

## - A Study in Acts -

### Chapter Fifteen – First Doctrinal Problem

#### ACTS 15:1-2

In our last lesson, we concluded the first preaching journey of the Apostle Paul. The journey concluded by Paul and Barnabas returning to where the journey began, Antioch of Syria. They are going to stay here for some time with the disciples at this location (**14:28**).

Up to this point, the **Body of Christ** has only known external trouble via persecution by non-believers (**8:1; 9:1; 11:19**); now the **Body of Christ** is going to be faced with the first internal problem, which will continue to be the number one internal problem for many years to come – Judaizing teachers.

An interesting point to note, early on, is that the persecution has come from Jews who did not believe; now the doctrinal problems will additionally come from Jews who have secretly come in to undermine the Gospel of Jesus Christ from within.

#### Text #1:

**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.” <sup>2</sup> 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.”

I strongly recommend that everyone read the entire **second chapter** of **Galatians**, as Paul will refer to the events of **this chapter** of **Acts** there and give additional information to coincide with Luke’s (I will periodically refer to this chapter of **Galatians** in the lessons for this chapter).

**Came Down from Judea:** For the sake of understanding where the problem originated from; Luke here states that these “**men came down**” to Antioch of Syria. It should be noted **first**, that up and down used by Luke is not the direction of the map, but that of elevation. Jerusalem, where these men will come from, is one of the highest points in all Judea (especially the south), and as such “**came down**” demonstrates that Antioch of Syria is lower in elevation.

**Second**, it gives the origin of the problem and the reason it would be sought for Paul and Barnabas to go back there to see to the solution. This takes away any argument of sponsoring churches, as the **Body of Christ** in Jerusalem is not a headquarters in this case, but simply where the men came from who brought the problem into the **Body**.

**Third**, it will be very important to note, for the same reason that those who came with this false doctrine, did not come with the blessing of the **Body of Christ** in Jerusalem. In fact, we will learn that they come from the sect of the Pharisees (**Vs. 5**), and that they were infiltrators, note:

**Galatians 2:4-5** “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), <sup>5</sup> to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.”

**Problem:** These Judaizing teachers are demanding that Gentiles be circumcised according to the tradition of Moses (we will learn in **Verse 5** that they expect that the traditions of Moses be kept as well).

The Law of Moses was never meant to exist as a system of righteousness after the coming of the Messiah of God.

**Romans 1:16-17** “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.””

**First**, it had been given to the children of Israel only – **Deuteronomy 4:8-9; 6:4-9**; etc. Most important, it was given to Israel to bring forth the oath that God had made through them:

**Deuteronomy 7:7-8** “The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; <sup>8</sup> but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

The oath included a great name and nation through Abraham (**Genesis 12:1-3**), but most importantly it included a promise, whereby God would bless all!

**Second**, to this final part of the original promise, God began instructing this people that the time would come when the One who would bless all came, Him they would hear in all things, even over Moses – **Deuteronomy 18:15-18** (Peter quotes this in the second recorded sermon; **Acts 3:22-23**). Then by the prophets of God, He would prepare this people for the time when He would give them a new covenant, not written on stone, but on men’s hearts – **Jeremiah 31:31-34**. The Hebrew writer would quote this verbatim – **Hebrews 8:8-12**; and then added the following:

**Hebrews 8:13** “In that He says, “A new *covenant*,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”

It was always God’s intent to abrogate the Law of Moses (do away with power – **Hebrews 10:9**). Everything in Christ Jesus is superior, making everything before inferior – **Colossians 2:14-17**.

Now before we get too far; is there something the Law can teach us? **Sure!**

Paul will explain that we can learn much from the patterns of disobedience by the children of Israel as a set of character traits to avoid – **Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 3:7-4:1**.

We can learn about the character of obedience by faith needed to please God – **Hebrews 11**.

We can additionally learn from the great preparatory work of God and His promises to come in the Christ, a great deal about the nature of God – **Galatians 3:24**.

However, the righteousness of God is now revealed apart from the Law (having been abrogated) in Christ Jesus the Lord – **Romans 3:21-26** (righteousness – to be right with God).

There are many today who have yet to accurately divide the word of God in order to properly instruct the righteousness of God! So, although this problem was localized to Judaizing teachers as a point of fact, there is much to learn about the need to accurately discern the divisions.

The Jews who rejected the Lord in the flesh would continue to reject the Gospel of Him as the Christ, and or pervert the Gospel by trying to cling to the Law of Moses and circumcision – **Galatians 1:6-10**. Paul will additionally tell that it has been 14 years since the Apostles of our Lord began to work in Jerusalem that this problem would occur – **Galatians 2:1**.

This would be, as I mentioned earlier, the number one problem in the early Body of Christ; and much of the writing and teaching of the Apostles would have to focus on this problem (**Romans; 2 Corinthians; Galatians; Philippians 3:1-11; Colossians 2:11-17; 1 Timothy; Titus; Hebrews** – just to name a few!). Here is the beginning!!!

**Dissension:** This word is translated from the Greek, ‘*Suzstuo*’, which emphasizes a mutual discussion of differing sides, debate, and disputation; however, in Paul’s own words (**Galatians 2:5**); it would seem that the discussion was extremely heated.

**Determined:** Paul makes no bones about the fact that they did not yield to these false teachers even for a moment; however, since the problem can from Jerusalem, they determined that the only way to truly stop the problem was to go to the source.

**Apostles and Elders:** It is insinuated in **verse 2**, that these false teachers were additionally claiming authority from the Apostles and elders which were still in Jerusalem (**Acts 8:1**); thus, for Paul and Barnabas to go to them.

Paul, as a true Apostle of Jesus Christ had the authority to establish this issue in Antioch of Syria; however, if a question about the doctrine being taught by the Apostles of the Lord was in question (whether true or not); the division could weaken the work of the Gospel and the credibility of the Spirit of God working through them. Paul would add to Luke’s account of this event by stating that it was the Spirit of God who told Him to go (**Galatians 2:2**), which enforces the need to show the unity of the Spirit (**Ephesians 4:3**).

**Next: “To Jerusalem!”**