**Lesson 16 Acts 15:1-35 The Council of Jerusalem, Antioch**

In our last lesson, Paul and Barnabas were on their first, missionary journey. Their reception by Jews and Gentiles was mixed. Their preaching drew big crowds and some of the conservative Jews were “filled with jealousy and heckled Paul. It was their practice to always take the message of Jesus the Christ first to the Jews in the synagogues, and then to the Gentiles. The Gentiles “delighted” in the message of salvation, yet the Jews expelled them from Antioch. In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas left after a time anticipating violence. In Lystra, after a healing, the Gentiles proclaimed Paul and Barnabas to be gods. The Jews heard this, and even though the disciples denied being gods, the Jews incited the crowds against them and stoned Paul. Paul recovered and journeyed back to the cities he had visited earlier. He preached and taught the people, assigned presbyters to each Church. Chapter 14 ended with Paul back in Antioch, sharing the information about how God had worked through him to build the Church.

1. **When did you feel closest to God this week? Was there a particular verse in Acts 15 that you found inspiring in some way?**
2. **What issue did Paul and Barnabas need to discuss with the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem? What is it that the Jewish Christians disagree about? See Acts 15:1-2.**

**Check footnotes for these verses in your bible.**

**Acts 15:1-21**Some who had come down from Judea were instructing the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved.” **2**Because there arose no little dissension and debate by Paul and Barnabas with them, it was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and some of the others should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and presbyters about this question.

1. **How were Paul and Barnabas received in Phoenicia and Samaria at this time? What is the reason for this kind of reception? See verses Acts 15:3-4.**

**Acts 15:3-4 3**They were sent on their journey by the church, and passed through ***Phoenicia and Samaria telling of the conversion of the Gentiles***, and brought great joy to all the brothers. **4**When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, as well as by the apostles and the presbyters, and they reported what God had done with them.

1. **This meeting is often called the first “Council” of the Church. Who was in attendance? See Acts 15:4-18.**

**Acts 15:4-18 4**When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, as well as by the ***apostles and the presbyters***, and they reported what God had done with them. **5**But some from the party of the ***Pharisees*** who had become believers stood up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and direct them to observe the Mosaic law.”

**6**The ***apostles and the presbyters*** met together to see about this matter. **7**After much debate had taken place***, Peter*** got up and said to them, “My brothers, you are well aware that from early days God made his choice among you that through my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. **8**And God, who knows the heart, bore witness by granting them the holy Spirit just as he did us. **9**He made no distinction between us and them, for by faith he purified their hearts. **10**Why, then, are you now putting God to the test by placing on the shoulders of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? **11**On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they.” **12**The whole assembly fell silent, and they listened while ***Paul and Barnabas*** described the signs and wonders God had worked among the Gentiles through them.

**13**After they had fallen silent, ***James*** responded, “My brothers, listen to me. **14**Symeon has described how God first concerned himself with acquiring from among the Gentiles a people for his name. **15**The words of the prophets agree with this, as is written:

**16**‘After this I shall return
    and rebuild the fallen hut of David;
from its ruins I shall rebuild it
    and raise it up again,
**17**so that the rest of humanity may seek out the Lord,
    even all the Gentiles on whom my name is invoked.
Thus says the Lord who accomplishes these things,
**18**    known from of old.’

1. **Reflection: Following Mosaic Law, was part of the covenant made between God and the Israelites led by Moses, who were saved from slavery in Egypt. Were Gentiles included in the covenant at the time of Moses? Could this be one of the reasons for not requiring Gentile converts to follow all of the Mosaic Laws?**
2. **What specific Laws and practices did James, the brother of Jesus, feel Gentiles needed to follow when they became Christians? See Acts 15:19-21.**

 **Acts 15:19-21 19**It is my judgment, therefore, that we ought to stop troubling the Gentiles who turn to God, **20**but tell them by letter to avoid pollution from idols, unlawful marriage, the meat of strangled animals, and blood. **21**For Moses, for generations now, has had those who proclaim him in every town, as he has been read in the synagogues every sabbath.”

1. **In this time before telephone, telegraph, and internet, how did the news of these changes get transmitted to those in Antioch and elsewhere? See Acts 15:22-29.**

**Acts 15:22-29 22**Then the apostles and presbyters, in agreement with the whole church, decided to ***choose representatives and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas***. The ones chosen were Judas, who was called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers. **23*This is the letter delivered by them***: “The apostles and the presbyters, your brothers, to the brothers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia of Gentile origin: greetings. **24**Since we have heard that some of our number [who went out] without any mandate from us have upset you with their teachings and disturbed your peace of mind, **25**we have with one accord decided to choose representatives and to send them to you along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, **26**who have dedicated their lives to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. **27**So we are sending ***Judas and Silas who will also convey this same message by word of mouth***: **28**‘It is the decision of the holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities, **29**namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meats of strangled animals, and from unlawful marriage. If you keep free of these, you will be doing what is right. Farewell.’”

1. **Reflection: In Mass we speak of a “New Covenant”. What is this *New Covenant*? See Luke 22:17-20, and Catechism reference 610.**

**Luke 22:17-20 17**Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, “Take this and share it among yourselves; **18**for I tell you [that] from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” **19**Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.” **20**And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.

**CCC 610**Jesus gave the supreme expression of his free offering of himself at the meal shared with the twelve Apostles "on the night he was betrayed". On the eve of his Passion, while still free, Jesus transformed this Last Supper with the apostles into the memorial of his voluntary offering to the Father for the salvation of men: "This is my body which is given for you." "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

1. **What are the most important ideas or concepts in this chapter?**