

## Trouble Winds A Blowing, II Acts 15:7-35

Chapter 15 is the central point in the book. It, according to Heanhen, “rounds off and justifies the past developments, and makes those to come intrinsically possible.”<sup>1</sup> It marks the final transition in the book. The ministry of Peter gives way to Paul and the prominence of Jerusalem is eclipsed by that of Antioch.

From the later perspective of church history the importance is incalculable. The infant church is liberated from its Jewish diaper; the caterpillar emerges as a butterfly. This is a historic event of seismic proportions!

1. **The speech of Peter. Vv. 7-12.** In the midst of much heated debate “Peter stood up” and:
  - a. **Called them to face the inevitable fact. V. 7.** Peter employs the exact term used by Paul. E.g., **“choice.” Cf. 13:17.**
  - b. **Confirmed it by his personal experience. Vv. 8-9.** **“By my mouth ...”** God *testified* to His acceptance of the Gentiles *apart* from embrace of the ceremonial law on *equal footing with Jews*. This He did by regenerating them and replicating Pentecost. **Cf. 10:44-11:18.**
  - c. **Confronted them with the reality of their actions. Vv. 10-11.** Peter emphasizes two negative implications of their position:
    - i. **It constituted “putting God to the test.” V. 10a.** Language with salvation historical significance. It is precisely what Israel did in the wilderness.
    - ii. **It unnecessarily burdened the Gentiles. Vv. 10b-11.** Bruce notes the appropriateness of the

term **‘yoke.’**<sup>2</sup> “Peter spoke as ... rank and file of Galilean Jews” who labored under a legal tradition multiplied beyond the ability to track. **Cf. Matt. 23:4.**

The outcome was mute awe in the face of the salvation historical realities. They reconsidered Paul’s testimony. **V. 12; cf. v. 4..**

2. **The speech of James. Vv. 13-21.** In the midst of the mute awe James arose and began where Peter left off.<sup>3</sup> No doubt some thought James would set Peter right and bring Antioch “in line.”
  - a. **He reminded them of the prophetic significance of the moment. Vv. 15-18.** James quotes **Amos 9:11-12** (Likely Luke that employs LXX) to express agreement that Gentile inclusion apart from ‘the yoke’ of the law is divine fulfillment. Far from contradicting the ministry of Paul was fulfillment of OT prophecy.
  - b. **He set before them a theologically sound and practically wise path. Vv. 19-21.** It is founded on two principles:
    - i. **The principle of Christian liberty. V. 19.** We cannot compel what Scripture doesn’t demand.

1. The church’s power is spiritual, and confined to scripture<sup>4</sup>. Note Paul’s:

---

<sup>2</sup> Bruce, p. 290.

<sup>3</sup> Of James Bruce wrote, “If the elders of the Jerusalem church were organized as a kind of Nazarene Sanhedrin, James was their president, primus inter pares. The church’s readiness to recognize his leadership was due more to his personal character and record than to his blood relationship to the Lord.” James was widely considered the most scrupulous of all the Hebrew Christians.

<sup>4</sup> God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it, free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also. WCF Ch. 20 para. 2

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Stott. P. 241.

- a. Description of the Judaizers. **Cf. Ga. 2:4-5; 5:1; 6:12-13 (Acts 15:10).**
- b. Rational behind the description. **Cf. Col. 2:20.**
- c. Description of his own ministry. **Cf. 2Cor. 1:24.**

2. We must not push our preferences on others. **Cf. Ro. 14:1-4.** It defeats the basic thrust of the gospel. It produces salvation by works not grace.

- ii. **The principle of biblical love. Vv. 20-21.** The Gentiles are asked to avoid that which caused unnecessary offense to believing Jews<sup>5</sup> who had become brothers through the cross. **Cf. Ro. 14:13-20; 1Cor. 9:19-21.**

**3. The pronouncement of the council. Vv. 22-29.** The council approved of the persuasive reason and wisely implemented the conclusions. ***“Then it seemed good....”*** Note:

a. **They essentially:**

- i. **Establish a delegation. V. 22.** They select trusted men as representatives. **Cf. V. 27.**
- ii. **Accept the apostolic counsel. Vv. 23-29.** The letter is almost verbatim the words of James. **Cf. vv. 28-29.**
- iii. **Commend the Gentile mission. Vv. 25-26, 28.** This was an extremely courageous act. They had little hope of a favorable reception

given the strength of sentiment bound up with the issue. **Cf. 21:17-21.**

- b. **They viewed this as the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Cf. V. 28.** Some people look at church government and deliberations as necessarily opposed to the Spirit. Not so the early Church.
- c. **This resulted in rejoicing. Vv. 30-35.** They promulgate the Jerusalem decision and briefly enjoy the ministry of Judas and Silas. Why was it viewed as encouragement?
  - i. The restrictions were entirely reasonable.
  - ii. The ministry was upheld.

The two great implications we must draw and practice from the Jerusalem council are:

- We must preach salvation by grace alone.
- We must stand against any deviation from salvation by pure grace alone.

<sup>5</sup> What the ESV translates “sexual immorality” is the word pornea. Here it probably has reference to foods associated with temple prostitution. Witherington says, “For Paul, the issue is clearly one of venue rather than menu....” P. 466.