The background of the slide is a classical painting, likely a depiction of the Council of Jerusalem. It shows a group of men in traditional robes gathered around a central figure who is speaking. The scene is dramatic, with strong lighting and shadows, emphasizing the importance of the event. The overall color palette is warm, dominated by browns, oranges, and reds.

Book of Acts

Chapter 15

Theme: The Council at Jerusalem

The Diaspora



Introduction

✠ At first, Gentiles were a small minority in the church.

✠ But now the Gentiles were becoming the majority, and they were, in the minds of some, ‘*skipping the Jewish route to salvation*’.

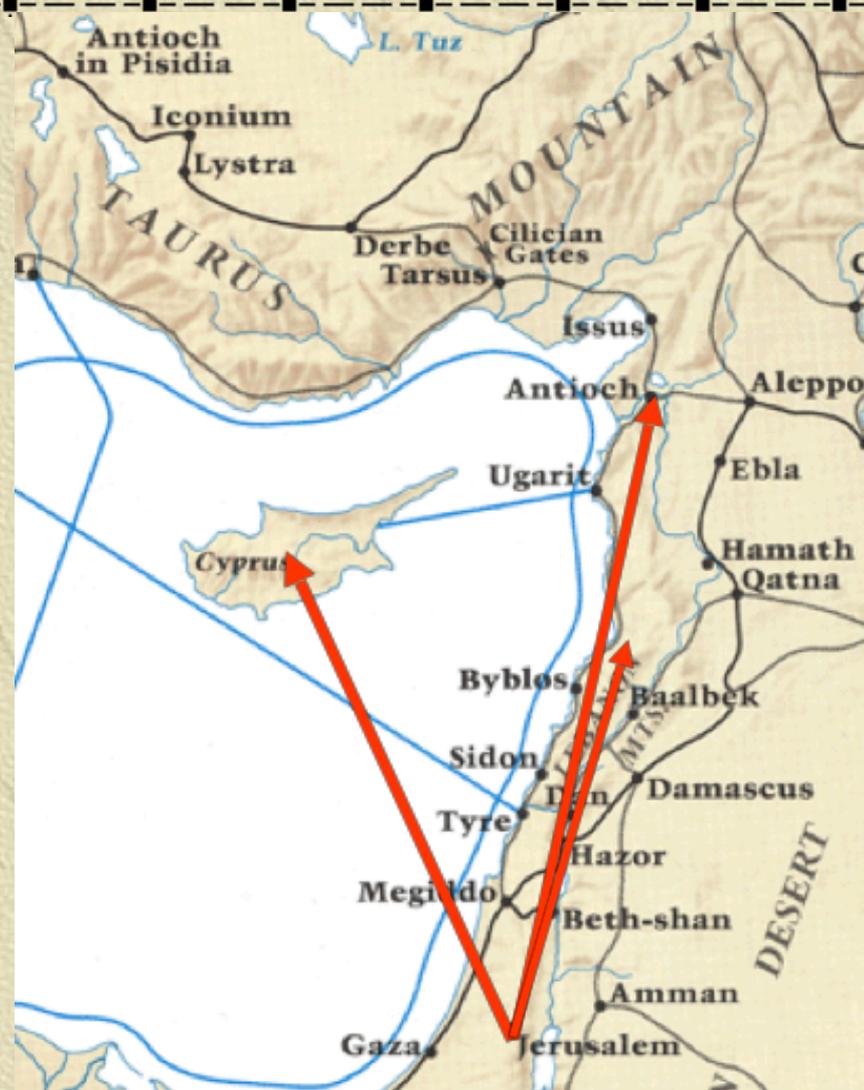
Acts 9:31 – Gospel Spread



Acts 10 – Gospel Spread



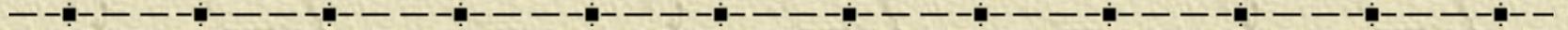
Acts 11:19



Acts 13 & 14

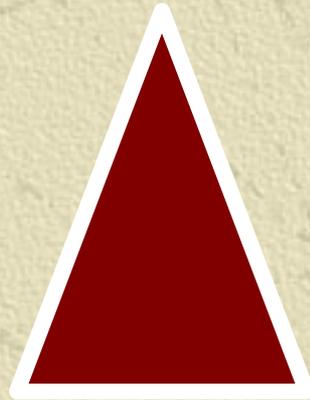
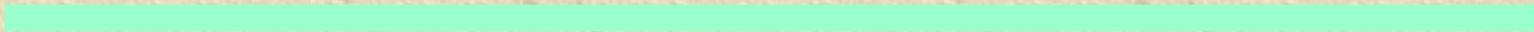


