

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 48

I. Exposition of Chapter Fifteen (Continued).

A. Verse 2 – **“Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.”**

1. Obviously, these Judaizers were teaching something totally contrary to what Paul and Barnabas had preached to the Gentiles. In fact, referring back to Paul’s message in Antioch Pisidia, he said; **“...and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” (13:39).**
2. **“...had no small dissension and dispute with them...”** – The word **“dissension”** means; **“to express forceful differences of opinion without necessarily having a presumed goal of seeking a solution”**¹ The Word Study Dictionary adds the thoughts of **“insurrection”**, **“uprising”** and **“contention.”**² The word **“dispute”** means; **“to engage in intense and emotional expressions of different opinions—‘to quarrel, heated quarrel.’**³
3. This was an important issue, not a side issue because it had to do with salvation. You can just imagine how Satan would want to take advantage of this situation. First, he certainly would want the false doctrine of works righteousness to succeed. But even if it didn’t, Satan wanted to stir up strife within the church which could cause a split and weaken the church’s testimony of the Gospel. This was definitely one of the greatest threats to the work of the Gospel that we see in the Book of Acts!
4. **“...they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.”** – Jerusalem was still considered to be the “mother” church due to the fact that the original apostles were based there. So, they decided to send Paul and Barnabas to go there and consult with other Christian leaders about this issue. They also sent **“certain others”** with them which, many scholars state, was for the purpose of having other witnesses so no one could accuse Paul and Barnabas of distorting any results of the meeting.

B. Verse 3 – **“So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren.”** – Paul and Barnabas take advantage of their journey to Jerusalem by visiting churches in the two regions of Phoenicia and Samaria and giving testimony of what God has been doing amongst the Gentiles. Grant Osborne states: **“Antioch is about 250 miles from Jerusalem, so instead of traveling straight there, they decide to stop at churches in Phoenicia...and Samaria...and report on the recent advances in Gentile ministry they had experienced. The term for ‘conversion’ (only here in the New Testament) is *epistrophē* and means a ‘turning’ to Christ from the pagan gods. This report on the success of the Gentile mission results in great joy in all the churches, showing that the rest of the church not only agreed with Paul but also was thrilled at the prospect of full participation by Gentiles in the church. The Judaizers are clearly the minority position in the church as a whole.”**⁴

C. Verses 4-5 – **“And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.’”**

1. The word **“received”** means; **“to accept the presence of a person with friendliness.”**⁵ Another source adds: **“to receive kindly or hospitably.”**⁶ Stanley Horton writes:

“In Jerusalem, also, the church welcomed them, and the apostles and elders gave them a favorable reception. They all listened to the report of how much ‘God had done through them’ (with them as His fellow laborers). They gave God all the glory; He had been with them; He had really done the work (cf. 1 Cor. 3:5–7). In giving a full report, Paul undoubtedly included an account of the persecution as well as the miracles. We can be sure also that he told of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the confirmation of the faith of the Gentile believers.”⁷

¹Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 437.

²Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, (AMG Publishers; Revised edition, 1993)

³Louw and Nida, 437.

⁴Grant R. Osborne, *Acts: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 272.

⁵Louw and Nida, 452.

⁶The Complete Word Study Dictionary

⁷Horton, 263.

2. **“...But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed...”** – Pharisees were the largest religious party amongst the Jews. They were conservative and strong adherents to the law as well as additional traditions. Regarding these Pharisees, Dr. Thomas Constable writes:

“Some in that meeting, converted ‘Pharisees’ who had a high view of the Mosaic Law, repeated the same objection Paul and Barnabas had encountered in Antioch. These were not necessarily ‘ex-Pharisees,’ since a Pharisee could become a Christian without relinquishing his distinctive beliefs concerning Scripture and theology.”⁸

D. **Verses 6-7** – **“Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. And when there had been much dispute,...”** – The word **“dispute”** is the same Greek word found in verse 2. So, there was a great amount of **intense and emotional expressions of different opinions. There was quarrelling going on for quite some time.**

E. **Verse 7 (cont.)** - **“...Peter rose up and said to them: ‘Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.’”**

1. Peter, of course one of the apostles in Jerusalem, stands up and makes his case. This is the last mention of him in the Book of Acts. He refers back to the account recorded in **Acts 10** where he is supernaturally instructed to take the Gospel to the Centurion Cornelius and his household. This event revealed God’s will concerning the Gentiles coming to faith.

F. **Verses 8-9** - **“So God, who knows the heart acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”** - This helps us understand **10:44-46** in that the Holy Spirit fell upon them before there was any outward indication of their receiving Christ. The Fire Bible notes say:

“God’s knowledge of the hearts of the Gentiles (i.e., namely Cornelius and his household) means that he saw true saving faith within them (i.e., they had truly accepted Jesus as the Forgiver of their sins and Leader of their lives). God himself testified to the genuineness of their faith (1) by spiritually cleansing their hearts through the inward work of the Holy Spirit (v. 9) and (2) by baptizing them in the Spirit immediately afterwards (i.e., following their spiritual salvation by faith), with the accompanying sign of speaking in tongues...”⁹

G. **Verse 10** – **“Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”**

1. **“...why do you test God...”** – What does it mean to **“test”** God? It means to attempt to force God, by your actions, to do something against His will. Grant Osborne writes:

“This ‘test’ uses the same verb as in Hebrews 3:9 of Israel testing God in the wilderness and calling down his wrath. This is much more than just questioning his decisions; it means standing in the way of his will.”¹⁰

2. **“...by putting a yoke on the neck...”** – The word **“yoke”** here refers to the law. Thomas Constable states:

“When a Gentile became a Jewish proselyte, the Jew in charge of the ceremony said the Gentile now ‘took up the yoke of the kingdom of heaven’ (cf. Matt. 23:4; Gal. 5:1). Peter said this ‘yoke,’ the Mosaic Covenant, was an obligation that was both unbearable and unnecessary (cf. Matt. 11:29-30).”¹¹

3. **“...which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”** – The phrase **“...our fathers...”** is referring to the forefathers of Judaism. Peter states here that they were not able to **“bear”** the yoke of the law. The idea is they were not able to **“hold it up”** or **“carry”** it. Paul’s letter to the Galatians makes it clear that the law was given to bring us to Christ (**Galatians 3:19-25**).

H. **Verse 11** – **“But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.”** – This is the simple Gospel and plan of salvation. Faith in the grace of God, plus nothing else. Notice also, Peter makes it very clear that the Jews and the Gentiles are **“...saved in the same manner...”**

⁸Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Acts* (<http://www.soniclight.com>: Sonic Light Publication, 2019), 304.

⁹*Fire Bible: English Standard Version*, Donald C. Stamps, Gen. Ed. (Springfield, MO: Life Publishers Int’l, 2011), 1843.

¹⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *Acts: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 275.

¹¹Constable, 305.