

# **BIB204 NT2 Early Church**

Unit 4b

The Jerusalem Council and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey

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In this segment, we're going to be dealing with the Jerusalem council. This is after the first missionary journey that Paul and Barnabas undertook. The main outlines of chapter 15. "Some men came down from Judea." That is, they traveled northward, they went to the province of Syria, and they were teaching the brothers that they needed to be circumcised according to the custom of Moses, otherwise they could not be saved. They needed to be circumcised and they needed to keep the custom of Moses is really the sense of it. So I'm going to try to summarize all the way from verse 2 to verse 5. Paul and Barnabas had a major argument, a major debate with them, and they all decided to go to Jerusalem, to the apostles and the elders, to settle the question. So they were sent by the church at Antioch. They passed through Phoenicia and Samaria because there are believers there, and they were describing the conversion of the Gentiles and they brought joy to all the brothers. They came to Jerusalem. They were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared what happened with respect to their first missionary journey. But there were some Pharisees who had become believers and they stood up and said that it was necessary to circumcise these Gentiles and to order them to keep the Law of Moses. That was the question. So there was opposition. Not all was sweetness and light.

The apostles and the elders gathered together to consider the matter (verse 6). And I want to summarize verses 7 all the way to verse 20. So they debated quite a bit. Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that God made a choice among you in the early days, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe." So he refers back to his experience with Cornelius and he says in verse 8 that God knows the heart and bore witness to them, giving the Gentiles the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them. In other words, circumcision and the Law of Moses was no longer a barrier to Gentiles being placed in the house of God, included in the house of God. This is what Peter is saying. So he asks them a question, verse 10, "Why are you testing God by looking to place a yoke on the neck of the Gentile disciples, a yoke that we nor our fathers were able to bear? We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just like the Gentiles will."

So at that point, all of the assembly gets quiet. They listen to Barnabas and Paul as they continue to give testimony as to what was done among the Gentiles during the first missionary journey. When they finished speaking, James closes the shop. He says, "Brothers, listen to me. Simeon (that would be Peter, Cephas) has related how God first visited the Gentiles." In other words, he agrees with Peter that the Cornelius event, it was a singular signature event highlighting the fact that Gentiles were now welcome. And he cites Amos 9 to make the point. Amos 9:11-12, which says in Book of Acts 15:16-17, "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old." And then he makes a judgment in verse 19. "Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood." Rationale in verse 21. "For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues." So in other words, "We don't want to offend our Jewish brethren unnecessarily, so let's stipulate a few things for the Gentiles. Please abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from what has been strangled, and from blood, so as not to give offense."

Verses 22 to 35, the apostles and elders agree with this, and they choose men to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They choose a gentleman by the name of Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas. And

these men write a letter instructing the Gentiles in Antioch, in Syria more generally, and Cilicia. “Greetings.” Verse 24, “We have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds. We did not give them instructions to that effect. It seems good to us to choose men to send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.” First missionary journey. “We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” Pretty clear letter. Verse 30, they’re sent off. They go to Antioch. They gather the congregation together. They deliver the letter. The people at Antioch rejoiced. Judas and Silas, who are prophets, encourage and strengthen the brothers. They spent some time there, and then they were sent back to Jerusalem in peace. Paul and Barnabas, they remain in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

Now, before I go to the next segment, not the video segment but the next section in the Book of Acts, we need to highlight the background. If you will come back with me to the beginning of chapter 15, verse 1, it says, “Some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren.” That would be, some people went to Antioch in Syria and began to teach these folks of a need for circumcision and to keep the custom of Moses. We’re told that Paul and Barnabas had much dissension and debate with them. But that requires another layer of background. Prior to the Jerusalem council which took place in AD 49 or 50 thereabouts, some scholars push the date as far as AD 51, Paul would have written the letter to the Galatians. If you would please hold your place here and come with me to Galatians, I believe chapter 2, we can weave in that material in the service of furnishing a background.

In verse 11 of chapter 2, it says, “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.” Cephas being Peter, that is. “Before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. The rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, ‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?’ We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” He goes on in verse 17, “But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. (Christ has nothing to do with me trying to rebuild my adherence to the law, an adherence I never kept.) For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” You can almost picture Paul saying this to Cephas, to Peter. All of it. Verse 21, “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”

And so Paul stands up to Cephas. But notice the dynamic in chapter 2. Cephas came to Antioch presumably to get away from Herod Agrippa I, and he spent time there. He basically became a member of the church. But then some people came from James. That doesn’t necessarily imply that they were sent by him. It just means that they were closely affiliated with James and they may have perceived

James' lack of a response or lack of an objection as some sort of tacit approval for them to go to Antioch and to try to straighten out those believers there. So they go to Antioch and they begin teaching the need for circumcision and to keep the Law of Moses. Correlating this with Acts 15 now, in Acts 15, all we read about is Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, but Paul himself narrates the fact that Cephas withdrew himself out of fear of the circumcision party and began to eat just with Jews, acting as though he had lived according to the strictures of Judaism all along, which was sort of hypocritical on the part of Peter, as Paul would later point out. But it didn't just happen with Peter. It happened with Paul's ministry partner, Barnabas. That's why we read in verse 13 that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. So what that means, when you correlate that with Acts 15, is that Barnabas had a short spell there where he was caught up in the Judaizing effect of those certain individuals who came from James in Jerusalem to try to straighten out the Antiochene church. But for a while, Barnabas adhered to this strange mindset. That's going to impact, that seems to have impacted their relationship.

