ministry and Barnabas and how they were sent to the uncircumcision. Peter and some of the others really worked among the circumcision, the Jews which were in Judea and some of those other areas around there. Where did Peter later on go in his ministry? Babylon, he didn't go to Rome. There were a lot of Jews over in that area because of the Babylonian captivity. Peter went that direction because he was a minister to the circumcision.

In Acts 15 we have the council meeting starting in verse 6.

Acts 15:6-7:

And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

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.

He's referring to the household of Cornelius in Acts 10.

Acts 15:8-12:

And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us;

And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved [not by the works of the law], even as they.

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.

Paul and Barnabas showed what great things were happening in the body in Galatia, Phrygia, down in Perga and on Cyprus, up in Antioch, in Syria, Cilicia, and those areas.

Acts 15:13-14:

And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men *and* brethren, hearken unto me:

Simeon [Simon, Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

James is pulling all the pieces of the puzzle together.

Acts 15:15-18:

And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:

That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

Dr. Wierwille gave a literal translation according to usage of these verses, **Acts 15:16-18:**

After these things, I will build again and will build up the tent of David which is fallen down and I will build again the things overturned thereof and I will make it upright that the remnant of man might earnestly seek the Lord and all the nations on whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who maketh all these things known from the laying of the world.

Did this, what he quoted, pertain to the church, the mystery, the body? No, it was similar. It's only similar. It was an Old Testament quotation regarding something yet future, regarding Gentiles. But the mystery regarding the Jews and Gentiles being fellow-heirs and of the same body; that was part of the mystery. This was only similar and James just said, "Well, to this agree the words of the prophets; that there's a time coming for Gentiles." This just happens to be one of them.

Acts 15:19:

Wherefore my sentence [declaration, revelation] is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

That's his revelation, his declaration as the one responsible for these things.

Acts 15:20-21:

But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood.

For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

“Didn’t Moses write it down that it could be read?” James says, “We’ll write them that it can be read that they can know. Just like you can know the Old Testament, now you can know the new covenant.” So the decision was made.

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:

If these men hadn’t walked by revelation and hadn’t really laid the Word out, you’d have had a split in the first century church this early. You’d have had your Circumc-ists and you Grace-ists and maybe your Baptists under Apollos. It pleased them because they walked by revelation. They walked by the Word. They had that spiritual perception and awareness.

Acts 15:23-29:

And they wrote *letters* by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren

send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia.

Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment:

It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell *you* the same things by mouth.

For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

Acts 15:29:

That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: [Stay away from other gods, is what they're telling them. Worship the one true God] from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

Isn't that a neat letter? Short, sweet and to the point. That's the way you ought to write your letters; get to the point. That's what they did when they wrote this epistle.

Acts 15:30:

So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:

"they came to Antioch" - Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas. I'll bet Titus came back and others.

Acts 15:31-33:

Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed *them*.

And after they had tarried *there* a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

Did they have peace when the "Judais-ing" Christians came up telling them, "In order to be saved you've got to be circumcised"? Was there peace in the Body? No. Now they've got peace. Why? Because those men in that first century church stood and walked upon the revealed Word and Will and they had that spiritual perception and awareness. They didn't let a schism develop in the body. They stayed put on the Word. Maybe they didn't know then yet. Maybe they didn't know all of the Word but they knew enough that they could keep their P's and Q's straight in the spiritual field; that they could keep law and order in the church and grace.

There are a lot of great things in here; like keeping your mouth shut. When you go to other areas, don't tell them about all the negative things. Don't hang your dirty laundry in public. Hang it in the back yard, where the apostles and elders meet. Take it to those who are of reputation. Work it out from the Word that there doesn't have to be a schism. That's the only thing that prevents it. There's one body, one spirit, one baptism,

one faith, one everything until you start allowing these things to come in. Then you've got two denominations, three denominations, four sects and so-on.

That word peace is a mile high. Because before they had war, now they've got peace.

Acts 15:34:

Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

Now you know that if Silas stayed there others went back. Judas went back, for example. But Silas stayed there with Paul and Barnabas. And Silas will be the man who accompanies Paul on his second itinerary. Silas was a man from the Jerusalem area. He was a Jew in background and he will go with Paul, as we'll see, on his second itinerary. On the way, they pick up Timothy. Timothy has some Jew and some Greek background but he's mostly Gentile background.

Acts 15:35:

Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.