

## **The Jerusalem Decree**

Text: Acts 15:22-29

### **Introduction:**

A counsel, made up of Apostles and elders, met in Jerusalem to officially resolve the matter of whether or not gentiles were to be circumcised (and to keep the Mosaic law). After much debate, and talking back and forth, Peter, Barnabas & Paul, and James, all provided testimony, confirming the fact that the Gentiles were not to be burdened with the Mosaic ceremonial laws. The Lord had confirmed this by giving them the Holy Spirit, even as He had done to the Jewish believers, whom they received, apart from circumcision. And furthermore, James was able to show that this was not a novel idea, but rather, God had planned this from the beginning, revealing it in the Old Testament Scriptures. The counsel, therefore agreed, that the Gentiles were not to be bothered, by any of the Jewish religious customs, with the exception of abstaining from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled and from blood. In honoring these stipulations, they could maintain fellowship with the Jews, without any recourse.

And so, a delegation, including Paul and Barnabas, would be sent back to Antioch, to deliver the Jerusalem decree to the brethren there. And furthermore, it would be sent to Cilicia and Syria, other areas (near and surrounding Antioch), which have been infected with the poisonous teaching that had begun to make its way into Antioch. This morning then, we will examine the Jerusalem decree, given in verses 22-29.

### **I. The Jerusalem Decree**

"Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren" (vs. 22).

Question #1: Who sent leading men from Jerusalem to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas? Why was this a wise thing to do (see also vs. 27) [and why "leading men"~]? What hidden providence of God, is attached to this action, specifically concerning Silas [short for "Silvanus"]? What

does this teach us about God's providence? [Consider also 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:12]

Question #2: Looking back at verse 6, was the whole church directly involved in working through this dilemma? Why or why not? Considering this, and in light of what we have looked at (repeatedly), concerning the church's role in sending, receiving...etc, what does this teach us about the dynamic between elders, and the church as a whole? Are there other teaching texts, in the Epistles, which would seem to go along with this? What is the role of the New Covenant pastor/elder? What does "oversight," "ruling," "leading," entail and not entail?

Question #3: Are there any "conflict resolution" principles that we can take, from what we have gone over, concerning the working through of this present dilemma?

"They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia [the Same Roman Province]: Greetings" (vs. 23).

Question #4: Who was represented, as the "senders" of this letter?

[Read verses 24-29]

Question #5: What does verse 24 teach us about insubordination in the local church? Was there sin involved here? What does this teach us about the responsibility of members of a local church? Where can the line be drawn here? [Acts 15:1]

Question #6: According to verses 25&26, what kind of men did the church at Jerusalem send to Antioch? What does this teach us about the type of people, who ought to be given any degree of large responsibility in the church? How would such men stand out in a local church? [Recall chapter 6, and the choosing of deacons]

Question #7: According to verse 28, who else was involved in making this decision? How can they be certain that this was the case (also see vs. 25)?

Question #8: Why were these specific stipulations, given in verse 29 (and in vs. 20) *alone* mentioned, when there are so many other commands given in Scripture (ex: What about murder, stealing, lying, keeping the "Lord's Day" holy...etc)? What might the relationship of these

specific commands be? Does verse 21 help answer these questions, and does this have any relevance, concerning the discussion, which we have already had, about eating "blood"...etc?

Amen!