

BIB204 Early Church NT2

Unit 5b

The Jerusalem Council, Beginning of 2nd Missionary
Journey

Presented by the



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So in this segment, we're going to cover Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. And because of the volume of the material, I'm going to do a flyover. I'll pick up various points as the need arises. So what we have according to the last segment is the first visit to the Phrygio-Galatian region and the first city that they visit is Antioch. Not Syrian Antioch, but Pisidian Antioch. And of course, they are driven out of the city of Pisidian Antioch by a groundswell of opposition by people who are heavily invested in Judaism. This is stirred up by the Jews. And now they go to Iconium. In Iconium, they go into the Jewish synagogue and they speak. I'm looking at chapter 14, so if you have your Bibles with you, please turn there. And when they speak in the Jewish synagogue at Iconium, a great number of Jews and Greeks believe. But you have unbelieving Jews there too, and they stir up the Gentiles and they poison their minds against the brothers. But Paul and Barnabas are able to stay there for a while, and there are signs and wonders that Paul and Barnabas exhibit under the power of the Holy Spirit (verse 3). But the people of the city are divided. There's a great deal of division in Iconium. Some side with the apostles. Others side with the Jews. But then there is an attempt (look at verse 5) by Gentiles and Jews to mistreat them and to stone them. And so Paul and Barnabas have to run for their lives. They go to Lystra and Derbe, and then they continue to preach the gospel there (verse 7).

Now, verses 8 to 18, initially anyway, they go to Lystra. There's a man sitting there who is lame. He's crippled from birth. He's never walked. Paul is speaking and then Paul looks at him and tells him to stand up on his feet. And God moves on Paul's behalf and heals this man instantaneously. He springs up. He's walking. And so the people of Lystra effectively deem Paul and Barnabas to be gods. They deem Barnabas, Zeus, the Greek god of thunder, the ruling god, if you like. And they deem Paul to be Hermes, the messenger of God because Paul is the one who speaks. And they attempt to offer sacrifice to these men, and Paul and Barnabas barely restrain these people from offering sacrifice to them. So it says in verse 18.

Now we look at verse 19 to verse 23. We'll do that. So what happens is now you have a groundswell of opposition. It is sustained. So now you have Jews coming from Antioch and Iconium, those earlier cities, and they persuade the crowds. And so Paul is stoned and dragged out of the city, and he's believed to be dead. But the few believers that Paul and Barnabas are able to evangelize in Lystra stand around him, and he gets up. He's probably covered with welts and bruises and wounds. He goes back into the city. And on the next day, he travels with Barnabas to Derbe. They preach the gospel in their city. Look at verse 21 of chapter 14. And they make many disciples. And then they return to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch. They basically retrace their steps. And verse 22 tells us the purpose of that retracing of steps. They are strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to continue in the faith because these people would have seen Paul and Barnabas mistreated. Everywhere they go and they preach the gospel, they are mistreated. So a narrative begins to arise about these men. And so they have to strengthen the souls of these disciples and they need to encourage them. And they tell these disciples, if you look at the latter portion of verse 22, that through many tribulations, through many tests and troubles, we enter the kingdom of God.

Now, that's not a salvation message. That's not a salvation narrative of such. Theologically speaking, that's more of a sanctification narrative because, as Paul says, you cannot do anything to justify. You can't be justified by the Law of Moses. You can't be freed. You just have to continue in the grace of God. But in the grace of God, there will be trouble. And they're doing this so that the disciples do not lose heart with respect to all the things that have occurred to Paul and Barnabas, Paul in particular who has suffered many things, constantly pursued from city to city, mistreated. And so Paul and Barnabas are

effectively telling these disciples, “This is what it’s like. This is what we must go through. We enter the kingdom of God through this hard road.” “And when they had appointed elders for them in every church...” That’s the other purpose. They have to appoint ruling elders. “With prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

So let’s close out chapter 14. Verse 24, “Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia.” This is more of a retracing of the steps. Verse 25, “They had spoken the word in Perga. They went down to Attalia.” That’s on the coast. “From there they sailed to Antioch (in Syria), where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples.” So they basically go back home and give a missionary report regarding the success of their mission. By most estimates, these men are gone, they are in missionary mode for anywhere from 15 to 18 months. So if they started around the beginning or the middle of AD 46, they would have returned back to Antioch in Syria, to their home church around AD 48, early 48, no later than.

