



# Paul – Lesson 6

## New Testament Studies

CBC B&B Sunday School  
April 23, 2023

# Lesson 6 Intro...

- Acts 13-14 First Missionary Journey (~ AD 47-48):
  - Paul and Barnabas went on their first Mission Trip through Gentile region (AD 47)
  - They return to (Syrian) Antioch and reported everything that God had done, and continues to minister at that church (AD 48)
  - Paul wrote the letter of Galatians to the churches they planted in Galatia in response to the Pharisaic Jews who had visited those churches and subverted Paul's teachings (AD 49)

# Acts 15:2-35 [NASB]

## The Tale of Two Churches

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## Jerusalem:

- Diverse Jewish Christians
  - Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Hellenistic
  - ~~Sikarii (Zealots)~~
- Hebrew Culture
- More Traditional Religious Practices
- Attracts people with religious disciplines / backgrounds

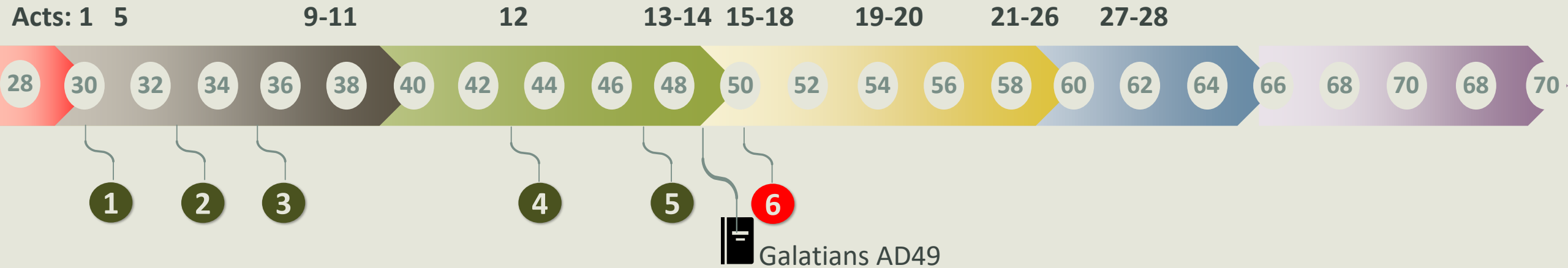
## Antioch:

- Diverse Gentile Christians + Hellenistic Jews
  - Cyprus, Cyrene, Phoenicia, Cilicia, Syria, Niger, (others)...
- Greek Culture
- Less Traditional, open to new paradigms
- Attracts people who are new to religions

# Acts 15:2-35 [NASB]

## Case Study of Church Conflict

# Chronology of Acts / Life & Ministry of Paul



1 Ascension – Acts 1  
Pentecost – Acts 2  
Apostles before Sanhedrin – Acts 5

2 Stoning of Stephen – Acts 7

3 Paul's Conversion – Acts 9

4 Paul to Antioch – Acts 11

5 Paul's First Missionary Journey – Acts 13-14

6 Jerusalem Council – Acts 15

# Acts 15:1-35 [NASB]

**15** Some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”<sup>2</sup> And when Paul and Barnabas had *great dissension and debate with them*, *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren.<sup>4</sup> When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.<sup>5</sup> But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.”

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<sup>6</sup> The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. <sup>7</sup> After there had been **much debate**, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup> And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; <sup>9</sup> and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup> Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup> But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”

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<sup>12</sup> All the people kept silent, and **they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.** <sup>13</sup> After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, “Brethren, listen to me. <sup>14</sup> Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. <sup>15</sup> With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,

<sup>16</sup> ‘AFTER THESE THINGS I will return,  
AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN,  
AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS,  
AND I WILL RESTORE IT,  
<sup>17</sup> SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD,  
AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,’  
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  - Paul / Barnabas: Gospel is the salvation to all who believed, Jews and Gentiles



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<sup>19</sup> Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, <sup>20</sup> but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. <sup>21</sup> For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

<sup>22</sup> Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas— Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, <sup>23</sup> and they sent this letter by them,

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  - Paul / Barnabas: Gospel is the salvation to all who believed, Jews and Gentiles
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- Leadership **“Congregational Church Model”**
  - Peter: We are saved not by following any ordinances, but by grace alone
  - Paul / Barnabas: Gospel is the salvation to all who believed, Jews and Gentiles
  - James: Salvation was always intended for Gentiles, but Mosaic Law was for the Jews
- Leadership motion, church approved resolution



# Acts 15:1-35 [NASB]

<sup>30</sup> So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. <sup>31</sup> When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. <sup>32</sup> Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message. <sup>33</sup> After they had spent time *there*, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out. <sup>34</sup> [But it seemed good to Silas to and prea

**Unity is achieved through intentional efforts of encouragements, not by edicts, letters (documents), or representations**

# Acts 15:2-35 [NASB]

The Tale of Two Churches

Cultural Impact on Churches



# Biblical Principles

Cultural influences are unavoidable. The church in Antioch, though sheltered from the influences of the Jewish (religious) culture, the makeup of their leadership team suggests that they were heavily influenced by their ethnic culture.

How much can (should) culture influence the practices of the church?

- **God never intended for His church to be culture-bound**

The church in Jerusalem practices Christianity with a slant towards a Jewish culture. The church in Antioch did not follow any of the Jewish traditions. Each church has its own unique blend of cultural influences (church in Jerusalem had multiple Jewish sects, church in Antioch had multiple ethnic groups), yet both churches were approved by God, and also, both churches had problem people.

- **God never intended for His church to promote rule-based religions**

The boundaries of cultural influences stop at the footsteps of legalism. The Pharisaic Jews in Jerusalem wanted to promote the same rules-based (Pharisees) Jewish practices on Christian living. This went beyond the Jewish culture, crossing over into doctrinal issues – the same doctrinal issues that Jesus rebuked (Luke 11:46 cf Acts 15:10). The apostolic declaration (15:23-29) frees churches from such burdens.

- **God does not want culture to influence the gospel**

The conflict and dissension of Acts 15 was caused by a disagreement over the interpretation of the gospel message as it relates to salvation. The *facts* of the gospel message were not in dispute (that Jesus died and resurrected for the sins of both Jews and Gentiles). It was the *interpretation* of the gospel message – influenced by culture on the doctrine of salvation – that created dissension. Rather than to get caught up in a debate over the Law of Moses as interpreted by the Pharisees, Paul and Barnabas simply kept promoting the Gospel message with a focus on what God had done (Acts 15:3, 4, 12).

# Applications

- **Don't use the Bible to settle cultural differences in churches.**

The Bible is the Word of God that points to the Gospel Message. It is not a user manual that teaches us how to settle our differences that are commonly rooted in cultural upbringing (ex: conflict resolution, dissensions).

- **Don't preach culture in the Gospel Message or in churches.**

Inter-cultural or mix-cultural dynamic is noble, but it is not the goal of the Gospel. Ethnic churches are perfectly fine if that ethnic group is what God wants to target. Don't try to force cultural-ness, or inter-cultural-ness in ministry. Just preach the Gospel and let the Word of God do its work.

- **Raise “go-betweeners,” especially for multi-cultural churches.**

By all accounts, Paul can be considered as a “go-betweener,” or someone who can relate to each side of the deeply rooted cultural understanding. Being a Pharisee, Paul understood what it means to be a Jew; and being raised as a Roman citizen, he also understands what it means to be a Gentile. Go-betweeners can help resolve misunderstandings that come about through cultural differences. Generationally, go-betweeners are often referred to as “1.5 gen,” somewhere between first and second gen.

# Questions