

## 4. Behind the scene of Acts 15

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I love to know what and how things are made. In other words, I'd like to know behind the scene stuff, like special effects in TV or movies. Actually, we see this everyday when we watch news programs on TV, especially weather reports. A meteorologist sits in front of his desk and talks about the upcoming weather report that would come right after the commercials. Then, after 40,000 commercials, you see him standing in front of a gigantic map image of America and starts to explain about tomorrow's weather all the while the background images change from one to another.

If you look for his shadow carefully, he doesn't have it. If he does, it is hard to see it clearly. It is because his shadow was masked while he is standing in front of a big green screen. The technical name for this fancy masking effect is "Chroma key effect" through 'Adobe After Effect' computer software. The majority of the Hollywood's special effects are done through this Chroma key effect.

What we have in the first portion of chapter 2 of the Book of Galatians gives us "Behind the scene of Acts chapter 15."

### A. PAUL'S SECOND TRIP TO JERUSALEM

*Galatians 2:1-2 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. 2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.*

In Galatians 1:18-19, Paul described a trip he made to Jerusalem three years after Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. Now, he describes a second trip to Jerusalem, fourteen years later.

Paul's traveling companions were Barnabas and Titus. I believe that it is important for us to check into these two faithful believers of Christ:

#### 1) Barnabas

As many of you already know he was one of Paul's closest friends. In fact, when Paul tried to get into the fellowship of the Jerusalem church, it was Barnabas who opened the way for him in Acts 9.

The name Barnabas means "son of encouragement," and you will always find Barnabas encouraging somebody. When the Gospel came to the Gentiles in Antioch, it was Barnabas who was sent to encourage them in their faith as it is mentioned in Acts 11.

It was Barnabas who enlisted Paul to help minister at the church in Antioch, and the two of them worked together, not only in teaching, but also in helping the poor.

Barnabas accompanied Paul on the first missionary trip according to Acts 13 and had seen God's blessings on the Gospel that they preached to the Gentiles. It is worth noting that it was Barnabas who encouraged young John Mark after he had "dropped out" of the ministry and made Paul refuse to take him on their next missionary journey. But in later years, Paul was able to commend Mark and benefit from his friendship.

In other words, Barnabas was happy to be a supporting role of Paul and didn't have a problem not sharing the lime light with Paul.

## 2) Titus

We generally know far less about Titus other than that there is a Book named after him in the Bible. He was an example of the apostle Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. In later years, Titus assisted Paul by going to some of the most difficult churches to help them solve their problems as they were mentioned in 2 Corinthians 7 and Titus 1.

The apostle referred to Titus as his brother and told others how he had no peace when Titus was absent. Paul considered him as his partner and fellow worker in his ministry. What a compliment to hear from the aging apostle! May all of us be that way to other fellow workers in the Lord.

Please note what Paul said in v2:

*Galatians 2:2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.*

Paul didn't go to Jerusalem because he was ordered to appear before the Jerusalem Council where Peter, James, and John were the pillars of the church in Jerusalem. He went there because the Lord led him through revelation.

What was the background that prompted them to make a trip to Jerusalem? Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch from their first missionary journey, excited about the way God had "opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles". But the Jewish legalists in Jerusalem were upset with their report; so they came to Antioch and taught, in effect, that a Gentile had to become a Jew before he could become a Christian.

*Acts 15:1 And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."*

Because their minds were so saturated with the external rituals of the OT laws and traditions that they couldn't and didn't want to accept the free gift of God, the salvation through Jesus. They wanted to earn their salvation through their own effort.

Guided by the Lord, Paul and Barnabas thought that the best place to settle the question and argument was before the church leaders who were the original apostles of Jesus in Jerusalem.

Now, we shouldn't think that the Jerusalem Council was the headquarters of a denominational church. It was not. At that time, this was the place where the original apostles of Jesus met, prayed, and taught the other followers of Jesus who resided in Jerusalem areas. But because their intimate connection with the Lord Jesus previously, they were in authority over others with the exception of apostle Paul.

Paul was looking for an agreement and acknowledgement from the Council, not an authorization, because Paul was an apostle like them, not a subordinate.

