

Acts: The Gospel Gone Viral
Lesson 31 “The Council of Jerusalem”

I. Introduction - We have been studying through *Acts* and how the gospel went viral through various revivals in the first century throughout the book of *Acts*. This is what turned the world right side up in a generation.

A. Most recently we have been studying through Paul’s first missionary journey to Crete and through the region of Galatia. On this journey, Paul and Barnabas saw a great outpouring of the spirit and many signs and wonders that led to many Gentiles being saved and Gentile churches being started in the region of Galatia.

B. One of the unintended consequences of the Gentiles getting saved led to the most important theological debate in the early church: The Council of Jerusalem.

1. The mass conversion of non-Jewish believers led to a question the early church had not formally grappled with yet? Do people need to keep the law or certain parts of the law in order to be saved. Some people (the Judaizers) said yes, while others said no. This led to a major debate and a decision needing to be made about how people are saved and how they should live once they are saved.

2. This is similar the last 10-15 years in our nation with the proliferation of technology, social media and phones. Some of this has happened so fast, parents didn’t have the opportunity to put ground rules in place with their kids.

a. Example with my boys doing online gaming with people from Texas.

b. Ashley and I never had rules about this, because it wasn’t something people did when we were growing up. Later Ashley and I had to go back and put some guidelines in place to ensure our kids grow up healthy.

II. The Council of Jerusalem

A. **Acts 15:1-5 Conflict Over Circumcision**

1. A group of men from Judea (the Judaizers) came to the church in Antioch and begin to teach you had to be circumcised to be saved. Jesus plus works.

2. FYI, circumcision was established before the law through Abraham.

Colossians 2:11 we are now circumcised with a circumcision without hands, the circumcision of the heart. God cuts off the stony places.

3. This led to a great dissension and debate that they could not resolve so they determined that Paul, Barnabas, and the Judaizers should go to Jerusalem and talk to the Apostles and elders about the question.

4. Last week we saw about how Paul established elders (mature believers) in the churches they established. Any major decision (particularly theological ones)

need to be made among a plurality of elders. This is the New Testament Pattern.
Proverb 11:14 safety in a multitude of counselors.

B. Acts:15:6-21 The Debate in Jerusalem

1. Each side presents their case and then Peter gets up and begins to speak. He says God has purified the Gentiles hearts by faith so why we are we going to put a yoke on the Gentiles that none of us Jews could keep.
2. For those who think we should preach more rules and put more rule on people, how many of you would want 15 minutes with me reading the Bible to you about everything you are supposed to do? Most of y'all would cry. It's all by grace.
3. Paul and Barnabas then share their testimonies about the signs and wonders among the Gentiles. Further evidence of God moving among the heathen.
4. James (brother of Jesus) who was the head of the early church then declared how this was a fulfillment of *Amos 9:11-12*. Only the Jews were invited to the tabernacle of Moses that focused heavily on law and rules and condemnation while both the Jews and Gentile were could worship at the tabernacle of David. There was no separation, only the Ark of the Covenant in a tent. It was a place of non-stop 24-7 worship where David paid musicians to worship around the clock.
The theme was celebration because God loves us and everyone else.
5. *Verses 19-21* James says because God's heart was to always reach the Gentiles, we shouldn't put extra requirement on them. He says it would be good if they abstain from sexual immorality, food offered to idols, things strangled, etc. because it would it wasn't good for a Christian to do and it's a bad witness. He didn't say they had to do these things to be saved.

C. **Acts 15:22-29 The Jerusalem Decree** - They sent out chosen men with a letter written by the Apostles and elders that went to the churches saying you don't have to be circumcised and keep the law in order to be saved. It's all by grace through faith.

III. Conclusion

A. It's always been about Jesus and not about us. We could never live it and He doesn't need our help. He just needs our faith in what He did. We don't need to add extra rules to ourselves and others. We need to pray and trust Jesus to conform people to the image of Christ.

B. We also need to learn a lesson from the early church and pull together with a spirit of unity in our disagreements instead of fighting and separating all of the time. The only way to do this is by experiencing the radical love of Jesus on an ongoing basis. Not just have a one time event.

C. Pray Closing Prayer and Call Up Prayer Team