

**The Epistle to the Galatians**  
**Lesson #5 • Galatians 2:1-10**  
♦ **The Jerusalem Council** ♦  
· H A N D O U T ·

▶ This study picks up in the second chapter of Galatians, which begins, “14 years later.”

By this time, for the first time in history, the Followers of the Way began calling themselves “Christians.” This created a political problem because it established Christianity as a separate religion from Judaism, rather than an extension of Judaism. This put the church at risk because being separate from Judaism meant there were not a legally protected religion in Rome and would be subject to persecution.

It also created new questions: How were Gentiles to be regarded? How was the Law of Moses to be implemented? How were the prophecies and promises in the Holy Scriptures, especially in the Old Testament, to be applied to these Gentile “Christians?” For many, the most pressing problem was the issue of circumcision. Since circumcision was the outward sign of God's covenant with Israel, didn't the new Gentile Christians need to also be circumcised, if they were to be recognized as part of God's covenant?

Galatians 2:1-2 [NLT] • Then fourteen years later I went back to Jerusalem again, this time with Barnabas; and Titus came along, too. I went there because God revealed to me that I should go.

While I was there I met privately with those considered to be leaders of the church and shared with them the message I had been preaching to the Gentiles. I wanted to make sure that we were in agreement, for fear that all my efforts had been wasted and I was running the race for nothing.

Q: Who was Titus and when did he come into the picture as someone working with Paul?

Q: Why would Paul take Titus with him and Barnabas to Jerusalem?

Q: Why was Paul going to Jerusalem at this time?

**Luke's comments in Acts gives us a more complete understanding  
than what is recorded in the Galatians letter ...**

Acts 15:1-2 • While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers: "Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved."

Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them, arguing vehemently. Finally, the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question.

Q: What was unique about this meeting according to the Galatians passage?

Q: Why would Paul say: *I wanted to make sure that we were in agreement, for fear that all my efforts had been wasted and I was running the race for nothing?* What was he fearing?

**Again, Acts gives us more details about why Paul was concerned about whether he and the apostolic leadership in Jerusalem were in agreement. The following provides the text from both books for our greater understanding ...**

Acts 15:4-5 • When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them.

But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, "The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses."

Galatians 2:3-5 [NLT] • And they supported me and did not even demand that my companion, Titus, be circumcised, though he was a Gentile.

Even that question came up only because of some so-called believers there – false ones, really – who were secretly brought in. They sneaked in to spy on us and take away the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. They wanted to enslave us and force us to follow their Jewish regulations. But we refused to give in to them for a single moment. We wanted to preserve the truth of the gospel message for you.

Q: How well did the private aspects of this meeting go?

Q: What does the Galatians passage tell us about Titus?

Q: What do the combined passages of Galatians and Acts tell us about these “false brothers?”

Q: What accusations does Paul make in the Galatians letter regarding these “false brothers?”

Q: Why did Paul refuse to compromise?

**The matter was settled by the Apostolic and Elder leadership in Jerusalem.  
Acts gives us details not included in Paul's letter.**

Acts 15:6-11 · So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows:

"Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. God knows people's hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear?

We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus."

Q: It is Peter who stands and speaks reasonableness into the situation. In what ways does Peter show support for Paul's ministry?

**The final summary of the Jerusalem Council is recorded by Luke in the book of Acts. It is James, the Lord's brother, and Bishop of the Jerusalem church, and makes the final judgment ...**

Acts 15:12-21 · Everyone listened quietly as Barnabas and Paul told about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

When they had finished, James stood and said, "Brothers, listen to me. Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for Himself. And this conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted. As it is written: *'Afterward I will return and restore the fallen house of David. I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord , including the Gentiles – all those I have called to be Mine. The Lord has spoken – He who made these things known so long ago.'*

"And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead, we should write and tell them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood. For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations."

Q: What does the respectful silence of the assembly after Peter spoke imply?

Q: What is significant about James reminding the Assembly of Peter's testimony and referring to the believing Gentiles as a *"people whom God has taken for Himself?"*

► Deuteronomy 7:6 · *For you are a holy people, who belong to the Lord your God. Of all the people on earth, the Lord your God has chosen you to be his own special treasure.*

Q: Where is James quoting from?

Q: What does the reference to “*rebuilding the fallen house of David*” mean?

Q: What were the general accomplishments of the Jerusalem Council?

Q: Instead of forcing the new Gentile believers to become Proselyte Jews and become circumcised, what decision did James recommend?

Q: What were the four provisions of the Mosaic Law that the Gentiles should continue to observe:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Q: Of all the prohibitions James could have chosen, why were these four selected?

**Paul shares his perspective of what happened at the Jerusalem Council  
in his letter to the Galatians ...**

Galatians 2:6-10 [NLT] • And the leaders of the church had nothing to add to what I was preaching. [By the way, their reputation as great leaders made no difference to me, for God has no favorites.] Instead, they saw that God had given me the responsibility of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as he had given Peter the responsibility of preaching to the Jews.

For the same God who worked through Peter, as the apostle to the Jews, also worked through me, as the apostle to the Gentiles. In fact, James, Peter, and John, who were known as pillars of the church, recognized the gift God had given me, and they accepted Barnabas and me as their co-workers. They encouraged us to keep preaching to the Gentiles, while they continued their work with the Jews.

Their only suggestion was that we keep on helping the poor, which I have always been eager to do.

Q: Paul gives an very abbreviated account in his letter to Galatia and basically said they all agreed with him and told him to keep on doing what he had been doing. But, what was the final statement of helping the poor all about?

► The entire Church at Jerusalem agreed with James and the Council's conclusions. They prepare a letter to confirm their decision. They sealed the decision by sending two leaders back with Paul, Barnabas & Titus back to Antioch to read the letter and answer any questions the congregation at Syrian Antioch might have.

► Some time later, Peter left the Jewish community of Christians in Jerusalem and traveled to Syrian Antioch. Possibly he desired to see for himself what Paul had reported to the Council. However, it is impossible to know, for certain, what was motivating Peter. What we do know is that things got a bit out of hand.

► **This is where we will pick up the story next time.**



Next Time • Lesson #6

## ~~ Peter's Visit to Syrian Antioch ~~

Galatians 2:11-21