## **B. NO SUBMISSION TO THE LEGALISTIC FALSE BRETHREN**

*Galatians 2:3-5 Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. 4 And this occurred because of false brethren*

*secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), 5 to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.*

The historical account of the Council of Jerusalem is recorded by Dr. Luke in Acts 15:6-21. Several witnesses presented the case for the Gospel of the grace of God, beginning with Peter who had been chosen by God to take the Gospel to the Gentiles originally – the household of the Roman Centurion Cornelius in Acts 10; and he reminds the assembly that God gave the Holy Spirit to the believing Gentiles just as He did to the Jews, so that there was “no difference.”

Titus, Paul, nor Peter and the rest of the apostles thought a circumcision was necessary for Titus, but to those nit-picking legalistic false believers, it was unacceptable.

This had been a difficult lesson for the first century Christians to learn, because for centuries there had been a racial segregation between Jews and Gentiles.

*Acts 15:8-9 So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, 9 and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.*

During the OT, we saw so many idolaters among the Israelites who worshiped pagan false idols as their gods rather than one true God whom they already had. But after the exile to Babylon, they promised that they would never, ever worship those pagan idols again. They kept their promise, in a way.

Though they'd never worshiped the visible false idols since then, they switched the object of their worship to their own traditions and the false religious concepts of external rituals. In other words, they created their religion and tradition as another god to worship over the Almighty one True God.

I am sure that the Judaizers were fuming at this point, but they couldn't refute the fact that Titus who was standing in the midst of them was saved by the grace of God alone, not by any of their OT law, not even a circumcision. This only proves that the Judaizers were WRONG.

I know what you are thinking now. Some of you are thinking about Timothy, Paul's other associate in Acts 16:

*Acts 16:1-3 Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. 2 He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.*

Was Paul being inconsistent by refusing to circumcise Titus, yet agreeing to circumcise Timothy? No, they are two different situations. In the case of Timothy, as we just read, he was a part Jew and a part Greek. His lack of circumcision would have hindered his ministry among the people of Israel. But for Titus, he was a full breed Gentile. For him to have submitted would have indicated that he was missing something in his Christian experience.

We, the Gentiles, should appreciate apostle Paul's courage and tenacity for the truth of the salvation through Jesus Christ only. We have the liberty in Christ Jesus, but we

should be concerned about the truth of the Gospel more than the peace within the church. Peace at any price was not the idea of Paul, nor should it be ours. That is the reason why I have nothing to do with any of interfaith gatherings or agreement like some liberal Christian denominations want others to participate.

#### **D. THE CONFIRMATION OF GOD THROUGH THE APOSTLES**

*Galatians 2:6-10 But from those who seemed to be something --whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man--for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. 7 But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter 8 (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), 9 and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.*

The Judaizers had hoped to get the leaders of the Jerusalem church to disagree with Paul. By contrast, Paul makes it clear that he himself was not impressed either by the persons or the positions of the church leaders. He respected them, of course. Otherwise he would not have consulted with them privately from the beginning. But he did not fear them or seek to buy their influence. All he wanted them to do was recognize “the grace of God” at work in his life and ministry, and this they did.

Though the Jerusalem Council leaders – the original Apostles heartily endorsed Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles, they also recognized that God had assigned different areas of ministry to different men. Apart from his visit to the household of Cornelius in Acts 10 and to the Samaritans in Acts 8, Peter had centered his ministry primarily among the Jews while Paul had been called as God’s special ambassador to the Gentiles.

They didn’t have two different messages – one to the Jews and the other to the Gentiles. Rather, the same message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all mankind. There is little doubt that the Judaizers went to the churches of Galatia to sow their seeds of discord, and for this reason Paul had to write the letter we are now studying.

In v10, we move from theological to the practical – helping the poor. They must go together. Correct doctrine is never a substitute for Christian duty.

In light of a brink of war between Israel and Hamas in recent days, we do need to pray for the peace of Jerusalem as the psalmist said in Psalm 122:

*Psalm 122:6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May they prosper who love you.”*

#### **E. APPLICATION**

It is easy for us to fall into a trap that makes us think that we don’t have to worry about any idol worship. We need to be aware of anything that takes priority over our God in our heart is an idol – person, job, even the ministry that we are called to.