Paul's 1st Journey – Shifting of the Believer's Center of Gravity



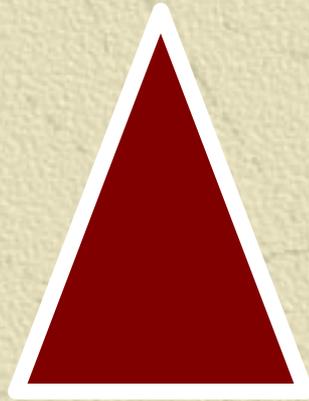
Jews

Gentiles



Paul's 1st Journey – Shifting of the Believer's Center of Gravity

Jews **Gentiles**



The Jerusalem Council

Watershed of the Book of Acts

15

1-14

16-28

The Book
Of Acts

Antioch

- ✦ We start the narrative at Antioch after Paul's 1st Missionary Journey.
- ✦ Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire.
- ✦ Paul's "home base" as it were.
- ✦ It features prominently in this the second half of Acts as Jerusalem did in the first half.

Jewish Circumcision

- ✦ Jewish practice of circumcision goes back to Gen. 17
 - ◆ A sign of belonging to the covenant people of God.
- ✦ By the Second Temple period, circumcision had become a key distinction of the Jewish people,
 - ◆ Marking them out from the pagan Gentiles, who often ridiculed the Jewish practice as rather barbaric.
- ✦ Male Jews who were born into the faith were circumcised as infants when they were 8 days old.
- ✦ Gentiles who wished to convert to Judaism (proselytes) were circumcised as part of the conversion process.

Jewish Circumcision

- ✦ Circumcision symbolized their becoming part of the covenant people and *obligated them to observe the Jewish laws and rituals* just as if they had been born Jewish.
- ✦ The issue for the early Christians was whether or not to continue this ancient Jewish practice.
- ✦ Their argument was: Can we claim to be the true Israel, God's covenant people, without adopting the sign? How "Jewish" does the church need to be in observing the Jewish law and customs.

Episcopalian view of Church Government ?

Question:

- ◆ Does the referral of this issue to the Jerusalem church teach an Episcopalian view of church government? Why did Paul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem?

Answer: No

- ◆ “And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) - those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me.” Gal 2:6
- ◆ Simply, the issue was referred to Jerusalem because that is where the problem came from.

The Position of the Judaisers

 One must be circumcised and live in obedience to the law of Moses in order to be saved.

- ◆ One had to become a Jew first, then a Christian.
- ◆ "Judaize" = to make a Jew of someone.

The Crux of the matter

- ✦ Judaizes accepted that Gentiles could be saved and added to the church.
- ✦ But they were convinced that Gentiles first needed to be circumcised and become Jews.
- ✦ *Nothing less than the truth of the Gospel was at stake!*

The Crux of the matter

✦ One of the most difficult of all ideas for human beings to grasp is the doctrine of salvation *by grace alone*.

✦ We always want to add something:

- ◆ Baptism
- ◆ Church membership
- ◆ Good works
- ◆ Some ecstatic spiritual experience ...

✦ **Our Salvation is attained only by:**

- ◆ **Grace alone.**
- ◆ **Through faith alone.**
- ◆ **In Christ alone.**

Peter spoke first

 Remember we asked why Peter was sent to Cornelius, 14 years ago, and not Paul or Philip (who were arguably closer geographically)?

 Peter was in a unique position here:

- ◆ He was a Jew.
- ◆ An Apostle.
- ◆ A leader in the church at Jerusalem.
- ◆ The Lord instructed him that he would receive “the key’s of the kingdom of heaven”.
- ◆ And he had seen the Holy spirit come upon the Gentiles as He did at Pentecost.

Peter's 1st Argument

 His first emphasis is on the giving of the Holy Spirit to Gentiles.

◆ These Jews knew the Old Testament and understood that Ezekiel had prophesied this, as a sign of restoration.

 By this God had already accepted these Gentiles.

◆ To attempt to impose these rites, which God had shown were to be abolished, would be to provoke Him to anger.