So we have the stage set for us, the implications. Remember what I said in chapter 13. Early on, John Mark leaves. He does not go back to Antioch. He goes back to Jerusalem. So he travels all the way back down south, back to his home. And one need not suppose that John Mark went back to Jerusalem and said, “Do you see what those men are doing? Those men are violating the law.” He didn’t need to do all of that. All he would have had to have done would have been to have gone back home, and in response to queries about “How was your journey?” “Well, I traveled with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch. Here’s what I saw. I saw Jews and Gentiles, and they both worship God. Both groups worship God together. They eat meals together. They rub shoulders together. There’s no separation between them. I went on this missionary journey and I saw a Roman proconsul come to saving faith in Christ. And he didn’t know anything about the customs of our fathers and of our ways.”

Now, you understand that what I’m doing here is I am simply dramatizing what may have occurred. We don’t actually know what occurred, but I’m simply just giving an illustration of what it may have looked like. And so, one could imagine John Mark doesn’t have to go on a crusade to report Paul and Barnabas to the people at Jerusalem. All he has to do is talk about his experiences. And for those at Jerusalem who are zealous for Torah, it’s like waving a red flag to a bull. And when you bring Gentiles into the mix, you’ve got a lot of volatility. Never mind the fact that in Acts 10, Paul was sent to Cornelius, an uncircumcised Gentile, and preached the gospel, and the Holy Spirit fell on all of those uncircumcised Gentiles, and they spoke in tongues and Paul baptized them. But you will remember what happened to Peter when he went back to Jerusalem. There were people who raised a hue and cry. “You went into uncircumcised Gentiles and you ate with them.” And he had to explain himself. Well, it’s been a few years. So the hue and cry has died down, but no one is really enthusiastic about the fact that Gentiles have been judged worthy of eternal life as they put it at that time.

So now you have a sustained mission to Gentiles, and Gentiles are coming to faith in Christ. And for the Jews, it’s an existential crisis in the making because for generations, Gentiles have come to the Jews seeking to know about their God, Yahweh, and the Jews have had a system since the post-exilic period, the second temple period, the earliest part of the second temple period. And they have instructed Gentiles increasingly as the centuries wore on, all the way up to the 1st century, the time of Jesus. And so this is an existential crisis for Jews. And so it’s no surprise to see what we see in chapter 15. In 15:1,

we read, “But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’ And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.” So that’s verses 1 and 2.

What just happened? Well, the proper setting and context for these series of events is the people who come from Judea go to Antioch in Syria, Paul and Barnabas’ home church, because they heard about Jews and Gentiles mixing. Well, according to their sensibilities and their traditions, more importantly, if those Gentiles are going to rub shoulders with the Jews, they need to keep the custom of Moses. Not to mention the fact that they need to be circumcised. So they basically tried to go and impose order. Now, remember, earlier on, you had this sudden, spontaneous arising of a mixed church of Jews and Gentiles because some diaspora Jews were not Palestinian Jews. They basically went back to Palestine from the feasts and the festivals. But when they got back to their own haunts, like Cyprus, Cyrene, Antioch in Syria, they talked only to the other diaspora Jews, right? 11:19 thereabouts. But then they suddenly started talking to Gentiles. It made the leap. And that was because of what Peter had done in Caesarea and at Joppa, particularly Caesarea, in preaching the gospel to Cornelius. The keys of the kingdom of heaven being given to Peter, the leading apostle, he opened the door to evangelization of the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit confirmed that by falling on and indwelling uncircumcised Gentiles.