So we can leave Galatians behind and we can go back to Acts 15. So they've written the letter. We've looked at verses 22 to 35 of Acts 15. They've written the letter. And now look at verses 36 to 41. Verse 36, "After some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.'" In other words, "Let's go back to Southern Galatia. "Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."

This is where Paul and Barnabas go their separate ways in terms of their mission, go their separate ways in terms of their ministry. They no longer worked together. The only time that they worked together is during the first missionary journey. At the beginning of the second missionary journey, Paul says, "Let's go visit those churches," and Barnabas says, "Let's take John Mark," and Paul says, "No." And there's such a sharp disagreement. You may recall that when they landed at Pamphylia in Acts 13, John Mark decided to go back to Jerusalem. That means he took a boat, he went through Cyprus and made his way from Cyprus to the Palestinian...to the Levant, to the mainland, and he traveled south, all the way back to Jerusalem, back home. And it's not unreasonable to suppose that he narrated some of the features of his experience with Paul and Barnabas, namely his experience at a church comprised of Jews and Gentiles, the sending on the missionary journey, the evangelization of the proconsul who was an uncircumcised Gentile. And this may have proved to be a bit much for John Mark. In any event, Paul does not want to take him, ostensibly because he quit the journey. And Barnabas wants to take him. They can find no point of agreement, so they separate. So Barnabas takes John Mark and sails away to Cyprus, but Paul chooses Silas and departs.

Which takes us to chapter 16. Paul comes to Derbe and to Lystra. He's in Southern Galatia now. And of course, by the way, before the Jerusalem council of Acts 15, Paul has written Galatians. That's two letters that we know of: the letter of James and the letter to the Galatians. So Paul comes to Derbe and to Lystra. There's a disciple there named Timothy. He is Jewish as well as Greek. He's never been circumcised. Paul circumcises him so that he can enter synagogue. He just deals with that. Not because he doesn't believe that circumcision commends one to the law, commends one to God any more than

uncircumcision does. It is purely a practical matter. Timothy is already a believer evangelized arguably during the first missionary journey. So the churches in Southern Galatia are strengthened and they are increasing in numbers daily.

Starting in verse 6, they travel through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, but they can't speak the word in Asia Minor. They go to Mysia, and then they attempt to go into Bithynia (verse 7) but they are not allowed. So they go down to Troas and Paul gets a vision in the night. A Macedonian man is standing there saying, "Please come over to Macedonia and help us." And Paul determines that that means that they need to go into Macedonia. So they go into Macedonia. They make a direct voyage (verse 11) to Samothrace and then to Neapolis, and from there, to Philippi, a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And they stayed there for some days. There is no synagogue there. They go down to the riverside. This is already verse 13. They spoke to women who came together. There was a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira, who was a merchandiser, a businessperson, a seller of purple goods who was a Gentile worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. She got converted. She got baptized. Her household got baptized. So now you have a house church in the home of Lydia because she invites Paul and Silas and Timothy to now come to her house. And that's where the church will meet in Philippi.

There's a slave girl who follows Paul and Silas around for a few days, proclaiming that they have the word of salvation. "These men are servants of the Most High God (verse 17), who proclaim to you the way of salvation." She did it for many days. Paul exorcises the spirit from her. Her owners (verse 19) see that there is no gain any longer, so they seized Paul and Silas and they dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers and accused them of disturbing the city and of advocating customs that are not lawful for Romans. So the crowd beats Paul and Silas with rods. They throw them into prison and their feet are fastened in the stocks.

Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas are worshipping. The prisoners are listening. About midnight, there is an earthquake. All of the chains are loosed. The jailer thinks the prisoners have escaped. He attempts to kill himself. Paul dissuades him of that attempt. And in the course of time, that jailer and his entire family are converted and they are baptized. So the church in Philippi increases. An apology has to be made to Paul and Silas because they were beaten, but no one bothered to ask them if they were Roman citizens, which they were. And that's what you see in verses 35 to 40 of chapter 16. The magistrates want them to go in peace, and Paul says, "They beat us publicly. We are Roman citizens." And at that point, there's great fear because you don't beat a Roman citizen like that. So they have a public apology and then they go on their merry way after encouraging the saints. Chapter 17, they pass through Amphipolis and Apollonia, and they come to Thessalonica. But we will pick that up in the next segment. This is still the second missionary journey. But we'll pick up Thessalonica, which is just another city within the province or the region of Macedonia. We'll pick that up in the next segment.