

Acts Chapter 15 Handout- The Council of Jerusalem

v.1-5 – The gospel has spread and more and more Gentiles are believing and receiving the Holy Ghost. The church at Antioch is predominantly Gentile. Jewish believers of the Pharisees (the strictest advocators of the law of Moses) came from Judaea saying “except you be circumcised you cannot be saved, thus tying salvation to adherence to the law of Moses. Paul and Barnabas disputed with these men and a decision was made to send Paul and Barnabas to the church in Jerusalem to talk with the apostles and get an official word. While on the way they declared in Phoenicia, the sea people, and Samaria how the Gentiles had been converted and this made the believers there glad. Arriving in Jerusalem, they were well received by the apostles and elders but those of the sect of the Pharisee believers rose up saying that these Gentile believers needed to be circumcised and submit to the law of Moses

v.6-11– So the council is convened, apostles and elders, including James, the brother of the Lord, who also is the pastor of the church of Jerusalem. Peter is also present, who had left Jerusalem after God miraculously freed him from prison (Acts 12). Peter stands and tells what he himself experienced of God’s selection of the Gentiles (Acts 10). Purified their hearts by FAITH (v.9) and saved by the GRACE of the Lord (v.11). Peter asks why they should put the yoke of the law on the Gentiles which they as Jews had not been able to bear

v.12- 21- After Peter spoke the multitude kept silence (which seems to imply that there was a lot of talking on top of talking). Paul and Barnabas now could report on the conversion of the Gentiles throughout their missionary journey and the miracles that God had worked among the Gentiles. After that James answered (speaks to an official response of the church). He refers to Simeon’s (Simon Peter) account, then he confirms this with the prophesy of the prophet Amos (Amos 9:11, 12—the remnant of Edom and all the heathen which are called by my name). This speaks to the notion that Gentiles will be called by His name. James then declares a judgement (v.19) “Wherefore my sentence is that we trouble not” the Gentiles that are turned to God. But we will write to them that they 1) abstain from pollutions of idols 2) things strangled 3) from blood 4) from fornication (which is an all inclusive term for any sexual activity forbidden by God).

v.22-29 – Everyone accepts what is said and Paul and Barnabas are sent back to Antioch with letters, and two representatives of the church, Judas and Silas, both respected men of the church. The letters are read and Judas and Silas confirm what is read. The letters also disavow any authority of the men that came to them from Judaea – “We didn’t send them”

v.30-35- The church was happy; Judas and Silas, prophets themselves, exhorted the brethren, then they were let go in peace, but Silas stayed on. Paul and Barnabas, with many others, continued preaching and teaching the word.

v.36-41- After a while Paul suggests to Barnabas that they return to the places of their missionary journey to check on the churches there. Barnabas wants to take John Mark but Paul does not want him to come because John left them in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13) The dispute is sharp between them and they decide to separate: Barnabas takes John Mark, his cousin, and goes to Cyprus, and Paul takes Silas and goes Syria and Cilicia (and Galatia).