

"The Battle for Liberty"**Part 2****Acts 15**

Introduction: Last week in our study of Acts we stepped into chapter 15 where there was a battle for liberty. Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch after the first missionary journey and they then remained there for a long time. While they were there Jews came from Judea into Antioch preaching another gospel which was no gospel, and they proclaimed that Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to be saved. These Jews were teaching that the Gentiles had to come under the Law of Moses and become Jews in order to be saved. This led to a heated dispute and it was then determined that Paul and Barnabas would take the matter to the church at Jerusalem. The journey was some 300 miles. When they arrived, they were received by the elders and the Apostles and they shared all that had happened on their missionary journey. It was then that several believing Pharisees stepped up and declared that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and come under the Law after they were saved.

Notice Acts 15:5-6

These Jews were suggesting the Gentiles come under the Law for sanctification while in verse 1 those Jews were teaching that the Gentiles had to come under the Law for salvation. Both of these were wrong. The Gospel is a Gospel of grace and to mix the Law with the Gospel for salvation or sanctification makes it another gospel completely.

I. The Defense of the Gospel.**Part 2****Notice Acts 15:6-9**

Peter made it very clear that the Gentiles were saved as the Jews were and it was by faith.

Notice Acts 15:10

Here Peter asks them a very pointed question. In verse 5 the Jews wanted to command the Gentiles to keep the Law of Moses. Peter now turns it back on the Jews and asks why they should be put under a yoke of bondage that none of the Jews were able to bear. In other words, he is stating, "Why do you want to put the Gentiles under the Law when you nor your fathers were able to keep it?" The Law had been given over 1400 years earlier and no Jew was able to keep it. Why did God give the Law? It was given to show what God required of sinful man. It was also to help man to see his need of a Savior because every

man has failed in trying to keep the Law. It was for the purpose of bringing man to Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:23-26

²³ But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

²⁴ Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

²⁵ But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

²⁶ For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Some people strive every day to keep the Law but James tells us that if we break one command, we are guilty of all.

James 2:10

¹⁰ For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

There is another thought in verse 10 that we need to see.

Notice Acts 15:10 again.

Peter asked, "Why tempt ye God?" How was their desire to put the Gentiles under the Law tempting or testing God? Peter's words would have taken the Jew's minds back to Exodus 17.

Exodus 17:1-7

And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink.

² Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD?

³ And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?

⁴ And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me.

⁵ And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go.

⁶ Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.

⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?

Here in this passage the Israelites had just come out of the bondage of Egypt and through the Red Sea. Now when they came to Rephidim there was no water. They then began to complain and, in their complaints, they asked if the Lord was with them or not. After all that God had just done for these people now, they put God to the test to prove if He was really with them! This was tempting/testing God. They had all the proof they needed from their release from Egypt, deliverance through the Red Sea, and even the drowning of the Egyptians. Now they were asking God to prove Himself! They were accusing God of making a mistake in the way in which He had brought them.

The Jews in Acts 15:5 were doing the same thing. They had just been saved from the bondage of sin by grace through faith. Now they hear of the Gentiles getting saved and they want to put them under the Law which they could not keep. They were testing God by implying that He had made a mistake by saving these uncircumcised Gentiles.

Notice Acts 15:11

Peter stated that Jew and Gentile are both saved by grace through faith. Notice the words of Whitcomb.

"The message of the believing Jewish Pharisees: "Gentiles need to become like Jews and be saved by the law (circumcision, etc.)." Peter's message: "Jews need to become like Gentiles and be saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus."

Notice Acts 15:12

Paul and Barnabas shared what God had done on the first missionary journey and how He had opened a door for the Gentiles. Then James spoke.

Notice Acts 15:13-14

James points to how God had saved the Gentiles when Peter was called to the house of Cornelius. This was when the door was opened for the Gentiles to come into the body of Jesus Christ in Acts 10. In the day that we live this is what God is still doing. He is taking from the Gentiles a people for His name. There are some Jews that come to faith but for the most part it is the Gentiles who make up the body of Jesus Christ. The Jews are in unbelief today because of their rejection of Jesus Christ. So today God is working with the Gentiles as He builds His church.

Revelation 5:8-9

⁸ And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

⁹ And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

Notice Acts 15:15-17

The word "agree" in verse 15 is where we get our word "symphony" from. The idea is that what was happening here with the salvation of the Gentiles was in perfect harmony with what the prophets wrote. James then quotes from the prophecy of Amos.

Amos 9:11-12

¹¹ In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old:

¹² That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen [Gentiles], which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this.

Now Amos is speaking directly of the Kingdom that is yet future, and James uses this to make an application but James is very careful not to say that what was happening in Acts was the fulfillment of Amos 9. Notice the words of William MacDonald.

"James looked on contemporary events as God's first visitation of the Gentiles. He felt this first visitation was in perfect harmony with what Amos predicted—the future visitation of the Gentiles when Christ returns as King. The two events agree though they are not identical."

Notice Acts 15:16-17 again.

"After this I will return" which means after the Gentiles are saved, after the church is complete. There will then be seven years of Tribulation then Jesus will return, the Temple will be rebuilt, and He will sit upon the throne of David. Israel will have their King, their Kingdom, and their land. The Temple worship system will be reinstated and the Jews will live in peace. These verses were a reminder to the Jews that even though God is gathering a people from the Gentiles for His name He is not finished with Israel. Jesus will return, Israel will be saved and the covenant promises will be fulfilled that were promised to them.

Romans 11:1-2a, 11-12, 25-27

I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

² *God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.*

¹¹ *I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.*

¹² *Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?*

²⁵ *For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.*

²⁶ *And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:*

²⁷ *For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.*

Notice the words of Whitcomb on what James says in these verses.

"How do these verses strengthen the argument of James? The issue at the Jerusalem Council involved how to handle Gentile converts. The legalistic Pharisees wanted to put them under the law of Moses. That is, to be saved, Gentiles would have to become like Jews. And yet, James quoted from Amos showing that even in the Kingdom there would be saved Gentiles who would maintain their ethnic identity and not become Jews. In the Church there are saved Jews and saved Gentiles, united together into one body, but Gentiles do not need to become Jews in order to be saved. They just need to believe on Christ. In the Kingdom, there will be saved Jews and saved Gentiles, and the Gentiles will

not need to become Jews in order to be saved. They will maintain their Gentile identity. James's point is that the prophet said Gentiles will be in the Kingdom without becoming Jewish proselytes. Therefore, there is no need for them to become proselytes in the present age."

Conclusion:

Notice Acts 15:18

This is a reminder that God knows what He is doing and there are many times when we do not understand what He is doing. Our responsibility is to trust Him and walk by faith. We are to believe that He has a plan and He will be faithful to carry it out. Our mission is not to question but to share the Gospel and stand for the Truth so that He will be glorified.

Psalms 46:1-3, 9-11

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

² *Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;*

³ *Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.*

⁹ *He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.*

¹⁰ *Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.*

¹¹ *The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.*