

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Third Quarter 2018: *The Book of Acts*

Lesson 8 “The Jerusalem Council”

Read for this week’s study

Acts 15; Galatians 2:11–13; Exodus 12:43–49; Romans 3:30; Leviticus 18:30; Revelation 2:14, 20.

Memory Text

“ ‘We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are’ ” (Acts 15:11, NIV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Point at Issue
- III. Circumcision
- IV. The Debate
- V. The Apostolic Decree
- VI. The Letter From Jerusalem
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Jon Paulien

1. The big question facing the Jerusalem Council was: *Do you need to become a Jew in order to become a Christian?* How did the Council answer that question? What implications does this question have for mission today? (Sabbath afternoon)
2. Read Acts 15:1-5. What problem was the church facing? If you were one of the Pharisees, how would you argue your case from the Bible? Which side had the clearer biblical argument? While the Bible should always trump experience, all other things being equal, when does experience convince us to rethink our understanding of the Bible? What picture of God did the party of the Pharisees have? What was God trying to teach them through the Cornelius experience in Acts 10? (Sunday’s lesson)
3. Read Genesis 17:9-14. Who commanded circumcision and how long was this command supposed to last? Read Exodus 12:43-49. Was circumcision limited to those who were born Israelites or was it required for others as well? How seriously did Paul take these texts (Romans 3:30; 1 Corinthians 7:18-20; Galatians 3:28; 5:6)? How could Paul dismiss the clear teaching of Scripture? (Monday’s lesson)

4. Read Acts 15:7-11. What was Peter's contribution to the debate in Jerusalem? Read Acts 15:13-21. What solution to the Gentile problem did James propose and how did he read the Old Testament differently than the Pharisees did? (Tuesday's lesson)
5. Read Acts 15:28-29. What four prohibitions did the Jerusalem Council decide to impose on the Gentile converts and why? (Wednesday's lesson)
6. Read Acts 15:22-29. How did the Council choose to publicize its decision regarding Gentiles in the Church? What was the church at Antioch's response to these measures (Acts 15:30-33)? How difficult do you find it to have fellowship with believers from other races, cultures and even social classes? Since nearly all followers of Jesus are Gentiles today, why do we still sometimes struggle with this? What does our picture of God have to do with it? (Thursday's lesson)
7. If being part of the "true church" does not guarantee salvation, what advantage is there to belonging to such a church? (Friday's lesson)
8. Read Acts 15:36-39. Paul and Barnabas part ways on the basis of a sharp disagreement. Who was right and who was wrong on this occasion? What was the long-term outcome of this division between them? Are "church splits" always a bad thing? What does this tell us about God? (from Lesson 9)

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Now this time he is relating the knowledge of God to the good news and to the cross. They are all about the same subject. Paul is sympathetic with them, for what could be expected of new converts, when some of the leading Christians in Jerusalem were themselves contradicting and compromising the gospel of Christ, as described in Acts 21. Even Peter, after his broadening experience with Cornelius, reverted to some of his narrow views that he used to hold. Paul was moved to correct Peter to his face and in public, recorded in Galatians 2. How could Paul feel right about doing that? This is Paul who wrote in first Corinthians 13 that love is never rude. Love never insists on having its own way. This is the Paul who wrote in Romans 14 that he was so respectful of other people's freedom that when there was disagreement over this and that religious matter, he would say, "Let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind," and "who are you to criticize one another?"

But when it came to the good news, and those who would suppress it or pervert it, gentle Paul spoke out with almost frightening conviction and power. He even went so far as to suggest that these legalistic agitators were confusing the new saints about the good news of truth and freedom. They were upsetting the new converts by urging them to adopt once again such ceremonial requirements as circumcision and other legalistic details like that. He said, "I wish they would go the whole way and make eunuchs of themselves." That is Galatians 5:12, if you want to look it up. You know that Paul would have to be deeply moved to say that about those

legalistic agitators. In fact, if you have the *Jerusalem Bible*, you might like to look up Galatians 5:12, where Paul said: "Tell those who are disturbing you and confusing you about the good news of freedom, tell them, 'I would like to see the knife slip.'" Paul was pretty stirred to talk like that. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #16, "God's Last Pleading with His Children" recorded May, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:*
<http://pkp.cc/16MMCAG>

