

Acts of the Apostles study 12 – Meetings of the Church Elders in Jerusalem:-

Read Acts chapter 11, verses 1 – 18 and chapter 15, verses 1 – 35:- The records of these two meetings reveal the tension between the practices of the traditional Jewish Christians and the newly established Gentile churches under the leadership of Saul (Paul) and Barnabas. The story of the establishment of the Gentile church at Antioch is found in Acts chapter 11, verses 19 – 26. The outreach initiated by the congregation there is recorded in Acts chapter 13, verses 1 – 4. Note that Saul and Barnabas are “*sent out by the Holy Spirit*” verse 4!

The meetings of Peter, and later of Saul and Barnabas, with the Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem were essential to decide the status of Gentile converts and their full acceptance into the life of the growing Christian Church.

Acts chapter 11, verses 1 – 3:- Following on from our study last week - upon Peter’s arrival back in Jerusalem he ran into criticism from “*the circumcision party*”. Peter had remained at the house of Cornelius “*for some days*” chapter 10, verse 48 and would have shared meals with the Gentile household. The ‘gossip’ of what Peter had been doing would have spread rapidly among both Jewish and Gentile Christians. For some this was a scandal! A Jew was forbidden to share meals with “*the uncircumcised*” (chapter 11, verse 3). The decision made now would decide the future of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Gentile communities as well as cementing the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Chapter 11, verses 4 – 14:- Peter recounts his experience in the city of Joppa and his travelling to Caesarea accompanied by the six Jewish believers. This is the second time that Luke records in full the experience of Peter. Emphasising that this was an outreach initiated by the Lord God through His Holy Spirit

Chapter 11, verses 15 – 18:- The key to Peter’s reasoning in this section of scripture is verse 17 “*If then God gave the same gift to them as He gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?*” End of argument! Note that the outcome was that “*they glorified God*”! The new ‘Gentile church at Antioch was then checked over by Barnabas on behalf of the Jerusalem Elders and affirmed and encouraged – see verses 19 – 26 of chapter 11.

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Acts chapter 15, verses 1 – 5:- Even after the decision and affirmation as described above in Acts chapter 11, there were still those who insisted that it was necessary to go through the Jewish rites of entry to become Christian believers.

Verses 6 – 12:- Peter is again called on to defend the inclusion of the Gentiles based on his experience in the household of Cornelius. Barnabas and Paul relate their experiences among the Gentiles that the “*signs and wonders*” which had taken place among Jewish hearers, also took place among the Gentiles.

Verses 13 – 21:- The summing up by James, acting as chairman is important. Note that the few conditions he suggests mean that both Jewish and Gentile Christians could share ‘table fellowship’. Important because the Breaking of Bread (Holy Communion) was held as part of a shared common meal (Compare with 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verses 18 – 34).

Verses 22 – 35:- The decision having been made, Paul and Barnabas were sent back to Antioch accompanied by two representatives from the council in Jerusalem, Judas Barsabbas and Silas. They carried an official letter and were able to verify the decision of James and the elders at Jerusalem. Note that this decision was from the Lord God! “*It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us*”.

Even in the differences and disagreements in the Church, God the Holy Spirit is directing all things!

The hymn ‘Holy Spirit come confirm us’ is still in full copyright. It is available to listen to on ‘youtube’.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yo0nwgYYo6c>