

A Controversy Arises Concerning the Mosaic Law and Gentile Believers

Acts 15

Outline

- 1-5 | Paul and Barnabas sent to a council in Jerusalem regarding the keeping of the Law
- 6-11 | Peter defends the liberty received in Christ
- 12 | Paul and Barnabas describe God's work among the Gentiles
- 13-21 | James gives his decision
- 22-29 | Emissaries sent with a letter to the Gentiles
- 30-35 | The Antioch congregation encouraged as a result
- 36-41 | Second Missionary Journey; Paul and Barnabas split

Reflections

There have been numerous controversies in the church through the ages. How those controversies have been resolved through the years has produced mixed results. Sometimes with growth and encouragement and sometimes with frustration and division. In the book of Acts we find two controversies concerning theological matters. Each of these was discussed in a council setting in Jerusalem.

The first, from Acts 10 and 11, was with regard to the gospel being offered to Gentiles, which Peter gave witness to being blessed by God through the imparting of the Holy Spirit as on the Day of Pentecost. The second we find here regarding whether the new Gentile converts should be required to keep the Law of Moses.

It began when some teachers came to Antioch and began teaching that the new converts had to keep all the commandments. Paul and Barnabas were adamant in refuting this requirement. As a result, it was decided that it should be addressed by the apostles, elders and church leaders in Jerusalem. So Paul, Barnabas and other travel to Jerusalem.

Peter reminds the gathering of how the proclamation gospel was blessed by God through the events in which he was the primary individual in opening the door to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas then relate the progress of their travels among the Gentiles and how they had established churches in Asia Minor. Then after much debate, James, Jesus' brother, gives his opinion which the group decides is reasonable.

It is decided that a letter be drafted and delivered to the Gentile believers at the hands of Paul, Barnabas, Judas Barsabbas, and Silas, the last two being "leading men among the brethren." When this group arrived in Antioch and the contents of the letter is read to the congregation, there is much rejoicing and encouragement. Judas and Silas both offered lengthy messages of encouragement to the believers as well.

Judas Barsabbas is likely a brother of Joseph Barsabbas in Acts 1.¹ Judas and Silas were known to be inspired teachers. They are both described as having "risked their life for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." After these events, Judas returned to Jerusalem but Silas remained in Antioch.

After these events take place, it is decided that the letter needs to be shared with the other church where Paul and Barnabas had traveled previously. As they began to make plans, a sharp disagreement arose between them regard John Mark being included in the group. The disagreement became so sharp that the two men who had ministered together for a number of years now separated: Barnabas taking John Mark with him to Cyprus and Paul taking Silas with him to the churches in Asia Minor.

1 Orr, James, ed. "Judas Barsabbas", *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939. Print.

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One thing that we learn about Paul's relationship with Mark is that, later in life, Paul asks for Mark to be sent to him as he found him useful (II Timothy 4:11; see also Colossians 4:10 and Philemon 1:24). It is a reminder that reconciliation can happen and people can become useful to the cause of Christ as they mature.

Lord, We know that as imperfect humans we will have disagreements and differences of opinions regarding any number of things. Help us to find consensus and unity of the Spirit when they arise and let an encouraging word rule the day. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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