◆ God had made no distinction, and had given the Spirit to the Gentiles, just as he had to the Jews, thus Gentiles can be saved without becoming Jews.

Peter's 2nd Argument

 The Jews themselves had not been able to keep Moses' law.

- ◆ They had tried, but failed, and the only way they could be saved was by grace through faith.
- ◆ In Genesis 15:6, God recognized Abraham's righteousness based on his faith, even before his circumcision or the giving of the law. Therefore, it is faith, not circumcision and/or the law, that makes one an heir of Abraham.
- ◆ Dovetails into Paul's historical argument.

Peter's 3rd Argument

✦ This was probably the most striking point of all to the ear of the Jews.

- ◆ Paraphrased - “*We Jews can be saved through grace, just like the Gentiles.*”
- ◆ Certainly, most Jews would have phrased that the other way around!

Paul's 4 Arguments

Legal Argument:

- ◆ If one submits to circumcision, he is obligated to obey the *whole* law (Gal 5:3). Impossible!

Historical Argument:

- ◆ Faith, for Abraham, preceded circumcision; He (Gen 15:6) was declared righteous by faith before he was circumcised (Gen 17). Therefore keeping the Law is not what justifies. In fact, the Law was given (Ex 20) centuries after God gave His promises to just men like Abraham.

Paul's 4 Arguments

Logical Argument:

- ◆ Law and grace are antithetical. If we can work our way to God, or to heaven, then there was no need for Christ to come and be sacrificed

Theological Argument:

- ◆ Because God has destroyed the barrier between Jew and Gentile, there is no distinction in Christ. Circumcision and un-circumcision are no more. (Eph. 2:11-22)

James' Quote

 In Act 15:16 James is quoting Amos 9:11-12:

◆ “In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my Name, declares the LORD who does this.”

- ◆ Some questions as to the “textual details”
- See Dr. D. Gooding’s book “True to the faith”.

James' Quote

 Clearly 3 Points emerge:

- ◆ That there would come a time when God would rebuild David's fallen booth.
 - What is David's booths or tents? – Not the Church or Israel.
 - It's a metaphor for *David's royal house*, that had been in ruins ever since Nebuchadnezzar put an end to David's dynasty at the exile. (See Ps. 89:36, 38-40)
- ◆ That the rebuilding would lead to a vast number of Gentiles seeking the Lord.
- ◆ In the mind of James this time had come.

 Again the action is confirmed by the Word.

James' Judgment

 He agreed fully with Peter on the doctrine of salvation through grace.

 **So do his 4 recommendations agree with the doctrine of salvation through grace!**

 All 4 points were negative – no burden was placed on Gentile converts.

James' Judgment



So what was the purpose of the 4 recommendations?

- ◆ Gentile and Jew would come into fellowship with one another as they were saved in “every city”.
- ◆ The Jew would have a conscience over eating food offered to idols, eating blood or strangled meats.
- ◆ The Gentile would have no such conscience. But, *for the sake of new found fellowship in Christ*, James was asking the Gentiles to forgo their liberty in respect of their brothers and for the sake of the gospel.
- ◆ Paul would later write the same to his converts. (I Cor. 8-10, Rom. 14)

The Letter



Notice who wrote the letter:

- ◆ Not the Apostles.
- ◆ Not the Apostles and the Elders.
- ◆ But the Whole Church (stated twice vs. 22 & 23).
- ◆ The dispute was over they were all in one accord now.

The Letter

- ✦ Antioch is about 300 miles north of Jerusalem. If travelers averaged 20 miles a day, it would take 15 days by foot. No small journey.
- ✦ But I Gigantic Victory had been won!
 - ◆ For all the centuries of saints to come, salvation had been defined.
 - ◆ **Salvation and Justification were by Grace through Faith apart from the Works of the Law!**

Acts 15 Begins and Ends with Dispute

-  Great victories are often followed by small (and sometimes painful) defeats.
-  These 2 men stood so staunchly together in Jerusalem.
-  Now they seek to separate at home in Antioch.

Acts 15 Begins and Ends with Dispute



But the positive:

- ◆ The dispute was not about doctrine but a practical issue.
- ◆ They did not divide the Church over it.
- ◆ They did not go out and plant their own named Church's.
 - Some to Paul and some to Barnabas – God Forbid!
- ◆ 2 missionary teams now went out and the Name of Christ was spread even faster.