

Acts 15, A Disciplined Church
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A. Overview

From 11:19 through ch. 15, the structure of the book is dominated by Antioch.

1. 11:19-26, Founding of the Church; also gets Barnabas and Saul together.
2. 12-15, Three Characteristics of the Church, each bracketed by the departure and return of Barnabas and Paul:
 - a) 12, a Loving church
 - b) 13-14, a Missionary church
 - c) 15, a Disciplined churchObjective: a case study for the things the church should do.
3. Train of thought:
 - a) Review the pattern of Matt. 18
 - b) Recognize this pattern in Gal. 2 and Acts 15.
 - c) [Next week] Study the deliberations of the conference in Acts 15.
 - d) [Next week] Comment on relevance for how the church makes decisions today (NO basis for councils).

B. The Pattern of Matt. 18:15-18

1. Context: the power of assembled believers in three successively more general settings:
 - a) 15-18, for discipline of an erring brother;
 - b) 19, for prayer;
 - c) 20, the Lord's presence in general.
2. Cf. 1 Cor. 5:4 (only use of this verb in Paul), with the same features as Matt. 18:
 - a) disciplinary setting;
 - b) church assembled;
 - c) with spiritual presence of the LJC.
3. Here as well, there is a question of an offense by some believers from Jerusalem who are visiting Antioch. Paul and Barnabas, after trying unsuccessfully to settle the matter in Antioch, now come back to the home church of these troublemakers for a decision.

C. Unified Chronology with Galatians 2

1. Acts 11:27-30 = Gal. 2:1,2 (famine visit: to Jerusalem, with Barnabas, by revelation)
2. Gal. 2:3, at this earlier visit, the reception of uncircumcised Titus provides an important precedent; only with the (later) introduction of false teachers did the question of circumcising Gentiles come up.

3. Charter of Gal. 2:9 leads to the journey of Acts 13-14.
4. Gal. 2:11-14, rebuke of Peter, probably fits at end of Acts 14, after end of first missionary journey. The "certain" who "came from James" (Gal. 2:12) are the "certain men which came down from Judaea" (Acts 15:1), and probably also the "false brethren" of Gal. 2:4.

Application: Beware guilt by association. These men are not in fact official representatives of Jerusalem. Had Paul and Barnabas not brought the matter up with Jerusalem, they might well have formed a negative (and unjustified) opinion of that church.

5. The emergence of this disagreement leads to two steps on Paul's part, fulfilling his responsibility toward two groups:
 - a) Toward the *new churches*, to help them guard against this false doctrine, he writes Galatians in the time covered by Acts 15:2, providing the new churches with a summary of the discussion he had with Peter (and the Judaizers from Judaea). Thus he settles the doctrinal issue without consulting Jerusalem, emphasizing his autonomy of Jerusalem.
 - b) Toward the *false teachers*, per Matt. 18, he and Barnabas (evidently together with Peter, whom we find next in Jer after being in Antioch) go to the church from which the false teachers came.

In this, he and B. are official representatives of Antioch. 15:2,3 show the church active in sending them out (not passive as it was in Acts 13, there merely releasing them).

- c) *Application:* We have these same two responsibilities: to carry on those who come to Christ through our ministry; and to follow the biblical process in cases of potential schism.

D. The Reception in Jerusalem

Vv. 3-5 bear the Gk marks of contrast, emphasizing the difference between Jerusalem and the outlying districts in how Paul's mission is received. In both cases, Paul and Barnabas declare what God has been doing among the Gentiles.

1. 3, the churches of Phoenicia (now Lebanon) and Samaria (northern part of Israel) rejoice in the news.
2. 5, in Jerusalem, some of the believing Pharisees feel that the job hasn't been finished, and insist that the Gentiles must first become Jews.

Application: Compare Rom. 14:4; Mark 9:38-40. When assessing the work of other Christian groups, be careful not to deny the work of the Spirit through them just because they do not see things exactly the way we do.

Summary:

1. We have two responsibilities when false teaching arises.
 - a) Warn less mature believers about it.
 - b) Follow the biblical process for dealing with the false teachers, to avoid unwarranted assumptions about them and the groups from which they come.
2. Rejoice in the work that God's Spirit does, even through groups somewhat different than our own.

Hymn: Ps. 133, "Behold, How Pleasant and How Good"

Analysis

A. 1-2, Disagreement in Antioch

1. quote p
 - a) quote f: 1 Kai/ tines katelqo/ntes a)po\ th^s)Ioudai/as e)di/daskon tou\s a)delfou\s o(/ti
 - b) quote: conditional p
 - 1))Ea\n mh\ peritemnhsqe tw^| e)/qei tw^| Mwu+se/ws,
 - 2) ou) du/nasqe swqh^nai.
2. 2 genome/nhs de\ sta/sews kai\ zhth/sews ou)k o)li/ghs tw^| Pau/lw| kai\ tw^| Barnaba^| pro\s au)tou\s
3. e)/tacan a)nabai/nein Pau^lon kai\ Barnaba^ n kai/ tinas a)/llous e)c au)tw^n pro\s tou\s a)posto/lous kai\ presbute/rous ei)s)Ierousalh\m peri\ tou^ zhth/matos tou/tou.

B. 3-5, Contrasting Responses to the Gentile Mission

1. 3, Journey to Jerusalem
 - a) 3 Oi(me\n ou)^n propemfqe/ntes u(po\ th^s e)kklhsi/as dih/rxonto th/n te Foini/khn kai\ Sama/reian e)kdihgou/menoi th\n e)pistروفh\n tw^n e)qmw^n,
 - b) kai\ e)poi/oun xara\n mega/lhn pa^sin toi^s a)delfoi^s.
2. 4-5, Disagreement in Jerusalem
 - a) 4 parageno/menoi de\ ei)s)Ierousalh\m parede/xqhsan a)po\ th^s e)kklhsi/as kai\ tw^n a)posto/lwn kai\ tw^n presbute/rwn,
 - b) a)nh/ggeila/n te o(/sa o(qeo\s e)poi/hsen met' au)tw^n.
 - c) Pharisees' speech
 - 5 e)cane/sthsan de/ tines tw^n a)po\ th^s ai(re/sews tw^n Farisai/wn pepisteuko/tes,
 - 1) quote p
 - a> quote f: le/gontes o(/ti
 - b> quote: dei^
 - 1> perite/mnein au)tou\s
 - 2> paragge/llein te threi^ n to\n no/mon Mwu+se/ws.

C. 6-29, Jerusalem Conference [Next message]

D. 30-35, Return to Antioch [next message]