

Chapter 6

The Council in Jerusalem

Acts 15

A. **It Has Now Been at Least Ten Years Since the Conversion of Cornelius**

B. **Judean Brethren Came to Antioch in Syria Disputing and Teaching that Circumcision was Necessary for Salvation. Acts 15:1**

1. Paul, Barnabas, and others are sent to Jerusalem to confer with the apostle and elders. **Acts 15:1-2** – “And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’”

2. Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.”

2. Galatians 2:1 says Titus was with them. **Galatians 2:1** - “Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me.”

3. The distance between Antioch and Jerusalem was about 300 miles.

4. On the way to Jerusalem Paul and Barnabas continued to report to brethren and declare what God had done through them. **Acts 15:3** – “So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren.

a. They reported in Samaria as well.

b. “They caused great joy to all the brethren.”

c. **Proverbs 15:25** – “As cold water to a weary soul, So is good news from a far country.”

5. This is Paul’s third visit to Jerusalem since his conversion.

C. **Conference at Jerusalem.** Acts 15:6-21; Galatians 1:1-10

1. The Jerusalem church was the center of Christianity among the Jews.

2. By contrast, the Antioch church was the center of Christianity among the Gentiles.

- a. Formal reception of the brethren from Antioch. **Acts 15:4** – “And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them.”
- b. Private interview with Paul. **Galatians 2:2** – “And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.”
- c. Discussion of the circumcision of Titus.
 1. **Acts 15:5** – ““But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.’” **NOTE:** This passage is proof positive that some Pharisees had obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 2. **Galatians 2:3-5** – “Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.
 - 4 And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage),
 - 5 to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.”
3. The meeting of the council proper.
 - a. Speeches given by:
 1. Peter. **Acts 15:6-11**
NOTE: These are Peter’s last recorded words in the Book of Acts.
 2. Paul. **Acts 15:12**
 3. Barnabas. **Acts 15:12**
 4. James. **Acts 15:13-21**
 - b. Outcome of the meeting.
 1. Gentile brethren should:
 - a. “Abstain from pollutions and idols.” **Acts 15:20**
 - b. “Abstain from . . . fornication.” **Acts 15:20**
 - c. “Abstain from . . . things strangled.” **Acts 15:20**
 - d. “Abstain from . . . blood.” **Acts 15:20**
 2. No commandment for them to be circumcised. **Acts 15:24**
 3. No commandment for them to keep the law. **Acts 15:24**
 4. Brethren selected to report to the churches. **Acts 15:22**
 - a. The apostles, elders, and the whole church selected men to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Antioch.
 - b. Acts 15:22 - “Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, **Judas who was also named Barsabas**, and **Silas**, leading men among the brethren.

- c. This is how Silas will come to be positioned in Antioch to be selected by Paul for the second missionary journey.
4. Ratification and endorsement of Paul and Barnabas' mission to the Gentiles. **Galatians 2:3-10** – “Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.
- 4 And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage),
- 5 to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.
- 6 But from those who seemed to be something -- whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man -- for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me.
- 7 But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter
- 8 (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles),
- 9 and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.
- 10 They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.”
6. Letter from the apostles and elders drafted for the churches. **Acts 15:23-29**
- Antioch
 - Syria
 - Cilicia

D. The Return from Jerusalem to Antioch. **Acts 15:30**

- Letter from the apostles, elders, and brethren is carried to the church at Antioch. **Acts 15:30-31** – “So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter.
- 31 When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement.”
- Judas and Silas exhorted the brethren. **Acts 15:32** – “Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.”
 - Judas returned to Jerusalem, but Silas chose to remain in Antioch. **Acts 15:33-34** – “And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles.

34 However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there.”

4. Paul and Barnabas, along with others, continued their teaching in Antioch. **Acts 15:35** – “Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.”

5. Peter visited Antioch and was rebuked by Paul for separating himself from the Gentiles when the Jews arrived. Barnabas was also caught up like Peter. **Galatians 2:11-16** – “Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed;

12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.

13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?’

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

16 knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”

- a. Some Jews came from James in Jerusalem to Antioch. **Galatians 2:11**
- b. Peter withdrew himself from the open association he had been having with the Gentile Christians.” **Galatians 2:12**
- c. “The other Jews” and Barnabas went along with Peter. **Galatians 2:13**
- d. Paul rebuked Peter in the presence of others. **Galatians 2:14**