In those days the Pagans were accustomed to offer some of their food to the idols before selling it to the public. We're familiar with this from the book of Daniel, aren't we? You remember the richest food was offered to the idol so Daniel said I won't eat that food. Sometimes we limit the meaning of his decision to his dietary preference, but in *Prophets and Kings* Ellen White says the primary reason why he didn't eat that food was that since it had been offered to idols, to eat it would be interpreted as reverence for the idols. That was his main reason for choosing that. It also happened to be beneficial for his health.

Well, clear down to Paul's day, this same offering of certain foods to the idols was customary, and the food most commonly offered was flesh and wine. And in the *King James* when you read "meat" you know often it's not flesh. So it's better in the modern versions, they'll discriminate between "food" and "flesh" whereas in the *King James* it will say "meat". Jesus says my meat is to do the will of him who sent me. Does he mean my lamb chop is to do to the will of him who sent me? No, just my food, just food. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series *Romans*, chapter 15-16, recorded February, 1978, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/29MMROMANS66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/30MMROMANS66> (Part 2)

Further Study with Ellen White

No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan's circle the poor souls who have been deluded by his deceptions. It places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise. {COL 386.2}

The opinion is held by many that God placed a separating wall between the Hebrews and the outside world; that His care and love, withdrawn to a great extent from the rest of mankind, were centered upon Israel. But God did not design that His people should build up a wall of partition between themselves and their fellow men. The heart of Infinite Love was reaching out

toward all the inhabitants of the earth. Though they had rejected Him, He was constantly seeking to reveal Himself to them and make them partakers of His love and grace. His blessing was granted to the chosen people, that they might bless others. {PP 368.1}

Never was there such an evangelist as Christ. He was the Majesty of heaven, but He humbled Himself to take our nature, that He might meet men where they were. To all people, rich and poor, free and bond, Christ, the Messenger of the covenant, brought the tidings of salvation. His fame as the Great Healer spread throughout Palestine. The sick came to the places through which He would pass, that they might call on Him for help. Hither, too, came many anxious to hear His words and to receive a touch of His hand. Thus He went from city to city, from town to town, preaching the gospel and healing the sick—the King of glory in the lowly garb of humanity. {MH 22.1}

The blessings of salvation are for every soul. Nothing but his own choice can prevent any man from becoming a partaker of the promise in Christ by the gospel. {DA 403.2}

The Saviour is still carrying forward the same work as when He proffered the water of life to the woman of Samaria. Those who call themselves His followers may despise and shun the outcast ones; but no circumstance of birth or nationality, no condition of life, can turn away His love from the children of men. To every soul, however sinful, Jesus says, If thou hadst asked of Me, I would have given thee living water. {DA 194.1}

The promise of the Holy Spirit is not limited to any age or to any race. Christ declared that the divine influence of His Spirit was to be with His followers unto the end. From the Day of Pentecost to the present time, the Comforter has been sent to all who have yielded themselves fully to the Lord and to His service. To all who have accepted Christ as a personal Saviour, the Holy Spirit has come as a counselor, sanctifier, guide, and witness. The more closely believers have walked with God, the more clearly and powerfully have they testified of their Redeemer's love and of His saving grace. The men and women who through the long centuries of persecution and trial enjoyed a large measure of the presence of the Spirit in their lives, have stood as signs and wonders in the world. Before angels and men they have revealed the transforming power of redeeming love. {AA 49.2}

The unity that exists between Christ and His disciples does not destroy the personality of either. In mind, in purpose, in character, they are one, but not in person. By partaking of the Spirit of God, conforming to the law of God, man becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ brings His disciples into a living union with Himself and with the Father. Through the working of the Holy Spirit upon the human mind, man is made complete in Christ Jesus. Unity with Christ establishes a bond of unity with one another. This unity is the most convincing proof to the world of the majesty and virtue of Christ, and of His power to take away sin. {SD 286.3}