And so now, all of a sudden, further up north, you had diaspora Jews suddenly speaking to Gentiles. And all of a sudden, this church is formed. And initially, the response from Jerusalem is positive. They send Barnabas. He goes there. He encourages them because he too is a diaspora Jew. He’s from Cyprus. And so he has no quarrel with that. And what does he do? He goes to Cilicia and he looks for Saul in Tarsus. He brings him to Antioch. It’s their old haunt. Saul is a diaspora Jew. He’s very strongly into Judaism, as he says it of himself in Philippians and in Galatians. And so they teach this group of disciples, Jews and Gentiles, for about a year. And that’s where these disciples, these believers are called Christians, *Christianoi* (plural).

So initially, the response from Jerusalem was positive. But when that church sends out missionaries to evangelize Gentiles, or to put it another way, Gentiles are being impacted and are now being invited to come into the kingdom of God by faith in Messiah, well, then their response, the next response is not so positive. Now there is a need to control this phenomenon. “We need to get a handle on it. We need to impose a stamp of authority on it. So these people need to be circumcised. They need to keep the custom of Moses. Otherwise, how can they be saved? They can’t be saved.” And so there is an attempt to sanitize Antioch in Syria and basically to spread that effort to the missionary endeavor. So they would have found out where Paul went. They probably may have found that out from John Mark. They may have questioned John Mark. And none of this is in the text. This is reading between the lines, if you like, because the only reason these folks come from Judea is because of John Mark going back to Jerusalem which is in Judea. So we can extrapolate a few things, and that’s what’s happening here. And so possibly they question John Mark. Where did these men go? Well, they traveled throughout Cyprus. Where else did they go? Well, we traveled to Perga and Pamphylia, and I came back to Jerusalem. They planned to go to Antioch. Possibly that’s what happened.

But anyway, this conflict begins around the year AD 49, perhaps 50. Some scholars say 51. I’m not one of them. I tend to date this conflict around AD 49 to 50. And I tend to date the composition of the letter to

the Galatians within the same timeframe. In fact, I would date it AD 48 to 49. Some would disagree. At least one scholar that I know of, New Testament scholar, would date the letter to the Galatians in about the year AD 51. So there's a lot of debate to be had. But that's what they're attempting to do here. They're attempting to impose the traditions that they've always known. Circumcision. Keep the custom of Moses. And yes, believe in Messiah, but you must be circumcised and you must keep the custom of Moses. The laws. You must keep the law. And so Paul and Barnabas have a great deal of disagreement with them.

And of course, this is happening at Antioch in Syria, but then Paul is going to compose a letter, probably at around the same time that this conflict first breaks out into the open. He's going to compose this letter to the Galatians because the Galatians in Pisidian Antioch and Iconium and Lystra and Derbe have received teachings from Jerusalem that basically is pretty much the same thing. You need to be circumcised. That's why in Galatians, you read about Paul saying to them, "If you're circumcised, you've fallen from grace. You can't keep the law. Did you begin with the law? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now perfected by the flesh?" So Paul is exercised, perhaps even angry about what has happened. And so he sends a letter that is harsh in some respects and tender in others, to sort of try to correct what's happening there. And what we read about in the Galatians letter is basically what happened at Antioch. And so it's instructive for us to go to that letter. Please hold your place here in Acts 15 and come with me to Galatians very quickly. So we can take that narrative and we can sort of impose that in here on chapter 15 of the Book of Acts.

So in Galatians 2:11, we read, "But when Cephas (that's Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party." So you have to roll this in with Acts 15:1-2. So Peter was at Antioch already because he had to run for his life. He's out of the jurisdiction of Herod Agrippa I. James the apostle, the brother of John the apostle, has been beheaded. Peter was imprisoned but was released by an angel, and he left that jurisdiction so he wouldn't be under Agrippa I's thumb. So he's been spending time in Antioch of Syria, Paul and Barnabas' home church, and he's been eating with the Gentiles. He's had no trouble with it. After all, he was the one sent to Cornelius. But then certain men came from James, from Judea, and he was eating with the Gentiles. But when they came (verse 12), he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

Look at verse 13. This is really instructive. "And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him." So this became a real definitive trend in the church. So Jews are now separating from Gentiles in the church of Antioch. A split was forming. "So that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy." See, Luke doesn't mention that in the Book of Acts 15. But prior to Paul and Barnabas having no small dissension with the circumcision party here in Antioch, Barnabas had been swept away. He had been part of that split. He had gone off with the Jews and separated himself from the Gentiles, which is remarkable because he was a diaspora Jew. So Paul, in light of that, verse 14 of Galatians 2, "saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel" that he and Barnabas had preached during their first missionary journey. And so he challenged Cephas (Peter). And that runs all the way from the latter portion of verse 14 of chapter 2 of Galatians to verse 21. He says, "I don't know if I have the grace of God (2:21), for if righteousness was through the law, through Torah, then Christ died for nothing." And once Paul challenges Peter (Cephas), the fever breaks. Barnabas recovers himself, and then he and Paul join up again, and they oppose this trend and successfully turn it aside. And then they have to go to

Jerusalem and they have to have this council meeting. And that's what you read about starting in verse 3 back to Acts 15, verse 3 all the way to the end of the chapter. It's a pretty long chapter. And you get to verse 29. That covers the entire thing. So let's quickly summarize that, and then in the next segment, we'll pick up the second missionary journey.

So they go to Jerusalem. On the way, they pass by Phoenicia and Samaria, and they talk to disciples in those provinces and they bring joy regarding the narrative of the first missionary journey, the conversion of the Gentiles. Then they come to Jerusalem. They are welcomed by the church, the apostles, the elders. They declare what happened during the first missionary journey. But then verse 5, "Some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the Law of Moses.'" Actually, the term *nomos* is not used there for law. It's *ethos*, the custom of Moses. So the apostles and elders are gathered together to discuss the matter. They have much debate. Peter stood up and he described his experience with Cornelius, and he asks the group in verse 10, "Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

So the group gets quiet and they listen to Barnabas and Paul talk again about their experiences in Gentile country. And then James, in verse 13, sort of puts the final word, puts the final point on it. He quotes from Amos 9 and he says, "Yeah. The prophets agree." Verse 16 and 17, "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old. Therefore (verse 19) my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood." So everyone agrees on this and they write a letter to Gentiles basically saying, "Listen, we know what God has done with you. It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us. We've sent them to tell you these things by word of mouth. The only thing we ask (verse 28 and verse 29), abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality." So in other words, they're basically saying, "Listen, we accept what God has done among you. But for the sake of our sensibilities, we ask that you do not do these things."

So they are sent off. They go to Antioch. They report the good news. Peace reigns again for a time. Paul and Barnabas (verse 35 of Acts 15) remain in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord. But then, verses 36 to 40, you have the crackup between Paul and Barnabas. Paul says, "Let's go visit the brothers in the cities that we want to evangelize: Southern Galatia." Barnabas wants to take John called Mark. Apparently, John Mark has returned to Antioch. And that's an interesting point. That's often not noticed. John Mark is back in Antioch. He's not in Jerusalem anymore. He's back at the mixed church and things have been resolved. But Paul thought best not to take John Mark because John Mark had deserted them. So you have this sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, and you never see those two together again. Barnabas takes Mark and he goes to Cyprus. And you don't hear about Barnabas anymore. But Paul, he gets a new partner by the name of Silas (verse 40). Silas is actually mentioned in the letter to the Galatians. No, I'm sorry. Not Silas. Titus is mentioned. So that's a separate issue. But Titus is a Gentile who wasn't circumcised and who had been approved prior to the call of Paul and Barnabas for the first missionary journey. So Paul goes through Syria and Cilicia. He strengthens the churches and then he makes his way back to the site of the churches in the first missionary journey.

Now, in the next segment, we're going to pick up in chapter 16 and we're going into the second missionary journey starting in chapter 16.